

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education



# **Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate**

## **Evidence to the Assembly Committees**

**Submitted by**

**The Northern Ireland Council for  
Integrated Education**

## Evidence to the Assembly Committee

### 1.1

Review the effectiveness of ETI's current approach in respect of school inspection/improvement-considering particularly how ETI assess the value added in those schools which have lower levels of examination attainment.

- Recent evidence from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, derived from the ETI, suggests that schools with a socially advantaged intake are more likely to receive a very good /outstanding Inspection Report than schools with a socially disadvantaged intake. This evidence suggests a social bias in inspections which can be traced to the distorting impact of selection throughout the educational system. A selective system influences attitudes and places a ceiling on the aspirations and expectations of those not selected. Selective exams distort the primary school curriculum and its delivery. The embedding of social segregation via selection disadvantages children from less well off or disadvantaged families.
- A less than satisfactory Inspection Report can reduce parental confidence in a school and fast track the closure of a school especially in the current review of the school estate under Area Based Planning.
- The concept of 'value added' does not appear to inform the inspection process and is not reported on. Recent reports indicate year 8 levels of attainment in English and Mathematics. The validity of this evidence has been challenged and many schools use independent assessment tools such as MIDyis to establish baseline attainment and for the purposes of target setting. A credible baseline tool is a necessary pre requisite before meaningful value added outcomes can be measured.
- Inspection reports do not take enough account of the many factors that impact on the quality of education provided nor do recognise the wider achievements of schools in terms of social and personal development. A proper cognisance of the 'value added' concept is critical in making fair and consistent judgements on schools.

### 1.2

Identify the key issues impacting on schools experiencing difficulties, and any gaps, both in terms of the ETI review process and the support services provided by the Department or ELB's.

- The downturn in demographics will continue to impact on those schools experiencing difficulties. The resultant decrease in funding, due to falling enrolment and fluctuations in the AWPU, will impact adversely on the composition of classes in post primary schools and the size of classes in primary schools. Falling enrolment also impacts on a school's capacity to ensure specialist teachers are employed to teach their subjects, in the organisation of classes and on the provision of additional support for individual students.
- Schools, particularly post-primary schools competing for pupils with a nearby grammar school, who take an increasingly wide range of ability, will see a continued narrowing of their social base. This will impact on student expectation and staff expectation and will further impede improvement. Such conditions place students and teachers under a great deal of stress.  
Essentially there is a key issue of inequality of provision for those children and young people in schools experiencing difficulties.
- Schools also experience financial problems due to incremental drift and, with schools having to remain within the 5% deficit parameters, staffing will be affected. There are situations in such schools where non-specialist teachers have to teach a number of subjects – such a situation will have an obvious detrimental effect on teaching and learning.
- Schools, as previously described, will usually be in socially disadvantaged areas with greater challenges in improving Numeracy and Literacy, making it extremely difficult for such schools to achieve an outstanding/very good inspection report.
- ETI monitors the quality of teaching and learning and depending on the outcome of an inspection the ELB, through the Curriculum Advice and Support Service, will provide whatever support is necessary. However, due to vacancy control in the ELB's and the financial constraints under which they operate, staff reductions in the CASS service means officers do not have the necessary in-depth knowledge to provide the support that may be required by schools. The range of high quality capacity and expertise is no, longer available. There is an additional concern that schools have ceased to look for external expert advice because of the reduction in the CASS service.

### 1.3

Identify and analyse alternative approaches and models of good practice in other jurisdictions in terms of school inspection, the assessment of value added and improvement.

- There appears to be a loss of confidence in the inspection process with fears that the inspection process may lead to the 'naming and shaming' of schools through the media. This undermines confidence in the process and its capacity to support schools towards improvement. It also adds to the stress of schools.
- The current performance levels, as used by the Inspectorate, to describe a schools performance is wide and does not help build confidence in staff, pupils and the community. A survey of inspections indicates very few schools have achieved a performance level of 'outstanding' in all areas. The use of language to support improvement is important. Phrases such as unsatisfactory and inadequate undermine the confidence of teachers, governors students and the community. A more thoughtful use of language, as used elsewhere, would identify weaknesses without the undermining of a school's capacity to improve.
- The Scottish system of inspection has put the concept of self-evaluation at the heart of their process:
  1. Scotland has moved from a cycle of inspection to a sampling model
  2. Primary schools receive two weeks written notice of inspection
  3. Post-primary schools receive three weeks' notice
  4. There is a constant dialogue between District Inspectors and Local Authorities
  5. The Managing Inspector will have had a significant leadership role – very important when assessing Leadership and Management
  6. Lay members as well as Associates are included in the inspection team
  7. A Health and Nutrition Inspector is present
  8. Phrases such as Confident, Partially Confident and Not Confident are used to describe Inspectors' view of the school's ability to self- evaluate thereby not undermining the stakeholders.

It is worth noting that Finland, whose system of education is recognised as a global leader, does not use an inspection process at all to ensure quality outcomes.

"Finland has built up an education system whose characteristics consist of uniformity, free education, school meals and special education by using the principle of inclusion. Typical of Finland are very small differences between schools, which may be explained by the definition of admission areas and the lack of ranking lists and thus by the even distribution of good teachers between schools.

The Finnish school system has been intentionally developed towards the comprehensive model, which guarantees everybody equal

opportunities in education irrespective of sex, social status, ethnic group, etc. according to the constitution. **By the beginning of the 1990s the system of school inspection was discontinued.** The realization of national goals was instead systematically evaluated by national and international surveys of learning results.”

NICIE would argue that a deeper analysis of the purpose of inspection and its processes would assist the Committee with its enquiry.

#### 1.4

Consider what priorities and actions need to be taken to improve ETI’s approach to the school improvement process including the need for enhanced powers, alternative measures of achievement, improved governance and transparency.

- It may be that the publication on an annual basis of the names of schools to be inspected in the following year would be supportive of a schools journey to improvement.
- Such notice should be accompanied by a shorter period of actual notice. This would allow the inspection process to see the school operating normally and would reduce stress. Preparation for inspection disrupts schools and the long period of notice places teachers under stress.
- Inspectors need to cultivate an ethos of ‘being a critical friend’ and work with management and teachers.
- There is scope for an extended role for the district inspector. The DI has a detailed knowledge of the school and should be intervening, as the critical friend, at an early stage: to set the school’s performance in a wider context; to ensure boards of governors are aware of the school’s performance in this wider context; to support the exploration of strategies for improvement and to provide constructive challenge towards improvement.
- The depth and extent of the role of the DI would be determined by factors such as new leadership, shifts in performance, the outcome of inspections.
- Any enhanced powers for ETI should be agreed only after consultation with schools and other stakeholders.