



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Research Paper

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# Approaches to school inspection

**NIAR 521-13**

This paper outlines the approach to inspection in place in NI and in a number of jurisdictions internationally. It also considers the governance arrangements for school inspection, including powers, legal frameworks, transparency and inspector qualifications and evaluation.



## Key Points

- The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is responsible for inspecting the quality of provision across a range of providers in NI;
- In 2010 ETI introduced a risk-based approach to determining how often a school should be inspected;
- Internationally, over three quarters of countries reviewed by the OECD require school inspections, and most also require school self-evaluation;
- Examples of approaches elsewhere include the high stakes approach of Ofsted in England; this emphasises external inspection and includes the potential for the “naming and shaming” of underperforming schools;
- In Scotland a more collaborative approach is taken whereby inspectors are viewed more as coaches than examiners, while the Republic of Ireland focuses on self-evaluation and light touch external inspection;
- In Finland there is no external inspection; instead the system places great trust in teachers and principals and provides them with much autonomy;
- A range of governance models are in use internationally. The inspectorate is within the education ministry in some countries and outside it in others (for example, Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department reporting to Parliament);
- The importance of credibility for external evaluators and the transparency of inspection processes is emphasised in the research – this can relate to the publication of clear standards, the levels of qualifications and experience required and performance management processes;
- In light of these findings, areas that could be given further consideration include:
  - The risk-based approach to determining the frequency of inspection, for example, whether value-added indicators are used to identify schools;
  - The approaches to inspection other jurisdictions, for example the high stakes approach in England and the centrality of self-evaluation in Singapore;
  - The situation of the ETI within the Department of Education;
  - The additional powers for the ETI set out within the Education Bill;
  - Other practices including school-to-school or peer evaluation;
  - Qualification requirements for inspectors here;
  - The performance management of inspectors in NI, and the extent to which they draw upon a broad and robust evidence base.



## Executive Summary

### Introduction

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), part of the Department of Education (the Department), is responsible for inspecting the quality of provision across a range of providers. This paper explores the approach to school inspection in NI and in a number of jurisdictions internationally. It also discusses governance arrangements.

### Inspection approach in Northern Ireland

Self-evaluation is not mandatory for schools in Northern Ireland, although school development planning requires them to use a range of data in considering their performance. Evidence from the most recent *Chief Inspector's Report* suggests that self-evaluation was a key aspect of organisations rated very good or outstanding.

ETI completed 360 external inspections in 2012. Typically, a team of inspectors visits the school and draws on a range of evidence to inform their judgements, including:

- **Classroom observations** (a key area of focus);
- **Interactions with pupils** during lessons to determine what pupils understand;
- **Quality of work in pupils' books** (to benchmark the work observed with previous learning experiences);
- **Discussions with teachers and senior managers;**
- **Documentation** produced by the school; and
- **Responses to an ETI questionnaire** by parents, teachers and support staff.

In 2010 ETI introduced a risk-based approach to determining the frequency of school inspection. This involves using information from performance indicators; risk factors such as the length of time since the last formal inspection; and ongoing monitoring of schools by inspectors at a local level, to assess how often a school should be inspected. Schools receive two weeks' notice of an inspection.

However, concerns around this approach have been raised recently, with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) suggesting that this may place too much emphasis on examination outcomes and could have a socio-economic bias.

### International approaches

Three broad approaches to evaluating schools can be identified around the world – many countries combine these methods. The approaches comprise school self-evaluation; external evaluation; and comparison of schools using performance measures. Over three quarters (77%) of countries reviewed by the OECD require school inspections, and most also require schools to conduct self-evaluation.

**Table 1: Examples of approaches to school evaluation in other jurisdictions**

Jurisdiction	Key features
<b>England:</b> High stakes approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspection plays a key part in the accountability framework</li> <li>• High stakes approach with potential “naming and shaming”</li> <li>• Emphasis on external inspection and a short notice period</li> <li>• “Satisfactory” grade recently replaced with “requires improvement”</li> </ul>
<b>Scotland:</b> Collaborative approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspectors viewed more as ‘coaches’ than ‘external examiners’</li> <li>• A sampling approach to selection of schools is taken and there is a two to three week notice period</li> <li>• The school’s capacity to improve is evaluated (confident, partially confident or not confident)</li> </ul>
<b>Republic of Ireland:</b> Emphasis on self-evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on self-evaluation and light touch external inspection</li> <li>• Teachers have reported that the process can be positive and affirming, however criticisms include the avoidance of conflict with teachers</li> </ul>
<b>Singapore:</b> Improvement driven by self-evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A self-assessment model is the primary driver of school improvement</li> <li>• Schools must provide evidence of continuous improvement in results</li> <li>• External experts visit the school to validate the self-evaluation</li> <li>• A comprehensive set of awards is linked to the model</li> </ul>
<b>Finland:</b> No external inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School inspections abolished in the early 1990s</li> <li>• Education system relies on the effectiveness of teachers and leaders</li> <li>• Finland places significant trust in teachers and principals and they have significant autonomy</li> </ul>

### **Governance**

In a number of countries responsibility for educational evaluation is within the education ministry, while in others, it is situated beyond it. An example of this is Ofsted, a non-ministerial government department accountable directly to Parliament. Most jurisdictions, including NI, have a highly structured legal framework for inspection.

The Education Bill currently before the NI Assembly would significantly enhance the powers of ETI. This would include widening the role to advise the Department on ‘any aspect’ of establishments as appropriate; and providing new powers to inspect or take

away documents; and to obtain access to any computer and associated material. These powers mirror those of Ofsted as set out within the Education Act 2005.

### ***Inspector qualifications***

The research emphasises the importance of ensuring that external evaluators have credibility. In NI all inspectors must be qualified to at least degree level and have a qualification enabling them to teach. The Department notes that all inspectors have substantial teaching experience. In England the requirements include that inspectors must be able to demonstrate up-to-date professional knowledge.

### ***Transparency***

Research highlights the importance of transparency and objectivity in school inspection. The publication of clear standards can promote transparency, and ETI's *Together Towards Improvement* details the indicators and standards used.

A further method of promoting transparency relates to the evaluation of inspectors. In NI performance management includes discussing examples of reports the inspector has prepared, although this does not include a specific separate review of inspection evidence bases. Post-inspection questionnaires are completed anonymously and as such are not used in the performance management of individual inspectors, although any correspondence received directly by ETI is considered.

