

Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education – Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process

Updated and revised submission from ParentsOutLoud

1. About ParentsOutLoud

- a) ParentsOutloud is an independent, non-funded and non-profit group. It aims to give a voice to parents, carers and others who are interested in education. It operates primarily in England, but has also been campaigning on the issue of school starting age flexibility in Northern Ireland.
- b) It should be noted that the views expressed in this paper are the views of ParentsOutLoud alone, and are not intended to represent the views of any of the charities or other organisations, or other individuals, who are also involved in the above-mentioned campaign on school starting age flexibility.

2. Introduction

- a) We greatly welcome this inquiry by the Committee for Education. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in Northern Ireland has always maintained a very low public profile, compared to its relatively high-profile counterpart, Ofsted, in England. While Ofsted has attracted much criticism over the years, the publicity which has resulted from that criticism and from its own proactive communications efforts has engendered a level of public debate about school inspections in England which has never been evident in Northern Ireland. We hope that the Committee's inquiry will help to provoke a constructive public debate about school inspections here.
- b) We believe that ETI has significantly improved the standard of its school inspection reports over the past few years. However, there is much scope for further improvement. Our concerns about the current system of school inspections in Northern Ireland focus on a number of key issues:
 - a. The accessibility of school inspection reports and information about the school inspection system
 - b. The criteria used to assess schools
 - c. The extent to which parents and pupils have an input into school inspections

- d. The content and quality of inspection reports – **we are particularly concerned that reports, particularly primary school reports, are failing to examine the quality of delivery of the full breadth of the curriculum**
 - e. The frequency of school inspection reports – **we have found evidence of alarmingly lengthy gaps between full (or nearest equivalent to full) inspection reports which are available on the ETI website, and evidence that only a tiny proportion of primary schools and a modest proportion of post-primary schools receive a full inspection (or nearest equivalent to full inspection) in any given year**
 - f. Notice of school inspections
 - g. The resources available to ETI – **we are very concerned that ETI’s budget is currently being cut by 20%**
 - h. Assistance available to parents with concerns about a school
 - i. Thematic reviews of school provision and publicity
 - j. Benchmarking the quality of ETI school inspections
- c) As we have no staff members in Northern Ireland, we have not been able to research these issues in depth. However, we hope that we provide sufficient information on these issues in this submission to offer the Committee some areas of investigation for its inquiry.
- d) We have carried out some comparative assessment of the inspection systems and inspection reports in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, focusing on a small sample of recent reports in each country, and on the information available online. We readily acknowledge that a more robust and comprehensive study would be required in order to validate our findings.
- e) It should be noted that our comments focus on inspections of primary and post-primary schools only. We note that the Early Years charity has made a submission to the Committee’s consultation, and we would support its call for pre-school inspection reports to take a holistic view of the quality of pre-school provision.
- f) This revised and updated submission to the Inquiry takes into account information which was provided by the Department of Education to the Committee for Education at its request. We have also included some further analysis of our own, and revised information with regard to the different categories of primary school inspection carried out by ETI, in the light of the very recent addition of a new category of primary school inspection.

3. Accessibility of information

- a) Both Ofsted and ETI publish leaflets for parents about school inspections. By contrast, their Scottish counterpart, Education Scotland, has no easily accessible information on its website which is aimed at parents. The ETI leaflets are the most helpful, containing clear summary information about what will happen when your child's school is inspected.¹ However, while there is also a link under 'Information for Parents' to a page about different types of school inspection, no information is provided about 'primary inspections' which are one of a number of different types of primary school inspection.
- b) The Ofsted website also publishes a more detailed and very clear *Framework for school inspection* which explains the process in more detail and which outlines the detailed criteria used in school inspections.² **We could find no such easily accessible document on the ETI website, and information supplied by the Department of Education to the Committee suggests that no such document exists.**

1.b.1. After the Committee requested further information from the Department of Education on this question, **the Department stated that the quality indicators against which inspectors evaluated the quality of educational provision were contained in a document called *Together Towards Improvement*.** We could not access this document via the home page of ETI's website, nor under 'Information for Parents'. When we used the website's search facility to try to locate the document, links appeared to a number of versions. However, they all appeared to constitute guidance to schools on how to carry out self-evaluation. **We could not find any version of the document which stated that it provided a framework for school inspections.** Recent primary and post-primary school inspections contain a link to the relevant (primary or post-primary) version of this document, but the document itself is not presented as an inspection framework.

