



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

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

23 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)
Mr Chris Hazzard
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr Robin Newton
Mr Pat Sheehan

Witnesses:

Mr Mark Langhammer	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
Ms Nuala O'Donnell	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Ms Karen Sims	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
Ms Avril Hall-Callaghan	Ulster Teachers' Union

The Chairperson: Avril, you and your colleagues are very welcome. Obviously, you are here to make a presentation to the inquiry. You have heard the comments of the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI). I ask that you speak to the paper that you submitted to us, and then we will have questions.

Ms Avril Hall-Callaghan (Ulster Teachers' Union): We will try to shorten the day for you and let you get off to lunch, because much of what we came here to say has already been said by GTCNI. As you will note, the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC), of which we are all members, has endorsed the paper, and that is the theoretical basis for where we are coming from. We will try to put a human picture to it now.

I take exception to only two of Carmel's comments. The first one was about maths. As a former maths teacher, I think that maths should be taught in schools. The second one was about girls being compliant.

The Chairperson: I am glad that you said that and not me. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Hall-Callaghan: We are absolutely delighted that the Committee has thrown a light on this area, because, on behalf of our members, we have been and have become increasingly concerned about it. We are not critical of the inspectorate, and I want to put that down right at the start of this. The inspectors who go in and out of the schools are highly respected individuals, as was said earlier, and the teaching profession looks to them for best practice. However, it is the inspectorate's policy direction and ethos that, we feel, needs to be fixed.

In the past — I can go back nearly as far as Carmel or maybe even further — there was a much stronger feeling of support from the inspectorate. There was a good relationship between schools and the inspectorate. There was never any concern about an inspector coming in through the door because the teachers felt that they were working in partnership with the organisation. The role of the district inspector was absolutely crucial, and it needs to become crucial again. I can perhaps confirm where the concerns about that are coming from. In a recent meeting with the chief inspector, she said that the minute a district inspector walks through the door of a school, they are in inspection mode. If that is the case, it changes the relationship completely. So, we need to get that back on track again.

On self-evaluation, which was spoken about this morning as well, Marion Matchett, who was not the previous chief inspector but the one before that, had gone a long way down the path of developing a model of self-evaluation, and the schools had bought into that. Now, they are all absolutely terrified of showing any flaws. We all need to look at our bad points in order to improve, but schools are now being put in a position where they feel that they must always show their best side, and that is not a helpful situation to put them in. There is a climate of fear and stress, and there are workload issues. Of course, the stakes are very high because we are in the era of area planning. If a school gets a bad inspection, it fears that it will disappear. So, in building up this picture that teachers have of inspection no longer being a positive experience, we see that it is all interlinked.

If you look at the last chief inspector's report, you see that all the language is negative. It points out that so many per cent of leadership is inadequate and whatever. I do not think that that is healthy for the education system. It is certainly not healthy for those teachers who have been targeted in that way, some of whom will never, ever set foot in a school again, because their lives have been destroyed by it. That is not how, I think, we should treat our professionals. As somebody said this morning, inspection causes tensions and stress in schools. We are dealing with cases where there are still splits among staff perhaps a year or 18 months after an inspection. It is not an opportunity to bring the best part of your education experience to the fore. You find that people go into silos, with one department against another or senior management against the staff, and that is not healthy either.

Let us look at the Scottish model and what prompted it to change, because it did change and evolve over a period of time. As the result of an inspection, a teacher in Scotland took their own life. That is what made them look at it again and say, "What are we doing to our teachers?" We do not want that to happen here. Thankfully, it has not happened yet, but we need to heed the warning signs. What is the difference between the Scottish system and ours? The Scottish system, as was said earlier, is a supportive one, and the reporting system is entirely different. There is a report that is made public, and there is also a much larger report for the school's consumption. That is where we need to go, so that the school knows how to improve rather than just being told, "You are rubbish".

