



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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James Stewart

Inspections: Notification and Information

1. Introduction

Inspections of schools and colleges are carried out by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) in England, HM Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMI), and Estyn in Wales. In the Republic of Ireland inspections are carried out by the Inspectorate. This briefing note outlines the **notice period** given to schools in advance of an inspection in the various jurisdictions. It also details the **information and documents** that the respective inspectorates request from schools.

2. Notification

In **England** a school is notified of its inspection at midday on the working day before the start of an inspection. However, Ofsted reserves the right to inspect any school without notice where this is judged to be appropriate by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector.

Inspection can take place at any point after five working school days in the autumn term. For example, if pupils return to school on a Wednesday, inspection can take place as early as the following Wednesday.¹

¹ Ofsted (2014): *The Framework for School Inspection*; Available at: <http://nia1.me/1vI>

In **Scotland** primary schools and early years centres receive notification two weeks before the start of an inspection. Due to the need to arrange a wider range of meetings with outside partners, post-primary schools receive notification three weeks before the start of an inspection.²

Welsh schools receive four working weeks' notice of an inspection.³ Schools receive two weeks' notice in the **Republic of Ireland**.

3. Information Requirements

3.1. England

Inspectors use a range of evidence for the initial identification of issues to be followed up in inspection, including performance data and the school's previous inspection report.

Inspectors are instructed to use evidence to develop an initial picture of the school's academic performance. The list of evidence outlined in the inspection handbook⁴ is not exhaustive. Inspectors may ask for any other documentation that will provide the evidence needed to make an accurate judgement. However, inspectors are instructed *not* to make unnecessary demands on schools or expect the documentation to be presented in a particular format.⁵

Inspection Documents

Ofsted requests that the following information is made available to inspectors:

- a summary of any school self-evaluation
- the current school improvement plan
- school timetable, staff list and times of the school day
- the single central record, which summarises the checks and vetting of all staff working with pupils
- all logs that record exclusions, pupils taken off roll, incidents of poor behaviour and incidents of bullying
- details of any off-site units run by the school or in partnership with other schools
- details about the school's use of alternative provision (Pupil Referral Units)

²Education Scotland (2011) *Arrangements for inspecting schools in Scotland*

³Education Scotland (2013) *Guidance for the inspection of primary schools*

⁴Ofsted *Inspection handbook*; Available at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/school-inspection-handbook>

⁵Information provided by Ofsted

- up-to-date attendance information
- records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching
- information about the school's performance management arrangements
- documented evidence of the work of governors and their impact
- reports arising from any external evaluation of the school

3.2. Scotland

The school principal is sent a list of information requirements prior to inspection. Schools are asked to provide **only** the material on the list. The inspection team does not evaluate all aspects of a school's work. Inspectors discuss 'areas for focused attention' in order to prioritise their activities⁶.

The inspection priorities are influenced by a brief **self-evaluation summary form**, which a school completes and submits prior to the inspection. The self-evaluation summary is a concise, evaluative paper (**no more than** three sides of A4). Education Scotland places emphasis on the importance of self-evaluation stating:

"When self-evaluation evidence is robust and convincing, we use it as part of the inspection evidence. It can also help identify good practice and innovation that Education Scotland may wish to look at in more detail as part of our continuing engagement after the inspection has been completed⁷."

Inspection Documents

Schools are advised to send **only** the following items in advance of an inspection⁸:

- the most recent and previous annual report
- the current and previous school improvement plan
- names of all teaching and other staff, and details of their responsibilities
- any job-sharing arrangements
- school and class timetables
- information about how children's achievements are gathered and tracked
- self-evaluation summary paper
- completed child protection pro forma

⁶ Education Scotland (2011) *Arrangements for inspecting schools in Scotland*

⁷ Education Scotland Website *Being ready for inspection*: Available here <http://nia1.me/1v7>

⁸ Education Scotland *Briefing note for head teachers of secondary schools* Available at: <http://nia1.me/1vm>

- evidence of completed meetings

A confidential questionnaire is also distributed to pupils, parents, and staff at the beginning of the notification period. Additionally, the documents outlined in Appendix 1 are to be made available on Monday of the inspection week.