The Republic of Ireland and Sweden have recently subjected their school evaluation processes to national audits. Ofsted in England uses rigorous performance management systems to hold inspectors to account. These draw on a range of information including quality assurance inspection visits, review of inspection evidence bases and school responses to post-inspection questionnaires.

### **Conclusion**

Areas that could be given further consideration include:

- The risk-based approach to determining the frequency of inspection, for example, whether value-added indicators are used to identify schools for inspection;
- The approaches to inspection other jurisdictions, for example the high stakes approach in England and the centrality of self-evaluation in Singapore;
- The situation of the ETI within the Department of Education;
- The additional powers for the ETI set out within the Education Bill;
- Other practices including school-to-school or peer evaluation;
- Qualification requirements for inspectors here;
- The performance management of inspectors in NI, and the extent to which they draw upon a broad and robust evidence base.



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# 1 Introduction

A school inspection is a formal process of external evaluation which may aim to hold schools to account, and to drive school improvement. This paper outlines the approach to inspection in place in NI and in a number of jurisdictions internationally. It also considers the governance arrangements for school inspection, including powers, legal frameworks, transparency and inspector qualifications and evaluation.

## 2 Inspection approach in Northern Ireland

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is part of the Department of Education (the Department). It inspects a range of providers, including schools; pre-schools and the youth service.

### Self-evaluation

Schools in Northern Ireland are not required to conduct self-evaluation; however school development planning involves an element of this. Schools must use performance and other data to evaluate the school's strategies for a range of areas, including teaching and learning and staff development.<sup>1</sup>

ETI uses this to provide evidence on leadership, and in particular the actions taken to drive improvement. From this academic year, ETI will not ask schools for any self-evaluation information, other than that which they use for their own purposes.<sup>2</sup>

*Together Towards Improvement* contains the quality indicators used by ETI in its evaluations, and provides guidance to schools on self-evaluation.<sup>3</sup> The resource sets out a series of quality indicators under three broad headings:<sup>4</sup>

- **Leadership and management:** indicators include strategic leadership, action to promote improvement and links and partnerships;
- **Quality of provision for learning:** indicators include planning, teaching and learning and assessment;
- **Quality of achievement and standards:** indicators include achievement and progression.

Evidence from inspections cited in the *Chief Inspector's Report 2010-12* suggests that self-evaluation was a central feature of the work of organisations rated very good or outstanding, and drove improvement in schools where follow-up was required.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Information provided by the Education and Training Inspectorate, September 2013

<sup>2</sup> As above

<sup>3</sup> As above

<sup>4</sup> ETI (2010) *Together Towards Improvement: A Process for Self-Evaluation* Bangor: DE

<sup>5</sup> Education and Training Inspectorate (2012) *Chief Inspector's Report 2010-12* Bangor: DE

## External inspection

At the end of the 2012 business year there were 61 inspectors and 130 Associate Assessors at the ETI. Over the year it completed 360 inspections of organisations in addition to 20 surveys of provision across a range of settings.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 2: Overview of inspection models for schools and pre-schools<sup>7</sup>**

Inspection model	Phase	Overview
Focused inspection	Primary, post-primary, special	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on particular aspects of provision and leadership</li> <li>• Aspects include child protection and pastoral care</li> </ul>
Standard inspection	Post-primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A core team (including an Associate Assessor) inspects leadership and management through a focus on aspects of the school development plan</li> <li>• Specialist inspectors (usually four) also report on provision within a specialist area (pastoral care/ child protection always included)</li> </ul>
Inspection	Pre-school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assesses quality of provision across range of activities (such as development and learning; child protection; and leadership)</li> </ul>
Short inspection	Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluates the quality of the school's ethos, pastoral care, teaching and learning, leadership and management</li> </ul>
Unannounced inspection	All phases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on pastoral care and child protection as evidenced by arrangements and work observed</li> </ul>
Area inspection	All phases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluates provision in a geographical area across phases</li> </ul>

A team of inspectors visits the school, ranging from two inspectors for a small primary school to up to eight for a large post-primary undergoing standard inspection. A range of evidence is used to inform judgements, and there is a particular emphasis on classroom observation. Evidence also includes:<sup>8</sup>

- **Interactions with pupils** during lessons (to determine what pupils understand and the extent to which they are supported);

<sup>6</sup> ETI (2013) *Annual Business Report 2011-12* Bangor: DE

<sup>7</sup> ETI: *An explanation of the types of Inspection* [online] Available at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/support-material/support-material-general-documents-non-phase-related/support-material-general-documents-about-inspection/an-explanation-of-the-types-of-inspection.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Information provided by the Department of Education, October 2012

- **Quality of work in pupils' books** (to benchmark the work observed with previous learning experiences);
- **Conversations with teachers** and managers;
- **Documentation** produced by the school;
- **Responses to an ETI questionnaire** by parents, teachers and support staff (used to support identification of lines of enquiry); and
- **A discussion with senior management** on the school's performance data.

### **Frequency of inspections and notice given**

A new approach to the frequency of school inspections was introduced in 2010 (prior to this schools were inspected at least once every seven years). This aims to be more proportionate and risk-based using a range of information to guide requirements:<sup>9</sup>

- Information from school performance indicators;
- Risk factors such as the length of time since the last formal inspection;
- Ongoing monitoring of schools by inspectors at a local level.

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) has recently highlighted concerns around this risk-based approach, suggesting that this may have a "*potentially in-built socio-economic bias*", and noting an "*excessive reliance*" on quantitative data and examination outcomes.<sup>10</sup>

ETI has standardised the notice period for inspections from September 2013, with all organisations receiving two week's notification of inspection (other than further education colleges which will receive four weeks' notification).<sup>11</sup>

### **Moderation and reporting**

Inspection teams take part in a moderation conference immediately after the school's inspection. This aims to ensure that the gathered evidence is challenged and moderated.<sup>12</sup> Managing Inspectors (MIs) join a sample of moderation meetings for quality assurance purposes and all reports are reviewed by MIs prior to issue.<sup>13</sup>

Principals receive a copy of the report to check factual detail around four weeks later. The final copy of the inspection report is generally published around three months after the inspection on the ETI website.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Information provided by the Department of Education, October 2012

<sup>10</sup> Gallagher, C. (2013) *Striking the Right Balance* Belfast: GTCNI

<sup>11</sup> Information provided by the Education and Training Inspectorate, September 2013

<sup>12</sup> Information provided by the Department of Education, October 2012

<sup>13</sup> Information provided by the Education and Training Inspectorate, October 2013

<sup>14</sup> ETI: FAQs [online] Available at:

[http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/faqs.htm#what\\_happens\\_after\\_the\\_inspection\\_and\\_what\\_is\\_the\\_timescale?](http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/faqs.htm#what_happens_after_the_inspection_and_what_is_the_timescale?)

