



Department of  
**Education**

[www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk)

AN ROINN  
**Oideachais**

MÄNNYSTRIE O  
**Lear**

Peter McCallion  
Clerk to the Committee for Education  
Room 375a  
Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw  
Stormont  
BELFAST  
BT4 3XX

Tel No: (028) 9127 9849

Fax No: (028) 9127 9100

Email: [veronica.bintley@deni.gov.uk](mailto:veronica.bintley@deni.gov.uk)

Your ref: PMcC/SMcG/1164

13 February 2014

Dear Peter

## **INSPECTION**

Following my letter of 31 January you pointed out that we had conveyed to you a view from officials in the Education & Training Inspectorate about the independence of the inspection function rather than the more formal view the Committee wished to receive.

As you know, the power to inspect (when it applies to schools, pre-school, youth and other provision for which DE has responsibility) rests with the Department.

The Minister's key priority is to ensure that inspection is effective and makes a positive contribution to improving educational outcomes – and therefore life chances – for children and young people. In that regard it is important to point out that current legislation places a very specific duty on inspectors to promote the highest standards of education and of professional practice.

Turning more specifically to your question about the value of a structure that might be perceived as more 'independent', it is important to note that the inspection function takes many different formats in different countries across the world. Even amongst our nearest neighbours in the south and in England, Scotland and Wales, different structures apply. Structural arrangements – and indeed structural changes – are, however, no guarantee of increased effectiveness; rather the more important consideration is whether inspection promotes high standards of education.

What is of course also important is that the inspection function is delivered in a manner that is free from Ministerial influence – and that there is proper accountability for how that function has been discharged. When they inspect, our inspectors are clear that they must carry out their duties impartially and in line with procedures that are open and transparent, drawing on their own knowledge and experience to make their own professional judgements on the quality of provision and to report those judgements in the best interests of children and young people. The Minister is satisfied that the necessary arrangements are in place to ensure that the inspection functions conferred on the Department by legislation are discharged, as my earlier letter made clear, without fear or favour and without interference.

The evidence available to the Department, including from the recent OECD Review of Assessment and Evaluation Frameworks, is that our own arrangements for inspection are very effective when compared to those in other systems. Of course the Department, including ETI, continually evaluates its processes and procedures and looks forward to the recommendations flowing from the Committee Inquiry in anticipation that these too will be driven by the desire to improve the quality of education for children and young people.

Yours sincerely

*Veronica*

**VERONICA BINTLEY**  
**Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer**