

YOUR REF



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Brian Campfield General Secretary

Mr Peter McCallion
Committee Clerk
Committee for Education
Room 375 Parliament Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

6 December 2013

Dear Peter

RE: ETI AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT INQUIRY

Further to my letter of 11 November 2013 in response to your letter of 8 November 2013, I do apologise for the delay in getting back to you. Unfortunately other work pressures have intervened.

However I have attempted to address all of the issues that you raised and if you require any further information please do not hesitate to get in touch.

(a) 20% proposed reduction in the budget for the Education and Training Inspectorate

The view of NIPSA is that the 20% reduction is not linked with a growth in self evaluation in schools but rather merely a budgetary cut. Schools have, for some considerable time now, been encouraged and indeed supported to ensure that they have rigorous self evaluation in place. The Education and Training Inspectorate provide free and ready access to a document entitled "Together towards Improvement", which supports schools in this regard.

In relation to the point raised about Associate Assessors NIPSA does not possess the data regarding the number of days and costs associated with this in order to know whether or not there is a correlation. The Office of the Chief Inspector might be best able to provide this information.

NIPSA welcomes the use of Associate Assessors as it provides greater transparency in the system and allows for practitioners with current and relevant experience to play a significant role in the inspection. Inspectors and current Senior Practitioners work extremely well alongside each other and both learn from each other. NIPSA sees the value of such a scheme.

The main concern NIPSA has with the 20% reduction in resources is the severe demands that it is, and will continue to play, on Inspectors' workload, health and wellbeing and indeed the additional stresses it places on Inspectors and schools

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where it is felt that there are demands to increase the number of inspections with increasingly less time to do them. As we pointed out during our verbal presentation, doing more with less and less in a quicker time period will present increasing risks. NIPSA members in ETI stand for quality and not quantity and we would welcome the support of the Education Committee in this context.

Coupled with the decreasing resources and the high stakes involved, NIPSA would wish to point out that the policy of not allowing the District Inspector to be the Reporting Inspector in one of their own schools is placing increased risks on inspections. The District Inspector has an in-depth knowledge of the school context which is an essential component in evaluating a school. NIPSA clearly stands for quality inspection processes and adequate human resourcing.

It has been noticed that over the last few years many highly valued and experienced Inspectors have retired, some of whom would have stayed on in a part-time / specialist capacity. NIPSA's members in ETI welcomes the Education Committees support in considering the many advantages and benefits of implementing such a policy which operates in other parts of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

(b) Education Scotland Inspection Model

Our members have not had the opportunity of having a collective discussion on the whole issue of the Education Scotland Inspection Model. What we raised in our verbal submission was the opportunity which Education Scotland allows for their Inspectors to have, compared to our members, a generous amount of time for professional development.

It was that one issue which we highlighted during our verbal presentation.

Our members are neither for nor against the Scottish model but we believe that if there was to be a move towards adopting the Education Scotland model then our members in ETI would welcome the opportunity for a full engagement and the opportunity to contribute to such a discussion before any decisions were made. Our members remain steadfast in their view that they want to work alongside other colleagues and in order to promote improvement.

NIPSA in ETI wants a service that meets the needs of Northern Ireland's children, pupils and young people. NIPSA is very concerned at the accusations being made around the Inspection Service that arouses fear and concern. Our members in ETI are very much in favour of working alongside schools and other service providers to promote improvement and they strongly oppose vigorously a punitive inspection regime. Our members in ETI acknowledge that a trust has been lost of late, then there is clear work to be done to rebuild confidence and to improve relationships and trust.

(c) Development proposals and area plans

Our members in ETI have been asked, as one of a range of bodies, to respond to a range of Development Proposals. These cover a range of issues, including school closures or proposed amalgamations. In other cases they are about increasing the enrolment number or a change in pre-school provision in voluntary and private to statutory such as playgroup becoming a nursery unit.

In their comments on Development Proposals, Inspectors provide statistical data or previous inspection evidence to the Department of Education. This is done so that others are better informed and can take whatever decisions required. In this regard the ETI acts independently, uses inspection evidence and provides information based often on district knowledge. The information provided by ETI is not always acted upon by Department of Education.

I hope this clarifies all of the points you raised but if there is anything further you want please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony McMullan', written in a cursive style.

TONY McMULLAN
Assistant Secretary