## Complaints procedure

ETI has a complaints procedure which is the only mechanism through which an individual or organisation can make a formal complaint. Complaints may be made at any stage during an inspection or up to 12 weeks from the visit.<sup>15</sup>

The Complaints Procedure states that ETI will admit to being mistaken where this is clearly supported by the facts. However, it states that the procedure cannot be used to contest the professional judgements of inspectors because findings are unwelcome; because change is promised by the organisation at some time in the future; or because changes are made after an inspection.<sup>16</sup> ETI will investigate the following types of complaints:<sup>17</sup>

- An expression of dissatisfaction with an aspect of the work of ETI;
- Referring to action or lack of action by ETI affecting an individual, group or organisation;
- An allegation that ETI has failed to observe its published procedures; or
- An allegation that there has been unacceptable delay in dealing with a matter about how an individual has been treated by a member of staff.

The procedure involves an informal complaint stage followed by Stage 1 – a formal written complaint, and Stage 2 – an internal review of how the complaint was investigated (there was previously a third stage). The complainant may then refer it to the Assembly Ombudsman (requires MLA sponsorship) if still dissatisfied.<sup>18</sup>

**Table 3: Formal ETI complaints relating to primary/ post-primary inspections<sup>19</sup>**

Year	Complaints received	Stage reached
2008/09	1	Stage 1
2009/10	7	All Stage 1
2010/11	3	1 reached Stage 2, one Stage 3 and 1 referred to the Assembly Ombudsman
2011/12	3	All Stage 3
2012/2013	1	Stage 1

<sup>15</sup> ETI (2012) *Complaints Procedure* Bangor: DE

<sup>16</sup> As above

<sup>17</sup> Information provided by the Education and Training Inspectorate, September 2013

<sup>18</sup> ETI (2012) *Complaints Procedure* Bangor: DE

<sup>19</sup> Information provided by the Education and Training Inspectorate, September 2013

### 3 Overview of approaches to school evaluation worldwide

OECD identifies three main approaches to evaluating schools internationally. These are outlined in the following table.

**Table 4: Three major approaches to school evaluation**

Approach	Overview
School self-evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review conducted by members of the school</li> <li>• May draw on input from leadership, teachers, staff and parents</li> </ul>
External school evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Judged by an external body- may be an inspectorate, officials within a government department or by accredited individuals</li> <li>• Typically involves a strong focus on accountability; increasingly aims to provide feedback for development</li> </ul>
Comparison of schools on performance measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involves benchmarking schools in relation to others</li> <li>• Information may be reported to schools for their own use and/ or to the wider public</li> </ul>

Source: OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment* Paris: OECD Publishing

OECD states that school inspections are required in 24 of 31 countries (77%). While school inspections typically involve all schools, in nine countries inspections were targeted at low-performing schools.<sup>20</sup>

In countries where there are no requirements for school inspection, there is often a requirement for school self-evaluation. Very few countries do not require either school inspection or school self-evaluation (such countries include Greece, Italy and Mexico).

There is considerable variation in the use, frequency and scope of accountability mechanisms across and within countries. The areas most commonly covered by school inspections across the OECD countries were:<sup>21</sup>

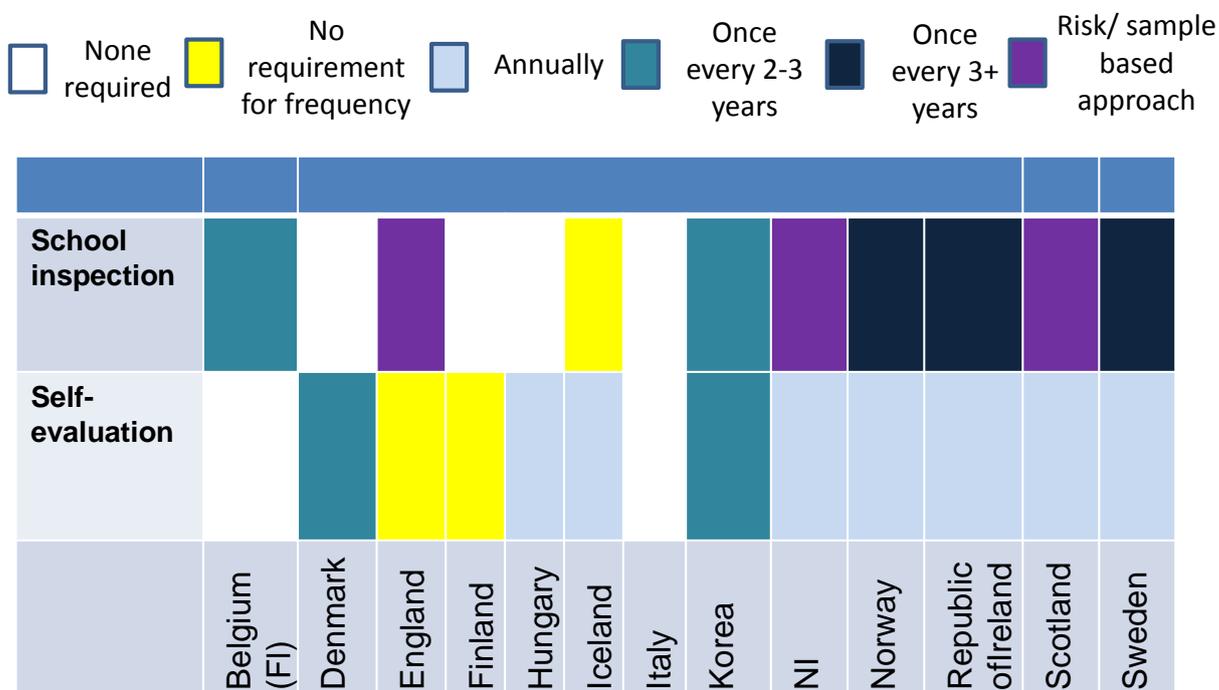
- Compliance with rules and regulations;
- Quality of instruction; and
- Student performance.