1.b.2. The Department also stated that another relevant document was one entitled *A Charter for Inspection*. This is available under 'Information for Parents'. However, it was only published on 23rd December 2013. In any event, this document contains a series of standards to which inspectors and ETI promise to adhere (e.g. courtesy), and does not constitute a framework for inspection.³

- c) Of the three inspection organisations, Education Scotland has the most user-friendly and fastest search facility. It is very intuitive and the results appear within a few seconds. On ETI's website, parents must use the overall website search facility. The search facility is reasonably fast and results can be filtered. However, in contrast to the Ofsted website, the results for a particular school do not appear in chronological order and searches produce

¹ See, for example: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/support-material/support-material-primary/schools-info-for-parents-2.pdf>

² See: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/framework-for-school-inspection>

³ A further document was referred to in DE's response to the Committee – *What Happens After Inspection?* However, self-evidently, this is not a framework for inspections.

other, unrelated results. **In general, ETI’s website could provide a more user-friendly and intuitive interface for parents.**

- d) We are also unhappy with the lack of any apparent system for providing parents with copies of school inspection reports in a timely manner. We note that a recent ETI Annual Report states that school inspection reports are emailed to “schools and organisations”, but that no hard copies are provided to parents.⁴ Schools should be required to publish inspection reports on their websites in a timely manner, and notify all parents when a new report is published and where it can be found on the school website. Schools should make available hard copies of the report to parents on request.

Recommendation 1: schools should be required to provide the appropriate ETI information leaflet about school inspections to all parents when a child enrolls at a school, and prior to a school inspection (or provide a link to the leaflet via email).

Recommendation 2: ETI should publish its own equivalent of Ofsted’s *Framework for school inspection* on its website and it should be available to parents in hard copy on request. This should clearly explain the inspection process in more detail and outline the detailed criteria used in school inspections.

Recommendation 3: ETI’s website should have a dedicated search facility for inspection reports which displays the results for each school in chronological order. Other steps should be taken to make the website more user-friendly and intuitive for parents.

Recommendation 4: ETI should require all schools to publish school inspection reports on their website in a timely manner, and to make all parents aware of how they can access that report, once published.

4. The criteria used to assess schools

- a) As the criteria used by ETI is not – as far as we can judge – published (see above), it is difficult to make any comparison with the criteria used by Ofsted or Education Scotland. It is also difficult to make any assessment of the criteria.
- b) As ParentsOutLoud has no staff, we have not been able to attempt any analysis of the criteria which appear to underlie post-primary school inspections. However, we have been able to analyse a small sample of primary school inspection reports. We have, therefore, focused on the criteria which appear to be used in primary school inspections, as evidenced by those reports.
- c) We note that ETI’s primary school inspection reports are structured under the following three broad headings, and that schools are assessed on each of these:

⁴ ETI Annual Business Report 2011-12, section 4.6. Available at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/support-material/support-material-general-documents-non-phase-related/support-material-general-documents-about-the-education-and-training-inspectorate/annual-business-report-2>

- a. Achievements and standards
 - b. Quality of provision (which includes quality of teaching)
 - c. Leadership and management
- d) Circumstantial evidence suggests that not all primary schools provide an adequate education in a broad range of subjects, and that some may focus disproportionately on mathematics, literacy and ICT, at the expense of other subjects which can help engage the enthusiasm of children for learning, and which provide an essential base for post-primary education. There is also circumstantial evidence of instances of a somewhat token approach to play-based learning at the Foundation Stage, and of poor communication with parents, and of a lack of involvement by pupils in the running of their school, in some instances.
- e) There is little doubt that school inspections act as a strong incentive for school to improve their teaching and practices, where these areas are weak. For this reason, we carried out two analyses of recent primary school inspection reports to examine the extent to which they focused on all these areas.
- f) ETI's primary school inspection reports are categorised under five different headings: 'baseline', 'focused', 'follow up', 'primary' and 'short' inspections. **The category of 'primary inspections' appears to have been introduced only in October 2013**, as no reports are published under this category prior to that date. **It is not clear what the difference is between 'focused' and 'primary' inspections, as both appear to focus on literacy and maths, and to cover the same general areas of examination.** The ETI website provides no explanation of 'primary inspections'. It states that a 'focused inspection' focuses on particular aspects of an organisation's provision. However, each 'primary inspection' report which we examined also stated at the beginning of the document that the inspection focused on certain areas.
- g) **We are concerned that ETI does not appear to carry out full, standard inspections of primary schools. Instead, it appears to focus on specific areas of a school's provision in both 'primary inspection' and 'focused inspection' reports. We believe this is entirely inadequate.**
- h) When the Committee questioned the Department on this issue, it responded:

On Primary inspections, the three key aspects which are evaluated and reported on include the achievements and standards attained by the children in English, mathematics and ICT; the quality of the provision which entails learning, teaching, pastoral care and assessment; and, the quality of leadership and management at all levels and safeguarding.