Another knock-on effect from making public the negativity about schools is the loss of respect in the local community, as well as the concerns that parents then have about whether their child is getting the best education. Last Friday, I was talking to a teacher who had been involved in an inspection a year ago. She said that, as a result of the negative inspection they had, parents are now up at the school every day, making complaints that they never made before. They were always very supportive of the school, but now they are looking for things that are going wrong. That is not a healthy atmosphere in which to work.

Finally, I would say that schools depend on their teaching and support staff to raise standards, and we need to help them to do that, not put obstacles in their way. Measurement alone does not make a difference. It is the people who make a difference.

I would like to call on Karen now to give her perspective.

Ms Karen Sims (National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers): I pulled out a few key points from the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) paper, and I hope, in bringing this to you, that I can now read my writing.

Our union believes that school inspection is being driven more and more by data, and we are very concerned about that. There is a disproportionate use of performance data to monitor schools, and because of that, inspection has higher stakes for those involved. We are concerned that schools are being forced to prioritise exam results over the broader educational outcomes for all the young people involved in the system.

My second point is that — again, I probably cannot articulate this as well as Carmel did in her presentation — we need to trust teacher professionalism. We have a very highly skilled and very

professional teaching staff in Northern Ireland. Every School a Good School places an emphasis on self-evaluation and self-improvement. However, we are concerned about the fact that evidence from other parts of the UK shows that, when self-evaluation is placed within a high-stakes inspection model, more bureaucratic and more burdensome systems come into place, requiring teachers to provide reams and reams of evidence to support the judgement that they are doing well. So, as a union, we believe that self-evaluation has to come from a position of trust in the professionalism of the teacher and respect for their professional ability.

I think that there is a concern from our union that there is a lack of regard about the range of inequalities in the education system. We believe that inspectors should pay a little more attention to the inequalities in the education system. They need to look at equality matters relating to pupils, staff, parents and communities and to take those into account in the schools that they are inspecting. Inclusive schools and schools with a broad intake of pupils and of educational need should not be penalised because they have a challenging intake and because they seek to meet the complex needs of their challenging pupils. That has to be recognised, respected and taken account of.

Echoing what Avril said, on area planning, we as a union are very concerned that inspection is being used as a means of justifying school closures, and it does not reflect the best interests of pupils in communities that need the most support and which need to have education in schools as part of that community and part of the cohesion in that community. Again, echoing Carmel from this morning, we suggest that there be a move to a more supportive model of inspection, again, in line with the Scottish model. We know that you, as a Committee, have looked at the models in Scotland and in England and Wales, and we ask you to give further consideration to the Scottish model as a way forward.

Mr Mark Langhammer (Association of Teachers and Lecturers): Thanks, Chair and Committee. Avril started by talking about Scotland. We were very impressed by the Assembly's synopsis as presented by Caroline Perry. You are lucky to have her. She presented a very good paper. That took us to look at Scotland. My colleagues have talked about high stakes. One of the aspects that I wanted to highlight was that pre-inspection data collection in Scotland is significantly less intensive.

As unions, we are not unlike politicians in that we respond to pressure, casework, people ringing us and people writing to us. We have a bag full about the pre-inspection data dump. I tried to get out to some schools and visit members of ours and ask them to show me what it is that they are required to produce. I did that with three people. Typically, they were middle managers who were at the administrative heart of the inspection. The three were pretty much the same. The data dump was in the region of 2 gigabytes. It is all online. In old money, that is about 700 pages. It is a lot. They talked about the difficulties that they had formatting. I have to say that they talked highly about the C2k people who helped them with that, but, when I tell you that the C2k people typically visit an inspected school for one, one-and-a-half, two or two-and-a-half days, you will realise that it takes a lot of man days to support an inspection. When you look at the C2k formatting guidance, which has 52 pages, you see that it is not easy. I am making the point that we think that the data dump at the start of the inspection is disproportionate, and we think that we should look at that.

Scotland in general is worth a look. Like you, we went, and we talked to our colleague unions and the General Teaching Council for Scotland. We visited schools, and, on the point that, I think, Pat or Chris made, we noted that HM Inspectorate of Education was amalgamated with the support bodies to form Education Scotland. Because the support flowed from the assessment, less high stakes seemed to be involved.