<sup>20</sup> OECD (2011) *Education at a Glance 2011 OECD Indicators* Paris: OECD Publishing

<sup>21</sup> As above

Figure 1 provides an overview of the requirements for school inspection across a number of jurisdictions.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 1: Frequency of school inspections and self-evaluation internationally**



Source: Adapted from OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning* and OECD (2011) *Education at a Glance 2011*

### Self-evaluation

Most OECD countries have statutory requirements for schools to conduct self-evaluation. Northern Ireland has a highly structured approach, whereby schools must prepare a School Development Plan. Requirements in other jurisdictions include:<sup>23</sup>

- **Australia:** a partially structured approach whereby all schools must publish an annual report including school performance information;
- **Republic of Ireland:** since 2012 schools have been required to produce an annual self-evaluation report and a school improvement plan;
- **New Zealand:** no standard reporting format for annual plans and reports;
- **Scotland:** legislation requires schools to develop an annual self-evaluation report, improvement plan and a report on a range of indicators.

Internationally many countries have concerns around the capacity of schools to conduct self-evaluation.<sup>24</sup> Other concerns include a perception that self-evaluation may matter less to schools than external inspection.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> OECD (2011) *Education at a Glance 2011 OECD Indicators* Paris: OECD Publishing

<sup>23</sup> OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment* Paris: OECD Publishing

## Self-evaluation and external inspection

The evidence suggests that school self-evaluation and external inspection can be complementary and many jurisdictions use both approaches in evaluating schools. Some studies have found a positive impact on outcomes where the two are combined.<sup>26</sup>

## School to school evaluation

OECD reports that in many countries schools are beginning to undertake peer evaluation, building on substantial evidence that partnerships and networks of schools can allow for sharing of effective leadership and practice. Such networks exist in countries such as England, Finland and Sweden. A key advantage to a principal from another school taking on the role of 'critical friend' is that they are viewed as an equal fellow professional.<sup>27</sup>

# 4 Examples of school inspection approaches in other jurisdictions

## England: High stakes approach

Ofsted is non-ministerial government department which is directly accountable to Parliament. Its approach to school inspection is high stakes in nature, playing a key role in the accountability framework for education.<sup>28</sup> The emphasis is on external inspection, and the process has been described as involving "*punitive levels of stress and potential naming and shaming of weak teachers and schools.*"<sup>29</sup>

Schools are evaluated on criteria including exam results and the quality of teaching observed during inspection.<sup>30</sup> A risk-based approach is taken. For example, a school judged to be 'outstanding' will be inspected on the basis of a risk assessment of its subsequent performance; while 'inadequate' schools placed in special measures will be given a monitoring inspection within three months and may receive up to five monitoring inspections within 18 months. Other key aspects of the approach include:<sup>31</sup>

- Visits last for around two days;

<sup>24</sup> OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment* Paris: OECD Publishing

<sup>25</sup> Whitby, K. (2010) *School Inspection: recent experiences in high performing education systems* Berkshire: CfBT Education Trust

<sup>26</sup> As above

<sup>27</sup> OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment* Paris: OECD Publishing

<sup>28</sup> Allen, R., Burgess, S. (2012) *How should we treat under-performing schools? A regression discontinuity analysis of school inspections in England* Bristol: Centre for Market and Public Organisation

<sup>29</sup> McNamara, G., O'Hara, J. (2008) "Trusting Schools and Teachers: Developing Educational Professionalism Through Self-Evaluation" *Irish Studies* 8, Dublin: Peter Lang Publishing

<sup>30</sup> Allen, R., Burgess, S. (2012) *How should we treat under-performing schools? A regression discontinuity analysis of school inspections in England* Bristol: Centre for Market and Public Organisation

<sup>31</sup> Ofsted (2013) *The framework for school inspection* Manchester: Ofsted

- Inspections are **sharply focused** on the aspects of the school's work known to have the greatest influence on outcomes;
- **Short notice period** - schools are notified of their inspection at or after midday on the working day before the start of the inspection;
- Ofsted has the **right to inspect any school without notice** where appropriate (for example, where academic performance has rapidly declined);
- **Inspectors engage principals, staff and governors and pupils**, and the views of parents are sought;
- **Principals may be invited to participate in lesson observations** and are typically invited to attend the formal inspection team meetings each day.

Ofsted no longer describes schools as 'satisfactory' where they are not providing a good level of education. Schools providing an acceptable standard of education are judged to be 'good', while a school not yet deemed 'good' nor 'inadequate' are described as a school that 'requires improvement'.<sup>32</sup>

### **Scotland: Collaborative approach**

In Scotland the approach to inspection is collaborative in nature with inspectors and the school under inspection cooperating throughout the process. Self-evaluation is another key aspect of the approach,<sup>33</sup> however research suggests that while some schools are enthusiastic about self-evaluation, others "*treat this with cynical compliance*".<sup>34</sup>

Recent changes to the inspection process have included a move to a sampling approach; a reduction in the notice period to two or three weeks; and greater focus on users, including giving parents opportunities to meet a lay inspector.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Inspection process***

Inspection is a 'two-way process', with inspectors viewed more as 'professional coaches' than 'external examiners'.<sup>36</sup> It has been suggested that teachers are more likely to view external inspection in a developmental manner rather than a judgemental one.<sup>37</sup> The following figure illustrates the inspection process in Scotland.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> As above

<sup>33</sup> Education Scotland (2011) *Arrangements for inspecting schools in Scotland*

