

St. Mary's University College, Belfast

Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process

I note that the Committee for Education is undertaking an inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and its role in the School Improvement process.

It is not feasible to present a well-researched written submission within the period 28 June – 23 August. The teacher educators at our institution take academic leave at various times precisely in this period and I would wish to consult them about a matter of such great importance to the school system in Northern Ireland.

However, I would wish to put a number of observations on the record and I do this from my experience in the field of teacher education.

1. The approach of self-evaluation followed by inspection is entirely appropriate for the teaching profession. It encourages schools and their teaching staff to reflect and evaluate critically, which is what one would expect from a profession.
2. In my experience the Inspectorate go about their work in an exemplary way. They manage to balance their key role of inspection with an input into the provision of much-needed advice and guidance to schools and other educational providers.
3. The reports of inspections are valuable sources of learning for the world of education in Northern Ireland and this applies in particular to the Chief Inspector's Report. The latter is the best source we have for understanding, in a global way, the strengths of the school system as well as the main areas for development.
4. School Improvement is facilitated by the ETI's current approach to inspection. The emphasis on data analysis in recent years has enhanced the approach as it enables a more focussed attention of the outcomes of teaching on pupils' learning.
5. School Improvement is the ultimate aim of Teacher Education provision. The ETI play an important role in teacher education through professional engagement with the HEI providers, either through the medium of link inspection or subject specialist roles. The most recent inspection of ITE which was undertaken by the ETI used the school model with some adjustments and in my view it improved teacher education provision in Northern Ireland.

This is a very brief summary of the views and opinions that I hold of the ETI and its role in the School Improvement process.