

**WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO THE COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION'S INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE AND ITS ROLE IN THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROCESS**

**HUNTERHOUSE COLLEGE**

**INTRODUCTION**

This submission has been completed by Mr. Andrew Gibson (Principal) and Mr. Peter McQuillan (Vice Principal) on behalf of Hunterhouse College. The school has a wealth of information explaining the value added measures which we use to determine the progress that individual pupils and their cohort make across the various stages in their education and we would be happy to explain these figures to the Committee if requested.

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

1.1 'Value added' should be interpreted as the progress which students make between different stages in their education. The strength of this value added measure can then be gauged by comparing it against the progress made by pupils in other schools who had a similar level of performance at the end of the previous stage in their education. It is, we believe, if carried out rigorously, the fairest way of comparing schools as it takes full account of the intake of a school and the levels of individual prior attainment.

1.2 In our opinion, the current approach is based upon a flawed model in which schools are compared on a named type (eg grammar or secondary) without any attempt to distinguish between schools within these types and between their widely differing intakes.

1.3 Apart from the very broad categorisation of 'selective' and 'non-selective' the only factor that is currently taken into account in relation to examination performance is the percentage of children on free school meals. However, it is acknowledged, even in documentation produced by the Department of Education that in some schools this has little impact. In fact, in some of the benchmarking data tables supplied by the Department, attainment rises slightly as the percentage of free school meals itself rises!

1.4 In the past, schools and Governors have been provided by the Department with a scatter diagram which shows the relationship between attainment at GCSE and the % of children on Free School Meals within the school. The line of progression has a  $r^2$  value of only 0.02. ( $r^2$  values measure the reliability of a progression line with 0 indicating no reliability to 1 indicating very reliable.)

1.5 When comparing the intake of our own school with those of other grammar schools we are acutely aware of how different we are to the vast majority of other selective schools. The students who completed their GCSEs in 2011, 2012 and 2013 entered the school with on average 15 % of them having attained an A grade in the old 11+ system. The A grade intake for other grammar schools over this period is several times this. Is it realistic and indeed fair to assume that given this

very significant difference in intake, that our pupils attain the same GCSE outcomes as those who entered post-primary education with a much higher level of prior attainment?

1.5 As an alternative to this and to allow us to realistically benchmark our pupils against other grammar school children who entered post-primary with a similar attainment level we compared the results at GCSE with their standardised 11+ scores. This gave a much more robust line of progression with a much more reliable  $r^2$  value. This one calculation shows that prior attainment has a much greater impact on outcomes than Free School Meals.

1.6 If the inspection process is truly about assessing how a specific school 'meets the needs of individuals', the words used by the ETI, the current model pays very little attention to how far an individual has progressed but views them instead as part of a very large group covering a wide range of abilities. This model benefits nobody.

1.7 Schools are then, in relation to public examination performance, labelled as 'well above average', 'above average', 'in line with average', 'below average' or 'well below average' with little attempt to take previous levels of achievement into account. In many cases, this results in schools being labelled as below average or well below average even when there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that, given previous levels of achievement, the school has exceeded expected levels of attainment.

1.8 By using national tests on entry to the school, we are able to show that, on average, every pupil taking GCSEs in our school obtains 5 grades more than should be expected. However, as prior attainment is not taken into account, the overall performance of the school at GCSE level is classed as "below average".

1.9 It is a similar story at Post 16 Level. Here we make use of the C2K progression lines to measure outcomes against prior attainment at GCSE. Over the past four years these figures have shown that the vast majority of our grades either meet or exceed benchmarked expectations with on average 50% of our A Level grades at least one grade higher than they should be. This is an astonishing achievement especially when taking into account the fact that value has already been added at GCSE. In spite of this our grades are seen as 'well below average' as prior attainment at GCSE is not taken into account.

1.10 All schools will have Sixth Form entry requirements based on GCSE performance. These will differ between non-selective and selective schools and between schools within these two groupings. As a school we set a low tariff as we know that we are able to add value and to get students into third tier education – our percentage of students entering university being comparable with the NI grammar school average. By putting the interests of pupils first however, we are accepting students into post 16 study who, based on their GCSE outcomes, will have difficulty attaining three A levels at C grade or better. Indeed over the period 2010-12 over 25% of our predicted grades, using the C2K prediction lines, were grade D or lower. We have to add value to every one of these grades to reach the C grade benchmark. This is not a challenge faced to the same extent by many other schools. A very easy way for any school to improve its A level results is simply to raise the academic profile of its post 16 intake by raising the threshold of entry. This would not however be in the interests of pupils or their families.