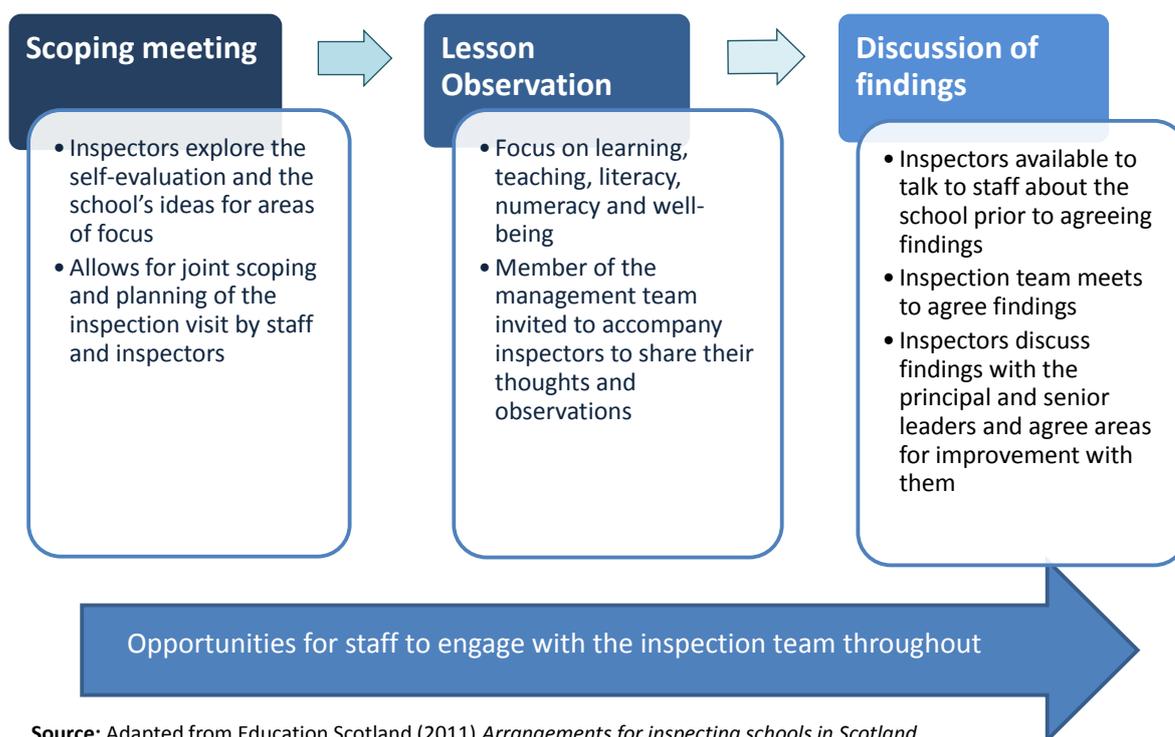
<sup>34</sup> Croxford, L., Grek, S. and Shaik, F.J. (2009) "Quality assurance and evaluation in Scotland" *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol 24, No.2, pp. 179-193

<sup>35</sup> Buie, E. (2011) "HMIE unveils new targeted approach to school inspection" *Times Educational Supplement* 25 February 2011

<sup>36</sup> Buie, E. (2011) "HMIE unveils new targeted approach to school inspection" *Times Educational Supplement* 25 February 2011

<sup>37</sup> Livingstone, K. and McCall (2005) "Evaluation: judgemental or developmental?" *The European Journal of Teacher Education* Vol. 28, No 2. Pp.165-178

<sup>38</sup> Education Scotland (2011) *Arrangements for inspecting schools in Scotland*

**Figure 2: Overview of the Scottish inspection process**

Source: Adapted from Education Scotland (2011) *Arrangements for inspecting schools in Scotland*

The report of the inspection is published within eight weeks. The emphasis of school improvement in inspection is evident through an evaluation of a school's capacity to improve (confident, partially confident or not confident). Follow up is proportionate and dependent on the inspection findings.<sup>39</sup>

OECD notes that this approach has had considerable influence, with Scottish inspectors often invited to participate in events across Europe, and the approach has been adapted by organisations including the New South Wales Catholic Education Authority.<sup>40</sup>

### Republic of Ireland: Emphasis on self-evaluation

The approach to school inspection in the Republic of Ireland emphasises self-evaluation, light touch external inspection and features little focus on data to support findings.<sup>41</sup>

Self-evaluation makes up an element of School Development Planning; however, the success of this in most schools has been limited. As a result, current policy

<sup>39</sup> Penzer, G. (2011) *School inspections: what happens next?* Reading: CfBT Education Trust

<sup>40</sup> OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment* Paris: OECD Publishing

<sup>41</sup> McNamara, G., O'Hara, J. (2008) "Trusting Schools and Teachers: Developing Educational Professionalism Through Self-Evaluation" *Irish Studies 8*, Dublin: Peter Lang Publishing.

emphasises improving self-evaluations so that schools make robust evaluations of their progress and share this information with parents.<sup>42</sup>

Self-evaluation and external inspection are both underpinned by self-evaluation frameworks highlighting key areas for evaluation. They also outline contextual factors that should be considered when evaluating a school.<sup>43</sup>

- Socio-economic circumstances of the pupils and community, including local employment availability and patterns;
- The size, location and catchment area of the school;
- Pupils' special needs;
- The physical, material and human resources available within the school.

The Inspectorate undertakes a range of inspections, including unannounced short inspections, subject-focussed inspections and whole-school evaluation. Their purpose is both to evaluate provision and provide advice and support to the school, and they include interviews with key personnel; scrutiny of planning and self-evaluation; classroom observation; and interactions with pupils. In some cases questionnaires are sent to parents and students.<sup>44</sup>

It has been suggested that the inspection approach used has a number of weaknesses, for example the avoidance of conflict with teachers and the reluctance of schools and teachers to engage in systematic approaches to data collection. However, teachers have reported that the process can be positive and affirming.<sup>45</sup>

### **Singapore: Rigorous self-evaluation model driving improvement**

In Singapore a comprehensive School Excellence Model (SEM) underpins the entire process of improving educational quality. The SEM is a self-assessment model which aims to allow schools to objectively identify strengths and weaknesses, and to benchmark their performance against other schools.<sup>46</sup>

The SEM is viewed as the primary mechanism for driving school improvement and requires schools to provide evidence of a range of areas including continuous improvement in results over three to five years and a set of appropriate and challenging performance targets.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2012) *OECD Review on evaluation and assessment frameworks for improving school outcomes: Country background report for Ireland* OECD

