

Wallace High School

Response to the Inquiry into The Education and Training Inspectorate And the School Improvement Process.

Submitted by: Deborah O'Hare

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

ETI inspectors use the information that is designed by DENI to be the key indicators of performance. It is this information that is lacking in sufficient detail and, one could argue, does not take account of value added measures across the whole school sector, not just in schools with lower levels of achievement. A lack of reliable KS2 and 3 data sets does not allow for careful scrutiny of the effect of a school's early intervention methods eg in Yr 8.

The first reliable comparative measure is that of GCSE results, in my opinion, which is too late in a young person's educational career.

Schools use a plethora of CATS, YELLIS tests to try to fill this gap, it is expensive. A reliable state sponsored test of this type would give a much clear baseline from which ETI and the Department could measure attainment and improvement at individual pupil level, school by school and system wide.

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 to improve:

The very public scrutiny in the press now of "failing schools" means for many schools in formal intervention following an ETI inspection the loss of confidence publically may be irreversible. Whilst schools in which improvements need to be made should receive support and firm intervention with targets etc, perhaps the question to be asked by the Department of Education and the managing authority is how did they let the situation get to this serious a stage and why did only a 3 day visit from Inspectors pick this problem up?

More regular supportive and exploratory visits by district inspectors would help ensure a wider knowledge base of the standards across the province. ETI's current structure would not facilitate this approach; it seems that district inspectors now have very high numbers of schools in their district. A reduction in the number, more inspectors and a more supportive role in assessing the standards regularly reached by the school, in my opinion, would improve the educational outcomes of all students.

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

The introduction of reliable comparable externally marked assessments at KS 2 and 3 would, in my opinion, provide a more accurate picture of attainment at KS2 and 3.

Careful consideration needs to be given to the way in which the curriculum is swayed and the negative impact on some students by the rather narrow measures of performance at GCSE and A'Level required by the Department and used by ETI to assess the performance of schools. Measures such as % of students achieving 3 + A-C at A'Level may encourage some schools not to enter students for 2 A'Levels plus one other subject at a lower level, which may otherwise have been a sensible career pathway decision and appropriate for the student.

A more sensible measure of performance in Sixth Form may be to look at the destinations of the students; if building capacity in the economy is one of the key aims why not track the progress of leavers to see where the value is being added? Also consideration should be given to a more holistic analysis of performance in Sixth Form to include the students' individual UCAS tariff. This includes representative sporting honours, music grades etc as well as raw grades.

The priorities and actions which need to be taken to improve ETI's approach to the school improvement process – does ETI need enhanced powers?; should ETI make more/any use of alternative measures of achievement (other than examination performance) to assess school performance?; should ETI be independent of the Department of Education?; does ETI need a better complaints/ feedback procedure? ; Do schools always understand the conclusions reached by ETI- is more transparency needed in this regard?

I believe ETI should be independent of DENI but a very different model of inspection service than OFSTED. The independence from DENI will allow ETI to scrutinise and critique DENI policy and make suggestions based on “on the ground knowledge” of the system.

As previously explained I think ETI should have a role in supportive school improvement through the district inspector structure and there should be a move from 3 day inspections to a much more self –analytical and self – evaluative approach to school improvement.

Underpinning this should still be a rigorous and accountable system but with more local support for schools, perhaps experienced Principals seconded to help also and early intervention in schools to reduce or obliterate the need for formal intervention or such headline carrying stories which serve to undermine the work of the whole system.

Other matters relating to ETI and the school improvement process that are worthy of further scrutiny. None.