While achievements and standards in English, mathematics and ICT are assessed, the extent to which these subjects are integrated across the curriculum is a key aspect of the inspection process. ETI conducts thematic/survey inspections of other

areas of learning on a rolling basis and this year is looking at the World Around Us.⁵
[our emphasis]

- i) In our view, **the above response is basically an admission that ETI is not investigating the quality of teaching and provision across the full range of the primary school curriculum**, as the Department states that it is simply examining the extent to which English, maths and ICT are integrated with other areas of the curriculum.
- j) We carried out two analyses of 20 recent primary school inspection reports – ten of these were ‘focused inspection reports’ and ten were ‘primary inspection reports’.⁶ We present the amalgamated findings below as there was no significant difference in the findings between the two different types of inspection. As stated previously, we could not identify why these two types of report were labelled in different ways as they appeared to cover the same areas. Our findings were as follows:
 - a. **All 20 inspection reports focused on the provision of literacy and numeracy**, although **eight focused mostly or solely on achievement** (as opposed to teaching quality) in these areas
 - b. **Only 14 of the reports commented on ICT** in terms of either achievement or provision
 - c. **Just five reports commented on the quality of play-based learning** at Foundation Stage
 - d. **Only four reports commented on physical education provision** (a number commented on opportunities for physical activity during break times which one would expect to be in place, in any event)
 - e. **Just one report commented on the provision of science and technology**
 - f. **Only two reports commented on the quality of provision in music, while one commented on achievement** (but not teaching quality) **in art. None covered history or geography**, although there was a brief reference in one report to ‘the world around us’ curriculum area which is meant to encompass science, history and geography.
 - g. **None of the reports commented on the quality of learning with regard to the development of group work skills, and of research and investigation skills, despite**

⁵ Correspondence from the Department of Education to the Committee for Education, 13.12.13.

⁶ Both analyses examined a sample of reports carried out in 2013 and published on a page devoted to primary school inspection reports published in 2013 on ETI’s website. We analysed the first ten ‘focused inspection’ reports, as listed alphabetically on that page, on 21st September 2013. We analysed the first ten ‘primary inspection’ reports, as listed alphabetically on that page, on 2nd January 2014.

the fact that development of such skills forms part of the Revised Curriculum, and that such skills are so vital to the future employability of pupils.⁷

- h. **Only eleven reports commented on communication with parents.** However, **most mentioned only channels of communication which ought to be in place in any case** and, with one exception, there was no proper assessment of the effectiveness of such channels. The report which did assess effectiveness drew on the results of its parents' survey. None of the reports commented on whether the school regularly surveyed parents about their views.
- i. Four reports mentioned the existence of a school council which can provide a vehicle for pupils to express their views. However, the lack of such a council was not commented upon.
- k) In short, **there was no evidence of a consistent and rigorous approach to the investigation of the quality of teaching in any subjects other than mathematics and literacy, nor of the development of key cross-curricular skills, nor of the quality of a school's communication with parents or pupils.**
- l) We would like inspection reports to examine the quality of provision (which includes teaching) in each area of the Revised Curriculum, with specific assessment of play-based learning at the Foundation Stage, and of science, history, geography, physical education, art, music, and of the core skills described in the curriculum (e.g. group work) throughout P1 to P7. We would also like inspection reports to examine, in a consistent and rigorous way, the quality of a school's communication with parents and with pupils, including the extent to which parents and pupils are given a meaningful voice in the running of the school.
- m) It should be noted that, in their primary school reports, neither Ofsted nor Education Scotland appear to investigate the quality of provision right across the range of subject areas in any consistent way either, although Education Scotland's reports appear to be wider-ranging in this regard. However, this should not provide an excuse for the narrow focus of ETI's primary school reports. We believe that the quality of a school's teaching right across the full subject range should be properly inspected in any country.
- n) We are especially concerned about the importance of physical activity, given the current high level of child obesity and overweight. **It is quite inadequate for ETI's comments on physical activity to be limited to the fact that opportunities for such activities exist at break time, as was the case in some of the reports which we examined.** In addition to properly examining the quality of physical education, ETI should also investigate whether both primary and post-primary schools are delivering the full two hours of physical education each week which is recommended in Department of Education guidance.

Recommendation 5: Primary school inspection reports should examine, in a consistent and rigorous way, the following:

⁷ Two reports did comment that children worked well in groups.

- the quality of provision (which includes teaching) in each area of the Revised Curriculum, with specific assessment of play-based learning at the Foundation Stage, and of the areas of the Revised Curriculum which cover science, history, geography, physical education, art and music
- the development of the core skills described in the curriculum (e.g. group work) throughout P1 to P7
- the quality of a school's communication with parents and pupils, including the extent to which parents and pupils are given a meaningful voice in the running of the school

Recommendation 6: the Committee for Education should commission an analysis of the criteria used and the actual areas of investigation in post-primary school inspection reports.

