



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

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

12 March 2014

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)
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson
Mr Chris Hazzard
Mr Trevor Lunn
Ms Maeve McLaughlin
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr Robin Newton
Mr Seán Rogers

Witnesses:

Mr John Anderson	Education and Training Inspectorate
Mrs Noelle Buick	Education and Training Inspectorate
Mrs Faustina Graham	Education and Training Inspectorate
Mrs Heather Jackson	Education and Training Inspectorate

The Chairperson: Good morning. Thank you again for taking the opportunity and time to see us. Let me say at the outset, Noelle, that we appreciate the information that has been supplied to the Committee over the time that we have been conducting our inquiry.

Mrs Noelle Buick (Education and Training Inspectorate): You are welcome.

The Chairperson: To date, that information has been profitable and useful. It has generated, I trust, more light than heat. Sometimes, these things can create a bit of heat, but that should not be taken personally in any way. None of it is personal. I would be the last person to take any of that; I would close it down very quickly. The inquiry is a genuine attempt by the Committee to delve into an important part of education provision in Northern Ireland. We seek to be a help, not a hindrance. I trust that we will conduct our proceedings this morning in that spirit.

Noelle, if you could make your opening comments, we will then go to questions.

Mrs Buick: If it is OK with you, Chair, I will make some opening comments. I will take about 10 minutes. Is that OK?

The Chairperson: Yes.

Mrs Buick: Thank you very much.

Let me formally say, "Good morning", Chair and members of the Committee. On behalf of my colleagues in the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), thank you for this further opportunity to present to you our views on the work of the inspectorate and the school improvement process. We look forward to hearing your recommendations, particularly where the Committee feels that it can add value and can help us to be even better at promoting improvement in the interest of learners. As you know, the Committee has already had two evidence sessions with the ETI so far, so I will confine my comments today to some of the points that I wish to clarify from the evidence that you have already received. As agreed with the Clerk, if there are any additional points to make, we will submit them by 20 March.

Every School a Good School recognises that sustained improvement comes from within a school. Although inspection has an accountability and assurance role, it is primarily about promoting improvement. It is a catalyst for improving the quality of education for our young people, through raising expectations and capacity building. As you will know, promoting improvement is one of the Cabinet Office's 10 key principles of best practice in inspection.

How does ETI promote improvement? The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study, which was published in December during the time of the inquiry, said three important things. First, there are well-established mechanisms for external school evaluation, that is, inspection, but inspection is based on quality assurance and emphasises school improvement. The framework for inspection is supported by international effectiveness research and is published and promoted for school use, which ensures transparency in the criteria that are used. That is a very positive endorsement of ETI's inspection process from a review team of educational experts that included an expert from the Dutch inspectorate and compared our performance with 26 other countries.

ETI identifies practice that is good or better so that it can be shared. It identifies provision that is not good enough and which needs to improve and promotes capacity building, for example, by promoting the effective use of self-evaluation, which leads to improvement, and by involving associate assessors in our work.

The professional dialogue that we have with schools during inspection provides them with a focused improvement agenda. ETI, through the follow-up inspection process, monitors the progress of a school in addressing the issues identified, as well as making an evaluation of whether the improvement has been effective for the benefit of learners. As you know, in formal intervention in schools, that improvement work is supported by the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS). Our reports enable schools to compare themselves with schools in similar circumstances and to consider best practice in similar schools while recognising that each school is unique. In addition to the follow-up inspections, inspectors in their district role visit schools to observe practice directly, look at documentation and outcomes for pupils and build a picture of the strengths and areas for improvement.

Surveys and dissemination of good practice events also highlight effective practice. Last week, we held an event that 230 principals and teachers attended. It included sessions delivered by schools identified through inspection as having best practice in English and mathematics. There are schools that we have identified where practice is not good enough for our children. ETI has a moral and professional duty to report that, and I appreciate that that is sometimes difficult for schools to hear.

You have had evidence from schools in that situation, but I ask the Committee, the public and parents if they would want us to ignore provision that is not good enough and which is not serving our children well. We give difficult messages sensitively in order to improve provision for our young people. The inspectors giving those difficult messages are the self-same district inspectors who are, rightly, held in high regard by many, including the Committee.

ETI's inspection leading to improvement tells us that nearly 70% of organisations improve at the follow-up inspection. Some 81% of respondents to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) post-inspection survey state that the inspection process helped the organisation to plan for and effect improvement in outcomes for learners.

We also know that more than 10,000 pupils have been attending schools that are less than satisfactory and are, or were, in the formal intervention process. Due to schools exiting the formal intervention process, nearly 5,000 pupils are now getting a better education. Inspection has been a catalyst for those improvements, and the life chances for those young people are now much better. That matters to those children and their parents.

ETI has recognised that we need to work in even greater partnership with those whom we inspect. We know that we can have the greatest impact on pupils' learning and achievement when we work successfully with schools, particularly school leaders.

ETI has a long history of being a continuously improving organisation, from sharing inspection criteria from Together Towards Improvement in 2003, which was revised in 2010, to the introduction of the proportionate risk-based model of inspection in 2010, and now into our current developments. The current developments, which I will outline, have not been as a result of the inquiry, but, rather, have been in train since 2011.

The Chairperson: I am glad for that clarification.

Mrs Buick: Since September 2013, we have reduced the notice period to two weeks, taking out some of the anxiety for teachers. On all school inspections, we now engage with teachers immediately after observing a lesson. In primary, we used to wait until the end of the inspection. We feed back the findings of the inspection within a week so that schools are not kept waiting over the weekend.

We now hold most of our moderation meetings in the school, with the intention of, from September 2014, involving the organisation leaders more in our team and moderation meetings so that they are clear about why we have come to our conclusions and to help them to be more effective in effecting improvements.

We have a stronger focus on self-evaluation — that is at the heart of the new post-primary model. We no longer ask schools to fill out a self-evaluation pro forma; we use their own self-evaluation. We have the development of the sustaining improvement one-day inspection, which enables very good and outstanding schools to demonstrate their continued capacity for self-improvement. This year, we are piloting the use of the running record, which is broadly the evidence base for the inspection, with a view to sharing that in more detail with a school. We have revised our inspection reports to be sharper and more accessible.

Last week, we completed training for associate assessors, which had been planned more than a year ago. That was on how we hold discussions with teachers after lesson observations to help them to observe and evaluate aspects of an organisation's work. That will further help them in their own schools and enable them to play a fuller role in inspection.

We are beginning to draft an inspection handbook for each phase. It will bring together the guidance for each phase that we already have in place and develop it further, including the criteria against which we make our evaluations.

We are looking at performance levels and have drafted some of the statements, which are statements rather than one word, as we use now. We have shared those in broad terms with the teaching unions and the associate assessors.

The tenth principle of best practice of inspection is that inspectors should continually learn from experience to become increasingly effective. The developments that I have referred to build on the good practice already in place in ETI. Those are outlined in our corporate plan and are monitored through our operational plan.

We have very good links with inspectorates internationally, through the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI), and with inspectorates in other jurisdictions. We are involved with inspector exchanges in the South, Wales and Scotland. In fact, Heather has just come back from an exchange in Scotland and has confirmed what we already know: that our inspection practices are very similar to those in Scotland and other jurisdictions.

Our work is about improving the lives and life chances of our children. I care passionately that every child has the best possible chance of a good education. We have been accused of showing social bias, but, in fact, there are schools in socially deprived areas that are not good enough. However, we also have examples of schools in exactly the same socio-economic circumstances where the inspection outcomes are good or better.

The context of a school is key. Good schools have their context well documented and verified in their school development plan, based on robust self-evaluation. The principal, staff and governors outline the context of the school in their interaction with the inspection team. With the information that ETI already has, we are well informed about the context of the schools that we inspect. ETI uses a broad

range of information to inform us about a school's context. We use outcomes, attendance data that is benchmarked with schools in similar circumstances, enrolments and the number of pupils who take free school meals or who have special educational needs. We have inspectors' district information and, at post-primary, we have the levels of pupils on entry. However, it is incumbent on a school to make the context clear. Inspection is not a one-dimensional activity: schools have their part to play too.