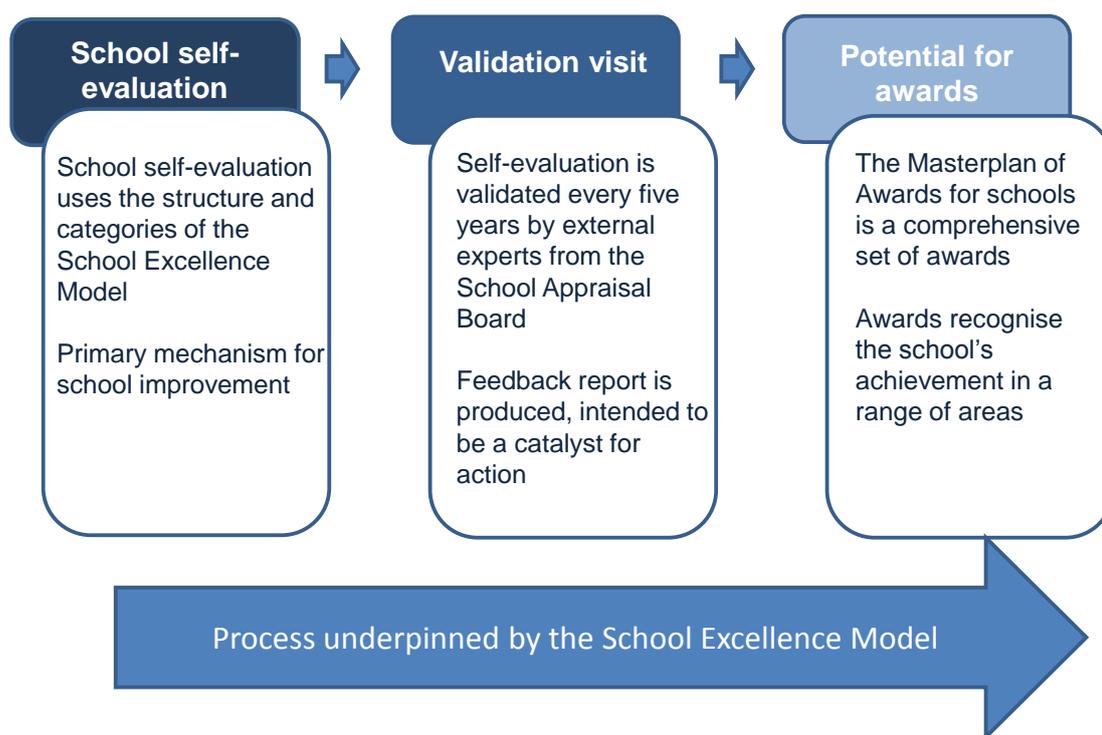
<sup>43</sup> As above

<sup>44</sup> As above

<sup>45</sup> McNamara, G., O'Hara, J. (2008) "Trusting Schools and Teachers: Developing Educational Professionalism Through Self-Evaluation" *Irish Studies* 8, Dublin: Peter Lang Publishing.

<sup>46</sup> Tee, N.P. (2003) "The Singapore School and the School Excellence Model" *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 2, pp. 27-39

<sup>47</sup> As above

**Figure 3: Overview of the evaluation process in Singapore<sup>48</sup>**

Source: Adapted from Penzer, G. (2011) *School inspections: what happens next?* and Tee, N.P. (2003) *The Singapore School and the School Excellence Model*

As Figure 3 highlights, a comprehensive set of awards is linked to the SEM. This recognises a school's achievements across a range of areas, including value-added and character development.<sup>49</sup>

### **Finland: No external evaluation**

School inspections were abolished in Finland in the early 1990s, and instead the education system relies on the effectiveness of teachers and other personnel.<sup>50</sup> Finland places significant trust in classroom teachers and principals, and they are given considerable autonomy. This means that there is no call for formal regulation.<sup>51</sup>

There is a focus on self-evaluation within schools and national evaluations of learning outcomes through annual tests undertaken by samples of schools. The results of national evaluations are not used to rank schools; rather to monitor progress at a national level.<sup>52</sup> Requirements around self-evaluation vary by local authority. Research suggests that while criteria for self-evaluation have been defined, their use in practice is questionable.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Penzer, G. (2011) *School inspections: what happens next?* Reading: CfBT Education Trust

<sup>49</sup> As above

<sup>50</sup> Ministry of Education and Culture *Evaluation of education* [online] Available at: [http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/koulutuspolitiikka/koulutuksen\\_arviointi/?lang=en](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/koulutuspolitiikka/koulutuksen_arviointi/?lang=en)

<sup>51</sup> House of Commons Education Committee (2011) *The role and performance of Ofsted* London: The Stationery Office Limited

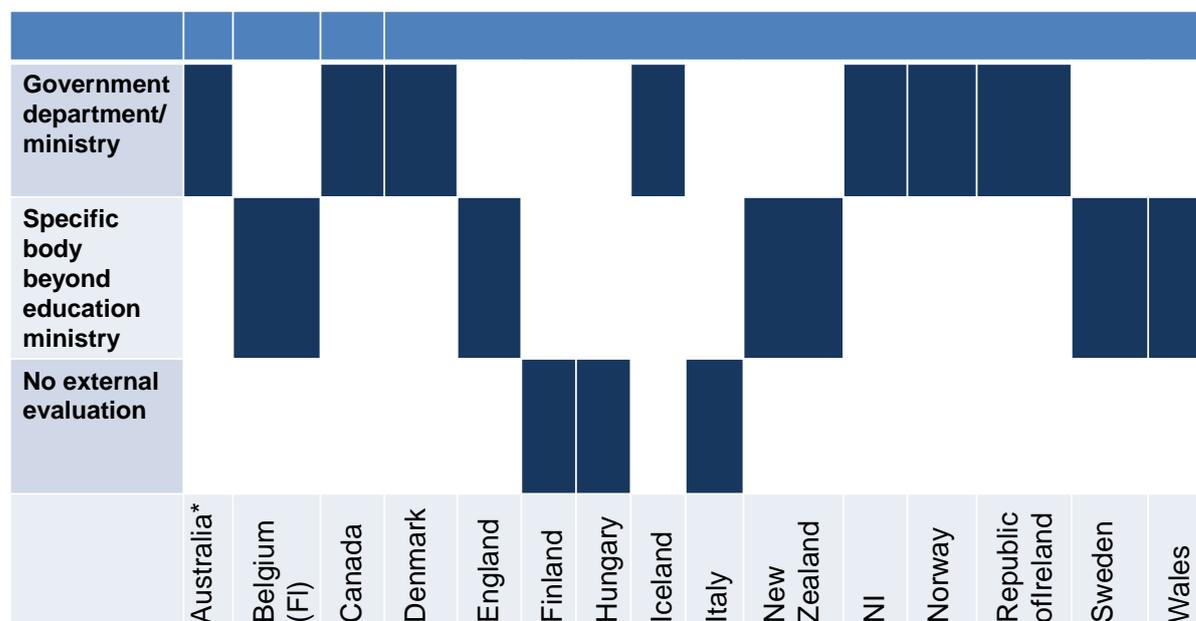
<sup>52</sup> Ministry of Education and Culture *Evaluation of education* [online] Available at: [http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/koulutuspolitiikka/koulutuksen\\_arviointi/?lang=en](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/koulutuspolitiikka/koulutuksen_arviointi/?lang=en)