Recommendation 7: primary and post-primary school reports should include an assessment of both the quality and quantity of physical education and sports provision received by pupils (excluding extra-curricular and optional activity)

5. Input by parents and pupils

- Until recently, Ofsted issued a questionnaire to every parent at each school it inspected. This asked parents to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with 13 statements relating to the quality of their child's education and to the school's communication with parents. The results were displayed (clearly in both numerical and percentage format) in the inspection report. The report also stated how many parents responded. This table provided a very valuable evaluation of the views of parents. By using the same questionnaire for each inspection, Ofsted also ensured that parents' views were both sought and reported in a consistent and fair way. The inspection report summarised this evidence and related it to the other inspection findings.
- Unfortunately, Ofsted has dispensed with this practice, and now relies on the results from an online survey on its ParentView website which it does not summarise in its reports. ETI issues a questionnaire to parents, but does not publish the results in tabulated form. It gives no detail of the questions asked in the questionnaire. In primary school inspection reports, it includes only cursory information about parents' views in its reports. In post-primary inspection reports, it includes only data on the number of completed questionnaires received and the number with comments. No attempt is made in either report to relate the views of parents to the other inspection findings.
- The current system of reporting parental views used by ETI is highly unsatisfactory. We would like ETI to adopt the very valuable data-gathering and reporting processes which were previously being followed by Ofsted, and to ensure that parents' views make a meaningful contribution to school inspection reports,** both with regard to the quality of teaching and with regard to communication with parents. We appreciate that this involves additional staff time. However, we believe that parents' views of the education provided by

a school are absolutely essential if that education is to be properly evaluated in inspection reports.

- d) We are also very concerned at the very low level of parental response to recent ‘primary inspections’ (see Table 1). **Of the ten ‘primary inspection’ reports which we examined, on average, just 14.7% of parents responded to a parental survey carried out by ETI.** In these reports, ETI states that the low response rate may be due to new survey methods which it is trialling. If this is the case, it is clear that the new methods are not working.
- e) ETI does talk to a sample of P6 pupils for its primary school inspection reports. Again, however, the information provided is cursory and we would welcome more detailed information which is related to the other findings in the report. ETI inspectors also talk to pupils from a number of year groups in post-primary schools but do not report any findings from these discussions. ETI is to be commended for talking to students. However, again, a reasonably detailed summary of the information gathered would be welcome.
- f) We were also concerned that, in most of the ‘primary inspection’ reports which we examined, a significant proportion of teachers or teaching support staff had not availed of the opportunity to provide their views to ETI as part of the inspection (see Table 1). We would suggest that teachers and teaching support staff should be required to contribute to school inspections in this way, except where they are ill or on leave.

Table 1: Sample of ‘Primary inspections’ Oct – Dec 2013 –parental, teacher and teaching support staff response rates (n = 10)			
School	Response rate to ETI parental survey (%)	Response rate to ETI teacher survey (%)	Response rate to ETI teaching support staff survey (%)*
1	10	55	n/a
2	18	92	56
3	12	67	25
4	No survey referred to in the report		
5	11	85	25
6	27	75	60
7	11	n/a	90
8	19	55	n/a
9	5	62	n/a
10	20	100	100
Average	14.7	73.9	59.3

Recommendation 8: ETI should adopt a similar robust, comprehensive and consistent approach to that which was previously being used by Ofsted when surveying and reporting the views of parents for its school inspection report. The views should be gathered and reported in a way which makes a meaningful contribution to the overall value of the report. All parents should be given the opportunity to provide their views.

Recommendation 9: ETI should provide more detail on the views of pupils and relate them to the other inspection findings. It should speak to the widest possible sample of students and should select pupils at random, to ensure that they are likely to hold representative views.

Recommendation 10: Teachers and teaching support staff should be required to respond to surveys of their views which are carried out by ETI as part of its inspection process, except where illness or other absence makes this impossible.

