



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into the Education and Training
Inspectorate and School Improvement
Process: ETI Briefing

16 October 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)
Mr Danny Kinahan (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson
Mr Trevor Lunn
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr Robin Newton
Mr Sean Rogers
Mr Pat Sheehan

Witnesses:

Mr John Anderson	Education and Training Inspectorate
Mrs Noelle Buick	Education and Training Inspectorate
Mrs Faustina Graham	Education and Training Inspectorate
Mr Paul McAlister	Education and Training Inspectorate

The Chairperson: I welcome to the Committee today Noelle Buick, the chief inspector; Faustina Graham, an assistant chief inspector; Paul McAlister, an assistant chief inspector; and John Anderson, a managing inspector. You are all very welcome. We are glad that it is not the Education Committee that is being inspected. This is a matter of grave importance, and we welcome the opportunity to discuss it. Noelle, do you and your team want to make some comments, and then we will have questions?

Mrs Noelle Buick (Education and Training Inspectorate): Thank you very much. Good morning, Chairman and members.

On behalf of my colleagues in the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), I would like to thank you for and welcome this opportunity to present our views on the work of the inspectorate and the school improvement process and, later in the process, to hear your recommendations for what we can do better in the interests of learners.

I will talk for about 10 to 12 minutes, if that is OK, Chair.

The Chairperson: Yes.

Mrs Buick: By way of a short introduction, I will outline the nature of the work that we undertake. You will have read in our submission that we are a unitary inspectorate in the Department of Education.

We carry out work mainly for three Departments: the Department of Education (DE); the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL); and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). The inspection of schools, as you probably know, is set in legislation, and all that we do is underpinned by our corporate values and principles. Our main function is to inspect and report on all education and training provision, focusing particularly on statutory provision. We also provide evidence-based policy advice to the three Departments, evaluate the effectiveness of key policies and, through the chief inspector's report, report on the quality of education system-wide.

We undertake institutional inspections as well as a wide range of inspection surveys. As you know, most of our inspectors are deployed as district inspectors, with responsibility for a group of organisations. We have just over 60 inspectors in the inspectorate. All inspectors have extensive experience as practitioners and have held substantial management responsibilities at senior level in the organisations from which they have been recruited. I have to say that I continue to be impressed by our inspectors' professionalism, experience, expertise and commitment to improving provision for learners.

Most of our inspection teams also include associate assessors (AAs) who are practising principals and vice-principals or senior managers in their organisations. We currently have over 200 associate assessors. We recently undertook a recruitment campaign, and we had over 200 applications for about 90 places. It is a mutually beneficial role: AAs bring currency of the sector to inspection, and that complements the inspection experience and skills of my colleagues, and, in turn, AAs, as senior leaders and managers in schools, get a deeper understanding of the evaluative process, with a view to strengthening their school's self-evaluation process, and have an opportunity to see at first hand good practice in other schools. Their involvement builds capacity for improvement in the sector, and AAs consider it very effective professional development. Most AAs are members of teaching unions, so, indirectly, it gives teaching unions — many of which, I know, you are going to meet later — an involvement in the inspection process.

I am immensely proud of the work that we do and the contribution that inspection makes to improvement. Again as you know, our mission is to promote improvement in the interest of learners, and we take that very seriously. The learner is at the centre of all our work and the decisions that we make, and we see ourselves as advocates for the child. We firmly hold the view that inspection is at the centre of raising standards for all learners. It promotes improvement by ensuring that best practice is highlighted and that poor provision is identified and improved. It assures parents that their children are safe and well educated. It also provides the government with evidence-based policy advice and robust accountability mechanisms.

'Every School a Good School' states that sustained improvement comes from within a school, and we see our roles as catalysts for and enablers of improvement. There is a strong link between internal self-evaluation and external assessment undertaken through inspection, so inspection is a continuum of improvement; it is not something that sits apart. The quality indicators that inspectors use are transparent and are published in 'Together Towards Improvement' and can be used by schools in their own self-evaluation. Inspection includes mainly first-hand evidence to identify, promote and effect improvement in education. Inspection findings are not based on perceptions but on robust, qualitative and quantitative evidence collated over a number of days. It involves a strong focus on teaching and learning through classroom observations, a review of the quality of pupils' work and interviews with key staff, governors and pupils themselves. With that evidence set against the experience of the inspection team, judgements on how learners are progressing are made. Inspection teams' judgements are totally independently made without fear or favour. It is important to note that we are not looking for anything that should not already be in place in a school.

Inspection can make a difference. For example, since April 2010, we have carried out a total of 238 follow-up inspections, and in approximately 80% of those, there has been an improvement of at least one performance level. That means that the quality of provision for pupils in those schools has improved.

Similar improvements have been identified in schools that have entered the formal intervention process (FIP). Since 2009, 3,400 primary school pupils and 6,300 post-primary pupils have attended schools in formal intervention. That is a total of nearly 10,000 that have been attending schools that are not good enough. However, because schools have exited FIP, 1,600 primary and 1,700 post-primary — a total of 3,380 children — are now getting a better standard of education. Inspection has played a key role in improving provision for those pupils, and that really matters to the life chances of those children.

We do not walk away from schools at the end of the inspection process. We provide support through the interim follow-up visits and inspections. The extent of that follow-up process depends on inspection outcomes. The follow-up process is highly regarded as being supportive, constructive and effective.

The effectiveness of our own work is independently and externally evaluated through the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), and the feedback is largely positive, with over 80% of respondents saying that inspection contributed to improvement in outcomes for learners in their organisations. We continually evaluate our own processes and procedures to build on strengths and to identify areas for improvement. As a result, the organisation has been awarded the customer service excellence award for the past eight years in a row. This involves the assessor meeting and interviewing some leaders of the organisations, chosen at random, that have recently undergone inspection activity. In addition, the business practices of the organisation were reviewed by a DE internal audit in 2011, and that resulted in a very positive evaluation.

I will take a few minutes to look in detail at specific areas identified under the inquiry's terms of reference. First, the effectiveness of the current inspection models and effecting improvement. I believe that our current models of inspection are effective. The Cabinet Office has stated that any inspectorate that can demonstrate achievement against the 10 principles of inspection will be at the forefront of best practice. I believe that ETI can demonstrate that it more than meets the 10 principles.

So, let us look at the 10 principles of inspection. We have a strong focus on promoting improvement, provision for learners and their achievement and standards. We take a learner view. We are proportionate to risk. We encourage self-evaluation, leading to improvement. We are evidence based. We are transparent and open about the processes that we use. We have a regard for value for money and continuously review our practice. I am sure that throughout the sessions we will have an opportunity to demonstrate further how we adhere to those principles.

As a continuously improving organisation, we do not expect less of ourselves than we do of those that we inspect. As a direct result of the feedback that we have received, since September 2013, we have made some changes to inspection. For example, the inspection notification time is now two working weeks instead of four. Inspection findings are reported on a Friday on whole-week inspections so that schools do not have to wait over the weekend to receive the outcome of their inspection. Prompt feedback is provided after lessons so that teachers do not have to wait until the end of the inspection to learn the findings. These improvements are aimed at reducing some of the apprehension that might have been associated with waiting for the inspection to start and receiving feedback.

The revised post-primary inspection was introduced in September 2013. We now have a greater focus on self-evaluation that demands less paperwork being provided by the schools and aims to be more collaborative. In primary schools, the short and focused inspection has been streamlined into one inspection that lasts two or three days, depending on the size of the school. Our reports are shorter now, so that we can turn them around more quickly. However, they are still backed up with detailed feedback throughout and at the end of the inspection. Since September 2013, we have been using a running record of evidence on all of our school inspections, and we trialled those in post-primary schools last term. We intend to begin sharing that with schools in the future, when we have perfected the process. Last week, in work-based learning, we also trialled having a nominee from the provider that was being inspected attend all of our meetings, including the moderation meeting. We intend to trial that more widely sometime in the future to see if it works for all parties. We are also undertaking a review of performance levels that we use on inspection, and we have already done some early work on this. We will be discussing these with the sector in early 2014.

To move on to the term of reference around value added, what is important here is not the model of value added that is used, as there are many schools of thought about what is an effective value-added model. It is more important that a school knows what progress its pupils are making and how that information informs planning for teaching, learning and meeting individual pupils' individual needs, as well as setting realistic and challenging targets for the whole school and by subject. Where schools use standardised tests — for example, Progress in English (PiE), Progress in Maths (PiM), Middle Years Information System (MidYIS) and the Year 11 Information System (YELLIS) — the inspection team samples the data to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's processes in distinguishing between low and underachievement and how they are using that information and data to make sure that each pupil achieves to their full potential.

The critical judgements that inspectors make about value added are based on the quality of pupils' progress relative to their baseline starting points. ETI does not use a prescriptive, formal value-added

system, but instead accepts and scrutinises all of the assessment information, such as outcomes for standardised tests and teacher assessment, that the school wishes to make available. The overall trends in the school's internal and external performance indicators are tracked and benchmarked against the performance of pupils in the school and the performance of pupils in schools with a similar free school meal entitlement.

I think it is fair to say that the Department continues to consider the most appropriate arrangements for introducing robust measures of value added to assess pupils' progress and school performance. There have been well-documented issues, as I am sure you will know, associated with the development of contextual value-added measures in other parts of the world. Of particular concern is the risk that the use of such measures entrenches low expectations for the most disadvantaged young people and masks underachievement. Although the concept of contextual value added appears attractive in promising to show the differences that schools can make, in reality such measures are very complex and can be difficult for stakeholders to interpret.

The new end-of-key-stage assessment arrangements include an expectation that, as well as achieving the expected level by the end of each key stage, pupils will progress by at least one level between each key stage. By capturing the progress made by pupils between each key stage, the new assessment arrangements should provide a measure of value added by schools. I want to emphasise that, although data is important in our inspections, the process of inspection is not data-driven but rather is data-informed. We have a strong focus on teaching and learning, looking at pupils' work and interviews with staff, pupils and governors. I am sure that we will get a chance to talk about that a little bit later.

The schools performance data that I was talking about is discussed with the senior management team, which has the opportunity to provide its interpretation of the context of the organisation. That, in turn, is set in the context of the inspector's own experience and judgements on the quality of pupils' achievements and standards. Again, I am sure we will talk more about value added as we go through the meeting.

I would like to move on to talk about the key issues impacting on schools experiencing difficulties. The 'Chief Inspector's Report — 2010-2012' indicated that, overall, the education system across Northern Ireland achieves good value, but its outcomes are too variable. Inspection evidence indicates that, although there is a range of factors impinging on schools experiencing difficulties, the most important are poor leadership and management, low expectations of the teachers and managers, and the poverty of aspiration among parents, pupils and the wider community. However, while any of those can apply in certain circumstances, inspection evidence indicates that the most significant issues in those circumstances are the quality of leadership and management, and the capacity of the school for rigorous and honest self-evaluation leading to sustained improvement.