1.11 A school where pupils had very high levels of achievement on entry but adds little or no value over the course of the pupils' education could still be labelled as above average or well above average using the ETI framework.

1.12 When a school is able to present evidence to show the value added to examination performance the ETI takes little notice of it as it does not fit into the scope of the inspection process.

1.13 This process runs counter to Every School a Good School (page 27) which suggests that in a school improvement policy, "the school makes effective use of data as an evidence base to help evaluate performance, identify areas for improvement and assist with target setting."

1.14 There are examples where the issues identified in a "Satisfactory" inspection report are almost identical to those in a "Good" or even an "Outstanding" report, the only distinguishing feature being the headline examination performance. However, the nature of the language used can be very different with much more negative language being used for the "Satisfactory" report.

1.15 The approach not only affects the performance level and language used in the report but can result in unrealistic targets for attainment in public examinations being set. A school with relatively low levels of prior attainment cannot necessarily be expected to match the performance of a school with high levels of prior attainment. Furthermore, it is statistically impossible for all schools to be "above average" which it would seem the current model of inspection expects.

1.16 A school with public examination results which are "below average" can still be a good, very good or indeed outstanding school if it is adding value to its pupils. Conversely, a school which has public examination results which are above average may be unaware of the overall progress of its pupils, good or bad.

## **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 the Education and Library Boards.**

2.1 If we accept that by not taking full account of the school value added profile, the inspectorate do not have a true understanding of the progression made by students, then by logical outcome the targets which are set for schools on how far and how fast they must improve must be fundamentally flawed, especially when tied into overall performance in public examinations.

2.2 Currently there is no recognised and dependable measure of prior attainment available through the Department of Education. In the past there has been no moderation of Levels of Attainment at Key Stage 2 or Key Stage 3 which makes the figures unreliable. As we move to the new Levels of Progression, it has been recognised by the Department of Education that it will take some time before we are clear on how well schools have adapted to this change. Consequently, schools have to be prepared to fund measures of prior attainment for themselves ( e.g. CAT tests ) and, therefore, there is no common approach to measuring value added figures.

2.3 This is recognised at several points in Every School a Good School. For example on page 39, "concerns include ... the absence of a generally accepted range of performance indicators which can

be used to provide an informed picture of a school's performance and how this compares to other schools, and, the need for a more robust means of assessing social deprivation which also includes a "value-added" measurement that relates to the performance of pupils in their level of attainment at an earlier stage e.g. in post-primary schools, performance at GCSE can be matched against level of ability on entry to the school."

2.4 The current model of inspection is based purely on outcomes and is focused on schools reaching benchmarked figures of attainment in public examinations. This approach penalises schools that carefully manage the individual needs of pupils rather than concentrating on reaching the benchmarks. For example, if a school decides that, in order to fulfil the ambitions of particular pupils to secure entry to university, they should take only take 2 A Levels and a third course which is recognised by UCAS (but not the Department of Education), the school is penalised as these pupils cannot be included in the 3 A\*-C benchmark set by the Department of Education. Furthermore, the 3 A\*-C benchmark in itself is by no means a measure of a school's outcomes in successfully achieving pupil progression to Higher Education or employment. Importantly, Every School a Good School (page 26) suggests that school improvement policy should have "the interests of pupils rather than institutions at the centre of the policy and the interventions."

2.5 The biggest stakeholders, pupils and parents, are best placed to be the barometers of how a school is doing in raising standards and measuring prior attainment against final outcomes. They are asked to submit evidence through the issue of questionnaires but, although some acknowledgement of the response to the questionnaires is made at feedback sessions with the ETI, the findings from these are usually reduced to a short paragraph of the final report. The concept of a school being the "best fit" for an individual child seems to be lost in the reporting model.

2.6 At the outset of an inspection it is made clear that the final report will be "Evidence Based". However, on the whole, the only documentation used as part of the evidence base is that which is requested by the ETI in advance of the inspection. Additional documentation supplied by schools as evidence is by and large ignored. During the feedback sessions held at the end of the inspection process, there is no right to reply or opportunity to influence decisions made. Furthermore, many positive comments made during the feedback can be left out of the final report with editorial decisions resting solely with the ETI. There appears to be an overall lack of consistency, a lack of any moderation process and lack of accountability on the part of the ETI in relation to the inspection process.

### **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;**

No comment

### **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;**

4.1 Until a reliable and robust measure to establish the progress made by individual pupils across the key points in their education is developed and these figures are then aggregated to give an overall

'score' for a school, a fundamental weakness will, we believe, continue to lie at the core of the inspection process.

4. In terms of standards and achievements a successful school is one that makes a difference to individuals, that adds value by allowing them to exceed beyond expectations and this is not being fully recognised.