HMI state that the volume of documentation provided varies widely from school to school. The inspectorate suggests that the extent and quality of the documentation provided reflects the effectiveness of the school's systems for self-evaluation and quality improvement.⁹

In the course of an inspection, inspectors may ask for additional documentation to help them evaluate the school's work. It is suggested that this means evaluations are grounded in as full an evidence base as possible. Although, the main emphasis is on professional discussion and requests for documentation are kept to a minimum, legislation allows inspectors to look at any aspect of a school's documentation.¹⁰

3.3. Wales

The inspectorate contacts the school by telephone to set up the arrangements for the inspection. During this discussion, the inspectorate discusses the specific information required before the inspection. Inspectors make arrangements for receiving documents in electronic form through a **Virtual Inspection Room (VIR)**.¹¹

The VIR is a central location for collating and storing the evidence required by the inspection team. Information templates and supporting documentation is also available in the VIR.

When schools are notified of inspection, they receive information on how to conduct a **survey** of pupils and parents. The surveys form part of the pre-inspection evidence. The inspectorate collects, collates and analyses the learner and parent questionnaire responses and presents the outcomes in the inspection report.¹²

Estyn maintains that inspectors do not wish to overburden schools with information requests. Therefore, as far as possible, they refrain from asking for information that is **not** on the following list of documents.

Inspection Documents

Inspectors may ask for the following documentary evidence¹³:

- self-evaluation report

⁹ Information provided by Education Scotland

¹⁰ As above

¹¹ Estyn *Important supporting information about the inspection process*; Available at:

<http://www.estyn.gov.uk/download/publications/8490.3/guidance-for-the-inspection-of-secondary-schools-from-september-2010/>

¹² Estyn (2013) *Guidance for the inspection of secondary schools*

¹³ As above

- assessment data standardised reading and numeracy test scores, and any value added analyses
- evidence of pupils' abilities at intake
- pupils' and parents/carers' views as expressed in questionnaires
- pupils' induction, transfer and integration arrangements
- statements, individual education plans, individual behaviour plans, personal education plans, annual reviews and transition plans, screening and assessment information and procedures
- curriculum documentation, plans, policies, option schemes and schemes of work
- records of pupils' progress and achievement
- the school improvement plan
- details of any complaints or appeals
- information on staffing and job descriptions for staff
- minutes of meetings
- documents related to the work of the school council
- the latest budget statement and auditor's report
- data on attendance, behavioural incidents, and permanent and fixed-term exclusions

3.4. Republic of Ireland

Schools are required to engage in self-evaluation of teaching and learning. The inspection model enables schools to report on the progress they have made in their self-evaluation and allows inspectors to take account of this.¹⁴

Inspection Documents

Schools are asked to provide the documents listed below for inspection:

- a completed school information form, which will include the school's reflection on and description of its work in relation to key aspects of education provision
- child protection policy
- code of behaviour, including its anti-bullying policy
- self-evaluation reports
- school improvement plans or action plans

¹⁴ Department of Education and Skills (2013) *A guide to whole school evaluation, management leadership and learning*

- individual teachers' written plans
- individual teachers' timetables
- assessment records
- roll books and registers
- minutes of board meetings

The list above is not exhaustive; additional information may be requested by inspectors. For example, he/she may request curriculum planning documents, to be made available.

Questionnaires for parents are sent to the school for distribution in advance of the inspection. The school is asked to have the completed questionnaires ready for collection on the first day of the in-school phase of the inspection. The principal is asked to make school staff aware of an on-line questionnaire in advance of the in-school phase.¹⁵

¹⁵ Department of Education and Skills (2013) *A guide to whole school evaluation, management leadership and learning*

Appendix 1

Schools inspected by HMI Scotland are advised to provide the following information on **Monday of the inspection week**.¹⁶

- Achievement Information used by the school to monitor and evaluate school and young people's performance
- Access to pupils' progress records
- Brief details of any out-of-school activities, after-school care and supported study initiatives
- List of young people with additional support needs and brief details of support provided. Details of young people with regular/long-term absence
- List of young people who are looked-after at home and away from home
- Access to records of complaints, bullying and racial incidents, accidents, administration of medicine and fire log
- Brief details of any established/regular contacts with individuals or organisations in the local community
- Any guidance for teachers and/or staff handbook (if available)
- List of CPD carried out during the last session and planned for this session
- Sample of agendas and minutes of Parent Council meetings, pupil council meetings and staff meetings
- A sample from different year groups of reports for parents regarding children's progress/learning
- Examples of school communications with parents and the wider community e.g. newsletters, prospectus, parent handbook
- Copies of school timetables

¹⁶ Education Scotland *Briefing note for head teachers of secondary schools*; Available at: <http://nia1.me/1vn>