High-quality leadership in a school will build on the smallest strengths in order to bring about improvement. There are no examples of schools that we have inspected where we did not find some evidence of good practice. In many schools inspected, either individual teachers or coordinators were managing to achieve good outcomes despite the socio-economic circumstances of the school. Where the quality of leadership was poor, we found that the senior leadership team did not have the capacity to analyse the problems or plan strategically and realistically for improvement.

The need to improve the outcomes for learners in English and mathematics across all sectors remains a priority. Of particular concern are the standards achieved by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Only 34.1% of all school leavers entitled to free school meals achieved five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and maths, in 2011-12. Although that is an improvement from 2010-11, there is still a great deal of work to be done in order to ensure that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds fulfil their full potential.

The ETI recently published a report of schools with relatively high levels of free school meals in which good standards are achieved by pupils, particularly in English and maths. That was done to identify elements of good practice. Since September 2013, we have also been directly supporting 20 schools in which there is a gap in the outcomes of five A* to C GCSEs and including English and maths. Two inspectors will work on that project full time to support those 20 schools, and they will be supported by two seconded AAs, one for English and one for maths.

In some schools in which the quality of education is poor, the school community has difficulty accepting the validity and fairness of an inspection of performance level. We do not underestimate the difficulty in accepting that provision is not good enough when schools believe that they are doing their best. However, in focusing on the needs of learners, the ETI has no option but to comment on the

lack of impact that that hard work is having on pupil's achievements. That is always done with a view to making things better for everyone in the longer term. As I mentioned, we are considering a review of the performance levels used at the conclusion of inspection reports and, in particular, the terminology used in those descriptors.

I will now move on to talk about the models of inspection in other jurisdictions. I mentioned that our inspection approach adheres to the 10 principles of public service inspection. We are part of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI). In fact, I attended its meeting in Edinburgh last week. We constantly review aspects of the work of inspectorates across other countries and evaluate how effective those would be in Northern Ireland. In addition, over the years, the ETI has participated in inspection activities with other inspectorates in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland and in other European countries. Recently, other inspectorates have indicated their interest in the development of our sustaining improvement inspection model, which I am sure we will talk about a little bit more later.

The last of the terms of reference is to look at the need for enhanced powers, alternative measures of achievement, improved governance and transparency. A key feature of all of our inspection activity is to build capacity within the organisations inspected. The ETI seeks to achieve that outcome by promoting processes of evaluation that will endure beyond the period of inspection by helping to establish improved ways of working through professional dialogue and identifying, reporting and disseminating examples of outstanding practice from which others can learn. I believe that we have been very effective in building capacity in the sector through, for example, our collaborative inspection work, our inspection reports, the use of associate assessors, the role of the district inspector, the dissemination conferences that we have recently undertaken, and the examples of good practice that are featured on ESaGS.tv, to name but a few.

I move on to the powers of the inspectorate. The Education Bill that was introduced to the Assembly clarifies and modestly enhances the functions and powers of inspectors. The ETI notes and supports the main changes as being necessary and proportionate. However, even with that enhancement, the powers of inspectorates in other jurisdictions are still considerably stronger than those of ETI.

As I said, the ETI keeps its processes under continuous review and is always open to new ideas or views. The ETI is aware of the need to retain the professional support of the education system. The introduction of a formal intervention programme and the associated media coverage resulted in some schools expressing their difficulty in accepting the validity or fairness of an inspection performance level. It is worth mentioning that, between 2009 and 2013, the inspection models that we use have not changed. With the new introductions that we have made in 2013, we are aiming to be even more collaborative in how we inspect.

Finally, the ETI consults with stakeholders in the design, development and review stages of all its processes and work. I am sure that we will get an opportunity to talk about that later.

The Chairperson: Thank you for that detailed opening comment, Noelle. I will just take you back to your last comments in relation to the changes that are beginning to appear. The cynic in me — not that I have ever been accused of being one — would say that there was no change in the inspection regime for a number of years, but then, when the Education Committee determines to have an inquiry, all of a sudden we have altered inspection arrangements and guidance issued to governors consulting on the changes to the formal intervention process. Is this a case of the ETI trying to get its house in order before we get to the end of an inquiry?

Mrs Buick: The intervention process is a DE policy. So, the changes that we are making to the formal intervention process are set aside from the changes that we are making to inspection. We started making changes to inspection in September 2011. As part of our staff development, we have two days on which we review our practices and principles. We started to implement the changes that we would like to make and decide how we might go about doing that. You cannot just change the inspection process overnight; it takes time. My colleagues all know that I would like it to have been even faster, but it takes time to develop, trial and consult on models; that is a really important part of our process. So, no, it is not a response to the inquiry; we have had that in place since 2011.

The Chairperson: There are a number of specific things that I want to get to. This is the commencement of a process for us. Noelle, you made a comment about the ETI being transparent and open throughout the process. As I am sure you noticed, I tabled a question asking the Minister what arrangements exist between his Department and the Education and Training Inspectorate once a

school inspection has been completed. The response was that the inspection team shares the key findings with departmental colleagues once the inspection has concluded. However, it seems that the practice is that, prior to the final report being published, there are ongoing discussions with the Department. I will not name the school, but you will be well aware of one special school that was inspected recently. In the inspection report, you made recommendations as to what could be done to help and assist. When I asked the Minister what actions were being taken as a result, this was the response:

"I have noted the recommendations contained in the Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) recent inspection ...

In the first instance, the departmental officials have been liaising with the ETI regarding the inspection report, and in particular the recommendation regarding the possibility of collaborative working."

How can we see or access the recommendations or discussions that take place between the ETI and the Department before the final report is published? Therein lies the mist; therein lies the concern. We are told that what happens, in some cases, is that the report that is given verbally to the school is completely different from what ends up in the written report. Why should that be the case if the process is transparent, which, according to you, it is?

I should say that the district inspectors are held in the highest regard. It was remiss of me not to say that at the start that, if there is one value in our system that we need to maintain, it is our network of district inspectors. I, and schools that I have spoken to right across the country, value greatly the district inspector. However, over the past number of years, there seems to be an increasing concern that there is a breakdown between what happens with the district inspector when an inspection is initiated and the report itself. That leads me to be worried about the comment that, from your perspective, the process is transparent and open. There seems to be a number of issues.

Mrs Buick: You raise a number of issues in your question. I will try to take those in the order in which you raised them.

First, there is no mist between us and the Department. We inspect without fear or favour. The outworkings of the recommendations that we make may well inform policy, and we may well give policy advice related to that. We may well then inspect the effectiveness of that policy. With regard to the verbal report, we aim to give accurate feedback at all times through the inspection. We have good liaison with the schools that we inspect throughout the inspection process, but it is a fact that the verbal report is more detailed than the inspection report. That is why one of the things that I outlined in my speech was that we are hoping to produce the running record and to leave that with the school. It is a process that we are beginning to trial and hope to perfect. That may clarify some of the points that you raise. They are points that have been raised before, and we have had a lot of internal discussion about that matter. The verbal report lines up with the final inspection report, but there will be more detail, and rightly so, at the verbal report.

You are quite right that the district inspector role is highly regarded. They will have a significant role in the follow-up inspection process, which is considered constructive, effective and thorough, and they know their schools well. I would like to spend more time on the district inspector activities, but we have a budget that we have to adhere to. We give the maximum amount of time that we can give to district inspector activities, but it is within a budget envelope that we have. Faustina may want to add to that.

Mrs Faustina Graham (Education and Training Inspectorate): I am aware of the Assembly question to which you refer. Truthfully, looking at the number of inspection reports that go through our hands, in our directorate dealing with schools, the processes that would have been described in answer to that question are exactly what happens in the Department. Colleagues in the school improvement team in the Department will receive the same information that the school receives. In other words, at the verbal report back with the school, we leave a summary sheet, which is a short, one-page document that sums up the findings of the inspection. That is left in confidence with the school, and that is exactly the same information that is passed on to the Department. After that, we work through our processes and the inspection report is published. There is no contact between ourselves and colleagues in the Department before the publication of that report. The process will be continued in schools where there is an entry into the formal intervention process, because that will kick-start a process, but it is clearly outlined in annex C of Every School a Good School what the process is. We follow it to the letter, and we have to, given the volume of reports that we deal with.

The Chairperson: How that plays out in practice is not the case. I will not name the school, but I am sure that you will be aware of it when you hear the comments. A school was inspected, and the principal said that it was "inherently unfair and unjust" that the school did not have the opportunity to question or challenge the inspectors' findings on the basis of evidence. He went on to say:

"The first opportunity we are allowed to comment on the findings is after the publication, at which point our personal and professional reputations and the reputation of our school have already been irreparably damaged if not thoroughly destroyed."

How do we address that? That is not a mist or a perception; that is a fact by a principal in a school that was inspected. In another school, and, again, I am not naming it, the principal has now taken early retirement as a result of the inspection, and, unfortunately, he has suffered physically as a result of the process because he believes that he was made the scapegoat for the issues that were raised.

There has to be transparency and openness through the process. None of us likes inspections. None of us likes to be inspected on anything. Members of the Assembly get inspected as to how many paper clips we have and all sorts of things, but that comes with the territory, and we accept that. However, this is a situation where genuine concerns are being raised and where it is a real person and a real school. The other one that I referred to is a real school and a real individual. How do we prevent that?

Mrs Buick: I will respond, and, again, Faustina might like to come in to add to my response. I could give you hundreds of other examples of schools that are entirely happy with the process. I outlined in my introduction that it is sometimes very hard for schools to accept the outcome of an inspection if it is not what they expected, especially if they have been working hard. I would say that there is every opportunity for a school to provide evidence throughout the inspection process, and we will look at all the evidence that is provided. There is also the opportunity for a school to respond through the factual accuracy check; the report goes to the principal through the factual accuracy process. We would hope that any complaints are resolved before an inspection is completed, but there is quite a thorough complaints process if a school really is not happy with the outcome of an inspection. We have to inspect without fear or favour. If a school is not serving its pupils well, we must make sure, for the benefit of those pupils, that we say so. As I demonstrated, over 80% of schools that have gone through the follow-up process have improved. That impacts on learners, and, at the end of the day, they are the important people. They are at the centre of this process. Faustina, is there anything that you want to add?

Mrs Graham: Obviously, it is not our intention, in any shape or form, to find ourselves in the circumstances that you outlined. As Noelle said, we work very hard before the inspection. You mentioned the role of the district inspector. The reporting inspector will discuss any concerns with the school, particularly with anyone who has difficulties at that time with the inspection process, and when we are in the school, we will be sensitive to those situations. We try to discuss and mediate the findings across the three days of the inspection. We meet the principal of the school every day to discuss the emerging findings, so that, by the end of the inspection process, the findings, we believe, should not come as a surprise. That does not, for one minute, take away from what you just read to us. The important thing for us is that we are always extremely open to finding ways of improving our communication and making the process as constructive as possible. If, as a result of this inquiry, you can assist us with that, we will be entirely open to accepting your recommendations. We want to ensure that we do not change the evaluation, because, as Noelle pointed out, the primacy of the learner and the child is the most important thing for us, but if there are better ways that we can convey the findings, so that people do not find themselves in the situation that you just described, we would be open to hearing them.

