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Peter McCallion,
Clerk to the Committee,
Committee for Education,
Northern Ireland Assembly

11th February 2014

Re: Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) – correspondence between DE and ParentsOutLoud

Dear Peter,

We wish to bring to the attention of the Committee a letter from Lynn Hayes, Head of the Inspection Services Branch at the Department of Education, dated 29th January, and our response, which was sent to her today.

As you will see from the correspondence, copies of which we enclose, Mrs Hayes has provided corrected versions of the tables in our submission to the Committee's Inquiry into ETI which highlighted apparent lengthy gaps between full (or closest to full) inspections at schools in both Belfast and Omagh. However, she has corrected the tables to include short and follow-up inspection reports, and inspection reports which focus on very specific areas of the curriculum, such as pastoral care or library provision. In our submissions and evidence to the Committee, we had highlighted the fact that we were not including these as we wished to ascertain how frequently schools were receiving a full, or closest to full, inspection.

Mrs Hayes has asked us to forward the corrected information to any party to whom we have sent what she terms our "invalid data" in the respective tables in our submission. We entirely refute the assertion that these tables were inaccurate – and our reasoning is set out in our letter to Mrs Hayes. However, we are very happy to forward her letter to us and our response to that correspondence to

the Committee as we believe the Committee will be able to reach its own judgement on the value or otherwise of the data which we provided.

It does trouble us that the Department appears to consider that short, follow-up or narrowly focused inspection reports represent adequate interventions during the course of a lengthy gap between full (or closest to full) inspections. To illustrate our point, we have highlighted, in an Appendix to this letter, the inspection histories of two of the schools included in our tables (which are not meant to imply that these schools are in any way currently deficient). To summarise these illustrative case studies, they feature:

- A Belfast post-primary school where the only areas which have been inspected in the past 13 years are pastoral care and ICT, and two key areas identified for improvement were not followed up by ETI subsequently in any published report
- An Omagh primary school with 294 pupils (therefore, not a small school) which had its last full inspection in 1999, a short inspection which resulted in a three-page report published in 2009, and a follow-up inspection which resulted in a one-page report published in 2011. The only other available report related solely to library provision and was published in 2004.

We also wish to highlight the much fuller nature of what were called primary school general inspection reports in the late 1990s, which covered a number of key curriculum areas in some depth, including science, technology and PE. Examples include the 1999 general inspection report for the above-mentioned Omagh primary school and a 1998 general inspection report relating to another Omagh primary school.¹ While we welcome the inclusion in more recent primary school inspection reports of clear gradings, we do feel that these old reports provide a good example of how an inspection report can look in some depth at teaching and learning in all the key curriculum areas.

Finally, the Committee may note that the corrected tables provided by Mrs Hayes state “Prior to 2007, records were held manually. Therefore, the cost of providing more detailed information on inspections prior to 2007 would be disproportionate.” This concerns us greatly because it implies that this information has not been fully digitised, and that the Department and ETI are unable to readily access the inspection history of each school.

Yours sincerely,



Northern Ireland Representative,

ParentsOutLoud

Encs.

¹ The reports are the 1999 general inspection report for Omagh Integrated Primary School which is available here: http://www.etini.gov.uk/report_detail.asp?id=812 and the 1998 general inspection report for Loreto Convent Primary School which is available here: http://www.etini.gov.uk/report_detail.asp?id=673

Appendix

Methodist College, Belfast

- Last standard inspection – unable to ascertain date from DE and report not available on ETI website
- 2001 focused inspection report on pastoral care – this report highlighted a number of strengths and three areas for improvement²
- 2005 focused inspection report on pastoral care and ICT – this three-page report devoted one paragraph to pastoral care and child protection. Although child protection arrangements were judged effective, the report noted that the school was not yet fully implementing a circular on child protection, issued by the Department of Education two years previously. There was no specific reference to the areas for improvement identified in the 2001 report, and whether or not the school had improved in those areas. The report identified a number of strengths and two areas for improvement in ICT and, in a short appendix, a serious issue regarding accommodation for ICT.³ In this appendix, it states:

Aspects of the accommodation constrain the work of the school and adversely affect the quality of the pupils' experiences. The majority of the ICT rooms, for example, are cramped and in need of improved ventilation.

- 2008 follow up inspection report – this report, which is slightly over one page in length, states that the inspectors were satisfied that the areas for improvement regarding ICT which were highlighted in 2005 have now been addressed. However, there is no reference to the concern regarding ICT accommodation, nor to any measures which have been taken to improve the accommodation. Moreover, the report does not comment on the child protection issue raised in the 2005 report, namely the school's adherence to the DE child protection guidance. As now confirmed by the Department, this is the most recent inspection report of any kind available for this school, although it states that what it terms a "survey/evaluation inspection visit" was carried out in 2009.

Omagh Integrated Primary School

- 1999 general inspection report – the last full inspection report available on this school⁴
- 2004 focused inspection report on library provision – this one-page report highlighted a number of strengths and one area for development⁵

² 2001 report available at: http://www.etini.gov.uk/report_detail.asp?id=558

³ 2005 report available at: http://www.etini.gov.uk/report_detail.asp?id=2881

⁴ Available at: http://www.etini.gov.uk/report_detail.asp?id=812

⁵ Available at: http://www.etini.gov.uk/report_detail.asp?id=2686

- 2009 short inspection report – this three-page (excluding statistics) report highlighted a number of strengths, but stated that some aspects of leadership and management needed to be addressed⁶
- 2011 follow-up inspection report – this one-page report concluded that the areas highlighted for improvement had been addressed⁷
- (the information supplied by Mrs Hayes refers to a 2006 focused report, which is unavailable on the ETI website – we wonder if this was the 2004 report – and “information on survey/evaluation inspection visits 2007” which is also unavailable on the website)

⁶ Available at: http://www.etini.gov.uk/report_detail.asp?id=4506

⁷ Available at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/inspection-reports/inspection-reports-primary/inspection-reports-primary-2012/follow-up-inspection-omagh-integrated-primary-school-and-nursery-unit.htm>