A further principle of best practice in inspection is a focus on outcomes. I make no apology for focusing on pupils' outcomes. The target of five A* to C grades, including in English and mathematics, is set by the Executive in the Programme for Government. However, more importantly, outcomes reflect young people's life chances: employers want literate and numerate employees.

In Together Towards Improvement, which we discussed a couple of weeks ago, there are 16 quality indicators on achievements and standards. Only one refers to data, and it is about achieving in line with benchmarking data. Inspectors use data to engage in discussions about where a school can demonstrate added value and how it addresses under- and low achievement. The OECD states that ETI takes information and data from a range of stakeholders and through direct observation. It states that it is those multiple perspectives that help to increase objectivity in evaluation results. School inspections are not determined by data. Inspectors make judgements based on all the evidence available and spend time observing learning and teaching in classrooms, looking at children's work and talking to pupils and teachers.

The Committee has had a great deal of feedback on value added and, I am sure, has taken cognisance of the words of caution from educationalists such as Sir Bob Salisbury, Professor Gardner and the OECD, who say that value-added models must be treated with caution. As described by Professor Gardner, for example, mathematical calculation for value added based on questionable principles can lead to the entrenchment of low expectations and skewed views of schools.

Schools have a responsibility to demonstrate to the inspection team that they add value. Good schools can do that. However, if they do not, how can they say that an inspection did not take it into account? Pupils' progress relative to their starting point is the most important driver of a judgement on the achievement of standards. It can override absolute outcomes where a school demonstrates clearly that pupils are making progress and that a school is adding value to a pupil.

Every inspection report is written after full, frank and robust discussion at the moderation conference, which is conducted immediately at the end of evidence-gathering in a school. As you know, on many inspection teams, there is an associate assessor who brings an important external perspective to the challenge process and complements inspectors' experience. The moderation meeting ensures that all evidence picked up by team members is challenged, moderated and discussed and that findings are collective and secure.

A key element of coming to an overall evaluation is the experience of members of the inspection team, who will have visited many schools and worked in a range of contexts. It is that experience, combined with the wide range of evidence presented by a school, that contributes to the overall judgements of an inspection team. ETI is foremost about promoting improvement in the interest of all learners, not only children, pupils and young people, but also teachers, leaders and, not least, ourselves in ETI. That concludes what I wish to say. I look forward to hearing your recommendations. Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Noelle. Are associate assessors paid, or do they just receive expenses?

Mrs Buick: We provide substitute cover for a school. We do not pay associate assessors directly, but we do provide substitute cover for the school and expenses.

The Chairperson: The handbook, which is more general about inspectors and associate inspectors, talks about the "core values" of "honesty coupled with openness". Openness is key so that everybody involved is aware of what is required of them, what is being asked of them and the process in which they are involved. As regards correspondence, the written submission from the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) representatives was very worrying. I am sure you have seen the comments. One comment that greatly perturbed me, and I think, other Committee members is that:

"inspectors need greater assurance about the finality of their decisions and that evaluations may not be overturned from anywhere outside of the original inspection team."

I have difficulty in understanding clearly where that is coming from. Who would overturn the evaluations of the inspection team other than those who are involved in inspection?

Mrs Buick: Everybody in ETI is involved in inspection; that is the first thing that I would say. We, like any good organisation, have a quality-assurance process to help us to ensure and demonstrate consistency in all our work. Therefore, as I have just discussed, we have a moderation meeting as part of the quality-assurance process. However, there are also checks and balances in the system before and after the moderation meeting so that we have challenge at various levels.

The managing inspector may provide challenge if it is not clearly written in the report why a judgment has been arrived at. The challenge might come from the assistant chief inspector or, indeed, myself, but it is all of us in consultation with the reporting inspector. We state clearly in the feedback to a school that inspection performance levels are provisional, subject to moderation through ETI's quality-assurance processes and not final until the report has been published.

Some stakeholders who submitted evidence to the Committee raised consistency as an issue. The quality-assurance process is about ensuring and demonstrating consistency in the inspection process. There is no external interference in our evaluations from the Department or anyone else. However, we have a quality-assurance system and if we need to use it we will.

The Chairperson: So, when they use the phrase "anywhere outside of the original inspection team", are they not aware of the quality-assurance measures, which include everyone in ETI? Is there a misunderstanding on their part of the process that is used? These are members who represent the district inspector. If they are saying that they have a concern about it being overturned "anywhere outside of the original inspection team", you would have to conclude that they are not aware of the process of quality assurance and the fact that the report is only an interim one because it has to be handed over by the reporting inspector to ETI at a senior management level to go through checks and balances that can be all verified, and everybody knows what they are, before they end up with a final report. Why would they come to a conclusion that there is somehow outside interference — for want of a better word — in their evaluation and assessment of a school?

Mrs Buick: I do not know. That was not shared with me beforehand, so I can only surmise what they mean as you are surmising. However, what I am telling you is that we have a quality-assurance process. All of you are involved in aspects of business and work where you would expect to have a quality-assurance process that has checks and balances to ensure consistency. We have that too. That is feedback to people who perhaps feel that we do not have consistency in our judgements. In fact, we have a robust quality-assurance process to ensure consistency.

The Chairperson: Could it be that the initial feedback to the school before the final report is given is the practice whereby a school has been made aware of the informal feedback — I think that it has been in some cases — but then, when the final report comes to them, it nowhere near resembles what they had been told in the informal feedback and that leads to a concern that the process is not as open as the handbook desires or everybody says it is? Why would that contradiction be there in the first place?

Mrs Buick: I am not aware of any circumstances in which that has happened. In my time as chief inspector, no overall effectiveness grades have been changed through the moderation process. However, we have checks and balances in the system, and they are important to ensure and demonstrate consistency.

Mr Kinahan: Noelle, you talked about the moderation meeting. You then sit down and go through your quality assurance. Does anybody ever go back to a school for a second moderation meeting? If you change the direction in which the school feels the report is going, does anyone discuss it with —

Mrs Buick: As I demonstrated, that has not happened. We have any quality-assurance conversations with the reporting inspector and, ideally, with the deputy reporting inspector. If there was a change, the reporting inspector would go back to the school, yes.

The Chairperson: Why has the working practice become more prevalent now that district inspectors are no longer part of the inspection team? What is the rationale?

Mrs Buick: That is not factually accurate.

The Chairperson: In the discussions that we have had — other members can confirm this so that I am not putting a spin on it — we were told that the practice now — not in the past — is more often that the district inspector is not part of an inspection team. Is that case or not?

Mrs Buick: I will clarify the position regarding the district inspector. The district inspector is no longer the reporting inspector, and we had been moving towards that situation over the past year. We did that because best international practice says that we should be able to demonstrate objectivity. It leaves it clear for the district inspector to have those challenging but supportive conversations with the school to provide advice if that is required. Then, when a school is inspected, that person is not the reporting inspector essentially coming back to inspect their own support, advice and challenge. That is the only change. Ideally, I would like the district inspector to be part of an inspection team. That is our rationale. We have had a lot of feedback from inspectors, some of it justified, about the equity of workload. If you insist that the district inspector be the reporting inspector, your workload is dependent on the number of inspections being carried out in your district. We have had to take that into account. Furthermore, if the district inspector is the reporting inspector for all the schools in a district, that means that the inspection outcomes are attributed to one individual and not to the corporate ETI. Those are the reasons for the changes. The district inspector will be a member of the inspection team where that is possible, but it is not always possible if we are to balance that with equity of workload and other priorities in the inspection schedule.

The Chairperson: There is a difference, Noelle, between being the reporting inspector and being part of the inspection team.

Mrs Buick: There is no issue with the district inspector being part of an inspection team. In fact, my preference is that they are. It is not always feasible when you balance all the competing priorities.