The Chairperson: Trevor wants to come in on this point, but I just want to say this before I lose my train of thought. That may not be the inspectorate's intention, Faustina — I do not believe that there is that intention — but the reality is that this one school raised issues that, if you take Noelle's comment, should have been addressed, along with any inaccuracies and concerns, at the factual accuracy stage. However, it seems as though something broke down somewhere, and the principal of that school has ended up making very critical and, I have to say, very damaging comments. If it is only one, it should be addressed. The good shepherd went out to find the one sheep that was lost, because he knew that the other 99 were safe and sound. I have to say that I worry about such situations. It was not just a glib comment; very serious accusations were made.

Mrs Graham: Which, I think, we accept, but I would not accept that it was not factually correct; it is perhaps how we convey it. I think that we are very willing to improve on how we convey the findings. To say that something is factually incorrect — we provide the school with an opportunity before publication to comment on the factual accuracy.

The Chairperson: Trevor wants to come in on this point, and then we will go to other members.

Mr Lunn: I just want to get clarity on this. You keep the school informed of — I think that you used this term — the emerging findings, but it seems to me that the school does not have an opportunity to see the finalised report before that is published. That is perhaps where they are different.

The Chair of the Public Accounts Committee is here today. She would know, as would Sean, and as I know from my experience, about the way in which the Audit Office deals with the situation. Effectively, it shows the final report to the institution being investigated and to anyone who was a witness to a particular inquiry to make sure that it is accurate. It also gives them an opportunity, before the thing goes public, to correct misapprehensions. You do not accept that you are falling down in that respect, but is that perhaps where the problem lies?

Mrs Buick: Mr Lunn, we afford schools the opportunity to see the report pre-publication for a factual accuracy check. It is not to reopen the evaluative judgements that have been made, but it is certainly to check any points of factual accuracy. They have that opportunity, in the same way in which the Public Accounts Committee would afford us that opportunity to do so.

I go back, Mr Storey, to that particular school. If an issue is raised with us directly, we try incredibly hard to mediate and find a way forward with those schools. We try very hard to make sure that they are not left feeling that they have not been well served by the inspection process. John very recently attended a meeting of governors at a school that was not satisfied with the outcome of an inspection to explain again in more detail and to reach a consensus point at which the governors accepted that the outcome of the inspection was right and valid.

The Chairperson: Noelle, I think that you probably know the school that I am referring to. It might be useful if the Committee was given an update on where we are currently at with that school. I am quite happy to give you the name of the school afterwards.

Mrs Buick: Yes. I am entirely happy to discuss that with you.

Mrs Graham: The school has submitted its action plans, and we are about to visit it.

The Chairperson: On the point that Trevor made, the Department of Education, prior to the publication of a report on the early years fund, had a discussion with the organisation about the final outcome of the report. It gives money to that organisation. It clearly has those discussions. There seems to be a breakdown or a misunderstanding. The purpose of this inquiry is to find out what exactly the practice is, how it is interpreted and how it is put into place. It is useful that we have this discussion.

I want to ask one other simple question. You said that the inspectorate is data-informed rather than data-driven. What is the attitude of the inspectors to the computer-based assessment (CBA) in our schools, which caused us grave concern? You said earlier that you look at the value added based on PiE, PiM and other systems in place, which have not cost us the millions of pounds that the computer-based assessment has. It seems that the inspectorate looks at that as a good model and tool to deal with the issue of identifying the needs of children. Will you clarify for us what the inspectors' attitude is towards computer-based assessment?

Mrs Buick: I will start, and maybe Faustina would like to come in. Our position is that we will look at the data that the school provides for us. We expect a school to be able to know what progress its pupils are making and to take action on foot of that information. CBA is a diagnostic tool that came after the interactive computerised assessment system (InCAS). The established principle was that we would not ask for InCAS results. It was to be the same principle for CBA. If a school wants to provide us with that information, we will use it, but we do not specifically ask schools to provide it for us.

The Chairperson: You advise the Department. There is always the issue around independence, which we are raising concerns about. You advise the Department on policy, or you make a comment

on policy. I find it absolutely astounding that we have a situation in which the inspectorate says, "We had an agreed working practice that we would not ask about InCAS, and we are going to carry that on with the computer-based assessment." That is a laudable position for the inspectorate to have, but the Department has put in statute a requirement to have those assessments, and the chief inspector, who goes into schools to see how the assessment is being done, says, "We do not want to see that; we are not going to ask you for it".

Mrs Buick: That is not quite what I said, Chair. I said that we will use —

The Chairperson: It comes across that way. We have a policy from the Department. As far as the inspectorate is concerned, if the school does not provide the information, it will not ask for it.

Mrs Buick: That is true. We will use the information that a school provides for us, but we expect a school to be able to demonstrate to us that it knows about the progress of its pupils.

The Chairperson: Yes, but by using not computer-based assessment but PiE and PiM, which you have historically always used.

Mrs Buick: It is by using whatever tool that they think is most appropriate for their pupils. Faustina was involved in the CBA assessment that we did, so perhaps she will elaborate.

Mrs Graham: In February and March, we very quickly responded to the concerns from the Education Committee, and the Minister commissioned us to do a piece of work. We would probably have been undertaking that in the upcoming year anyway, because, as Noelle said, we were not looking at computer-based assessment in individual organisations, because the nature and purpose of computer-based assessment was to encourage the use of assessment for diagnostic purposes, not for summative assessment. It really was to look at how what you were finding out in November in your school was going to inform the teaching and learning process subsequent to that. For that reason, the Department was not collecting the statistics from computer-based assessment, nor were we looking at it as a prerequisite that someone should share with us. Nevertheless, it was our intention that, when the new NINA and NILA was embedded, we would look at computer-based assessment. We are standing back this year to allow that to happen and for people to become comfortable with it.

Instead, we set up a piece of work in February and March. We sent a questionnaire out to all primary schools at that time. Around 50% of primary schools responded to that questionnaire, and, on foot of that, we sent inspectors accompanied by associate assessors. So, any school that was visited was visited by an inspector and an associate assessor to look at the reality of what happened on the ground with computer-based assessment this year. Obviously, the implementation of that was not good enough, and that has been accepted by everyone. Our recommendations to the Department reflected that, as things move forward, it is very much about working with the sector and with the profession to ensure that people are content with what is replacing what we currently have, in particular the issue about the procurement process requiring to be carried out on a three-year basis. All of those things cause problems to schools. Even if the resulting computer-based assessment is good, it will still cause problems on that three-year basis. So, we did respond very quickly and listened to the voice of the profession in what we fed back to the Minister and the Department.

The Chairperson: We could go a long way on this one. You undertook a piece of work on behalf of the Department. The issue is that, as far as the inspectorate is concerned, if you do not ask for computer-based assessment information, you will not receive it. So, my question is this: why do we have it when the inspectorate is content about what is already there as assessment tools? That is a policy issue for the Department, and we have been pursuing that for some time.

Mrs Graham: Schools do share the information with us, because we are looking at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. It is just not something that we require them to do. Schools have been very open with InCAS and, in the current year, NINA and NILA, sharing that information.

Mr Newton: I thank the delegation for coming today. I will be a bit selfish and particular, if I may. I represent East Belfast, and I am sure that you know that there are high concerns about underachievement in east Belfast. I have been pleased with some of the responses from parents recently in that they have stepped up to the mark to provide the teachers with what, I think, is absolutely necessary assistance to get the standards up. That is true of one school in particular. Last week, we had some discussion around the area plan for east Belfast, and there are some of us who

think that it is not a plan that is fit for purpose. Those very difficult circumstances have an impact, particularly on Orangefield High School, Dundonald High School and the merger, or potential merger, of Newtownbreda, which is a South Eastern Education and Library Board school, and Knockbreda, which is a BELB school. I note that all references are to working with "the" school or "a" school to help improve the situation. Given the area-based plan, do you have a role in advising how that situation can be addressed in a holistic manner as opposed to an intervention in one, two or three schools as individual schools?

Mrs Buick: I will begin on that, and then, as those are post-primary schools, perhaps John would like to comment.

We would have inspected all those schools, and we inspect what we see and what the quality of provision is like for pupils in the school at that time. Our role in area planning would merely be that, if a development proposal was put forward for a school, we would comment on that development proposal. That is entirely our role, in that we inspect the school and make a determination about the quality of provision. If a development proposal comes our way for comment, we would comment on it. However, we have no role or locus in the area planning process.

Mr John Anderson (Education and Training Inspectorate): As you know, five major indicators are used as part of area planning. The inspectorate's input is really into one of those and part of one of the others. Determined by the school budget, pattern of enrolment and accessibility of the school, our input is an evaluation of the quality of provision. To a certain extent, we can contribute to making evaluations about the effectiveness of the leadership, management and governance of a school, but that is not the whole part of that particular criterion. So, that is that particular part. An inspection report will never close a school.

In the case of those particular schools, they work together. Several of those schools are part of an area learning community. When we are inspecting or, as happened recently, following up inspections in those schools, we are aware of that. We talk to pupils who are attending courses in one of the other schools and see pupils in the school who are attending from another school. So, we are interested in how the curriculum provided to those pupils is being broadened by how effectively those schools are engaging in the area learning community to provide the entitlement framework at Key Stage 4 or beyond. That is absolutely part of our inspection when we look at any one school: we look at how it works with other schools so that the curriculum that is provided is as suitable as it possibly can be for the aptitudes, needs, interests and abilities of the pupils of that school.

Mr Newton: Given the fact that three of the schools mentioned are in close proximity, it would seem to me to be a consultation role at least. However, really, your role is very minor in that situation in area-based planning.

Mrs Buick: That is not our locus to be involved in. As John said, the criteria for sustainable schools are very clearly laid out. Our role is absolutely to look at the quality of provision for those young people and, as I said, to comment on the development plan. I think that it is right and proper that that should be our role.

Mr Newton: Even though, as John said, you look at the pupils, you are actually looking at those schools as individual schools, rather than at the impact within an area. The impact on east Belfast is huge.

Mrs Graham: We have done some work on area-based inspection. One piece of work that we did was in west Belfast in 2009. As a result of that work looking at underachievement in that locality and looking across primary, post-primary, some of the youth provision in the area and non-formal education generally, we wrote a report at that point. Subsequently, the west Belfast community partnership board picked up the gauntlet, so to speak, in responding to the inspection report and providing work across the area to try to look at improving standards. That is not formally the work that we do, but we have kept in touch with that work, as far as we possibly can. My understanding is that the east Belfast partnership board has liaised with west Belfast to see what it has done and how it has worked with the organisations. That type of work, where communities see that what is happening for their young people in the whole area is not good enough, has real potential for the future. So, we have done three pieces of work like that, but, again, as Noelle said, looking at how the provision across a geographical area and sectors is providing for young people comes down to resourcing. It is very interesting work for us to do, but it is quite resource intensive.