My other point is on the social bias of inspection outcomes. We had some difficulty getting data on that, but, eventually, we got data from the inspectorate for 2010, 2011 and half of 2012. They were general inspections; they were not follow-up or special, focused inspections. Our starting point on that was that if the inspectorate took account of the challenges that every school faces, be they socio-economic challenges, or whatever, one would expect there to be outstanding schools, good schools, satisfactory schools, inadequate schools and poor schools in every band. Taken across the region, the distribution in each social band should be broadly equal, if we take account of the challenges. However, that is not what we found. We found that schools in the least advantaged social band were four times more likely to get the worst two grades — inadequate or unsatisfactory. When you looked at the most advantaged social bands, you saw that they were twice as likely to receive the highest grades — outstanding or very good. The health warning is that our study was quite unscientific; it was a brief look. It was not a research study, and it was quite a small sample, but we felt that it was indicative.

Added to that, we looked at England, which, admittedly, has a different system. Some research has been done on that. In 2011, the Royal Society did research on Ofsted grades and found exactly the same thing. It found that there was not an even distribution through the social bands and that, essentially, the grades followed the disadvantage, more or less. Carmel has put some US research in her paper. I do not want to make a big point about this, but, as a teachers' council, we are saying that this would bear tracking and monitoring. That is all. The sample that we took over two and a half years was not huge, and it probably was not very scientific, but we think that there is something there, and we would maybe want a report on that.

The last thing I want to say is not exactly on inspection; it is more about baselines and the free school meals measure, which you talked about. In her paper, Carmel looked at New Zealand's decile system. Essentially, it is a geographic information system. We, in Northern Ireland, have a very good one through the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Your standard neighbourhood community group knows it a lot better than I do, with the multiple deprivation measures and super output areas. For quite a long time, I have been talking to somebody who may have been in front of you, I do not know; it is Billy McCauley, who was a colleague of mine in Rathcoole, years ago. You would know him, Danny. He used to be a principal at Black Mountain Primary School. He has been looking at this for many years. Mervyn, you talked about what we could do quickly. The New Zealand system might be longer term, but, in Billy's respected view, the quick fix would be to cross-reference free school meals with the NISRA super output area indices. Essentially, a school would take its children's postcodes and then go across into the super output area. If you cross-reference that with the free school meals, you get a much finer system. I am talking about a quick fix; I am not talking about a planned system costing millions of pounds. You would get a much finer-grain system for setting baselines. That may be worth talking about. I know that Carmel talked about speaking to Professor Shuttleworth, I think it was. So, there are people out there who understand this stuff and who could put this together.

Ms Nuala O'Donnell (Irish National Teachers' Organisation): I have a couple of other things to touch on. One of the issues for INTO in particular is the grading system of inspections, which, I think, Carmel touched on earlier. There is a very clear view from INTO that it wants to abolish the grading system of inspections. One of the reasons for that is this: what does it actually measure? What does it say about the school? It puts schools in competition. They feel that "very good" is not good enough when you compare it with "outstanding". It causes a lot of issues within the schools.

As was mentioned earlier in relation to the language used, what does "satisfactory" mean? Does it mean that it is acceptable? Or, does "satisfactory" mean that a school is not achieving where it should be? Those issues have been coming up for years. As Carmel mentioned and as has been said to us by schools, where schools got very good or outstanding results, being inspected now within two years for a follow-up is putting people off. So, there are issues with the grading systems and with the use of language.

The bottom line for us is this: what is inspection about? It is about measuring where a school is. However, how does that change whether a school is achieving or what it is achieving? If we look back through chief inspectors' reports, we see that, no matter what the inspectors have been doing, it has not changed the outcomes of the schools. Therefore, it is not doing anything for school improvement. It is just a measuring aspect, as opposed to helping anything to improve or giving support for schools to improve the outcomes for learners.