The Chairperson: What is the main reason for that change over the past year? Is it objectivity or equity of workload?

Mrs Buick: It is a combination of both.

The Chairperson: If it is a combination, are you then saying that district inspectors have not been objective and are not capable of being objective? I have met a large number of district inspectors, and I find them to be people of the highest integrity who have a genuine interest in ensuring that there is no whitewash, cover-up or cosy relationship between them and their school. They are there to do a professional job. I feel that we have done a disservice to the system by creating a distance between the district inspector, the inspection process and the schools for which they have, for want of a better term, a pastoral care responsibility.

Mrs Buick: I am sure that you will agree that we need to be able to demonstrate objectivity, and even the perception that we go back to inspect our own challenge, support and advice would not stand up to scrutiny in other aspects of the scrutiny of our work. It is important that we demonstrate objectivity. That is fundamental. However, I absolutely agree that having the district inspector on the team is the best practice principle that we could subscribe to, but there are issues around equity of workload. We said that we would review the position at the end of this year, and inspectors will probably have to make a decision on what is more important: the district inspector being the reporting inspector or the equity of workload. For me, there is a corporate responsibility for ensuring that the inspection outcomes in a particular district are not attached to one individual but to the corporate ETI. I feel that that fundamental issue is important.

Mr Rogers: I have to agree with the comments about the district inspector. Noelle, you said that you will have to make a decision at the end of this year. You talked about the context, which is so important with documentation. We spoke to district inspectors, and surely a district inspector is the best source of context. You said that inspectors will make the decision, but will it not be senior management in the inspectorate who will make the decision? We are told that they have only three or four days in each term for district inspector work and that they physically cannot do it. If we are to take a holistic picture of a school, should it not be a priority that school inspectors have time to do their district inspectorate role as well?

Mrs Buick: As with all organisations, we have competing priorities. On the one hand, we have parents' groups saying that we do not carry out enough inspections, and, on the other hand, we have to manage the amount of time that we can give to our district inspector work. It is always about

balancing reducing resources. The review of the role of the district inspector will be a joint conversation, but, ultimately, senior managers and I, as chief inspector, will make that decision. I come back to the point that it is important that we are able to demonstrate objectivity.

We have also worked very hard to ensure equity of the time allocated to district inspector work, and I think that we gave a submission to you about how the work is allocated to the district inspector role. On balance, about 14% of our inspection days are allocated to district work. In previous years, interim follow-up inspections and follow-up inspections were part of the district inspector's work. We have taken those out now and put them into the centrally scheduled programme of activity. If you were to take that into account, the work that district inspectors are involved in, including interim follow-up inspections and follow-up inspections, is about 21% of our inspection days. That is quite considerable. Ideally, we would like to give more time to that, but that is the reality of the budget envelope that we are dealing with.

On making provision for district inspectors not being the reporting inspectors, we now have pre-inspection days allocated so that they have an opportunity to understand the context of a school and to visit it, if that is possible, to find out more about the school before the inspection starts. We also have a robust internal management system so that, when a district inspector visits a school, he or she completes a management and recording information system (MARS) report. You will have heard of our management information system, and MARS reports and the details of those visits are available to the reporting inspector. We have opportunities in place for reporting inspectors to familiarise themselves with the context of the schools. Also, Northern Ireland is not a very big place, and we are not a very big organisation. We have a lot of conversations internally about the schools, so a lot of intelligence is available to the reporting inspector.

Mr Rogers: I want to clarify one point. Do district inspectors have the equivalent of three or four days a term to carry out their district inspector role? I absolutely do not question at all what you say about the district inspector not being the reporting inspector.

Mrs Buick: That is probably about right. Our submission states that 10 days a year are allocated for each district for which a district inspector is responsible, but it may be that he or she is a district inspector for a number of different types of schools. He or she might be a district inspector for special schools and post-primary schools, and, in that case, he or she would get 20 days. If district inspectors are involved in leading a subject area, as the principal inspectors of maths and English are, they get 10 days to carry out that work. Specialist inspectors get five days to carry out that work, which is also incorporated into the district inspector time, because that is where they carry out that activity. That is how we allocate the time. Our submission will give you chapter and verse on that.

Mr Hazzard: Thank you, Noelle, for your presentation. You have probably read in various Hansard reports of our meetings that we have had some interesting discussions around the role of the ETI — the foresight, the plans, whether an inspection is an audit or about school improvement. No doubt you have read Professor Gardner's words from last week about marrying the two ideas. What do you think the balance should be? We have looked at various models that not so much about an individual school setting but the wider education system. In your opinion, where is the balance, and what would be the best use of your resources? We are very heavy here on inspecting local schools in individual school settings but not so much the wider system as a whole.

Mrs Buick: Our mission is promoting improvement in the interests of learners. Therefore, we absolutely see our role as doing exactly that: promoting improvement. However, there is no doubt that we also have an accountability role. The chief inspector's report gives a state-of-the-nation view about how the education system is performing, and we are due to have another report this October. We also have an assurance role, demonstrating to parents that their children are getting a good education. Therefore, we have accountability and an assurance role, but I see our prime role as promoting improvement through the inspection process. As I described, we identify where there are strengths and good practice so that that can be shared. We identify areas for improvement so that improvements can be made. In addition, through what I think is a highly regarded process, we have our follow-up process whereby inspectors carry out interim follow-up inspection visits to check that progress is being made on those improvements, and we have a follow-up inspection to confirm whether those improvements have been effected. That sequence of events — from identifying the areas for improvement through to checking that they have been effected — demonstrates that promoting improvement is fundamentally what we are all about.

Mrs Faustina Graham (Education and Training Inspectorate): That raises a very interesting question that is worth considering. You visited Scotland, and Heather has been to Scotland. Obviously, it has a very different approach to sampling the education system. Everything is of its time. In 2010, we agreed, with the approval of the DE board, that we would introduce proportionate risk-based inspection, which was designed to address the inspection of each individual institution and ensure that that was done over a significant time.

We are commissioned by the three Departments: DE, DCAL and DEL. DE commissions 70% of our time, and that commissioning process has asked us to look at and to spend a significant amount of time on individual institution inspection. About 10% to 15% of the time is flexible for us to use and allocate as we see fit, and that is where we would undertake our thematic inspections. In the past, we also looked at area-based inspections. There was a point at which we were doing so much thematic work that we were not getting the same concentration on schools, which was why we introduced the proportionate risk-based strategy. That does not mean that there is not always a better way of balancing the two. As we become more sophisticated in our processes and planning, we would like to think that we would continue to achieve that better balance. There are arguments for both, and we are in a situation in which the requirement on us is to carry out individual organisation inspections. That is not to say that we are not trialling other approaches to see their benefits. However, it is difficult to change that focus entirely unless it is a system-wide decision, in the sense that that would come from the Department and the Minister. We are open to any of those options. However, at the same time, we are right in the middle of a particular strategy. Therefore, it would be difficult to change it without losing as much as you would gain at this time.

We are covering individual organisations this year; Noelle referred to that. We are going back to schools that were inspected during the past three years in which the provision was outstanding or very good. We trialled that last year with a small number of primary schools, and it was highly successful to look at how our schools are sustaining that improvement and giving them that endorsement so they do not have to wait seven years for someone to tell them that they are still doing an outstanding job. We are going to involve our associate assessors in that process so that they can go back to schools that they visited previously to see how things have changed in the interim or how outstanding practice continues to get even better.

Mr Hazzard: I think that it is probably fair to say that you seem confident and assured about the balance. However, from our discussions, I think that I am right in saying that, at various levels in your organisation, in the system as a whole and in the wider education community, there is not the same confidence in and shared vision of the balance. Is that fair to say? If so, what can be done?

Mrs Buick: What do you mean? Sorry, Faustina. You go ahead.

Mrs Graham: I think that it is fair to say that. One of the most significant learning points for me during the inquiry, aside from the recommendations that you will make, is what Professor Gardner said last week about our communication with the system and how that needs to be more effective than it has been. We can say to you — we will say to you — that we need more resources at any point in time, but Professor Gardner said that we also have to make better use of the resources that we have at any given point.

After last week's evidence session, John, Heather and I were working with the associate assessors on Friday, and during the meeting — we were not talking about this; we were talking about school leadership — the group that I was chairing made a comment that made me think again about what Professor Gardner said. A principal pointed out that, when you become a principal, you have to go through an inspection process whereby you support all your staff, particularly if it is a big school, and yet, as part of your training to be a principal, you are not given any kind of direction — I do not mean from us, but as part of the whole training — on how the inspection process actually works. Therefore, you are coming to it almost cold.

As Noelle said, our reporting inspectors, obviously, visit a school, spend a day there and brief the staff. However, I suppose that what that principal was saying was that it is almost too late at that point for a principal, particularly a first-time principal, to really get up to speed on an understanding of the inspection process. So I think that it is fair to say, as Professor Gardner did, that we need to look at our communication.

As Noelle pointed out, you could say that we have a huge amount of documentation. Truth be told, that is probably overwhelming for people, and we should not expect them to deal with all that on their

own. Perhaps we really need face-to-face interaction with people. When we get the opportunity to do that, we find it successful, as do the people who participate.

Last Wednesday, we had 220 principals at the dissemination of good practice event for literacy and numeracy. At each of those events, I think that people felt that, by listening to their colleagues as well as us, they were learning from that process. I suppose that it is up to us to try to improve communication. So your point is valid.

Mr Hazzard: I will go back to the idea of balance and individual school settings. Where is the appropriate balance between auditing a school's compliance with DE policy and school improvement in order to foster improvement? Where do you think the balance is? Do you have the balance right? What can be done to strike the right balance?

Mrs Buick: I will ask John to come in in a moment. There are some compliance aspects of inspection around, for example, the school development plan and safeguarding, and we must look at those. In general, we are looking at the quality of the education that children and young people get. We are looking at achievement and standards, teaching and learning, and quality of provision. We check the compliance issues, because we have a statutory responsibility to do that. We absolutely strike a balance in looking at the quality of education and training that young people get and promoting improvement.

Mr John Anderson (Education and Training Inspectorate): I hope that the balance is evident in any post-primary inspection report that you read. We explain to the school, just to remind it, that the main focus on promoting improvement is around our quality indicators in Together Towards Improvement. We report what we find in a school, such as its effectiveness or lack of effectiveness, or its lack of consistency in the quality of its provision or in any aspect of Together Towards Improvement that we inspect. In addition to that, as Noelle said, there are certain *[Inaudible.]* asks us to report on, and she mentioned a couple of those — for example, child protection. We are always asked to report on a school's progress against the Programme for Government targets for GCSE and A level. We are always asked to report on a school's progress towards delivering the entitlement framework, which is being phased in and finalised over the next two years. More recently, the Minister has asked us to report on the quality and effectiveness of a school's careers provision. He has also asked us to report more precisely on the extent to which governors provide challenge and support to a school. That is not quite everything, but it is almost everything. We always report on the effectiveness of provision for pupils with special educational needs. So you would find those in the report.

Let me take one example. The Department expects us to report on the extent to which a school is "compliant" — that is the word — with departmental regulations on school development planning. We always have a footnote in the report that discharges that duty, which states that a school development plan is or is not fully compliant with it. However, within the body of the report, you will find that what we report is not so much how the school development plan complies with a certain regulation checklist, but how effective a school's process of school development planning and improvement is, as we discussed at our last evidence session a fortnight ago. That gives you a sense of how we manage the balance between those issues that certain policy branches in the Department want to read from our reports, as well as trying to give the school as much as we can in support of improvement. However, I would have to say that, although the report seeks that balance, the main input that we can give to a school in contributing to its capacity building for improvement and how much it is getting better at it, is in the dialogue that goes on during visits, not only in the inspection visit but previously by the district inspector, and the district inspector who might do a follow-up inspection or continue monitoring whatever is necessary, depending on the outcome of the inspection. That is how we try to achieve that balance.

Mrs Buick: You raised an important point about the district inspector, who picks up the follow-up inspection process. If a school is satisfactory or less, the district inspector undertakes the interim follow-up visits and the follow-up inspection.

Mrs Graham: Noelle referred to a "running record". We are working on that at the moment and trying to collate all the evidence that we collect during an inspection, which a school would not have unless it made an FOI request. That will be professionally productive for a school subsequent to the inspection.

Certainly, during primary or post-primary inspections, when an inspector has responsibility for a particular area in a school — for me, it is English and drama — you have extremely detailed

professional discussions, which are not captured in writing, with your colleague in the school who has responsibility for that area. Very often, we learn as much from those discussions as the person who is in receipt of the inspection. However, there is not always a way to feed those back in a detailed written format to the school. I suppose that the busyness of an inspection in the course of a week like that can mean that someone will have found the discussion very valuable but will almost have forgotten the detail because it happened in such a busy period. We are trying to look at providing as much detail as we can to a school about the actual process of inspection that took place during the three days that we were there. We do not want to give that to people until we are content and confident in doing so, because we have to give people information that our colleagues are confident about preparing and sharing, and in a way that is productive for a school.

Mr Hazzard: I have one final question on the improvement side of things. Previously, the ETI has contended that, since 2010, the vast majority — some 80% — of schools that had been reinspected have improved by at least one performance indicator. What contribution do you feel that the ETI made to that improvement?

Mrs Buick: I hope that I articulated some of that in my introduction. We identify what a school does well and what it needs to improve on. Then, through the follow-up process, if a school is satisfactory or below, we support it through the challenge of the interim follow-up visits to make sure that progress is being made, and, finally, we evaluate that through the follow-up inspection visit. However, we do not do that alone. As I said, we are a catalyst for improvement. Schools that are in a formal intervention process obviously get CASS support, and principals get other support through the area learning communities. Ultimately, school improvement happens within a school, and, for it to be sustainable, it has to be a process within a school, and it has to be continuous. I think that we provide that catalyst for improvement.

Mr Lunn: I want to ask you about the external evaluation of your own effectiveness. You point us to the annual NISRA survey. That is fair enough; it is very complimentary, with a figure of 81% improvement, and so on, but it is not the only review of your performance. I am looking at the GTCNI survey. It is fair to say that the two do not quite marry up. In the GTCNI survey, for instance, 70% of principals felt that an inspection encouraged compliance but not innovation and was overtly data-driven. What are your thoughts about that? How do you reconcile those two positions?

Mrs Buick: I want to make some comments about that. The ETI has no issue with the GTCNI reflecting the professional views of its members, but we have genuine concerns about the methodology and reliability of the survey. I make no apology for challenging a survey that I think was flawed in its methodology. That was confirmed by NISRA, who are the statistical experts. No form of identification, for example, was needed. The survey was open to absolutely anybody to complete openly on the website. Anybody could complete it. There was an opportunity for multiple entries. There were no checks and balances in the survey, and, shall we say, no safeguards were put in place to reduce that risk.

There was no random sampling. There was the use of leading questions. I will give you an example of a leading question, which perhaps demonstrates the very point that you made. The question was:

"The inspection process has an in-built social bias in favour of socially advantaged schools because insufficient account is taken of context and intake".

NISRA considered that to be a leading question. According to NISRA, you are led to give a particular answer, so I have real issues about the outcomes of the GTCNI survey and its reliability, as has NISRA. I am content that our survey was carried out by NISRA and under the best statistical principles. Therefore, our survey is absolutely fair and accurate. It is feedback from the schools that were inspected, so it is a post-inspection survey that is carried out each year.

Mr Lunn: Do you have any concerns about leading questions in the NISRA survey, or are you happy with them?

Mrs Buick: They are NISRA-validated questions so they subscribe to the principles of best questions. So no, I have no concerns.

Mr Lunn: You seem to have a problem with the reliability of the GTCNI survey, with leading questions and all the rest of it. However, the people who respond to that survey are professionals and have an

interest in the subject. From what you say, it may be slightly troubling that it is anonymous, but that does not mean that people do not give an honest view. There is such a diametric difference between what comes out of one set of professionals and what comes out of NISRA.

Up to 45% of principals felt that you did not explain the inspection criteria and did not accept evidence-based challenge. Also, only some 30% of principals thought that the inspection took account of what schools produced in terms of value added.

Mrs Buick: I explained to you my concerns about the reliability of the survey, and those concerns remain.

Mr Lunn: Do you think that all those answers are produced by leading questions?

Mrs Buick: There were positive comments as well as the comments that you describe. Although I have concerns about the validity of the survey, I accept that we need to consider the themes that came out of it. Some of those themes would not be unknown to us from other evidence that has come through to the Committee. If you look at our survey, which to me is robust, valid and reliable, you will see that it says, for example, that 86% of schools felt that they had a good opportunity to brief the inspection team of the context of the organisation, and 81% felt that inspection helped the school plan and promote for improvement. Some 93% felt that the team was courteous, and 87% felt that it was approachable. Some 80% felt that they had a good service from the inspectorate, and 80% felt that they were treated fairly. To me, that is valid and reliable statistical evidence, but it does not mean that everything is perfect and that we do not have work to do, which is why I outlined the development of inspection work that we are undertaking over the next period so that we can be even better at building on the good practice that we already have. I accept that there are areas that we need to improve.

Mr Lunn: There is another external report from EMQC Ltd. If I remember correctly, it has given you a highly complimentary, gold standard report for the past 13 years. What are the mechanics of EMQC Ltd and how it evaluates your organisation? What does it actually do? I presume that it visits schools.

Mrs Buick: Yes, it inspects a range of providers. It is the customer service excellence award. It looks at a range of characteristics about how we provide information to those we inspect, how we actually carry out the process and the impact of the process. It has a set of criteria that it measures us against. We have just had a full re-evaluation of our customer service excellence in February this year, and, again, we came out very strongly through that process. I think that it is a very thorough and robust process that looks at how well we deal with our customers — that is, the schools we inspect. As you said, it came out extremely positively.

Mr Lunn: When the company visits a school as part of its assessment, is it accompanied by a member of your team?

Mrs Buick: I cannot remember whether the assessors are accompanied or not. I suspect that somebody does go with them as a courtesy, but assessors will carry out the interviews with those whom they are visiting and make their own determination. It is an absolutely independent charter mark, or whatever you like to call it, and we have no interference in that work, other than to provide the evidence and information that an assessor requests.

Mr Lunn: We have been told that assessors are accompanied by a district inspector when they go to a school.

Mrs Buick: I would hope that, because they are on unfamiliar territory — our assessor is from England — we would drive them wherever they need to go.

Mr Lunn: Do you not think that that would perhaps colour the reaction of a school? I could draw an analogy with some other type of follow-up inspection whereby an organisation that is being assessed is present when people are being asked questions about its performance. It does not seem —

Mrs Buick: I am sure that the organisation would have something to say about your comments. It is an absolutely independent assessment. An assessor makes independent judgements.

Mr Lunn: Which organisation?

Mrs Buick: The customer service excellence — EFQM, or whatever its initials are.

Mr Lunn: Do you pay for that service?

Mrs Buick: We do.

Mr Lunn: Is it expensive?

Mrs Buick: It is in the submission. I cannot remember exactly how much it is. We could probably refer you to the submission that we have already put in. It is not a huge amount of money, but there is an expense attached.

Mr Lunn: I have made my point about an assessor being accompanied. To me, if people are following up on your performance, they really should not have a member of your team present while they ask questions of the people who have been inspected. It just does not seem to be necessary or to add any validity to whatever outcome they come up with. They have come up with a fantastic outcome, it seems to me, for every year that the exercise has been carried out. You would think that there might be a blip along the way somewhere, but no, there are 13 gold medals, apparently.

Mrs Buick: We do a good job, Mr Lunn. I do not find the outcome of that surprising. We have partial compliance and some aspects that we have not complied with over the years. This year, two of our partial compliances were made full compliances, so we are moving even closer to getting that absolute gold star that you talk about. It would be disappointing if you were saying that, because it was a glowing report, it was in any way tinged with ETI influence. It absolutely was not. The assessor makes their own professional judgement about the quality of service that we provide to our customers. That came out very strongly.

The Chairperson: To help here, may I just come in? Imagine the man from Mars who lands here and looks at the process. This is what EMQC stated in its report on the process, so listen to this and determine whether there is objectivity in this. Remember that that was the issue on the district inspector:

"The on-site assessment visit started with the assessor meeting the Chief Inspector, the Assistant Chief Inspectors, Managing Assessors and Assessors reviewing documentary evidence and meeting with customers of the service and observing service delivery in the Inspection Services Branch. On the second day the assessor accompanied a District Inspection on visits to customers and met a selection of customers over a buffet lunch and met with lead officers in the Department of Education."

Could you write the term "objectivity" over that?

Mrs Buick: I am disappointed to hear you say that, because I can tell you that the process is completely objective. What you did not read out is that practically a whole day was spent in a telephone conversation with our managing inspector, who leads on this process. We did a self-evaluation for the customer service excellence award. So, that was the first bit. There was then a telephone call during which he quizzed the managing inspector on our self-assessment. Then, on the first day of his actual visit in Northern Ireland, he discussed aspects of the self-assessment report with us. On the following day, he went out and met some of the customers, that is, the people whom we inspect. So, I believe that it is a robust process and that it is objective.

Mrs Graham: I think that it is fair to say, as we would about our inspection process, that that is one element of the evidence that the assessors collect for that award. Actually, we have not had it for 13 year — we have had it since 2007, and it was hard won to get it by 2007. We did not get customer service excellence the first two times that we applied. We had to work very hard as an organisation to get it in 2007. However, it is not a repeated process; it is a continuous improvement process, and it is about looking at what we have achieved and trying to build on that successfully over time. So, in that sense, there is a lot of additional work. Obviously, the questionnaire returns are part of what is submitted. What the assessor then does is sample some of the schools. I think that we can absolutely share that with them and the idea that we should perhaps not be part of the discussion. I have to say that it is only part of the evidence that is considered in that instance.

Mr Lunn: We could talk round it all day. There is the same contrast between NISRA and GTCNI as there is between EMQC and GTCNI. I am not convinced by your assertion that GTCNI responses are coloured by the fact that the questions were leading or that people have perhaps a bit of grudge or something like that. We are talking about professional people here. One of the witnesses that we had recently described himself as a fan of ETI but indicated that, in his opinion, the inspectorate had a degree of "institutional arrogance". I know that that is a catchy phrase, but they were his words, not mine. Do you think that that would explain some of the adverse commentary that is perhaps in the GTCNI or in the Committee? I ask because a thread that has been running through this from the day that we started is that there is a contradiction between what you say and what the professionals in the schools and the system say.

Mrs Buick: John probably wants to come in there, but I will just respond to the question. NISRA carried out the analysis of the survey. That means they were not my views but NISRA's, as the statistical expert, that it was unreliable. That is the first thing.

Mr J Anderson: It might be worth adding a few percentages from the GTCNI survey. You quoted some who suggested that they are very out of line with what is found in the annual NISRA survey of those that had just been inspected in the previous year. Obviously, the GTC inspection is open to anyone, whether or not they have been inspected recently. The GTC responded to NISRA's critique of its methodology and extracted the returns from principals, as opposed to teachers. They might have been more open to it, but the principal has greater oversight than any one teacher of what is happening in the whole school. Teachers might see part of the process but not the whole process.