Mr J Anderson: It so happens that, at present, in all of the schools that you named, there is concurrent inspection activity. In every case, there are follow-up inspection activities going on. I forgot to add that part of schools working together through an area learning community benefits not just the pupils, in terms of access to provision, but the staff. We are always pleased to see and comment positively on instances where staff from different schools are working together to improve the quality of their provision, for example, in careers education or whatever it might be. That is the case in some of those schools as well.

Mr Newton: We would all want to see schools working together in that holistic manner. It seems to be that what I would describe as a voluntary action by the west Belfast partnership has proved to be a good model that others are now looking at. One might have thought that there would be a learning exercise there somewhere along the line. I know that that is not your role, as you have explained.

Mr J Anderson: Similarly, we looked in north Belfast, where schools are collaborating. Again, particularly on the point that you made at the start, their outreach to parents is very effectively supporting the pupils' learning. There are good case studies around, which other parts of the Province are interested in looking at and taking lessons from. We have found some of those lessons in other schools.

Mr Newton: It may be useful if the Committee could be provided with those pieces of information.

The Chairperson: John, to pick up on your comment that an inspection report will not close a school: it will certainly put the first nail in the coffin. That difficulty has arisen. I do not know how we get to a better place in dispelling the concern that people have. It looked very suspicious that there was an inspection in that school in the context of what was going on around that school. I could name schools that have undergone inspection and, in an area planning context, believe that they were targeted specifically because there was an area planning issue. We want to get to the bottom of how we deal with that issue, because it is prevalent out there at the minute.

Mrs Buick: I can absolutely dispel that myth. You know that Every School a Good School states that it is not about institutions; it is about the learners — the pupils — in those schools. We will inspect as we find in those schools, and if the quality of provision is not good enough, we will say so. There is no hidden agenda here. We have a proportionate risk-based approach to inspection, and we will inspect schools as we find it fit to do so. There is no agenda here.

Mr Paul McAlister (Education and Training Inspectorate): The one factor that I do not believe that the Committee, nor we, have any control over is how the media handle information that we put into the public arena. Mr Newton mentioned the importance of parents assisting teachers. A lot of that parental assistance, and, indeed, the way in which pupils engage with teachers, comes from the confidence that they have in the teachers and the professionalism that the teachers show. Serious damage is caused if that is eroded publicly and unfairly by the media, and it is certainly not something that we would ever want to happen when we put information into the public arena. We feel that the relationship between a teacher and a pupil is so special that it deserves to be treated with an extra layer of respect than, perhaps, any other job. We find that some of the reporting of the information that we put into the public arena is not helpful in that regard.

Mr Moutray: Thank you for your attendance. What support is given to the governors of a school that has been inspected and deemed to be inadequate or unsatisfactory? A principal is there day and daily to deal with the issues; governors are there for maybe a couple of hours a month, yet they play a critical role.

Mrs Buick: I will start, and John will come in. As part of the follow-up inspection process, our role as an inspectorate is to carry out an interim visit or interim visits to that school to monitor progress against the actions identified. The school will also access support from the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS), and it will provide a range of support, or broker support from other agencies if that is required. That might entail support for governors if we have identified that area as one for improvement.

Support is provided for governors through one of the education and library boards. You will be aware that, in September 2011, the Minister asked us to look more closely at governance, with the aim of identifying where there is good practice among governors and sharing it, and we have been doing that for the past year. We have identified where there is good practice in the way in which governors work,

and we hope that that is being shared. You will also know that the Department is setting up a governor support service. It is doing some preliminary work around the setting-up of that service to provide support for governors.

Mr Moutray: Therefore, you believe that there is an inadequate level of support for governors.

Mrs Buick: Like with everything else, there could be greater support for governors. We all know that governors are volunteers. When they come on as new governors, they may not have the skills and expertise to be able to challenge and support principals. Therefore, anything that can be done to strengthen that is an absolute positive. We value highly the work that governors do. In most instances, we find that governors are providing the necessary support and challenge for the schools.

Mr Moutray: Do governors have a direct line to people such as you if they have questions on the back of an inspection?

Mrs Buick: The district inspector is linked with the school, and district inspectors will liaise with whomever in the school wishes to liaise with them. We attend governors' conferences and talk about inspection. Last year, the Department and the inspectorate undertook a whole series of engagement events with governors to talk about inspections, budgets and challenges, and those events were very well received. The intention is that they will be continued, because governors found them very beneficial.

Paul reminds me that we had 10 conferences. We were out for 10 nights talking to governors, and we found that engaging directly with governors was beneficial for us, too.

Mr J Anderson: Advisory officers from the boards will attend board of governors' meetings. Part of the evaluation and action plan is that the governors need assistance in understanding the process of action planning and their role to monitor and to ensure that the leadership of the school is provided with the necessary leadership to address the issues identified. As was indicated in an earlier discussion, we always go the extra mile and go back to boards of governors with the reporting inspector — in some cases, I have gone as well — where the findings have been a surprise to them, and where they were not as aware of the state of play in the school as perhaps they might have been, to explain the evidence and why it led to the evaluation.

Chairman, you asked how we could avoid those extreme situations. Part of the answer lies in having very good, and we aim to do that throughout the inspection so that nothing comes as a surprise. All opportunities are there to provide evidence during the process so that the undesirable situation does not arise where someone says, "But I have more evidence." We also have to explain the situation to the governors. In the case that you mentioned at the outset, they refused to allow us to do that, so we did not have the opportunity to talk through the findings.

The Chairperson: On that point, it might be useful, Noelle, if you can supply the Committee with examples. The Committee will talk to schools that have had a very positive experience of the inspection process. Can you supply us with a sample of schools that were deemed to be unsatisfactory and satisfactory, and where the inspectorate suggested that schools do A, B and C? That would give us a flavour of the practical assistance or advice that could be given.

You referred to CASS. In most board areas, CASS has been well and truly decimated, and it may be that the school finds it difficult to access a particular intervention that would assist in addressing the problem. It would be interesting for the Committee to see examples of what is being said or the advice that is being given to improve certain situations so that we have some sense of it.

Mrs Buick: Are you talking about the recommendations for improvement that we make in inspection reports?

The Chairperson: Yes, or in the feedback that goes back to the school. When you go back to a school, you say that there are things that you think it could do. What is the feedback? We would like real, meaningful examples so that we have a sense of what that is.

Mrs Buick: I am very happy to do that, Chair. That is no problem. To clarify, the recommendations are very clear in the inspection report. Through the interim follow-up process, we provide a letter to the school on progress against those actions. Then, of course, we have the follow-up inspection process. Therefore, there is a very clear protocol for supporting schools from our inspection side, and

then for having the follow-up inspection, which is publicly reported. Certainly, with the schools' permission, I can give you some of those interim follow-up letters.

Mrs Graham: The letter is given in confidence to the school to allow the school to use it without it being in the public domain.

The Chairperson: Yes. We do not need the names of any schools, but we would like to be given a flavour of what the advice might be in practical terms, because, on a lot of occasions, we talk in generalities.

Mr J Anderson: You would like some examples of where it works relatively effectively, and some where it takes longer.

The Chairperson: Exactly.

Mr Lunn: I will take a different tack for a while. In your preliminary statement, Noelle, you mentioned the Education Bill. I am not asking you to comment on the Bill, because it is still just a proposal, but were you consulted on the sections that provide what you refer to as clarification of your role and powers?

Mrs Buick: A lot of the Bill was drafted before I took up my post as chief inspector, but, yes, we had involvement in those clauses.

Mr Lunn: The Committee has had a lot of discussion about this. This is not a view that I share, but some people think that if the Bill goes through in its present form, it will extend your powers considerably. The word "draconic" has been used. What is your comment on that?

It seems to me to be drawing together all the various strings. Down the years, your powers have been based on various orders and regulations. The Bill is clarifying where you stand at the moment. I cannot see that it gives you the power to do anything that you could not do in the first place, except in matters of detail. Is that a fair comment?

Mrs Buick: I think that you are right. It is clarification of some of the work that we already carry out, and there is a modest increase in our powers around the opportunity to be able to access documentation. I am sure that you will know that our powers are still not nearly as strong as those of the inspectorates in the other jurisdictions with which we have closest association. The Bill contains a modest increase in our powers around documentation. The rest is just clarification.

Mr Lunn: Is it an update on electronic and computer-based documentation, rather than paper documentation, which perhaps was not clear before?

Mrs Buick: Very rarely do we not have access to anything that we want to look at in schools. It is highly unusual. I know that there have been circumstances around the action short of strike, but that was a unique set of circumstances. On the whole, I think that the powers will make very little difference to our work on the ground.

Mr Lunn: Is it the case that, at the moment, a school could refuse to show you certain documents but under the Education Bill as proposed would have to?

Mrs Buick: I suppose that that is the difference, but we find that schools are very open. They share their information with us quite openly and willingly.

Mr Lunn: OK. That is all that I wanted to ask you. Thank you.

The Chairperson: Noelle, I think that a lot of people would find your definition of "modest" —

Mr Lunn: I knew that I would not get away with that.

The Chairperson: Trevor is being very diplomatic about it, but I think that it is a power grab. Why do you need additional powers, if all that they mean is that you will be able to do what you believe you

can do already? Why do you need the power to confiscate a photocopier? Why do you need those powers?

Mrs Buick: I hope that we would not take away a photocopier.

The Chairperson: Well, it is a means of gaining information. It would allow the inspector to inspect any aspect:

"including teaching and learning; management and staffing, equipment, accommodation and other resources".

What is all that about? If you already have what you believe to be substantial powers, I cannot understand why there needs to be what are pretty detailed powers, yet you described them as "modest".

Mrs Buick: I think that it brings us closer to the inspection powers in other jurisdictions. It absolutely does not bring us anywhere near the powers of, say, Scotland and England, where it is an offence to obstruct an inspection. It is right that we should look at what is happening in other jurisdictions. If we find that our powers are some way behind those, we should perhaps be looking at taking steps to improve them.

The Chairperson: Would the answer to that not be that we should have an independent inspectorate on the same basis as that which pertains in England, as opposed to the arrangement whereby the Department of Education and the inspectorate are really one and the same thing, according to Chris Stewart when he last came before the Committee? The inspectorate is the Department.

Mrs Buick: We are embedded in the Department, as you know, but whether we are independent of the Department or part of it makes no difference to the powers. The powers are related to our work and to carrying out our inspection duties.

The Chairperson: The last time that I saw the Bill, which was some time ago, clause 46 required inspectors to produce a short report following an inspection. That report must be shared with the Department and the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) and the board of governors of the school. The Department can publish the report in a manner that it deems appropriate, and the board of governors of the school is obliged to produce and publish a statement of action that it is to take on foot of the report. That is a fair increase on the current practice.