The reports have been touched on. This issue has come up repeatedly, and we have talked about the different kinds of reports in the Scottish system. One of the key issues that schools are telling us about regularly is that the one sheet that they get, and even the finalised report when they get it, which is only about three or four pages with recommendations, does not tell them anything about how they can seek to improve themselves; whereas the Scottish system gives them an individual report. We have raised that with the inspectorate. NITC had a meeting with the inspectorate on Monday, and it is now talking about making available to schools the running record that it is doing in post-primary schools. So, there are clearly benefits from your inquiry already that we would like to see continued, so thank you for that.

The last thing that I would like to touch on, which comes from the reports, is the complaints procedure. There is a complaints procedure. Two years ago, at the NITC's first meeting with the chief inspector, we were presented with a new complaints procedure, and it was clear that we were meant to just accept it. The big issue for all of us is this: there is absolutely no challenge to the inspectorate in relation to this at all. It was also clear from the meeting with the Committee and the inspectorate last week that the actual reports cannot be challenged; they can be challenged factually, but their

perceptions cannot be challenged. That is a huge issue for all of us. We are seeking an appeals procedure. Currently, it is the ombudsman, but that does not change it. The report is published, the damage is done, and the ombudsman cannot change the outcome of the report anyway. There are appeals procedures within the procedures for supporting effective teachers and supporting effective leaders. It is an act of human justice. Therefore, we feel that that should be there, and we still do not understand why it is not.

The procedure was to be reviewed after a year, but that has not happened. I have heard it said that very few appeals or complaints have been made, and those that have been made have not been upheld. However, very serious issues are happening out there. I know that Avril said that the inspectors who are going into schools are respected by teachers, but that is not the case with a number of inspectors. When we have raised individual complaints about an inspector, that inspector has been moved to a different district. It has not been dealt with. Somebody mentioned earlier that there are bad teachers in the system. We recognise that, and we have procedures to deal with that, but surely that must mean that, on some level, there are some bad inspectors as well, and we have to be able to address that for schools and for moving forward.

The Chairperson: Thank you. That has all been very helpful. Would all of this be helped if we had an inspectorate or assessment, or whatever we would call it — that is becoming an issue, and we all have been bedevilled in this country by what we call a variety of things, and people's perceptions of what things are is dependent on what they are called — that was independent of the Department? That is another issue that people have a problem with. The Department is very clear: the inspectorate is the Department. Chris Stewart made that abundantly clear when he came here some months ago. The Department is not trying to hide that fact. However, no matter what it is that you go to change, there is always this caution: be careful what you wish for. I think that the consensus is that you do not want to go to Ofsted. It is a bit like the balance that Carmel referred to in the earlier presentation; it is whether it is done for, with or to you. Again, there is surely a halfway house. We should not be satisfied that it is all in the Department and he who pays the piper calls the tune. In other words, inspection bases school assessments on the latest criteria or circular from the Department and is set against its policies and so on. What that tells you about how a school is performing is beyond me, and the children and young people in the school are lost in all of that. Is there an issue about independence and getting to a point where you have a system that helps to instil your members with confidence? Those members generally seem to have a growing concern and a greater concern than they would have had 10 or 15 years ago.

Ms Hall-Callaghan: It is certainly an area that needs to be investigated. I do not think that we have a collective view on the independence of the inspectorate. However, it is something that we would like to get involved in looking at, along with you.

The Chairperson: Nuala, I have just noticed this in your introduction; is cooperation with inspections still being withdrawn?

Ms O'Donnell: No.

The Chairperson: So, that concluded in July 2012.

Ms O'Donnell: Yes. It concluded at that stage, when we went back into discussions on a lot of issues. However, there has been a lot of fallout from that as well. We have one principal who was off on long-term sick leave as a result of how she was treated, having stuck to the industrial action. Even when she and the vice-principal were off, the inspectorate insisted on coming in and inspecting the school with the senior management not there. There have been a lot of issues. There was a lot of, shall we say, bad feeling because we took action on that, which, as Avril pointed out, there had not been previously. It was, basically, "How dare you take action against inspections?"

The Chairperson: That raises the point of who inspects the inspectorate or whatever it is called. People will say that that is their role. I am glad that the Committee is getting some credit for work that is beginning to make the Department decide to do certain things. It is actually funny to see how it operates — when you raise an issue, all of a sudden, there is a flurry of activity and certain things begin to happen. It may be something that the Committee needs to take on board, but I have a real worry that if that is still the case in relation to an ongoing issue — with the constant caveat that we cannot get involved in individual cases — you are clearly indicating to us that there are still issues of concern that your members feel are lurking in the past. Whatever description you wish to use, they are not happy with how that is being progressed. I believe that we should be raising that with the inspectorate. I certainly believe that, if the Committee agrees, we should raise those issues as a

result of this meeting. Politics is all about being adversarial, but that is not how it should be in schools, where it should be about cooperation. It should not be conducted in the way that it seems to be at the moment.

Ms O'Donnell: Certainly, our members would feel that to raise issues against the inspectorate, it comes down to that question of who inspects the inspectors. Members feel that it will just come back on them and inspectors are untouchable in that respect. That is how they are perceived in schools in a lot of cases where issues arise, which is why NITC is now doing its own kind of surveys for schools following inspections. We can then gather information without schools having to name themselves. We have had to do that because schools just do not feel that they can do it for fear of retribution.

The Chairperson: Before we move on to Danny — I should have done this earlier — I welcome Craig, who is in the Public Gallery. He is on work experience with Robin, and that will be an experience; I will not go any further, but you are very welcome, Craig. *[Laughter.]* Craig is a pupil at Orangefield, and we wish him well in his studies.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much; it has been very interesting. I have loads of questions, and I am not really sure where to start. I would love to explore the incentives question that I asked Carmel earlier, to hear what other things you feel are relevant to that. I want to ask about timescales. You mention in your brief the time that it takes a school to repair, and a lot of schools end up ringing us to ask when they will hear that they have come out of intervention. Should we look at a shorter period, or should it be done in a different way? The complaints and appeals side can be added to that as well. As you saw last week, we were not getting much bend from the inspectorate when we pushed for things. We should be looking for an appeals procedure, but should that be time-limited? If it is running too long, it turns into a long-term battle.

Area planning drives everything at the moment, and we should really pause that, because although it has been done for good reasons in certain areas, it is perverting everything that we do. We should perhaps put it on hold until we know where we are going with shared education and other issues.

Finally, I want to pick up on the points that you made about Billy's suggestion to do with NISRA and free school meals. We have indications that good things are being done in Sweden and lots of other places, and we can probably link them all into a reasonably quick fix and just keep working from that.

Ms Hall-Callaghan: I will deal with the incentives aspect and then pass over to my colleagues to answer the rest of the questions.

What the serving teacher who was at the previous session said rings really true with all of us. It is about professionalism, recognising that professionalism and somehow feeding it back into the system. At the minute, the strategic forum, which is kind of an advisory body set up between the Department of Education (DE), the employers and the unions, is working on the workforce review, and the paper that NITC put in might be useful to explain to you the flexibilities that might be built into the system. In a way, that would provide some incentives. For example, a teacher such as the one you spoke to earlier, who has huge expertise, would go into the inspectorate on secondment for a year, two years or three years, and then perhaps move into administration for a while so that all the good experience is shared. The Department needs to take that into consideration.

Mr Langhammer: I am not sure about an even shorter timescale. The notice of inspection is now a little bit shorter, at two weeks, and we welcome that. Our union is different from the others in that we want to get to a stage at which you do not need to give any notice and that you take us as you find us. That is probably a step too far for now, but the difficulty with a longer period of lead-in is that the school becomes consumed with preparing for inspection. We welcome the shorter period.

You asked about the appeals system, and so on. One interesting thing that we found in Scotland is that, instead of waiting for an appeal, they had a bit of a bun fight when the report came back. Here, you get the report back and you take it. That is it. In Scotland, the parents' council, which is like a board of governors but not the equivalent, was in the room. Therefore, the parents, the representative and chair of the council and the senior teachers were in a room with the inspectorate, and they had a bit of a fight about the report. At the end of the day, the inspectorate makes a determination, but, where there were rational grounds to make challenges, that was afforded. We like that. It was immediate and happened there and then. That is worth looking at.

Ms Hall-Callaghan: The council has not talked about the timescale for notice, but if the atmosphere towards inspections changed, there is no reason that the inspectors could not just walk in. Teachers would welcome that. The professional judgement is paramount.

Ms Sims: I want to go back to the incentives. As well as having been involved in a representational role, I have worked on citizenship projects with teachers across Northern Ireland. I have spoken to you in the past about that, Mervyn. For our members, the biggest incentive comes when they are recognised for the work that they do. They then feel encouraged and respected, and people recognise the fantastic work that is being done. I want to put that on the record.

Mr Hazzard: I want to pick up on the point that Pat made in the previous session; namely, a lack of parental engagement in socially deprived areas. That plays a huge role in kids' attainment. For any future body, I am reluctant to call it the "inspectorate". That is very important, because it could become an advocate for those kids. What are your thoughts on that?

Do you foresee a mechanism for the pupils and the families at home to feed into an inspection-type process? They have a stake in the future of the school, so should they be allowed to feed into the process somehow? Very many parents have a lot of opinions on teachers, on the way in which a school is run and on how it engages with its parents. That may be something that an inspection does not see.

Ms Hall-Callaghan: You said that you had a perception that teachers who taught in lower socio-economic areas might not have high enough aspirations for the kids, and I find that view I find very interesting. However, I do not think that that is true; rather, it is the other way around. An awful lot of the teachers who teach in those areas choose to do so so that they can be advocates for those children.

Mr Langhammer: We do not have statistics for Northern Ireland, but the last Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on the measure of social segregation ranked the UK 34th out of 34. In other words, it was the most socially segregated system anywhere. That is important because we also know, from local, regional, UK and international research, that the more that the pupil intake is balanced, the better that the school does. In fact, you find that not just the poor kids do better but the better-off kids do a bit better.

A lot of that is about peer effect. The biggest eye-opener for young people from a disadvantaged area is somebody who looks like them, who plays the same music as them, who is into the same computer games and who watches the same Man United games but has a different attitude to learning. Our union says that the critical thing here is applying pressure — carrots and sticks — to balance social intakes.

On the parental support issue, I go back to the Scottish model of inspection, where the parents' council is in the room. Not all of them are in there, but its chair, vice-chair or some representative of the parents is in the room for the critical engagement. That is quite good.

When I was involved in work with Dawn Purvis for the educationally disadvantaged in Protestant districts, there was a question mark about the whole system of governors. Quite a lot of governors said to us that they could not do the thing that they had volunteered to become governors to do and that they ended up with a heap of regulations on top of them that the principal or school manager should be addressing. Therefore, the role of parents in schools, on boards of governors or whatever, is questionable.

Ms Sims: Before we debate the role of parents as governors and them possibly feeding into inspection, which are valid ideas, we need to look at how we involve parents in the community in the school. In the first instance, how do we get parents to have a more active involvement in their children's education? How do we encourage those parents that their children's education is important and is something that they need to push, especially if their own educational experiences were not that positive? How do we include parents and put the school at the heart of the community?

There is an awful lot of very good work going on — extended schools and schools becoming the centre of communities — that we can learn from. We need to get parents involved in small projects. Some schools in north Belfast are running Irish-language evening classes for parents. My daughter's primary school has something on almost every night that parents can get involved in. If we can get them in to do their own learning and see the social side, they will start to see the school as part of the

community and want to have a more active involvement in their child's education. They will then want to be part of that school's improvement process and be more involved in how the school operates and delivers. We need to start not just with how parents feed into inspection but how they see the school as a key part of their community.

Ms O'Donnell: The current system for inspection has a parental questionnaire that goes out to all the school's parents. The inspectorate reports back to the governors on the responses from the parents, but that is it. The way in which the parents view the school is relayed to the governors, but it is not part of the inspection report, so there is a difference there. A sample of pupils' views is sought on pastoral care and how it is processed in the school. That is what is in the system currently.

