

## Inquiry into the ETI and the School Improvement Process

### Submission by Dr D Burnett, Headmaster (The Royal School Dungannon)

1. The ETI's current approach in respect of school inspection / improvement and how/whether ETI properly assesses the value-added in those schools which have lower levels of examination attainment

It would be helpful to all schools if the ETI was in a position to utilise pupil and institutional value-added data and not reliant upon the current approach of measuring achievement by school type and in relation to the average for that school type (see 3 and 4 below).

2. 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 ELBs to help schools improve

As a general rule in education we should expect school improvement to come from within a school or in cooperation with another school. The actions and resources of support services may provide additional help and guidance but the emphasis should be on schools bringing about their own improvement.

Where a school lacks the capacity to bring about improvement on its own then the experience in England of joining successful schools and schools in difficulty within federations or similar relationships has produced some significant results which are worth investigating. Although such arrangements are not always cheap and do often require short term injections of funding, in the long term stability is created by the new procedures and approaches enacted on the ground by staff and governors - by the rhythms of school life changing for the better.

See for example:

Ronald Arnold, 'Schools in collaboration: federations, collegiates and partnerships', by (2006) -<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/EMI15/EMI15.pdf>

Ofsted report on federations (2011)

<http://www.thegovernor.org.uk/freedownloads/newmodelsofschoolleadership/Leadership%20of%20more%20than%20one%20school.doc>

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/federated-schools-see-improved-outcomes-%E2%80%93-ofsted> (Ofsted press release)

3. Alternative inspection/improvement approaches which might better assess value-added and recognise improvement by schools

The most important point is to introduce value-added data for all Northern Ireland schools. This was promised in 'Every School a Good School' in April 2009 (see page 27, "In pursuit of this goal we will: introduce a contextual value-added measure to be

used alongside other performance data in assessing the performance of schools”). In addition ESaGS promised to “require the Education and Skills Authority to develop and deliver a training programme for governors, principals and teachers in the effective use of data, including benchmarking and the new value-added measure”. Neither promise has been delivered. The non-appearance of ESA is not a sufficient reason for the absence of value-added data from the schools system. There are a number of important consequences which follow.

The ETI are left with a limited model for making judgements about school performance based upon comparing the performance of any school to the average at GCSE and/or A Level. This model is predicated on the idea that schools fall into two types, selective and non-selective, and that each school should only be compared against schools which have the same designation. The key assumption is that all selective and non-selective schools are similar in terms of pupil intake and by the time public examinations come along at GCSE then salient judgements are being made by comparing any school within a category with the average for the entire category. This assumption is flawed in a number of ways.

First, the intake of schools within the selective and non-selective groupings varies significantly. A non-selective school in an area without a selective school nearby will have a higher ability intake than a non-selective school in an area with a selective school next door yet both will be labelled non-selective and treated the same by ETI in terms of comparing examination outcomes to the non-selective school average. The first school has an in-built advantage. Similarly, in a divided community, a selective school situated in an area with a large potential intake will have a higher standard of intake than a selective school with a small potential intake. This can be seen in the scores/grades for the selection tests used by selective schools more so than in the end of Key Stage 2 data provided by primary schools but even here there can be significant variation. As both are selective schools they will be treated the same by ETI although the first school has an in-built advantage over the second school when comparing outcomes to the grammar school average. It is the institutional designation which takes priority rather than the ability levels of the pupils. In the examples above it is entirely possible that value-added data would show the second school in each instance to be helping pupils to achieve greater progress relative to their starting point. This would allow ETI to make more sophisticated judgements about schools and pupils' progress than at present. Without value-added data it is not possible to address such issues.

Second, the data indicating the ability levels of pupils entering Year 8 in any Northern Ireland school prior to September 2013 have been based upon teacher assessed levels of English and Mathematics in primary schools at the end of Key Stage 2 which are not moderated or standardised and may vary considerably from year to year and between schools. This difficulty has been compounded by the production of a further set of teacher assessed judgements at the end of Key Stage 3 which are similarly not moderated and not standardised. Therefore, data on pupils' ability levels when beginning Year 8 and at the end of Year 10 cannot be considered reliable or valid. Even if the data were reliable and valid then there is no mechanism for calculating the progress made by individual pupils beyond an assumption that a pupil should make at least one level of progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. And even if that mechanism was found to produce valid and reliable data then there is no way to correlate teacher assessed levels in Mathematics and English at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3 with expected GCSE outcomes for an individual pupil across a range of subjects.

Third, the introduction of new statutory assessment levels at Key Stages 2 and 3 based upon Communication (instead of English) and Using Mathematics (instead of Mathematics), and in 2013-14 Using ICT, has compounded these problems. At Key Stages 2 and 3 the assessment levels remain as teacher assessed levels, with one third of the post-primary cohort earmarked for external moderation by CCEA. Trade Union action has undermined that outcome and the moderated cohort is much reduced. There has been no moderation of primary school assessment levels. Moreover, the assessments in relation to Using Mathematics, Communication and Using ICT are based upon the aggregated outcomes from work undertaken in a range of subjects and are not directly comparable to GCSE subjects such as Mathematics or English Language or ICT. Indeed, the emphasis for what is to be assessed at Key Stages 2 and 3 in Using Mathematics, Communication and Using ICT is often very different to the assessment demands found in GCSE Mathematics, English and ICT. No direct correlation is possible. Such data are therefore not reliable or valid for comparative purposes between schools or for measuring progress by pupils from Key Stages 2 to 3 and then GCSE at Key Stage 4.

