

Ceara Special School

Inquiry into the ETI and School Improvement Process

My name is Dr Peter Cunningham MBE, and I am currently the Principal of Ceara Special School, Lurgan. I have spent my entire teaching career, 33 years, in the area of special education. In addition, I am also a member of:

- The Southern Education & Library Board.
- The Special Education and Disability Tribunal.
- The Council for CCEA.
- Three School Boards of Governors.
- Chair of my local Area Learning Community; and
- I was one of the first 'Associate Inspectors' for DE when the 'concept' was being tested almost 20 years ago.

It is my view that ETI's current approach to school inspection/school improvement is generally fit for purpose. I do however have some comments and suggestions to make.

1. Given the increasing number of children who have special educational needs (SEN) in our schools, I feel all ETI members should have experiences in all aspects of SEN, not just the dedicated SEN inspectors.
2. I feel the 'Quality Self Inspection Audit' should be reintroduced to allow schools to identify and self evaluate their curricular provision.
3. Given the current economic climate that we find ourselves in, I feel that ETI should be able to comment of the funding available to schools. Some of our schools do wonders with very little funds while others

In addition, I have two areas that I would wish to make comment on:

Interagency Collaborative Working

Special schools bring staff from two government departments together - education and health. Yet when ETI visit special schools they are prevented from directly inspecting therapy provision. Given the number of concerns in relation to therapy provision in special schools I find this unacceptable. Especially, given that members of the Department of Health's inspectors do not visit schools. In some special schools the excellent educational provision is compromised by inadequate therapy provision.

I suggest that ETI should be allowed to directly inspect and comment on therapy provision in all schools.

Members of Boards of Governors

School Boards of governors are being given ever more powers and responsibilities, yet they are never inspected in terms of training, attendance, involvement with the school or child protection matters.

I therefore suggest that ETI should be allowed to inspect and comment on School Boards of Governors especially with regard to attendance at meetings. Whilst not wishing to name names, I suggest that the percentage attendance at meetings should be included in ETI reports.

I would be happy to give oral evidence, should the committee think it may be of value.

Dr P G Cunningham

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