Mr Hazzard: I am reluctant to keep talking about the bogeyman, Michael Gove, but he is even suggesting that kids will rate teachers in the classroom. What are your thoughts on that?

Ms Hall-Callaghan: We would be totally against that, obviously.

Ms O'Donnell: I do not think that you could answer that politely.

Mr Langhammer: The pupils' voices are important in all of this. The inspectorate is transmitting to schools that ways of capturing the pupils' voices are important. However, in some of the practice in some schools, RateMyTeachers-type surveys are being distributed to youngsters. Those can be very damaging if taken after a class test in which a youngster has done badly, or after a row in the class or for all sorts of other reasons. We need to give more thought to that. The pupils' voices are important, but the way in which they are captured is important as well.

Ms Sims: By way of an example, we had to address an issue in one school that distributed a survey about its teachers. The teachers of more, for want of a better word, academic subjects such as maths did not score so highly, because maths can be a difficult subject. Pupils will automatically not warm so much to the maths teacher. However, art teachers score extremely highly because they have the ability to be a little more relaxed in their delivery. Those surveys often do not give a true reflection of the merit, professionalism and value of the teacher.

Mr Sheehan: I just want to come back to the point, Avril, about lowered aspirations or expectations among teachers, particularly in disadvantaged areas. I am not suggesting for a second that it affects all teachers, but it does happen with some teachers. That brings me to the question that I was going to ask, which concerns what happens after inspections and, perhaps, after assistance from inspectors. You may not agree that that happens, but at some stage do you not have to call a spade a spade and say, "This is a bad teacher" or "This is a bad school."?

I could give you any number of examples of bad teachers. I was talking to a guy the other day who told me that, for four years in one class in his post-primary school, the teacher told the pupils to open their books at page 30 in case anyone came in. Everyone had their books open at page 30, and they just did what they wanted to do for the whole period. That teacher should have been out on his ear.

Ms Hall-Callaghan: We have just signed off on a new set of procedures to support teachers and principals who are in that situation and who were perhaps good teachers and principals in the past but have, for whatever reason, gone downhill. There are support mechanisms that need to be put in place. At the moment, the problem is that, because there are no resources in the education and library boards or in the Council for Catholic maintained Schools (CCMS), and so on, we have nothing with which to help those people out. They have to get to that procedure before support is put in place to keep them at the standard at which they need to be. I stress that the teachers that you are talking about are few and far between, but we do acknowledge that they exist, because they come to us for support. We try to get them that support but then find that we are hitting a brick wall because there is nothing out there for them.

Mr Sheehan: What do you do with a bad teacher who just cannot be supported?

Ms O'Donnell: The procedure is there to deal with that. If the teacher does not improve over time with the support that is there, the option is there to dismiss the teacher. It is a system that looks at the issues. There are a lot of issues, particularly in disadvantaged areas where there are high numbers of children with special needs. There is a lack of resources from the education and library boards for classroom assistants, and so on. With so many children presenting with a lot of issues, teachers are

not able to cope with that, and once those issues are addressed, the situation can change. As Avril said, nobody comes out of a training college as a bad teacher: issues arise.

It is the same with the formal intervention process. What are the reasons that got the teachers or the school to that position? Were they of the school's or the teachers' making, or were they of the system's making? That is one of the things that we need to look back on and get information from the inspectors on. We also need to get information on the system issues that need to be addressed, instead of leaving them up to each individual school, which has limited resources and finance to address them.

Mr Sheehan: This is my last question. How do you respond to the complaint that many of us have received from school principals that it is almost impossible to get rid of bad teachers?

Mr Langhammer: We spent quite a long time revising the procedure, and it is only just on the books again, so we will have to give it a little time to bed in before we say that it is not working. One of the systems that we looked at collectively with the management side was in Maryland in the US, where there was very focused support but also a truncated period in which you had to improve. That is what we have tried to replicate. There is a support programme put in place. It can last up to two terms, but it can last a lot less than that. It is assessed at the end, and if the assessment is negative, there is an answer. Part of the difficulty in what we used to call the "unsatisfactory teacher procedure" was that it was very adversarial, so, as unions, we had no option but to get the gloves off and say, "Where is your evidence?" With this one, it is slightly more collaborative. There should be more support, but the results should be quicker, in theory.