Although the NISRA positive percentages are in the range that you mentioned of 80% to 90% of those that had been recently inspected, in the GTC survey, some of the returns are of interest. For example, 68% of principals agree that inspectors provided appropriately detailed feedback on inspection criteria. Some 70% of principals agreed that the inspection has been central to later improvement. Some 69% of principals agreed that the inspection took appropriate account of their own context and intake. Some 77% of principals agreed that the inspection process took appropriate account of their school self-evaluation, and 77% agreed that the inspection process took appropriate account of the range of practice in their school. My view is that those are good figures, but, as a managing inspector, my view is that they are not good enough. Although they come from an evidence base, we want to improve on some of those percentages. They are not as strong as NISRA's, but they are not that dramatically different from NISRA's responses. They are lower but not significantly lower. I just think that it is worth looking at the figures in that way as well.

Mr Lunn: It said in the survey that there was an approval of the system. That is fair enough. I have taken certain statistics from what it says. However, in a way, its survey is only a reflection of what we have heard from virtually every organisation talking about your organisation. Whether it is unions, teachers, individual schools or the GTC, there is a theme running through it.

Mr J Anderson: I think that we have indicated that we have work to do on addressing perceptions so that we are better at explaining the role that we play. Professor Gardner said very clearly last week that we need to focus on explaining how we contribute to improvements so that things are better understood than currently.

Mrs Buick: As John describes, there are some myths about inspection. That is something that we absolutely must do something about, but the percentage of responses to the NISRA post-inspection survey, which is the schools and providers that have recently been inspected, is largely in the high eighties. So, when we carry out an inspection, for the most part, those who are part of the process regard it well. However, there is no doubt that we need to improve our wider perception of how we carry out inspections.

Mr Lunn: I will leave it at that. There is a fine line between fighting your own corner, defending your performance and "institutional arrogance", which is a term that I do not particularly like.

Mrs Buick: I would hope that that is not the case with ETI. We take our work and the feedback that we receive very seriously. The improvements that I outlined and that have been in train since 2011 are improvements to work in greater partnership with those that we inspect. I think that if there is an underlying message coming through, that is it.

Mr Lunn: Thanks very much.

The Chairperson: As outsiders watching it being played out in recent days, it has been interesting to see the reaction that there has been to some elements of the inquiry. The survey from GTCNI has been a typical example, where there was an exchange of emails between you and NISRA. If you read it in the context of what was going on, you could have concluded that this is only about trying to rubbish the GTC survey because it was uncomfortable, as opposed to the explanation that John gave, which was, "There are many things in the survey that we recognise, and we accept that there are things that need to be improved". If that was the context or tone of the way in which the queries, questions and concerns were being raised, I do not think that people would have been as exercised as they were, because they are having a very adverse reaction to all this. When you see the drawbridge being pulled up, you wonder who is inside the castle. What are they trying to defend? If we are saying that there are things that we need to address and that we need to be open and to do all these things, the way that we go about that is sometimes evidence that we are genuinely concerned about the issues that are being raised.

Mrs Buick: I will repeat what I said. We are an organisation of great integrity, so we take all the evidence and information that we receive on that basis. As I said, I make no apology for challenging a survey that was flawed in its methodology. NISRA, which is the independent statistician, said that it was flawed. GTC is entitled to take the professional views of its organisation, but we have, and remain with, genuine concerns about the quality of the survey. As I said, I think that we have to take some of the broad messages on board, and, as I described, we are already beginning to work on those aspects through the development of inspection work.

Mr Newton: Thank you for coming up. When we met on the Falls Road a few weeks ago, I told you that my background was in Investors in People, national vocational qualifications (NVQ) and so on. So, I have a slightly different cultural approach, I think, to inspection. I have to say, however, that when I was in that work, I always held the ETI as a paragon in inspection. So, I will say that now to you.

I want to explore a couple of things with you. Faustina referred to Scotland's experience, and Heather indicated that she had been in Scotland for a period. In your introductory remarks, Noelle, I think that you indicated that inspection is not a one-dimensional approach and that schools have a role to play. I think that the evidence in Scotland is that there is a much stronger focus on the cooperation between the schools and the inspection process. Maybe that is also true in other jurisdictions. How might ETI develop a more two-way collaborative approach to inspection?

Mrs Buick: I might ask Heather to come in and talk a little bit about what she observed in Scotland. We already work in partnership with those whom we inspect, but we have identified that we could do that further. We have the pre-inspection visit, which the reporting inspector carries out. They go to great lengths to explain the inspection process to the principal and staff and to set up the inspection so that it works for the inspectorate and for the school. In post-primary, for example, there is dialogue on which classes will be followed as part of the class pursuit on the Monday. So, quite a lot of dialogue happens before the inspection to set it up in a way that works for both.

During the inspection week, a lot of professional dialogue, as it was described, goes on with all the staff that we meet. We meet pupils, and we feed back to the principal and vice-principal each day to make sure that they are aware of the emerging issues. However, as I described, we can take that a stage further and get the principal more involved in our team meetings. That is a challenge for us and for our inspectors, because that has not happened before. I think that that will help the principals to be clear about why we have come to the conclusions that we have and will help them to better understand the areas for improvement. So, I think that that will help to do that.

We have the dissemination of good practice events. Those are incredibly successful and very well attended. They are an opportunity for us to explain the inspection process. They are also an opportunity for principals to see those practitioners who have been through the inspection process and who have been identified as having good practice demonstrate that good practice to others. Of course, we also have the district inspector role, which involves the inspectors who, next week, might be reporting inspectors working with schools. So, I think that a lot of activity is already going on to join that process up.

Mr Newton: Is that a change in process or a change in culture?

Mrs Buick: I do not think that they are mutually exclusive. From our perspective, our culture has always been to be open and transparent in the work that we do. I think that some people are saying

that they would like us to be more open and transparent. That is what we want to do. They want more transparency; it is not that we do not do it.

Mr Newton: Would Heather like to comment on that?

Mrs Heather Jackson (Education and Training Inspectorate): My experience in Scotland was in one primary school; therefore, it has been prefaced by that conditioning. There are similar processes there that are robust, rigorous and fair. The key emphasis is on what the children learn, the extent to which they learn and their entitlement to the Scottish curriculum for excellence, just as we would look at the Northern Ireland curriculum throughout primary and post-primary provision.

I have experience of being both a principal and being in ETI. I know that if I were still a principal, I would prefer our model, but we would welcome your advice and recommendations about where our inspection process goes. From the point of view of a principal's accountability, the process is very intense over the five days. The principal would be involved in different meetings, but an essential difference in a primary school would be that the principal and the senior leadership team nominate joint lesson observations. That would be a new departure. District inspectors in ETI do that at the request of individual principals and negotiate it with the teachers. However, in the Scottish model, that is a component for primary schools. So, that is part of the two-way process that Mr Newton was talking about.

There would need to be a lot of negotiation with our unions, training and principals to accept that. You have heard through your research about aspects in Scotland, but ours would have to be a made in Northern Ireland version as opposed to an adoption of a simple version. So, from the accountability point of view, there are higher stakes in the Scottish model for the principals' experience and understanding of what makes high-quality learning and teaching.

There is a scoping exercise on the Monday, which is the first day. In primary schools, we rely on the school development plan for the evaluation, as you were told in the meeting in the West Belfast Partnership headquarters. As mentioned, those are the compliance aspects of school development planning. In Scotland, prior to the inspection, there is a self-evaluation pro forma, which the school uses — this is the two-way negotiation aspect — to nominate three areas that it would like the HMIs to observe, evaluate and track throughout the inspection, as well as all the school curriculum areas. As a result of that, whereas teachers in primary and post-primary schools tend to be visited once a day, the teacher in Scotland can be visited two or three times a day as necessary to obtain the first-hand evidence in the classroom observation and so that the learning can be looked at closely.