Mrs Buick: I would say that all those things are already happening —

The Chairperson: Why do we not just ignore the inspectorate in the Bill and concentrate on what I believe the legislation was originally intended for, which was to deal with an over-duplication of resources? Why did the Department feel it necessary to include in a Bill that was about the reorganisation of management issues a clause specifically to enhance, according to your definition, modest powers to the inspectorate?

Mrs Buick: We are part of the quality assurance system for the education system in Northern Ireland, for which the Department is responsible. We should be part of any Bill that reorganises not just the Department but the wider education system. It is important that we are part of the Bill. If, on reflection, it is considered that our powers are less than those in other jurisdictions, why would we not look to have them strengthened? We should be part of the Bill. The Department is accountable for the quality of education that is provided to children and young people, and we are part of that accountability mechanism. I do not see any tension with the inspectorate being mentioned in the Bill.

Mr Lunn: I do not want to start a row, but —

The Chairperson: Go ahead.

Mr Lunn: — the fact that the clauses about the inspectorate are in the Bill is really neither here nor there. It is a good opportunity to upgrade, consolidate and clarify the role of the inspectorate. Whether that is done by a separate Bill or as part of an important piece of education legislation is irrelevant.

You made a comment about taking away photocopiers. I mean, come on.

The Chairperson: OK. We will see.

Mr Lunn: The Bill mentions taking away documents.

The Chairperson: OK. Thanks for that clarification.

Mr Rogers: You are very welcome. Thank you for the briefing and the documents that you gave us. It reminds me of the big red book that we used to get.

John, it is worth saying at the start that, over the years, the inspectors whom I dealt with were highly professional and hard-working. I appreciate what the Chair said about some teachers having issues after inspections and some schools perhaps having an increase in absences owing to stress and the like.

The other comment that I will make is about the inspectorate and the perception of independence. When you appoint your associate assessors, they cannot inspect their own school, but there is a perception out there that you are part of an organisation that you inspect.

Let me get on to my questions. There are a few left yet. You said at the beginning that inspection is a continuum, not something that is set apart. I certainly agree with that. In the interests of promoting improvement in the self-evaluation process, do you believe that there needs to be a closer link between inspection and curriculum?

Mrs Buick: Can you clarify what you mean?

Mr Rogers: If you compare the system with what is in Scotland, there is a closer link there between curriculum and inspection. Should you have that input into curriculum development, and so on, as a result of the work that you do?

Mrs Buick: OK, thank you. I will answer that as best I can. First, I will comment on your comments. We have many good teachers in our system, and we should be rightly proud of the work that our teachers do. As Faustina said, we hope that, on any inspection, we deal sensitively with any issues that are raised. We would really not want people to be in a position in which they were unhappy with the process, although they might be unhappy with the outcome. We work incredibly hard to make sure that that does not happen.

You mentioned Scotland. The arrangement here as it stands is that the inspectorate sits within the Department of Education. The arrangements in Scotland, where Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) sat outside the, if you like, curriculum organisation, were changed, and HMIE is now part of Education Scotland, where you have the inspectorate and the curriculum support working very closely together. That was Scotland's particular arrangement. I was with the Scottish inspectors last week, and there is a very clear distinction between the role of inspection and the role of curriculum support, although inspectors can identify curriculum support that is required from the other part of Education Scotland, so that part is joined up. However, the decision-making part is very separate.

I do not have a particular view one way or another. Our role is to evaluate the quality of provision in our schools, and I see that as rightly and properly our role. In my introduction, I mentioned that in one area — English and maths provision in post-primary schools — we have two inspectors directly providing support to a group of 20 schools, supported by two expert practitioners in English and maths. I suppose that that small part of our work is closer to some of the work that happens in Education Scotland, but our role at this time is really as evaluators and inspectors.

Mr Rogers: Related to the point that Stephen made earlier, do you believe that there is sufficient support for the principal when a school or a teacher is deemed unsatisfactory?

Mrs Buick: Faustina might want to pick up on that, but there is a process if a principal or a teacher is considered unsatisfactory. The procedures for that have just been reviewed and revised in consultation with the unions. The whole process is meant to be supportive not punitive, and the new arrangements make that absolutely clear. If a teacher or principal's work is found to be unsatisfactory, a programme of support needs to be provided for that teacher or principal. That external evaluation of

progress is included in the procedure. I think that the new procedures emphasise what was always there but was not always clear — the supportive nature of the procedures.

Mrs Graham: Furthermore, over time, with the introduction of performance review and staff development (PRSD) in particular, it has become clearer that the role of performance management is first and foremost with the school. It really is down to the governors working with the principal in the first instance to ensure that leadership is of appropriate quality, and, subsequently, the principal working with the remainder of the staff. It is unfortunate when we get to the stage at which a request is made to the ETI to come in and evaluate the competence level of either a principal or a teacher in the school. I would like to think that increasingly that will not happen. I do not believe that it should ever get to that stage. Support needs to be put in place before principals or teachers reach a stage at which they are overwhelmed by the job that they have in hand and cannot find the wherewithal to move their own professional development and competence forward. No one comes into teaching who cannot do the job; rather, over time, something happens, and a teacher or a principal can lose his or her way. That has to be stopped by professional development before it reaches the stage at which someone's work is evaluated as being unsatisfactory. That is not the way that it should be. Professional development for teachers should address those issues along the way and, in particular, provide one-to-one support, as you said. I think that our system is becoming better at doing that, although it is not perfect, obviously. Increasingly, it should not require inspection to evaluate the quality of individual performance.

Mr Rogers: As a principal, where do I get that support?

Mrs Buick: From our perspective, the district inspector will provide support to principals. I know of examples where the principal asked the district inspector whether he could talk about a particular issue, and the district inspector was very happy to do that. That is one vehicle for providing support for principals.

Principals have their own networks. There are associations of principals that get together and share good practice. Certainly, that is another avenue from which they can get some support. Being the leader of an organisation is a very challenging job. Hopefully, the principal and the chairman of the board of governors work closely together, with the chair providing support to the principal. Those are some examples of where support may be had.

Mrs Graham: In the past three to four years, where principals and teachers have had their work evaluated as unsatisfactory, in each instance in which we have been able to re-evaluate that work, those principals and teachers' work has returned to a satisfactory level of competence. The formal way of providing that support is through the Regional Training Unit (RTU) and the education and library boards' CASS. The Chair made the comment about the depletion of those services, so that is more difficult.

However, when we write an evaluation of an individual's work, we make it very clear where those competences need to be supported in order to improve someone's practice to a satisfactory level. Equally, as Noelle said, within the school, there may be the expertise so that someone can be supported by, for example, a peer or a head of department. However, ultimately, the formal requirement lies with RTU for principals and with CASS for individual teachers. In truth, when we have re-evaluated principals' work over the past three years, they have returned to a satisfactory level of competence. Therefore, that support, when it has been required, is working, even though I understand that you are making the point that it is perhaps more difficult to access than has been the case in the past.

Mr McAlister: If I can just add to that, the employing authority also sometimes gives support to principals. Mention was made earlier of the governor support service that is being set up. A school development service is also being set up. We are possibly at a stage of transition, with the boards being depleted and those other services being provided. We are probably at an interim stage at present.

Mr Rogers: Leading on from that, do you feel that the lack of high-quality staff development is impeding school improvement?

Mrs Buick: We would say that staff development is really very important. One of the initiatives that the Department is implementing is continuing professional development (CPD) for Key Stage 3 teachers. The package of support that is being provided will enhance that. There are many

opportunities for specialised support. We have the project to support teachers who are teaching special educational needs through the Stranmillis project, as we call it — although that is probably not the right title. Enabling teachers to take two master's modules and providing whole-school training around issues such as dyslexia are other forms of support. There is a pilot project in early years, and training is being provided to help teachers identify special needs at an earlier stage. There are a lot of activities around providing training for specific aspects of a teacher's role, and those are very important and very significant.

However, we have seen some good examples of whole-school training, where good practice in a school is shared among the whole school's staff. That is very effective. We also invite teachers to our dissemination conferences. We had separate conferences for primary and post-primary at which a teacher, a teacher's work, a teaching department or the provision was identified as very good or outstanding. Workshops were run for teachers and principals to attend, and those were incredibly successful. Although there is always more that could be done, there is quite a lot happening for teachers and principals to avail themselves of.

Mr McAlister: To add to what Noelle said, we work with ESaGS.tv. It was originally NEELB.tv but has been rebranded. When a school gets an evaluation ranked very good or outstanding, the ESaGS.tv unit is in regular contact with us. It does a short film piece with key members of the senior management in the school about, for example, teaching that was noted as being of particularly high quality by the inspection. Therefore, there are opportunities for schools to see visual examples of what good practice looks like and to hear from people who have taken a school on the improvement journey.

Mr Rogers: I am concerned that if we have one post-primary maths adviser in a particular board area, that person will find it very difficult to meet the needs of all the mathematics teachers in the board. It takes me back to my original point about the independence of the inspectorate. In a savings delivery plan, your departmental colleagues decided to cut £15 million from staff development, and they met their targets for that last year. My real concern is that we do not measure the impact of that in the classroom. The target for the next couple of years is something like £20 million.

CASS has been described a number of times as having been depleted. Until we really invest in ongoing staff development for our teaching population, we will not really raise standards to an efficient level. I think back on my own teaching career, and there was ongoing staff development, and whatever else. Yes, it is good to see good practice on the TV, and so on. However, if a teacher in my school is having particular issues with mathematics, for example, there is nothing better than for a mentor to come in and sit down with him or her and work through a plan of ideas. That person can be someone to whom the teacher can lift the phone and call. In two or three months, the mentor might come back in and see how the teacher has developed. That one-to-one coaching is really what we need, but I know that it is a money issue.

Mrs Buick: I do not disagree with you, Mr Rogers. You establish the good principle practices of continuing professional development. What we see in the area learning communities is really good sharing of good practice among schools. Teachers actually go into schools to watch lessons being taught by someone who is an expert practitioner in a particular area. I mentioned the maths and English project in which our inspectors will support the 20 schools that we have identified. We intend to run seminars for those schools. We will invite heads of maths and English departments from across the Province to those events.

I do not disagree with anything that you have said. However, there is a lot of work being done. The area learning communities in particular seem to be very good at identifying particular strengths and sharing those across the community.

Mr Rogers: Before I leave teacher development, I must say that the report said that the massive investment in leadership development through the professional qualification for headship (PQH) has not led to significant improvements in schools.

Mrs Buick: I will pick up on that and then ask John to come in, because he was very involved in that leadership survey. You are absolutely right: when we did that survey, there was no correlation between PQH and improvement in inspection outcomes. However, there were aspects of the PQH that were identified as very strong; for example, coaching, mentoring and time spent in schools. Those parts of the PQH are very strong. However, an issue was identified about the fragmentation of staff development and career development for teachers from when they start as initial teacher

educators. Again, we have identified that there are issues to be addressed. John might want to pick up on some of the detail.