6. The content and quality of school inspection reports

- a) **ETI's primary school inspection reports compare fairly well with those produced by Ofsted and Education Scotland in terms of clarity and user-friendliness.** They appear to be superior to those produced by Education Scotland in terms of having a clear and reasonably consistent structure. We welcome the fact that the most recent ETI reports, like those of Ofsted, provide clear gradings for each broad aspect of a school's performance.
- b) However, we are concerned that, as with the system used by Ofsted, no attempt is made to assess the 'value added' of a school's provision. We believe, therefore, that any such assessment must include an assessment of pupil achievement which factors in the proportion of children receiving free school meals, the proportion of children with special educational needs (excluding any classes which teach solely children with special educational needs), and whether or not the school in question selects its pupils through the use of academic tests.
- c) We have been unable to carry out any proper analysis of ETI's post-primary school reports. However, **we are concerned by the apparent lack of sufficiently rigorous attention accorded to the quality of teaching across the full range of subjects in those recent post-primary school reports which we have examined.** We do welcome the fact that recent reports generally (but not always) contain detailed assessment of the quality of teaching in two or three subject areas (normally including English and Maths). However, we would like to see this assessment extended to include a wider range of key subjects. In addition, there appears to be little or no specific comment on the quality of teaching at sixth-form level.
- d) We are concerned about the lack of breadth of both ETI's primary and post-primary school inspection reports. **Ofsted inspection reports provide a fuller account of how each inspection was undertaken. In particular, they provide information on the number and grade(s) of inspectors carrying out each inspection, and the number of teachers and of lessons observed. This is important information which should be provided for the sake of transparency, and to help ensure that sufficient resources are being invested in each inspection.**

Recommendation 11: The grading and assessment of pupil achievement in school inspection reports should investigate 'value added' achievement, and should take into account the proportion of children receiving free school meals, the proportion of children with special

educational needs (excluding any classes which teach solely children with special educational needs), and whether or not the school in question selects its pupils through the use of academic tests.

Recommendation 12: The Committee for Education should carry out a comparative analysis of the quality of the content and standard of the assessments of quality of teaching in ETI's post-primary reports, and should consider whether there is scope for a more detailed assessment of quality of teaching across a wider range of subjects.

Recommendation 13: ETI inspection reports should include information on the number and grade(s) of inspectors carrying out each inspection, and the number of teachers and lessons observed.

7. The frequency of school inspection reports

- a) While Ofsted provides clear information in its parent information leaflet about the frequency of school inspection reports, no such information is evident on the ETI website. However, **we believe that ETI's full inspections are far too infrequent**, based on the available evidence. We examined the frequency of inspection reports for 10 south and south-east Belfast schools (five primary and five post-primary), and for 13 schools in the Omagh area (seven primary and six post-primary).
- b) As can be seen from Tables 2 and 3 overleaf (pp. 13-14), *excluding short, specialist and follow-up reports*, and based on reports which we were able to find on the ETI website, using its search facility:
 - **The most recent available inspection reports for two Omagh primary schools date back 15 years and 14 years respectively**
 - **There is no full inspection report available for a well-known Belfast grammar school**
 - The most recent available inspection reports for a further four Belfast and Omagh area primary schools date back **nine years**
 - **There are gaps of up to 11 years between inspection reports, where the previous reports are available**
 - **In the case of one Belfast school where the most recent focused report was published in 2004, that report focuses on English and ICT – areas which the report says were selected by the school in question**
- c) We appreciate that this may be an issue of the inadequacy of ETI's search facility and/or website – or it may indeed represent the actual long length between full inspections. Either way, **the paucity of regular and comprehensive inspection information is quite unacceptable.**

- d) We would urge the Committee to clarify with ETI whether all inspection reports are properly uploaded onto its website, and to carry out an analysis of the actual frequency of school inspections in Northern Ireland. We believe that all schools should be inspected every three years as school inspections provide an important incentive to improve and maintain standards. We note that Ofsted now only visits good schools once every five years. However, we believe that standards can slip within a few years and a five year (or greater) gap between inspections is too large.
- e) We note that the Department has told the Committee that, until 2010, ETI 'aimed' to inspect every school once every seven years, but it would seem that there is now no stipulated maximum period between inspections, and that a 'risk assessment' approach is used.⁸ **We do not consider this to be acceptable.**
- f) We further note **66 'focused' or 'primary' primary school inspection reports are listed on the ETI website for the whole of 2013.** There are a total of 847 primary schools in Northern Ireland. This means that just **7.8% of primary schools received the nearest equivalent of a full inspection within a 12-month period. At that rate, each primary school can expect to receive a focused or primary inspection just once every 13 years.**
- g) The picture is only a little better with regard to the 215 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. **Only 32 full inspection post-primary school inspection reports were published in 2013.** This represents just 14.9% of all post-primary schools. Thus, **each post-primary school can expect to receive a full inspection just once every seven years.**
- h) These figures contrast sharply with the rate of Ofsted's inspections. In the financial year 2011-2012, it carried out 5,769 maintained school inspections. There are approximately 21,000 maintained schools in England. This means that **27.5% of maintained schools in England were inspected in a single year by Ofsted and therefore that, on average, each school in England could expect to be inspected once every four years.**⁹

Recommendation 13: ETI should carry out a full inspection of all schools once every three years, with additional follow-up inspections where necessary.