We talked about the running record, which is currently being trialled in post-primary schools. The record of inspection findings is left with the school two weeks after the inspection, as Faustina explained. The accumulation of the evaluative statements about the quality of learning and teaching under five key indicators is shared in confidence with the principal and the equivalent to our CASS officer on the fifth and final day of the inspection in a primary school. It is then edited, obviously, and sent to the school. However, as opposed to transparency, there is almost a quota for or a restriction on who can access it. It is very detailed and mentions specific teachers by year groups. That is why, as I say, there would need to be an evolutionary stage for us in Northern Ireland to agree to that form of reporting on individual teachers without the teacher being there and with it being in a written document. So, as a former teacher and principal, I have questions about how that would be used. It is kept with the equivalent of the chair of a board of governors here — the chair of the parent forum, the principal and the local education officer. That is very useful, and, as John would rightly tell you, the schools would find it very beneficial to move it on as an improvement document. I certainly think that there are issues there with transparency and about who would obtain the report.

The parents get a separate letter that focuses on three headings: how well children learn and achieve; how well the school supports children to develop and learn; and how well the school improves the quality of its work. There is then a concluding statement, of which there will be four to choose from: no further inspection activity; additional support for improvement; continued inspection, which is the equivalent of our follow-up process; and innovative practice, which would be equivalent to our very good or outstanding schools.

There are similarities, and there are equal challenges there, but the focus is very much on the learning. From a Northern Ireland perspective, there would have to be negotiation, as I said, between principals and teachers over what happens with the record of inspection findings and the confidentiality in that. By the way, in Scotland, they have indicators that are similar to ours, so where we have outstanding to unsatisfactory, they have good, weak and satisfactory.

Mr Newton: I want to explore the situations in which you are moving into support for schools or intervention. In your opening remarks, Noelle, you indicated that formal intervention should be supported by CASS. The evidence that is being presented to the Committee suggests that CASS services are being wound down and schools are being deprived of the necessary support to help them to improve.

Obviously, our objective is to improve for the pupils, as you outlined, and that is the goal that we are all dedicated to. I take your comment about formal intervention being supported by CASS. How would we see that in a situation where CASS support is not as extensive as it has been previously?

Mrs Buick: It has been well recorded that there have been some changes to the CASS service. It now focuses its activity on the schools that are in the formal intervention process. You will see in our follow-up inspection reports that we always refer to the quality of support that CASS has provided to those schools that are in the formal intervention process. I think that it is fair to say that the support is usually good. That is what we normally see. However, it is like a leg everywhere else, in that there is only a certain amount of resource to go around the schools. The resource is focused on those schools that are in the formal intervention process.

I said that there were, broadly speaking, 10,000 pupils in schools that are in, or were, in the formal intervention process and that there are 5,000 pupils who are in better schools as a result of the support that has been provided through the formal intervention process. So, there are clear examples of improvements to the quality of pupils' learning as a result of that supportive process.

Mrs Graham: The difficulty is that this is something that we are storing up for ourselves, in a sense. As Noelle indicated, there is sufficient support to help those schools that are in the formal intervention process. All the CASS services prioritise those schools. On the other hand —

Mr Newton: Sorry, I want to make sure I picked you up right. Did you say that you think that there is sufficient support?

Mrs Graham: Yes, to support the schools that are in the formal intervention process. That is certainly what our CASS colleagues tell us. They prioritise the schools that are in the formal intervention process.

Nevertheless, Noelle said in the last chief inspector's report that, particularly at post-primary level, once you get to a stage where a school is in the formal intervention process, the decline in standards and the downward trajectory has almost become endemic. You referred to culture, and when it gets to that point, it is quite difficult to turn things around and to improve them quickly.

Every School a Good School outlines the importance of support being in place before a school gets to that point. I think that that is where we have some difficulty at the moment, in that the support services are prioritising the schools that are already in a difficult situation, but really and truly, as a system, we need to be looking at ensuring that schools do not get to that point in the first place. The amount of time that has to be invested then in trying to improve things for everyone in that situation is difficult, and I think that our colleagues in CASS would say that they struggle to provide support to a school before it is in crisis. I think that that is a hugely important area that needs to be addressed in the system.

Mr Craig: I have met John to discuss the issues with all this. I can go only by my experience. You talk about adequate support, but I have noticed that, in the past year, the support officer on the board of our school has changed three times. I do not think that that experience will be much different to that in any other board or school. In my mind, there is definitely an issue with the changes in resources in boards. That has an impact on the level of support that you get from CASS, and I think that we need to bear that in mind when we say that there are adequate resources. If there were adequate resources, I would have expected more support than I have seen. We need to bear in mind that, with the running down of boards and the potential of something replacing them, a gap has been opening up. I can see it clearly, and I am not the principal of a school who is relying very heavily on that resource. So, I think that we need to be careful about saying that we believe that resources are there. I think that they are struggling to provide those resources. However, that is just my personal experience.

Mrs Graham: I agree, but that is outside our control. If you can exercise any influence there to support our colleagues in CASS, I think that that would be of huge benefit to the entire system. As I

said, I think that people are doing a valiant job to support the schools that are in the formal intervention process.

Mr Craig: They are struggling. I can see that.

Mrs Graham: I think that that is a fair comment.

Mr Newton: Faustina, you will be aware that the OECD report commented on ETI and CASS along the lines that Jonathan was talking about.

Can I ask you about the English and maths outcomes? You have recently engaged with, I think, 20 schools with poor English and maths outcomes. As ETI is now engaging with schools with numeracy and literacy issues, does that indicate that we are beginning to review the methodology and that we are maybe now looking more at a CASS-type approach rather than an intervention-type approach?

Mrs Buick: The project to support the 20 schools — 10 in English and 10 in maths — is a new area of work for us. It was identified, and I agreed with this, that the level of expertise that our English and maths inspectors have in their subject is superb. This project provides an opportunity for them to disseminate that expertise on a one-to-one basis with the schools. In the past few months, we have undertaken baseline inspections in each of those schools to identify the areas for improvement, and those inspectors now go in on a monthly basis to support the heads of department to implement their action plan. They will be supported by two expert practitioners, one each in English and maths, and where collective areas to be addressed are identified, they will run workshops to which all English and maths specialists will be invited. So, it is a new departure for us. It was cautiously received at the outset, but it has been well received now that it is in train and is providing dedicated support to those schools.

Mr Newton: Am I right in thinking that that falls under the CASS-type approach?

Mrs Buick: It is very much a supportive process and something that we have not done before. It is an extension of the interim follow-up activity and the district inspector activity that we do. However, it is different, in that it is targeted and dedicated support to those schools.

Mr Craig: I start off by declaring an interest as the chair of a board of governors of a school that is subject to your inspection at the minute. I pay tribute to John. I am a firm believer in working with you, not against you, on these issues and, in fairness, John went well and truly out of his way to attend a board of governors meeting about a month ago. That was one of the most useful meetings that we had ever had on how to make improvements at the school. That ties in with the subject of value added, and part of our discussions that night was how we can measure that. There are a lot of figures floating about in secondary schools in particular about the performance of pupils, and you and the other inspector were able to tell us quite clearly how there is a methodology by which you could track progress and see the value added in pupils. It might do no harm to indicate to us that there is a method of doing that.

Whilst there is a lot of information floating about on performance in secondary schools, I was struck by the question of whether there was the same amount of information floating about in primary schools. Do you think that there is? If not, how would you track the value added in primary schools?

Mr J Anderson: First, thank you for the compliment, but it is misdirected. The district inspector, John Murray, is the person who has worked most closely with the school.

Mr Craig: I know he has, but I appreciate that you were there too.

Mr J Anderson: As you indicated, we discussed how a school would understand whether it was effectively adding value for its pupils. In other words, and to put it more into the language that we use in 'Together Towards Improvement', how they were making progress by building on their prior learning and achieving their potential. That is the language of 'Together Towards Improvement'. Value added can have technical explanations that are not necessarily as clear as that.

We talked about the information that a school has on its intake and the level that they might have achieved in Key Stage 2 assessments. While many schools will say that that is a crude measure and they do not feel that they can rely on it enough, nevertheless government funds are invested in

providing those levels, and levels of progression are currently being embedded in schools. In addition, schools use a number of other diagnostic and other standardised tests to add to the information that they have on each pupil, such as the cognitive ability test, progress in English and mathematics tests, and others. Schools vary in what they choose but those are the most common. They also use predictive data tests from university providers called middle years information system (MidYIS) and the year 11 information system (Yellis). Those allow the school to predict, through the test, what those pupils should be expected to achieve by Key Stage 3 and by the end of Key Stage 4 and GCSE.