The best solution to these problems is the introduction of a value-added data system for all schools based upon an externally standardised “low stakes” test at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3. This would provide outcomes showing pupils’ ability levels at these points and enable projections for public examination performance at GCSE (and subsequently at A Level) that might be expected in the future. It would enable the focus for every school to be upon each individual pupil’s progress. As a result, the focus of ETI judgements could shift away from institutional judgements in comparison to the average and towards the same issue of pupil progress. This would allow ETI to make a judgement based upon learning demonstrated by pupils relative to their starting point and allow ETI to challenge schools where value-added is consistently low. Currently, some schools are purchasing value-added packages to enable them to track pupils’ progress and to focus upon individual needs but this raises further issues.

An obvious problem arising is that some schools have access to value-added data systems and some do not. For schools which have purchased value-added data systems, from the likes of CEM or GL Assessment, there is the potential to benchmark pupils against a national cohort and to project typical future outcomes in public examinations. Schools can then track which pupils are on target and which need help; and they can also measure the value-added when actual GCSE/A Level results are known. ETI would also be in a position to see the value added per pupil and would not be reliant upon the current benchmarking process of ‘above or below the average’. There is no clear message in current ETI reports that, where schools have purchased and utilised value-added packages, such data is a considered and consistent part of ETI judgements.

Schools without value-added data cannot currently operate in this manner. As a result, all schools continue to be judged by ETI inspectors in terms of benchmarking against average outcomes by school type as this is the only common data available. The problem is that the current benchmarking data is so limited that it could be possible for ETI to judge a school as failing (for being below the average for that school’s designation) when value-added data would show the school to be adding considerable value in terms of pupils’ progress. In short, that no school could have achieved any more with those pupils. Conversely, a school which is consistently above the average may be adding little or no value to pupils’ outcomes. In short, that the same pupils in a

different school would have achieved even more highly. These would be more meaningful judgements to make about schools in terms of performance and success.

There are no short-cuts available to ETI using the current assessment procedures and data. Any effort to tally the levels of progress made from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and then from Key Stage 3 to GCSE and to declare such to be value-added measure would not be legitimate. The only option is for DENI to deliver the value-added package promised in ESaGS in April 2009. The process used in England, known as 'Raiseonline', has been available to all schools in an online format for several years. An online model would be an ideal delivery method for Northern Ireland schools.

The final problem currently is that without a value-added data system provided by DENI for all schools there is a burden of the annual cost to a school which chooses to fund its own value-added system. In the current financial climate that is a difficult position for any school to maintain and it creates differences in provision amongst schools. This could be perceived as unfair and, more importantly, unhelpful in addressing DENI's key priority of raising standards for pupils. It may be that schools which currently purchase value-added data packages are forced to give up this practice for reasons of cost. That would be a backward step for pupils and schools.

The advantage of value-added data is that it can show the 'trend over time' outcomes for a school based upon the progress made by pupils; and also how that school compares to all other schools in the cohort. The school's designation as selective or non-selective is irrelevant as the key question for all schools is, "how well did pupils perform given where they started from?"

4. The priorities and actions which need to be taken to improve ETI's approach to the school improvement process
  - a. Does ETI need enhanced powers?
  - b. Should ETI make more/any use of alternative measures of achievement (other than examination performance) to assess school performance?

Schools will generally welcome the opportunity to demonstrate the value of extra-curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils. Data for such is not usually empirical but ETI could make more use of 'soft' data which allow the qualitative aspects of school life to be included in judgements more consistently and with greater emphasis.

- c. Should ETI be independent of DENI (as Ofsted is)?

The only answer to this question is 'yes'. It is imperative that the ETI are seen as independent in every regard.

- d. Does ETI need a better complaints / feedback procedure?
      - e. Do schools always understand the conclusions reached by ETI - is more transparency required in this regard?

Having read a great number of 2012 and 2013 ETI reports it is difficult to spot a consistent language for judging schools. For example, take the following extracts about the quality of teaching and learning from four inspections in 2012/13. One is from a school with a top ranked 'outstanding' judgement while the others are from schools with third ranked 'good' and fourth ranked 'satisfactory' judgements but which is which?

*Extract 1*

In three-quarters of the lessons observed, the quality of the learning and teaching was good or better.

In the one-quarter of the lessons observed which were less than effective, the pace of learning was too slow with insufficient challenge for the pupils, resulting in a considerable lack of progression in their learning.

*Extract 2*

The quality of the teaching observed ranged from outstanding to satisfactory with most of the lessons seen being good or better. [The term most is defined by ETI as "75% - 90%"]

*Extract 3*

The quality of the teaching observed during the inspection ranged from satisfactory to outstanding; in three-quarters of the lessons it was good or better and in one-third of the lessons it was very good or outstanding.

*Extract 4*

The quality of the teaching observed in nine-tenths of the lessons was good; in just over one half of these lessons it was very good, and a small number were outstanding.

In the less effective practice, in one-tenth of the lessons observed, the outcomes were unclear, there was over exposition by the teacher and fewer opportunities for the pupils to develop confidently as independent learners.

It would be helpful to schools if ETI reports could use standard terms which have a defined meaning.

5. Other matters relating to ETI and the school improvement process that are worthy of further scrutiny

I would be willing to give oral evidence to the Committee.

Dr D Burnett

26 September 2013