<sup>53</sup> Faubert, V. (2009) *School Evaluation: Current Practices in OECD Countries and a Literature Review* Paris: OECD Publishing

## 5 Governance arrangements

Figure 4 highlights responsibility for external school evaluation in a number of countries internationally. In a number of countries it is situated within the education ministry, while in others it sits beyond it.

**Figure 4: Responsibility for external school evaluation internationally**



\*In Australia arrangements vary between states and territories, but schools are generally evaluated by government departments

Source: Adapted from OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment*

The House of Commons Education Committee notes that in England, Ofsted’s independence is valued and supports credibility.<sup>54</sup> Barber asserts that an inspection system independent of government is most effective as it allows government to be held to account, in addition to the education service itself.<sup>55</sup>

### Legal frameworks and powers

Most OECD countries have a legal framework for evaluating schools externally, but there is great variation in the extent and type of requirements set. Typically, OECD countries have highly structured legal frameworks for evaluation, prescribing similar evaluation activities for schools based on a specific set of data collection tools.<sup>56</sup>

In Northern Ireland, Article 102 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 provides a ‘highly structured’ legal framework for school inspection. Similarly, England has a very structured framework (the Education Act 2005), as does Scotland, where the school’s self-evaluation is based on a centrally devised framework.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> House of Commons Education Committee (2011) *The role and performance of Ofsted* London: The Stationery Office Limited

<sup>55</sup> Barber (2004) “The virtue of accountability: system redesign, inspection and incentives in the era of reformed professionalism” *Journal of Education* Vol. 185, No. 1, pp. 7-38

<sup>56</sup> OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment* Paris: OECD Publishing

<sup>57</sup> As above

In the Republic of Ireland inspection is underpinned by the Education Act 1998. It also gives boards of management and teachers the right to request that the Chief Inspector reviews the inspection.<sup>58</sup> Internationally, other countries with a highly structured approach include Japan, Korea and the US. Countries with a partially structured approach include Denmark, which has a system of local authority-based reporting.<sup>59</sup>

### **Education Bill**

The Education Bill would significantly enhance the powers of inspectors in NI. Table 5 provides an overview of the legislative powers outlined within the Bill and compares it to the powers available to inspectors elsewhere. (The table refers to legislation only).

**Table 5: Examples of statutory powers of inspectorates**

	Areas of inspection	Powers to inspect and take documents
<b>Education Bill (NI)</b>	<p>‘Any aspect’ of establishments in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching and learning;</li> <li>• Management;</li> <li>• Staffing, equipment, accommodation and other resources</li> </ul>	<p>The inspector may inspect, take copies of, or take away any documents ‘at reasonable times only’ including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power to require production of documents and obtain access to any computer</li> </ul>
<b>England</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupil achievement;</li> <li>• Quality of teaching;</li> <li>• Leadership and management; and</li> <li>• Behaviour and safety</li> </ul>	<p>The inspector may inspect, take copies of, or take away any documents ‘at all reasonable times’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power to obtain access to any computer</li> </ul>
<b>Scotland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislation does not detail specific areas</li> </ul>	<p>Does not specify particular powers, however anyone obstructing inspection subject to fine/ imprisonment</p>
<b>Republic of Ireland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less prescriptive – inspectors consult stakeholders and evaluate as appropriate</li> <li>• Duties include advising and supporting schools</li> </ul>	<p>Inspector “<i>shall have all such powers as are necessary or expedient... and shall be accorded every reasonable facility and cooperation by the board and staff</i>”</p>

<sup>58</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2012) *OECD Review on evaluation and assessment frameworks for improving school outcomes: Country background report for Ireland* OECD

<sup>59</sup> OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment* Paris: OECD Publishing

For further information please refer to [Paper 931-12: Education Bill: school inspection.](#)

### Qualifications of inspectors

OECD highlights the importance of ensuring that external evaluators are credible and legitimate. Internationally, inspectors tend to be recruited from the education sector, are recognised as having in-depth expertise and have previously been successful practitioners.<sup>60</sup>

In Northern Ireland all inspectors must be qualified to at least degree level or equivalent, and must have a qualification enabling them to teach in a grant-aided school or further education college.

The Department states that all inspectors in NI have substantial teaching and/or training experience. The experience required depends on the specialism associated with the post and many inspectors are qualified and/ or experienced “*well beyond the minimum*” requirements.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, the ETI recruits a pool of “associate assessors” from among senior school staff, for example, principals, deputy principals or senior teachers. Associate assessors receive training and may be asked to join an inspection team not more than twice annually. The aims of this are to:<sup>62</sup>

- Help the individual to monitor, evaluate and improve provision in their own school; and
- To help develop ETI’s awareness of the current perspective of schools.

In Scotland and Hong Kong inspection teams also include lay members who have no qualifications or experience in education, but must attend training prior to conducting an inspection.<sup>63</sup>

In the Republic of Ireland inspectors must have a relevant teaching qualification and at least five years’ teaching experience. However in practice these requirements are typically exceeded, with most applicants holding more extensive experience and post-graduate qualifications.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup> OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment* Paris: OECD Publishing

<sup>61</sup> Information provided by the Department of Education, October 2012

<sup>62</sup> OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment* Paris: OECD Publishing

<sup>63</sup> Whitby, K. (2010) *School Inspection: recent experiences in high performing education systems* Berkshire: CfBT Education Trust

<sup>64</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2012) *OECD Review on evaluation and assessment frameworks for improving school outcomes: Country background report for Ireland* OECD

### England: Requirements for inspectors

Ofsted sets out clear requirements around the qualifications and experience required of inspectors. These include:

- A relevant degree and/or teaching qualification;
- A minimum of five years' successful teaching experience;
- Credibility and up-to-date professional knowledge, for example of the remit, curriculum, recent developments in the sector, and statutory requirements.