Mr J Anderson: Noelle has already summarised that fairly well. You mentioned coaching a moment ago. In fact, one of the strengths that we found in the revised programme for PQH was the coaching and mentoring aspect. However, we were not so much looking at the quality or effectiveness of one particular course; we were looking at whether that had made an impact for schools that were struggling in difficult social contexts to provide good results and outcomes for their pupils.

As for the other part of your question, Sean, one of the other things that we said as a consequence of that report is that there is not a sufficiently clear continuous line of professional development from initial teacher education through induction and right throughout the career that enables the type of staff development that, in the past, came from the large number of external specialist subject advisors that there were across Northern Ireland. They are simply not there any more to the same degree. Therefore, the emphasis falls very much more on the school and the kind of coaching that you talked about. When we inspect a school, we are looking for a culture and an open-door policy whereby staff are willing to share their best practice with each other.

There is never a school in which we do not find good practice. No matter what the outcome for that school, there is always good practice. The question is often one of balance and whether the capacity in the school is good enough to take it forward, and, very often, it is. However, if the culture of sharing were there in the school, a teacher who has still got more to learn could be provided with that individual help very effectively within the school. In inspections, we are very interested in finding out whether or not we can say that about a school and whether it is, indeed, internally self-sustaining.

The point remains that we have to address the larger picture of career-long professional development and lifelong learning for teachers as a professional development line. We raised those questions in a number of review reports that we published recently, including the one that you have just mentioned.

Mr Rogers: Does the inspectorate have any plans to set up a complaints and appeals procedure?

Mrs Buick: We have a complaints procedure. It is on the website and the details are provided to all schools before an inspection takes place. We reviewed that procedure in September 2012, so it is a new procedure. There is a well-documented complaints procedure.

Mr Rogers: So a school can appeal against a decision.

Mrs Buick: It states very clearly in the complaints procedure that you cannot appeal against a decision just because you do not like it or you have changed something after the inspection. As I described to the Chair, there are ample opportunities to provide evidence during an inspection. We expect that all the evidence will be provided, that there will be professional dialogue, and that any difficulties will be ironed out during the inspection process. That is absolutely the best way for any issues to be addressed.

Mr Rogers: We talked about ESA. Are there plans to make the complaints procedure statutory?

Mrs Buick: Not that I am aware of; no.

The Chairperson: You would not want to make it statutory. That is the nub of the issue, Noelle. There were two complaints last year. The number of complaints has fallen progressively from eight to seven to two. Since 2007, not one complaint has been upheld. I will be facetious and say that that procedure is not worth the paper that it is written on, because the criteria do not allow you to question the result. It is like the police investigating themselves. We have gone through turmoil in this country because people have not been happy about the police investigating themselves. We had to get the Police Ombudsman, and we now have ombudsmen for all sorts of things. This is a classic example. We have a very serious issue for teachers in our schools. We have an inspection regime, and we do not have a statutory format. Then, we are told, "If you are not happy, you can go to the ombudsman". The ombudsman cannot change the decision. The ombudsman can only investigate the process unless a legal point is discovered that can be challenged. By that stage, the person has got so disgruntled and so dissatisfied with the process — he or she faces a legal bill to take the whole thing to court — that they will decide that it is not worth it and walk away. That is not very fair.

Mrs Buick: I am disappointed to hear that view. Our complaints procedure has two stages, and the investigation is carried out by an investigating officer who has not been part of the inspection process. That is a very challenging process, and, quite frankly, if we have determined that we have got it wrong, we will hold up our hands and say so. We have a very robust moderation process that the associate assessors will be keenly aware of because they are actually at the moderation, but quite a lot of dialogue takes place before any evaluations are awarded. We also have our own quality assurance process, whereby inspection reports are looked at by the managing inspectors like John and by the assistant chief inspector, Faustina. All the way through, there is a robust quality assurance system, and the strength of that is reflected in the very few complaints that we have received. I do not see that as negative; I see it as a positive sign that our moderation and quality assurance process is working. Lots of things happen on inspection that our inspectors are very adept at dealing with. If an issue is raised or if a principal wants us to look at an additional piece of evidence or an additional class, we will absolutely do our best to do so. I do not see it as a deficit model; I see it as positive.

The Chairperson: I want clarity on one point, Faustina. Who can initiate the inspectorate coming into inspect the principal and teachers?

Mrs Graham: The chair of the board of governors of the school.

The Chairperson: How many of those have there been in the past number of years?

Mrs Graham: Not a big number. It is probably in single figures. In that situation, the chair of the board of governors writes to the Chief Inspector and requests an inspection of an individual's work. In writing that, it is expected that the chair of the board of governors will let the Chief Inspector know what action the school has taken and why they feel that they need an individual inspection of a principal or a teacher's work.

Mr Lunn: A total of 25 complaints in five years does not seem too serious to me. Are the complaints largely based on the conclusions of the reports or are they based perhaps on the attitude of inspectors or things that happen during the process?

Mrs Buick: They are based on a range of things. It might be a view that we did not look at all the evidence or it might be to do with the conduct of the inspectors. I could not say definitively that they are about one thing because they are all different.

Ms Boyle: Thank you for your presentation. To some extent, my questions have already been asked, but I want to dig a bit deeper on Sean's point. Noelle, you said earlier that schools have the opportunity to provide further information during an inspection. You said that robust models of quality assurance are built in. Can you give me some examples of how the process does or should work in communicating that information back and forward between yourselves and the schools? We have heard time and again that schools — I am only echoing what they are saying — do not feel that they have the opportunity to provide that further information. I am looking for an example of how that should be communicated. What is the process for that? You mentioned the guidelines, the protocols and the process. Are all your inspectors aware of the robust models of quality assurance that need to be given to schools?

Self-evaluation from schools is key, and contributes to your inspections. Again, I am echoing what schools are saying. I have heard them say that they have felt that their self-evaluation report has been ignored in the outcome of your deliberations in an inspection. How accurate or inaccurate is the information given to you by schools? How effectively do you use it in reaching the outcome of an inspection?

Mrs Buick: I will start off and then John will come in on some of the detail, as he attends moderation meetings and he makes sure that he sees his team working on an inspection at least once a year. I believe that there is good dialogue with the principal of the school during an inspection. Inspectors meet the principal at least at the end of every day, if not more often. That is an opportunity for us to signal to the school the direction of travel of our findings. It is an opportunity for the principal to raise whether we have seen x, y or z, and for us to pick that up and deal with it. That very good professional dialogue that happens during an inspection gives that opportunity for additional evidence that a principal or a school or head of department wants us to look at. John might elaborate on that.

In respect of our quality assurance models, I hope that all our inspectors know the quality assurance process, and I believe that they do. They absolutely do. There will be dialogue with the managing inspector. If an inspector wishes to discuss an aspect of an inspection during the inspection, if the managing inspector is not there, they will be on the telephone. There is very good communication in that respect and support is provided for inspectors.

Self-evaluation is central to our inspection process, and the new model of inspection for post-primary centres on self-evaluation. John will talk about that. We see self-evaluation and internal and external evaluation as very closely linked. There may be instances where our inspection outcome does not agree with a school's self-evaluation; it may be the case that a school has not analysed its performance data well enough, has not really been totally self-reflective. There will be circumstances where there are differences in outcomes.

Ms Boyle: Will there be an opportunity to discuss their self-evaluation with you?

Mrs Buick: Yes; absolutely. Through the professional dialogue that takes place not only with the principal but with coordinators, teachers and a whole range of staff, there is an opportunity to discuss all aspects of self-evaluation. I will bring John in to add some detail if necessary.

Mr J Anderson: You have asked a lot at once, so forgive me if I take a bit of time. I will go back to the Chairman's first question about how we make sure that the inspections work well and that there are not any problems. I said that part of the answer is dialogue, and part of the answer to your question is that there is constant dialogue going on during the inspection. While inspectors are inspecting, they are sharing with senior leaders in the school — those with responsibility and indeed class teachers — what they are seeing, why they are seeing it and what else they should be seeing while they are there that will enable the school to put its best foot forward. Before that occurs, we are very clear about the quality indicators that are used for inspection, and we have been since the mid-2000s. We published 'Together Towards Improvement'. We revised it a few years ago, and it is tailored to each sector. We take every opportunity to promote 'Together Towards Improvement' so that everyone is aware of it. It is used in courses that we provide, it is used in guidance that we give to schools, the advisory service uses it in training that it provides for schools, and it is used in initial teacher education. In every way we can, we make people aware that there are agreed quality indicators on which the inspection work is based so that the school is completely aware of all the things that will be looked at. Therefore, they are aware of the nature of the evidence they are required to share with the inspectorate about the work that they do.

Secondly, we have a preparation day when we visit the school in advance of the inspection. The reporting inspector and sometimes even the deputy chief will go to the school for a day, and they will meet the principal, the senior leadership team and somebody from the board of governors. They explain the process and what will be done. They will work with the school on planning visits to lessons and so on. I interviewed, at the start of this term, the principals of the first three post-primary schools that were inspected. Without exception, they said that that was a very reassuring exercise. Teachers were, naturally, apprehensive when they heard that the inspection was due. However, when the reporting inspector met all staff, they all said that they were reassured and their nerves were, to a degree calmed, although not completely, of course. They will still be apprehensive on the first day, with people attending their lessons. However, they find that reassuring. Therefore, there is great clarity about the quality indicators, the process that will be used and the nature of evidence.

As the chief indicated, we make it very clear to schools that we are bringing the inspection event, which is just part of an ongoing process with the school, alongside the school's self-evaluation and that we are making the school development plan central to the inspection. That plan is a document that contains the school's intentions, its priorities, how it will monitor progress in terms of improvement, and how it will decide whether the effort it is putting into improving aspects of provision that it determined with its governors to be priorities is working effectively.

I cannot comment on a school saying, "We felt that our self-evaluation was ignored." It will depend on how effective it was, but I can generalise to a certain degree. We sometimes find that action plans and monitoring plans are not directly focused on the effectiveness of learning. They may be distracted by issues that are not central to improving the learning experience, provision and outcomes for pupils. Secondly, sometimes they use secondary rather than primary evidence; it is not first-hand. The advantage of inspection work is that schools are increasingly using the same methods in their self-evaluation, observing practice in lessons, looking at pupils' written work, talking to pupils,

understanding what they learned and how they are getting feedback from the teacher, through assessment, to be more effective.

Sometimes, we find a discrepancy between what we see to be good practice and what the school feels is good practice, which may not be the same. However, we are trying to do that work through constant discussion and dialogue with a school so that we are evaluating not only how effective we think the school's self-evaluation and improvement process is, but are trying to contribute to building the capacity in the school while we are there to help them to develop their ability to be more effective self-evaluators, using first-hand evidence and focusing on the key issue, which is the interaction between the learner and teacher in the classroom.

Ms Boyle: Do you accept that some schools would say that there is a significant variation in the commentary that they receive from ETI inspectors? What measures does ETI take through spot checks to ensure that the inspection system is understood, applied and communicated consistently to all schools?