Recommendation 14: The Committee for Education should carry out an analysis of the actual frequency of full school inspections in Northern Ireland. It should also clarify with ETI whether all inspection reports are properly uploaded onto its website, and accessible via its search facility.

Recommendation 15: ETI should provide clear information on the frequency of school inspections on its website.

⁸ Correspondence from Department of Education to Committee for Education, op. cit.

⁹ Ofsted *Annual Report and Accounts 2011 – 12*, p. 11. This figure excludes follow-up and other monitoring visits.

Table 2: Frequency of sample of school inspection reports published on ETI website (Sept 2013) (all schools are situated in south or south-east Belfast)

Primary School	Most recent focused or primary inspection report (excluding specialist reports e.g. library facilities)	Previous focused inspection report	Length of time between focused/primary inspection reports	Length of time since last focused/primary inspection report
Forge Integrated PS	2008	2000	8 years	5 years
Holy Rosary PS	2004	Not available	Not known	9 years
Knockbreda PS	2004 (English & ICT)	Not available	Not known	9 years
Rosetta PS	2013	2003 (English, ICT & pastoral care)	10 years	0 years
St Michael's PS	Not available	Not available	Not known	Not known
Post-primary school	Most recent full inspection report	Previous full inspection report	Length of time between full inspection reports	Length of time since last full inspection report
Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School	2008	2000	8 years	5 years
Knockbreda High School	2009	Not available (but before 2001)	At least 9 years	4 years
Lagan College	2013	Not available	Not known	0 years
Methodist College	Not available	Not available	Not known	Not known
Wellington College	2008	Not available	Not known	5 years

Table 3: Frequency of sample of school inspection reports published on ETI website (Dec 2013) (all schools are situated in Omagh area)

Primary School	Most recent focused or primary inspection report (excluding specialist reports e.g. library facilities, and short inspections)	Previous focused inspection report	Length of time between focused or primary inspection reports	Length of time since last focused or primary inspection report
Omagh Integrated PS	1999	Not available	Not known	14 years
St Conor's PS	2005 (English, ICT/pastoral care)	Not available	Not known	8 years
Loreto Convent PS*	1998	Not available	Not known	15 years
Omagh County PS	2006 (English, ICT and pastoral care)	Not available	Not known	7years
Gibson PS	2009	Not available	Not known	4 years
Sacred Heart PS, Tattyreagh	2004 (Maths/ICT/pastoral care)	Not available	Not known	9 years
Christ the King PS	2004	Not available	Not known	9 years
Post-primary school	Most recent full inspection report	Previous full inspection report	Length of time between full inspection reports	Length of time since last full inspection report
CBS Omagh	2010	2001	9years	3years
Convent Grammar Omagh	2013	2006	7 years	0 years
Drumragh Integrated College	2008	2000	8years	5years
Sacred Heart College	2012	2003	9years	1 year
Omagh Academy	2013	2002	11years	0 years
Omagh High School	2013	2003	10years	0years

* Please note that Loreto Convent Primary School amalgamated with a neighbouring boys' primary school (St Colmcille's which is not included in this table) in Sept 2012. The new amalgamated school is called Holy Family Primary School. However, no inspection report exists for this new school, and we understand that it has not been inspected.

8. Notice of school inspections

- a) One controversial issue is the amount of notice which should be given to schools prior to an inspection. This issue has attracted great controversy in England, with a number of teaching unions criticising the concept of “no notice inspections”. However, shorter school inspections are conducted with no notice in the Republic of Ireland with no apparent difficulty, and Ofsted now gives schools just one day’s notice for full inspections. By contrast, ETI gives primary schools four weeks’ notice of a standard inspection and two weeks’ notice of a shorter inspection.¹⁰
- b) While we understand that some school staff find school inspections stressful, we believe it is vital that inspectors view a school on a normal school day. This can only be achieved through no notice or very short notice inspections. Moreover, when a school is conscious that it could be inspected at any time, this provides a powerful incentive for schools to maintain standards. Indeed, where all teaching staff are performing to the optimum level at all times (as should be the case), a school inspection is much less likely to be unduly stressful in the first place.
- c) We would therefore like ETI to provide schools with one day’s notice for full school inspections, and no notice for shorter or follow-up inspections. In order to allow schools time to prepare the necessary paperwork for full or focused inspections, all schools should receive at least three months’ notice that a full or focused inspection will be held, but with no details of the precise date. The precise date should only be confirmed the day before.

Recommendation 16: ETI should provide schools with one day’s notice for full or focused school inspections, and no notice for shorter or follow-up inspections. In order to allow schools time to prepare the necessary paperwork for full or focused inspections, all schools should receive at least three months’ notice that a full or focused inspection will be held, but with no details of the precise date. The precise date should only be confirmed the day before.

9. The resources available to ETI

- a) The level of resources available to ETI to undertake its role properly is obviously crucial, as is the efficient management of those resources. However, no information about ETI’s annual budget appears available on ETI’s website. **We are aware, however, that ETI has told the Committee that its budget is being reduced by 20% between 2011–2015.¹¹ We are appalled to learn that this is the case, when the evidence which we provide strongly suggests that more resources need to be invested in ETI.** Moreover, this is in the context of

¹⁰ Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service (October 2012) *School inspections*. Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2012/education/16712.pdf>

¹¹ See para. 1.5 of ETI’s written submission to the Committee’s inquiry at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/Education/Inquiries-and-Reviews/Education-and-Training-Inspectorate/41-Education-and-Training-Inspectorate.pdf>

an annual budget which is only £5m or 0.3% of the total education budget; indeed, we understand that two or three large schools might typically have a joint annual budget of £5m. We would urge the Committee to investigate the level of resources invested in school inspections in Northern Ireland, compared to England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

- b) We would further urge that the Committee recommends additional investment if it believes that this is required to improve the service. In our view, school inspections are absolutely central to ensuring the highest possible quality of teaching and learning in our schools, and the Department of Education must invest properly in this important service.

Recommendation 17: The Committee for Education should investigate the level of resources invested in school inspections in Northern Ireland, compared to England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

Recommendation 18: The Committee for Education should recommend additional investment if it believes that this is required to improve ETI's inspection service.

10. Helping parents concerned about their child's school

- a) The current schools system in Northern Ireland makes it very difficult for a parent to raise concerns about their child's education. While we have only circumstantial information available, it would seem many parents who try to raise issues about their child's education don't get very far. School principals will often defend their staff and fail to address issues. If a parent is unhappy with the response of a principal, they are supposed to approach the Board of Governors and, if they fail to gain satisfaction through the Board of Governors, they are meant to approach their local education board. In both instances, these bodies will treat the approach as a formal complaint.
- b) Both these latter steps are very daunting ones for the average parent. In many instances, it would be much less daunting if they could obtain guidance and provide feedback to ETI. If the issue was a very serious and urgent one, ETI could carry out a snap inspection to investigate further. If it was less serious and not urgent, ETI could record the information to help ensure that it was fed into the next scheduled inspection of the relevant school.
- c) Indeed, in England, Ofsted does offer assistance to parents who have concerns about their child's education. Ofsted has set up a 'ParentView' website and a complaints system for parents. Parents can submit their view on a school at any time on the 'ParentView' website and those views will be taken into account in determining which schools Ofsted inspects and when.¹² However, Ofsted also operates a complaints system

¹² See: <http://parentview.ofsted.gov.uk/>

where a parent has serious concerns about their child's school. It provides a helpful leaflet for parents about how they can complain.¹³

- d) The Ofsted system is not entirely satisfactory in that parents are still generally expected to go through the daunting Board of Governors/local education authority route prior to raising any complaint with Ofsted. However, Ofsted does at least provide clear information about complaints for parents, and does make clear that it can sometimes deal with serious concerns. Its 'ParentView' website is also very helpful.
- e) We would very much like ETI to set up a similar website to 'ParentView'. However, we would much prefer that ETI could provide an initial complaints route for parents, rather than going through the Board of Governors/local education authority route first.

Recommendation 19: ETI should offer assistance to parents who have concerns about their child's education, and should investigate any issues raised by parents when carrying out school inspections. If a parent raises a very significant concern, ETI should undertake a no notice short inspection to investigate the issue. It should provide clear information for parents on how ETI can help parents if they do have concerns. It should establish a website similar to the 'ParentView' website set up by Ofsted.

11. Thematic reviews of school provision and publicity

- a) **While Ofsted has attracted controversy in England, it has also made a very significant contribution to public debate about educational issues. One of the key ways in which it generates this debate is through the publication (and dissemination through the media) of thematic reports.** These draw on the collation and analysis of inspection data to focus on specific areas of the curriculum. In doing this, the reports are of immense value to schools which want to improve their practice, and to parents who want a benchmark against which their child's school can be measured.
- b) Examples of reports published in the past year include:
 - a. *Beyond 2012 – outstanding physical education for all* – a report which draws on evidence from school inspections carried out over a four-year period to provide an analysis of the current quality of provision, recommendations for the Department for Education, and practical advice for schools to help overcome common weaknesses in provision.¹⁴ In addition to the full report, Ofsted has also published a summary report.