In addition, Ofsted states that inspectors will normally have a minimum of two years' successful and substantial management experience in the relevant area; and a wide range of experience within the relevant area, for example in more than one institution.

However, evidence suggests that many inspectors lack recent or relevant experience of the settings they investigate. The House of Commons Education Committee has recommended that professional development opportunities such as secondments to schools for inspectors should be extended.

Source: Ofsted (2012) *Qualifications, experience and standards required of additional inspectors undertaking inspections on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills* and House of Commons Education Committee (2011) *The role and performance of Ofsted* London: The Stationery Office Limited

### Recruitment, induction and development

New ETI inspectors are recruited through public advertisements in the press. They serve a two-year probationary period which includes a programme of induction and development, and development continues throughout their service.<sup>65</sup>

The nine week induction process involves assessing the work and training needs of new inspectors. New inspectors undertake visits with an experienced colleague and their evaluations are compared, and they have opportunities to shadow reporting inspectors.<sup>66</sup>

At least five professional development days are provided by ETI for inspectors, in addition to phase-specific professional development days. All inspectors have the opportunity to access up to five additional personal staff development days, with attendance at training courses and conferences facilitated according to business need.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> ETI *Becoming an Inspector* [online] Available at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/support-material/support-material-general-documents-non-phase-related/support-material-general-documents-about-the-education-and-training-inspectorate/becoming-an-inspector.htm>

<sup>66</sup> Information provided by the Education and Training Inspectorate, September 2013

<sup>67</sup> As above

## Transparency

Research suggests that external evaluation of schools should involve setting clear expectations and standards in order to promote transparency and objectivity.<sup>68</sup> In Northern Ireland, ETI publishes *Together Towards Improvement*, a set of quality indicators for use in inspection and self-evaluation.

Another potential way of increasing transparency in school inspections is to evaluate inspectors, for example, by gathering feedback from schools and other stakeholders on their experiences of the inspection process, or through examination of inspection procedures through national audits.<sup>69</sup>

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) carries out an annual survey with staff whose school has recently undergone inspection on the effectiveness of the inspection process. The findings of the 2011-12 survey were largely positive, as outlined in Table 6.<sup>70</sup>

**Table 6: Key findings from the 2011-12 post-inspection survey**

Area	Example findings
Pre-inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>79% agreed or strongly agreed that the <b>amount of documentation required was reasonable</b> (8% disagreed or strongly disagreed)</li> </ul>
During inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>81% agreed or strongly agreed that in all spoken reports during the inspection, <b>the team identified the main strengths</b> of the organisation (6% disagreed or strongly disagreed)</li> </ul>
After the inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>82% agreed or strongly agreed that the <b>process helped the school plan for and promote improvement</b> in outcomes (7% disagreed/ strongly disagreed)</li> </ul>
Overall satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>82% agreed or strongly agreed that they were <b>treated fairly</b> by the inspection team throughout (9% disagreed or strongly disagreed)</li> </ul>

The performance of individual ETI inspectors is evaluated using the NI Civil Service Performance Management system which includes a mid and end of year review. At these reviews ETI reports that “all aspects” of an inspector’s work are discussed, and that this will include examples of reports the inspector has prepared.<sup>71</sup>

However, this does not include a specific separate review of inspection evidence bases. ETI notes that Managing Inspectors check these when they visit inspections. It

<sup>68</sup> OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment* Paris: OECD Publishing

<sup>69</sup> OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment* Paris: OECD Publishing

<sup>70</sup> NISRA *Post-inspection evaluation 2011-12*

<sup>71</sup> Information provided by the Education and Training Inspectorate, October 2013

states that all information relating to an inspector's work that is brought to the attention of management is discussed with the individual as a matter of course.<sup>72</sup>

Post-inspection questionnaires are completed anonymously and NISRA manages the process to ensure impartiality (as such they are not used in the performance management of individual inspectors). However ETI notes that if a school writes to them the matter raised is discussed with the inspector concerned.<sup>73</sup>

With regard to other jurisdictions, New Zealand systematically collects feedback from school principals on the inspection process. Stakeholders may also feedback concerns or suggestions for future inspections through the Education Review Office or through the official complaints procedure. In recent years both the Republic of Ireland and Sweden have also subjected their school evaluation processes to national audits.<sup>74</sup>

In England Ofsted holds inspectors to account for the quality of their work and reinforces this through rigorous performance management systems. These draw on information including:<sup>75</sup>

- **Quality assurance visits** (on-site visits by inspectors to assure the quality of inspectors and inspections – around 5% of all inspections);
- **Review of inspection evidence bases** (in-depth reviews of a proportion of all inspections and all those judged 'inadequate' (around 6% of all inspections);
- **Any complaints or commendatory letters** received;
- **Visits to inspections for performance management purposes** undertaken by both Ofsted's quality assurance team and by senior inspectors;
- **School responses** to post-inspection questionnaires.

## 6 Conclusion

This paper has highlighted a range of issues in regard to the approach to school inspection in place in NI. Areas that could be given further consideration include:

- The risk-based approach to determining the frequency with which schools are inspected, for example, whether value-added indicators are used to identify schools for inspection;

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<sup>72</sup> Information provided by the Education and Training Inspectorate, October 2013

<sup>73</sup> Information provided by the Education and Training Inspectorate, October 2013

<sup>74</sup> OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An international perspective on evaluation and assessment* Paris: OECD Publishing

<sup>75</sup> House of Commons Education Committee (2011) *Letter from Christine Gilbert, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Ofsted, dated 27 February 2011* [online] Available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmeduc/570/570we12.htm>

- The approaches to inspection other jurisdictions, for example the high stakes approach in England and its removal of the 'satisfactory' grade; and the centrality of self-evaluation to school improvement in Singapore;
- The situation of the ETI within the Department of Education;
- The additional powers for the ETI set out within the Education Bill;
- Other practices including school-to-school or peer evaluation;
- Qualification requirements for inspectors, for example Ofsted's requirement that inspectors demonstrate credibility and up-to-date professional knowledge;
- The performance management of inspectors in NI, and the extent to which they draw upon a broad and robust evidence base.