Ms Hall-Callaghan: The language is different. That is important, and we have been talking about that already.

Mr Langhammer: In fairness, in moving from the unsatisfactory teacher procedure to the supporting effective teachers system, we need to allow a bit of time. As unions, we know who you are talking about, and we have no vested interest in retaining teachers who are not fit for the job, but, at the same time, we have a job to do to support those who can improve. We are not necessarily against you on the issue.

The Chairperson: Following on from that, the Department is in the process of revising the formal intervention process. It all ties into the whole issue of inspection. What the Department is now saying is that a school will not automatically exit the formal intervention process on an Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) evaluation of "satisfactory". We are now going to be put in a position. For a fair number of schools — we have asked for a breakdown of the schools that are in the position of being deemed as satisfactory — that will compound the problem and make it more difficult to resolve the issues. Do you believe, as I do, that the proposed revisions will lead to a large number of schools going into formal intervention? The 4% that Carmel referred to earlier will rise dramatically. We will focus on the most negative elements of our system, not on the positive. We will not ignore the fact that there are issues, but it is about how you address those issues. That is out there now; that is what is being proposed.

Mr Langhammer: We share that concern. If words are to have meaning, "satisfactory" should mean that there are more strengths than weaknesses. That is what it reads as in the inspectorate language. If a school has more strengths than weaknesses, you should just encourage it with self-evaluation and work on the things that it has to work on, rather than put it into formal intervention. Once you put that in the local newspaper, you know what is going to happen: there is a parental stampede away from the school, and, all of a sudden, the rug is pulled from under it, and that has implications for area planning. You are into a cycle that you do not need to be in.

Ms O'Donnell: The proposals in the document that we responded to are not looking at why a school remains to be satisfactory. It is just saying that if that is the case, there is an automatic reaction. It is not being taken into account that the schools are, as we mentioned, from different socio-economic backgrounds and are all dealing with different issues. They may be facing resource issues or other issues, such as a change of principal. There are all kinds of different circumstances. Therefore, you cannot apply a basic baseline. As you said, if the numbers were to increase, what would be the purpose? It would still not be addressing the issues. This is still only about measurement and statistics for an audience, which is nothing to do with improving things for the learner in the school.

The Chairperson: Obviously, if a properly resourced and adequate Curriculum and Advisory Support Service (CASS) were in place, that would automatically mean that those schools could receive help, and so on, rather than what happens in the current situation, which is that we identify that a school has problems, but if it cannot improve itself, there is no service out there to assist. Some day, if the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) comes over the hill on a white charger, it is felt that that will answer all our ills. Well, I do not think that that will be the answer either, because how long will we have to wait until it has a service? We have been waiting for a long, long time for the Department to set up a regional service for continuing professional development (CPD), and it is still not there. It is now talking about a regional service for governors, and it has sent some poor man out to have all sorts of discussions around setting up that service when there was already a service in each of the boards that dealt with governor support. I am sure that you will not be surprised to hear that I believe that this is all part and parcel of the Department just getting to the point at which it wants, at all costs, to have that large monster created.

Ms Hall-Callaghan: When you look across the water at England and Ofsted and at the number of schools that have been closed down, I am concerned that there is an agenda there. We do not have an agenda here. We have very good schools, and we want to hold on to them, please.

Ms Sims: CASS is available only if the school goes into formal intervention. Had CASS continued to be funded in the way in which it was funded, the chances are that schools would have not been going into formal intervention, because the service was there to provide that professional development and support prior to schools ever having reached unsatisfactory, or, now, satisfactory.

Ms O'Donnell: It goes back to the premise of what this is about. Is it about school improvement and supporting school improvement? If it is, and if the district inspectors were able to work with the schools on that and identify the issues that CASS could assist them with, we might not have any schools going into the formal intervention process at all. It would be preventative rather than curative.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your time Avril, Mark, Karen and Nuala. It has been very useful.