Mr J Anderson: I think that I partly answered your second question when I explained the provision of the 'Together Towards Improvement' publication, the preparation day, and explanation of the process.

Ms Boyle: Can more be done?

Mr J Anderson: Of course. More can always be done. You can never have enough communication or dialogue. I asked three principals at the start of term how we could improve the dialogue and their engagement in the inspection. They all said, "We could not have coped with any more discussion and dialogue with the Inspectorate. They were constantly working with me, telling me what they were seeing, and asking me whether there was anything else that they needed to see in the inspection."

I believe that we are very good at communicating during an inspection. We do our best to provide information in advance, from documentation through publicity and preparation days, and through all the type of professional development that the Chief Inspector mentioned. You asked me whether I accept that there is a difference in view. I tried to explain that, sometimes, we find that some schools are not as far down the improvement journey as others. Some are very effective at self-evaluation. When you bring inspection alongside that, it validates and affirms that school. Other schools are not in the same position and may be further back on that journey. Therefore, when you bring inspection into the school, you are hoping and aiming to build the capacity in the school to understand how they can be more rigorous in their own self-evaluation so that they become genuinely sustaining schools when it comes to improvement. That is certainly our objective.

Ms Boyle: Do schools, outside the inspection, communicate with ETI for other reasons or on other matters throughout the school term?

Mr J Anderson: Yes; through the district inspectors. We discussed earlier the role of the district inspectors, who are highly valued in the continuing communication. It is not just district inspectors. We have very limited time to conduct inspections because of the pressure on our resources. We are all specialists in something, and specialist inspectors get occasions to go to schools to work with their departments and give feedback about their specialism. An inspection is an intense event in a continuing programme and process of working together with schools.

You also asked about moderation. Inspectors are highly aware of the need to be very rigorous in challenging themselves when the team comes to an overall evaluation of the school as a whole. You must recall that, in almost every instance in which those moderation meetings take place, an associate assessor attends as well — in other words, a senior teacher or principal from another school.

Ms Boyle: The curriculum changes so much so often, so they obviously get enhanced training as well.

Mr J Anderson: The AAs say to us that it is the most effective training that they receive of any kind. It is mutually beneficial: it benefits them and it benefits us considerably. It also benefits the school because there is a peer in the team.

You asked about moderation. The associate assessor is in that moderation meeting. If schools were aware of the extent of effort that is put in and self-challenge that goes on in the moderation meetings to ensure that the evidence supports the evaluation and that the evaluation is justified by the evidence, AAs say to us, without exception, that schools would be very reassured if they were aware of just how

intensively we do that and how much we challenge ourselves. That is only the first level. Beyond that, as Noelle indicated, I attend those meetings, I will look at those reports and I will ask for self-evaluations on the reports. The assistant chief looks at that as well. There is a constant process in the organisation of moderation and self-evaluation of what we do, how we do it, and of quality assurance. Our colleagues are very aware of that; they are on their toes all the time.

Mr Kinahan: I am very sorry that I had to nip out. Thank you very much for your presentation. I will start by saying that I fully appreciate how important inspection is. The presentation is demonstrative of a really thorough professional body, but, all the way through this, I get the impression that you are not really interested in the one or two little complaints that come in about the process needing tweaking. I will go into that more. It is a very good organisation that is doing very well, but I just get the feeling that it is not that interested in some of the minor problems, which are absolutely huge to the schools.

I apologise if certain things were discussed when I was out of the room. There is still a fear factor. We have extremely good district inspectors — really good people. In the past, when I have raised the issue of the fear factor, it has often been said that maybe the teacher is not up to the job if fear is that strong. We have to try to get that out of the system so that everyone works together. In your changes that are coming through the system, I cannot see what has happened to the actual publication. One of the elements of the fear factor is about whether it is still going to be published on the web in as thorough a way as it is at the moment. Are you going to keep the notes and the details, or will it just be a nice softer summary that a school is under inspection with a list of the problems? I am trying to explore that.

I am jumping around matters, but one of the main complaints that we get is that teachers do not feel that their principals are being asked beforehand about the factors that they want to be dealt with. You come in and inspect the whole school, but you do not focus necessarily on what the principal wants you to look at. Moving from that to continuous professional development, you sort of sidestepped the point that Sean made earlier. One of the messages that we get from all the schools at the moment is that very little training is going on because there are no funds, no support and no time, because we are throwing so much at them. When it comes to you inspecting and judging them, that needs to be taken into account. That message needs to go back to the Minister just as strongly.

I will move on to the governors, who, when we went to the primary school meeting in Hillsborough, you probably felt — I am not sure of the right word — not quite anger. They are all volunteers. Are you working nicely and comfortably with governors on your changes so that they are all on board with how you are doing it and what you are doing with the principals that they work with? Alternatively, as it seemed at that meeting, did you say to them, "This is what you are going to do because the Minister has told us so"? It needed to be cosier so that you are all working together.

When it comes to complaints, would you consider looking at a system whereby, after every inspection, schools are automatically offered a comments form so that they no longer have that fear factor and you are working with them all the way? I am sorry for putting it in those terms, but it just that the feeling that I get from the whole presentation is that you are all phenomenally good at your job and are very much working through it; however, the little things really matter to people.

Mrs Buick: OK. There is quite a lot in there —

Mr Kinahan: I know.

Mrs Buick: I will do my best to make sure that I answer. I will start at the end first, on your comments about inspection. NISRA carries out an independent inspection survey that is sent to all the schools and providers that we inspect. That is sent to NISRA, which collates it independently. Therefore, there absolutely is an independent opportunity for schools and providers to give their views on inspection. I gave the statistic earlier that 80% of the respondents said that inspection leads to improvement. The outcomes are really very positive. We also have a system of customer service excellence whereby the assessor visits a random sample of schools and providers that we inspect and carries out face-to-face interviews to ask those schools and providers about our role in supporting them, if you like, as customers. Were we sensitive to their needs? Did we listen to what they had to say? Did we treat everybody fairly? All those aspects are covered, and we have had that customer service excellence system in place for eight years. We try incredibly hard to get independent feedback, and, when we have asked for it, we have come out of that demonstrating that we are sensitive as well as professional.

Mr Kinahan: Do you think that the people who are being asked the questions and filling in the forms are confident that they are dealing with a totally open and free process that will not come back on them in their role as a teacher? The feeling is that this is government inspecting government.

Mrs Buick: No. NISRA is an independent surveyor. You cannot get more independent than that, as is the customer service excellence assessor.

Mr Kinahan: It may be independent, but can comments that you make to it backfire on you?

Mrs Buick: I am not sure what you mean.

Mr Kinahan: As a teacher, if you want to be totally open—

Mrs Buick: Absolutely not. We are not that small-minded.

Mr Kinahan: Well, I hoped that you would say that. I say that as a marker; that is all.

Mr J Anderson: We do not know who said what. We get the comments but we do not know who made them.

Mrs Graham: We did exactly what you outlined. We gave out a comment form after an inspection, and the outcomes from that were very positive.

Mr Kinahan: Good, thank you.

Mrs Graham: That was in the past. Then we were told that the outcomes were very positive because people were telling us what we wanted to hear. Therefore, we moved to having that done independently. It was first done by PwC, but the cost of that over time became difficult and we moved to having NISRA do the evaluation. There are benefits and disadvantages in both approaches. Obviously, if somebody had concerns about the outcome of an inspection, where we were handing out the forms it would come to our attention more immediately. On the other hand, overall, people felt that the best approach was to have it done independently, and we do not know who says what, so we cannot follow up on the outcomes. However, overall, they are very positive.

Mrs Buick: I hope that you feel reassured that that is independent. At all times, if somebody raises a point with us, we do not — how did you describe it? — take it out on them, come back on them, or whatever. That will never happen.

Mr Kinahan: It does not have to be you; it is the whole education system that is sitting there for the Minister.

Mrs Buick: We are absolutely open to accepting any feedback that a provider or a school wants to give us, and we are very happy to receive that directly. We have attended many conferences with principals and teachers, and we get a lot of feedback from schools. We are really pleased to receive that. It is important to us as part of our process. I will carry on in a moment. Paul, did you want to come in?

Mr P McAlister: When we receive our customer service excellence award, although we have been awarded it consistently, the assessor would always give pointers that we should look at how we might improve even further. Repeatedly, the assessor has asked whether there was some way that we could devise a mechanism to follow up complaints or areas that people are unhappy with about the inspection service. With the information that comes through NISRA being anonymous, we have always said to the assessor that we do not want to sacrifice anonymity in order to follow up. NISRA prides itself on maintaining the anonymity of people who give information. It is a bit like a catch-22 situation: we value anonymity so much so that people can feel free to give information and we then have to have that conversation with the customer service excellence evaluator on each occasion.

Mr Kinahan: If I am wrong, I am sorry. As long as you keep reviewing, checking and working through it.

Mrs Buick: We are a continuously improving organisation. That is absolutely what we do. I hope that I will not miss any of your points. You mentioned the fear factor that is associated with inspection.

John described our pre-inspection dialogue with all the schools that we inspect. We take up opportunities to speak to schools, principals and teachers to explain the inspection process. We had a very good meeting with the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) in February at which we went through the inspection process. That was very well received.

A principal told me, and I absolutely agree, that his job when the inspection letter arrives on his desk is to reassure his staff that it is part of a validation and assessment process. It is not something to be fearful of. We do a good job. All that inspectors ask for is to see you doing your daily job. We are not asking for any information or activity that is not happening in the school as a normal activity. So, I think that principals have a strong role in supporting their schools through the inspection process. We try to be incredibly sensitive and have lots of professional dialogue as we described. We work very hard on that.

With regard to CPD, I hope that Mr Rogers does not feel that I sidestepped the question on lack of training. Lots of training opportunities are available. It would not be the case that one type of training would suit everybody. The mix and range of opportunities that are available for staff training are appropriate because they are tailored to specific activities. However, I do not doubt, as I said, that more could be done with regard to training. I advise teachers to look at our inspection reports because, in them, we highlight good practice in teaching and learning. Looking at them can help to improve practice as well as the work through the area learning communities, the specialist training —

Mr Kinahan: You have given the same answer. The point that I am trying to get across is that all schools are under pressure. If the information that I am getting from many of them is right, CPD is not happening because they have not got the time. Therefore, it is not judging teachers and schools; it judges the system that comes down from the Minister and everything that is coming into place. So, they have so many things being thrown at them and so many cuts coming on board that they do not have time to do training. Therefore, when you judge them, you should not judge them on not having done the training; you should be looking at it and asking how you can get them more time and resources so that they can do their CPD training. That is what I was trying to get across.

Mrs Buick: Days are set aside in the school calendar specifically for training.

Mr Kinahan: Yes, but it is not happening. They have not got the time and resources to do it because one teacher is away or the cuts have come in. That is what I am trying to get across.

Mrs Buick: Well, they are set aside for that purpose. John, do you want to come in?

Mr J Anderson: I just want to underline that point. In teachers' terms and conditions, the way in which the school year is organised, and so on, time is set aside.