¹³ Available at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/schools/for-parents-and-carers/how-complain>

¹⁴ See: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/beyond-2012-outstanding-physical-education-for-all>

- b. *Going in the right direction? Careers guidance in schools from September 2012 – a report based on a survey of 60 schools which examined how well secondary schools were carrying out their new legal duty to provide careers guidance.*¹⁵
- c) Both of the above reports attracted significant publicity, thus raising awareness of the key issues among both teachers and parents. **We are very concerned that few similar thematic reports appear to be published by ETI, and that no publicity appears to accompany any such reports which are produced.** The ETI website has links to specialist surveys via both its 'primary' and 'secondary' publications pages. However, when we clicked on the link to primary school specialist surveys in September 2013, the web page stated that there were none. Three recent thematic surveys were listed for post-primary schools but none dealt with the quality of teaching in a specific subject area.¹⁶ None of these were the subject of a press release or received any media coverage of which we are aware.
- d) Since we originally investigated this issue in September 2013, ETI has added two thematic surveys to its 'primary' publications page for 2013. However, neither of these deal with the quality of teaching in a specific subject area. There are now four reports in the 'post-primary' publications section for 2013, but only one of these deals with teaching quality in a specific subject area. Again, we are unaware of any press release or media coverage. (One report appears on both pages). The one report which deals with teaching quality covers best practice in maths and English, and was published in October 2013.¹⁷ However, while this contains some useful information, it appears to us to be a collection of fairly descriptive case studies, rather than containing guidance of real value for teachers. We feel that the report would have been more useful if it had focused on a smaller number of case study schools and looked in more detail at exactly what was so special about the teaching of English and maths at those schools.
- e) We appreciate that ETI may be limited in the resources which it can devote to carrying out additional thematic surveys. However, at the very least, it can certainly collate and analyse, on a regular basis, its inspection data relating to specific subject areas and to different aspects of provision. **If such thematic reviews are not carried out – and widely disseminated – on a regular basis, we believe that a significant information resource is being neglected, and we further believe that parents are losing out through a consequent lack of public information and debate on issues of relevance to their child's education.**
- f) In addition, **we believe it is vital that ETI celebrates and publicises examples of good practice.** When a school is awarded an 'outstanding' grade, we believe that ETI should make every effort to publicise such awards in local weekly newspapers. It should also encourage

¹⁵ See: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/going-right-direction-careers-guidance-schools-september-2012>

¹⁶ See: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-post-primary/surveys-evaluations-post-primary-recent.htm>

¹⁷ This report is available at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-post-primary/surveys-evaluations-post-primary-2013/best-practice-in-english-and-mathematics-in-post-primary-schools.pdf>

regional media to focus on the special characteristics of outstanding schools through proactive publicity efforts from time to time.

Recommendation 20: ETI should draw on its inspection data to publish and properly disseminate regular thematic reviews of different aspects of school provision. These should include a robust analysis of inspection data which highlights strengths and weaknesses in provision, together with examples of good practice. Such reviews should also include recommendations for educational policy, and practical advice for schools on how to correct common weaknesses in provision. All such reports should be publicised through the media and should be easily accessible on ETI's website. Ideally, ETI should also carry out additional surveys of key areas of provision where inspection data alone provides an insufficient basis for a robust review (e.g. careers guidance).

Recommendation 21: ETI should make every effort to publicise the achievements and qualities of schools which are awarded an 'outstanding' grade.

12. Benchmarking the quality of ETI inspections

- a) We believe it is extremely important that the quality and rigour of ETI inspections are benchmarked against those of the comparable bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. We would like to see the creation of a British-Irish partnership between these organisations which meets regularly to review best practice. We would further like ETI to invite senior inspectors from the other bodies to take part in a sample of school inspections on a regular basis, and provide feedback to ETI on any differences in the approach to inspections and the expectations of inspectors between their own body and ETI.
- b) In particular, this process should help to ensure that a school which is judged 'outstanding', 'good', 'satisfactory' or 'inadequate' in an aspect of its provision in one of the other territories would also be judged in a similar way here. As an example, is there any difference between the weight accorded to the importance of teachers initiating their own teaching materials (and robust evidence thereof) between Ofsted and ETI? We would regard this aspect of quality of teaching as of fundamental importance but, without such a process, it is very difficult to judge whether such differences exist.

Recommendation 22: We would like to see the creation of a British-Irish partnership between the school inspection bodies in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. This would enable these organisations to meet regularly to review best practice. We would further like ETI to invite senior inspectors from the other bodies to take part in a sample of school inspections on a regular basis, and to provide feedback to ETI on any differences in the approach to inspections and the expectations of inspectors between their own body and ETI.

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ParentsOutLoud
24th January 2014