

St. Colman's PS Lambeg

28th October 2013

Mr P McCallion
NI Assembly

Dear Peter

I write to you on behalf of the entire learning community of St Colman's Primary School. I am aware that there is an ongoing debate with regard to the ETI and the future provision for the inspection process. Speaking as a teacher of 36 years (19 of which have been as a Principal), I have witnessed the inspection process in a variety of schools as an assistant teacher, curriculum coordinator and Principal. The process that schools face today is hugely different from the inspections of the late 1970's and early 1980's in that they are much more transparent and inclusive in their approach. The old fear of inspectors coming into schools have been replaced by an atmosphere of support, advice and recognition of what is good about schools, as well as suggestions on how we can improve.

I have no doubt that the system of having a district inspector that we can contact and invite in to discuss where we are at that time, has taken a huge amount of stress out of the process of inspection. I have been very privileged to work with a number of different district inspectors during my time as a Principal. However I should highlight the pioneering work in the area of self-evaluation carried out by **Dr Paddy Shevlin**. Dr Shevlin (along with **Heather Jackson**) has transformed our attitudes in St Colman's with regard to improvement from within. We have developed a capacity to reflect – a task that has been led by senior staff who in turn were guided through this process by Dr Shevlin. Gone is the attitude of **'have we done enough to get through'** - this has been replaced with an attitude of **'how can we improve our school for everyone within it?'**

This attitudinal change cannot happen overnight – it takes time, patience and a sense that our district inspector is working alongside us. Dr Shevlin has been tremendously influential in helping us achieve this.

I am aware that we are far from the finished article and like all good self-evaluating schools we must always strive to continue improving. To that end we have linked with 3 local schools to form a cluster in which we share good practice and learn from each other in so many different spheres. This cluster has been guided by Dr Shevlin and our district inspector, Heather Jackson. The feedback sessions have been led by subject coordinators and those that have been led by my coordinators have come with the proviso that the inspectors be present. **What a change in attitude!!**

Like all good self-evaluation processes, I know the ETI is going through a period of reflection. Indeed I recently contributed to the debate by completing the GTCNI questionnaire on the whole subject of the inspectorate and the inspection process. I can only conclude with the assertion that I made at the beginning of this correspondence, i.e. the process of inspection as it currently stands using a district inspector approach, has not only supported schools but in my professional opinion it has really assisted school improvement.

The work that Dr Shevlin and his colleagues have embarked upon over the last 10/15 years has undoubtedly changed how schools view the school improvement process – I would plead with those in a position of directing future policy to take on board the experiences of the extended St Colman’s School community. Improvement has come through self-evaluation – self evaluation has been led by district inspectors.

Yours faithfully

G McVeigh
Principal