Mr Kinahan: Yes. That is right. You have set all the rules nicely in place —

Mr J Anderson: So, there cannot not be time.

Mr Kinahan: — but it is not happening.

Mr J Anderson: I am not sure what your evidence is based on to say that it is not happening.

Mr Kinahan: I need to then go back to every single school and get them to come to me. I will happily send them an e-mail and ask them to tell me. What I am trying to get across is that you may have put all the right rules in place and you may be judging it on those rules, but the poor people who are being judged cannot do it —

Mr J Anderson: Let me —

Mr Kinahan: — because —

Mr J Anderson: Sorry, I cut across you. My apologies.

Mr Kinahan: I can see where you are coming from.

Mr J Anderson: As I said in my response to Sean, we find during our inspections that schools make time because they have time allowed to share practice. The most effective schools are characterised by a culture of openness and willingness to do that. That culture is not well embedded in every school, as Sean will understand, but the time is there. It is the culture that is the issue.

I absolutely agree that the number of specialist advisers is not what it was in the past; there is absolutely not that same resource, but increasingly, the capacity is in the schools. In response to Mr Newton's question, I said that we increasingly find teachers sharing within the area learning community. So, if the resource is not there, schools come together for staff development in the area learning community. If the expertise and the capacity is not in one school, it can often be found in another school in that area learning community with which these schools are partners. There are other answers. It is not what it was in the past.

Mr Kinahan: No, but please be aware that there is a whole other side to this.

Mrs Graham: We pride ourselves on evaluating the quality of provision in any school based on the circumstances in which that school is operating. You mentioned earlier, Chair, the whole business of resources and accommodation being in the Bill, and my thoughts are that we do that anyway. We comment on those things. For example, if accommodation or resources are not sufficiently good for that school in delivering the curriculum and doing the best in the interests of the children, we will say that. Schools often welcome the fact that we are saying those things. We will look at how that school is operating and whether it is doing its best in the circumstances in which it finds itself. If that shows that people have not had sufficient staff development or professional development, we will say that, too. In being advocates for learners, we are also advocates for teachers on behalf of the learners, and we would never walk away from saying that in any school.

Mr Kinahan: OK, good.

Mrs Buick: The final point was around governors. We recognise that governors are volunteers, but unlike volunteers in many other sectors of the community, they have a statutory obligation. It is a very important obligation as they are responsible for the quality of education in the school. We have strengthened our inspection of governance in response to the Minister's request, but as I explained earlier, one of the focus areas of that particular inspection methodology is self-evaluation by governors so that they can determine what aspects of their work they carry out well and what aspects of their work they need more training on. Work is being done to set up the governors' support service to enhance the training that is available to them, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that governors have a really important role in a school. When a governor takes on that role — I have been a school governor; I know what it is like — they have to accept that that is part of their role and responsibility.

Mr Kinahan: I agree with that, and yes, they need to be tested, but are you actually sitting down with them and working out the nice way of doing it, if I can put it that way? You have to produce a set of guidelines that they have got to be happy working with. You cannot just tell them, "That is what you have to do."

Mrs Buick: In general, the feedback that we are getting is that the self-evaluation guidelines are helpful. We spoke to governors at 10 conferences — you were at another event where we talked to governors — and I think that we are very open in explaining the inspection process and what our expectations of governors are.

John, you wanted to come in.

Mr J Anderson: Indeed. I surveyed the schools last year in which we are now commonly using the self-evaluation questionnaires for governors. They had a lot of comments to make about that process, about the complexity of the language sometimes and other things that we need to think about. However, the common comment that they made, without exception, was that they found the process of being asked to reflect on and self-evaluate how well they worked as governors to be valuable. Most, but not all, had not done that before. Some of them came back and said that they had been doing it and gave us their self-evaluation reports, which was great, but that was not common.

You asked three other questions; I do not know whether you wanted to get a response to those.

Mr Kinahan: Am —

Mr J Anderson: I have a note, if —

Mr Kinahan: Go on.

Mr J Anderson: Is that —

The Chairperson: Yes.

Mr J Anderson: You asked whether we talk to the principal and focus on what he or she wants. Again, the answer to that comes through the school development plan being central to the inspection. The school identifies priorities; I should have said that when I answered your question about staff development time. It cannot do everything, but it needs to determine what its top or top two priorities are and focus on those. We certainly have a discussion with the principal about what the priorities in the school development plan are and to what extent we, in our inspection, can look at the appropriateness of those priorities. We can consider whether they are the right priorities and how effectively the school is progressing them. We will give the principal feedback, because that is part of our evaluation. So, that dialogue is there.

You asked whether we still publish our reports. We do. We publish them on the web. That has not changed.

The first thing that you said was that we seem not to be worried about minor problems. Of course we are worried about minor problems. That set the tone for the opening conversation this morning, when we talked about a major problem in one school. Of course we are, because it is in those cases that we learn most about whether we have worked as effectively or as appropriately as we can.

Any union official will be able to say, and I am sure that they will, that there are individual cases where they have problems that they are pursuing in the interests of their member, but we are saying that, in the context of all the inspection work that we do, that needs to be put in proportion. It is not the case that we are not worried about those. We are certainly worried, and we will always seek to learn lessons from anything that we could be doing better.

The Chairperson: I have one final question on an issue that is of grave concern out there. I understand that the Department has a policy for the new arrangements for formal intervention. That is a policy that DE is pursuing, so has the inspectorate a view on this proposal? Basically, it would move a lot of schools from the position where they were designated as satisfactory to, after September 2013, having 18 months to improve to being designated as good. What is the inspectorate's view on that?

Mrs Buick: First, the formal intervention process has been given negative publicity as being punitive. It is meant to be a supportive process, and, if a school enters the formal intervention process, the key aspect is that the school is provided with support. We have seen many examples of schools that have gone into the formal intervention process and come out again stronger and providing a better education for their learners.

We do have an issue with what you could call coasting schools, as I think you described them in your publicity. Something needs to be done to provide additional support for those schools. It is an area that is out for consultation, and no decisions have yet been made. I think that some action is needed to help schools that are coasting to enable them to raise their performance to good. After all, our quality threshold is that every school is a good school.

The Chairperson: Do you believe that the timescale that has been given on this issue is adequate? If a school remains as satisfactory, it will move straight into formal intervention.

Mrs Buick: There are a number of inspection outcomes where a school is allowed to be designated as satisfactory before it moves into the formal intervention process. If it is designated as satisfactory twice, it may move into the formal intervention process on the third occasion. I think that, if a school is just trundling along at satisfactory, action to provide additional support, not anything punitive, is the right action to take.

The Chairperson: Has the ETI given a formal response to the Department on the issue?

Mrs Buick: We have not made a formal response.

The Chairperson: So, other than basing it on your comments here today, Noelle, how can we see a formal response from ETI to this consultation? The changes would have a major impact on the work of ETI. It is a bit like the issue of the common funding formula. If this was implemented as proposed, how many schools would end up in formal intervention?

Mrs Buick: I think that we are jumping the gun a little here, because the outcomes of the consultation process have not been —

The Chairperson: Noelle, that very attitude is the reason why, out there today, there are hundreds of primary-school principals who are nearly beating the doors down in this place about the common funding formula. The Minister said that we are not to worry and that it is only a consultation; nothing is going to happen. They still want to know the answer. If it was implemented, what will the implications be? I think it a fair question to ask. If this was implemented as proposed — and it is only a consultation, only a proposal — how many schools would be affected?

Mrs Buick: First, it is a consultation and there is no point in having a consultation if you are going to decide what the policy is going to be without taking into account the outcomes. I have not seen the outcomes of the consultation, so I am not in a position to comment any further on that.

The Chairperson: Surely the inspectorate knows how many schools in the system are satisfactory? If, according to these proposals, they do not make progress, they will move to formal intervention. We could have a ballpark figure without naming schools. Surely somebody in the Department could sit down and work out how many schools will be affected. Are they that naive?

Mrs Graham: It would be a very small number.

Mrs Buick: We can provide you with the number of schools that are satisfactory, but that is not the issue. A school has to be satisfactory on a number of occasions before it is considered to enter the formal intervention process. Certainly, there is no issue with giving you the number of schools that are satisfactory. In fact, there may have been an Assembly question submitted, and you may have that information.

Mrs Graham: It is also important to remember that our statistics indicate that 80% of schools that have a follow-up inspection improve. Therefore, in any scenario, quite a small number of schools will be involved. But we will have the —

The Chairperson: I have no doubt that this is another issue that we will be coming back to.

Mrs Buick: Mr Chairman, it is about school improvement. It is meant to be enabling for schools and for the learners in those schools. At the end of the day, it is about making sure that the provision for learners in schools is the best that it can possibly be.

The Chairperson: In conclusion, have you any comment about comparisons with Finland? Finland is always held up to us as a great example of how it should be done. There is no external inspection process there. In the document that you sent to us, you state:

"Inspection is at the centre of raising standards for all learners."

Is not the quality of teaching that is at the centre of raising standards?

At last, the Department has found such a place in the world. It used to be Montgomery County, but now, all of a sudden, it has become Finland. I was amazed to discover that Finland has no inspection process. That raises the question of how they evaluate — self-evaluation, and all that — but that is an issue for Finland. They have no external inspectorate.

Mrs Buick: I have two comments. I do not know whether you saw the headline in January: "Northern Ireland is the new Finland". That was based on the outcome of the TIMSS and PIRLS results, which were incredibly positive.

The Chairperson: That headline was probably just to do with the weather. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs Buick: It was to do with the TIMSS and PIRLS results, in which we came out, as you know, highest among the English-speaking nations. So, there really is not a direct correlation between having an inspectorate and the quality of teaching and learning in the way that you describe.

Finland has quality improvement agencies, but it all happens at the local level. They do not have a central inspectorate as we have. There is quality assurance taking place in Finland, but it is not a central inspectorate in the way that we are. However, there is quality assurance happening there, as there is quality assurance happening here.

It is a completely different landscape. The pupils are all taught in the same school from age seven to 16, and all the teachers have master's qualifications. The languages of Finland and Korea, for example, are easier to learn than other world languages, because they are spoken absolutely as they are written. There is a homogeneous socio-economic landscape. There are 101 reasons why Finland is top of the league tables, but I am not sure that you can say that one of them is that it does not have an inspectorate.

The Chairperson: Noelle, if that is the reason that Finland is so successful, Ulster Scots should be the language that all our children are educated in in Northern Ireland. I can tell you what the outcomes would be then: we would really beat them. *[Laughter.]* On that point, I genuinely thank you. The meeting has gone on longer than we anticipated, but I believe it was worthwhile for this reason: it is a very important issue. That is the reason why I was keen to have this inquiry. We are not holding it for any other reason but to ensure that we improve upon the processes that we have. I thank you and your staff for the time that you gave us this morning. We look forward to continuing this engagement through the process of the inquiry.

Mrs Buick: Thank you very much.