



DRUMAHOE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

19th March 2014

Mervyn Storey M.L.A.
3 Market Street
Ballymoney
Co. Antrim
BT53 6EA

Dear Mr Storey,

I am writing to you in relation to my position as an Associate Assessor with the Education Training Inspectorate, a role that I have fulfilled since my initial appointment in July 2006 to the present.

Firstly may I apologise for my unavailability to attend the recent informal briefing event with AA's in Parliament Buildings on Wednesday 19 February 2014 but my school was being inspected the following week so I was otherwise occupied!

What has both surprised and taken me aback is the reading of the Minutes of Evidence from the meetings held on 26.02.14 and 05.03.14 and the comments attributed to Mr T Lunn:

...“ MrLunn: I had not heard of associate assessors until a few weeks ago. That is my starting point. I am a complete ignoramus on this matter, but it sounds like a very good system. It is like a lay assessor. It compares with other situations, as long as their input is valued and they have some control or responsibility in the overall outcome. As you said, Noelle, you have not seen the results of last week's discussions yet. You might want to reflect on those when you see them because I do not think that they feel as valued as you seem to value them. I wonder what happens when they disagree with the outcome.”

...“It is fair to say that the associate assessors do not feel sufficiently valued in the process, yet the inspectorate says that it values them very highly, their input is taken on board, and so on. Somebody is wrong. It sounds to me like a good augmentation of the system, if for no other reason than it gives those head teachers — it is normally head teachers — the experience of an inspection, which will be valuable to them when they come back to their own schools.”

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Principal: T. R. McMaster B.Ed.





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If the inquiry is there to influence the future of school improvement and the effectiveness of the relationship of external inspection to internal improvement, then it would be remiss of me, in my experience and insights of working with ETI over the course of eight years, not to totally refute the above sentiments which you yourself in the minutes state ... *“none of the comments are attributable, but they give a sense of what came out of the event.”*

I can safely say that my own experience of working as an Associate Assessor has been the most valuable piece of continuing professional development (CPD) that I have undertaken as a Principal of some seventeen years in developing my understanding of the inspection procedures, processes and protocols. Together with being involved in many inspection teams, I have also had the opportunity of being seconded for a term to work for E.T.I., been involved in various aspects of survey work supporting policy advice for DE and also asked to serve as a primary principal representative on a focus group to advise on a draft strategy for inspecting schools.

In all of these different activities undertaken with ETI, I have always been treated as a highly valued member of any team that I have had the privilege to be a part of and my own personal knowledge and experience has always been sought after and respected. I have always felt that I have brought the outside perspective of a serving principal to the team which on occasion has challenged the process but in a positive way.

In terms of self-evaluation, the experiences I have had on inspection and in the training provided by ETI for AA's has complemented the internal self-evaluation process of my own organisation which I have no doubt contributed to the most positive nature of our own most recent school inspection.

In conclusion, I have been encouraged by reading the recent Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) Review of Evaluation of Assessment in Education: Northern Ireland which acknowledges the positive role of Associate Assessors in the inspection process and indeed included it in the “Synergies for Better Learning” good practice report (see below).

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Box 6.9 Recruiting senior educators to join external school evaluation teams, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

In Northern Ireland, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) recruits “associate assessors” from among senior staff in schools (e.g. school principals, deputy principals or senior teachers) to participate the external evaluation of individual schools. ETI recruits associate assessors via public advertisement and an interview process. Selected individuals join a pool of associate assessors and can be invited to join an external school evaluation team on an individual school inspection. Normally an individual will not be involved in more than two external school evaluations each year. Associate assessors receive training from the ETI and are introduced to the procedures and performance indicators used in external school evaluation.

This strategy has two objectives: first, it is hoped that the experience of involvement in assessing quality in another educational establishment will help to develop the individual’s capacity to monitor, evaluate and improve the provision in his/her own school; second, the presence in the team of someone coming directly from the school context adds a dimension which can help to develop the ETI’s awareness of the current perspective of schools.

Source: Department of Education, Northern Ireland (forthcoming).

I trust you will take my views into consideration when considering the evidence for your Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the School Improvement Process.

Thanking you in anticipation of your co-operation with this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

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