The key to success in a school understanding whether it is providing sufficient individual support is to bring that basket of test measures together and add to them the judgements of the teachers who are working with them daily in the classroom — that is the most valid of all the assessments that teachers have — and the school's knowledge of that child's circumstances and what barriers outside school he or she has to overcome, what his or her attendance rate is and whether he or she is subject to suspension or is engaging in low levels of disruptive behaviour. The more a school can bring together a basket of information about a pupil, the more successfully it can intervene — that is a word that carries no baggage in a school — in supporting a pupil if they seem to be falling behind their expected achievements. Additionally, they can ask themselves what else they need to do to try to help those pupils do better than the expected level by Key Stage 3 and GCSE. The success of that approach will determine how successful individual pupils are. That has to be the school's first priority. We had discussions along those lines during the meeting with the governors that evening.

Mr Craig: Yes.

Mr J Anderson: We tried to help to unpack the understanding among the governors of how the senior leaders and the middle managers — the heads of departments and the coordinators for literacy and numeracy — were effectively supporting those pupils. The history, without going into too much detail that would identify where we are talking about, is that, over the recent period, they significantly improved achievement in English and mathematics. The broader issue was how they could use those improvements to lever improvements across all subjects since, after all, literacy is the language of learning and mathematics, as in numeracy, is essential to success in a number of other subjects. Is that helpful?

Mr Craig: That is helpful. It explains how we do it in the secondary situation. However, John, what are your thoughts about where that leaves a primary school that perhaps does not have the same —

Mr J Anderson: Perhaps Heather is the best person to answer that question.

Mrs Jackson: The process would be very similar to what John has explained. In the primary sector, from when the child enters year 1, there is a transition record from the preschool. That gives evidence on the six areas of the curriculum and the pastoral well-being of the child. That is analysed by the year 1 teacher. During the two-year foundation stage — years 1 and 2 in primary school — the qualitative data is built up on how the child learns to read and how successful they are in acquiring number skills. That is the qualitative evidence that the teacher would have. In primary schools, we also have the middle infant screening test (MIST). That determines levels of responsiveness to reading text and writing. So, there is a qualitative build-up in years 1 and 2.

In years 3 and 4, and then through years 5 to 7, almost all primary schools now use the Progress in English and Progress in Maths assessments. They measure the children's in English and maths from year to year. That is tracked on an individual basis, in cohorts and across the whole school. Some schools also administer a non-reading intelligence test. That measures the potential of a child. Most schools are comparing similar data and asking whether they are doing a good enough job. They are taking their qualitative data from the child's free action on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis. In some schools, there is rigorous monitoring and evaluation of progressing the individual. In certain cases, as John said, individual targets are set for children. Children are involved with their own learning targets.

The quality of the teaching is so important that the programme in the class is designed around it. We cannot escape the high-quality teaching. It is about using that information to make a difference for every individual child. Those benchmarks are available in the primary school. We also have the levels of progression in communication, which is English and literacy in the wider field and also in maths. That sets almost a Province-wide benchmark of progression through those topics.

Mr Craig: That is interesting. It leads to a number of questions on all of this. You have indicated how you can measure the value added to a child throughout both primary and secondary school. The fear out there, which has been expressed time and again by just about everyone who has given evidence to the Committee, is that there is an artificial, target-driven system for inspection, whereby we must get to this level here, but there are schools and children out there whose level starts off so low that it is a massive achievement to get them to this level and it may well be impossible to get them up to the artificial target that is out there. Do you take that into account?

Mrs Buick: I think that, in my opening presentation, I said that progress is an important determinant in our evaluation of achievement and standards. I think that progress, or added value, as you describe it, can lead to a judgment that, on the face of it, may be out of line with the GCSE outcomes for similar schools. However, schools have to be able to demonstrate to us that they add value to their pupils' learning. I think that what John and Heather have described shows that we absolutely take into account added value when we make our evaluations.

Schools that have been through the inspection process know that that is how we work. I just wonder how many of the submissions that we have had are from schools that have not been through the process and have a different perception of how we carry out inspection. I know that we take account of value added. Heather and John have described very well how we do that. So, as part of our communication, perhaps that is something that we need to communicate more widely.

Mr J Anderson: I will make two points, if I may. First, the chief is right, of course, but the point, as I indicated, is that we are really interested to know how well the school knows that the pupils have added value. I referred to the second point in my answer to Chris Hazzard's question. We are required by the Department to report on the school in the terms of the targets set out in the Programme for Government, which are set by the Executive. Therefore, five or more GCSEs, including English and Maths, and seven or more in a grammar school, are the prime targets that people regard in the Programme for Government, and we are obliged to report on that. We do that in every report.

However, if the only focus in a report was whether a school was achieving that magic number, we would be doing it a lot of disservice by failing to recognise the extent to which it serves all pupils and the whole ability range within that school. An unintended and undesirable outcome of focusing on only one government target would be that the school, in order to demonstrate that it achieved it — at whatever level government has set — would focus on moving pupils who might attain a grade D over the boundary and into grade C. And that is all very well and good, because the school will have raised standards. However, it may well do that at the expense of more able pupils in the school who attain a B but should get an A or an A*, or the lower-ability pupils in the school, who obtain a G when they should have obtained an E, which would provide them with a progression pathway into apprenticeships and training, whereas a G would not.

Therefore, although we have to report on Programme for Government targets, we look at a whole range of assessment measures in a school to try to ascertain, depending on the make-up of that community in that school, how well it serves its particular community. That requires professional insight and judgement, and knowledge of how the community in that school is made up. That is where the strength of our district inspector's knowledge of the school comes into play. I think that the misapprehension occurs because schools see that we have to report on the standard in the Programme for Government: any five GCSEs, including English and maths. However, they perhaps do not realise — unless they have been recently involved in the inspection process, as the chief indicates — that those other measures are important to make sure that the school is doing its best for everyone, not just for those who, if I can put it rather bluntly, make the school look better.

Mr Craig: I think that is a big issue. A target-driven approach does not necessarily indicate the value added that the school provides for pupils, and that goes right across the board. That leads me into another area that I need to ask you a few questions about, which is the actual reporting and the way the initial report is worded. This is something which happens, and we are all guilty of it. We all get a report so thick, and what is the first thing we do? We look at the summary. In the case of your inspection report, we look at the last page. In particular, the press is looking for only one thing, and that is the final word. The press has damaged and destroyed many a good school out there by that type of reporting. I want to know your thoughts and opinions on that. You are very limited in the wording that you can use. As John well knows, there was a heated argument about this in the moderation meeting, as you called it. I thought it an amusing term, because there was not much moderation in that meeting. What are your thoughts on the wording? Are you happy with the way

reports are worded at the minute, or should we move to something that better reflects the fact that there is a fundamentally good school there, but there is a need for improvement?

Mrs Buick: There has been a lot of internal and external discussion about the performance levels that we use. However, it is fair to say that those performance levels were set before my time. The words that we use — "outstanding" to "unsatisfactory" — were agreed after a significant consultation with a whole range of stakeholders. That is how they came into being, but that is not to say that we do not need to look at the wording and performance levels. We have already some work on that internally that we have shared, in the broadest terms, with the teaching unions and the associate assessors. What we are looking at are statements, not just one word, possibly around the six performance levels. The feedback that we get is that they are still considered relevant because schools are able to demonstrate improvement, whereas, if we had fewer than that, it would be more difficult for a school to demonstrate improvement.

That is where we are currently. We are certainly looking at more statements on the performance levels that we award, rather than words. We are also looking at the overall effectiveness, evaluation and performance level that we use at the moment. Would that be better written as a "capacity to improve" judgement, more linked to the self-evaluation process? Do we think that a school has the capacity, through its self-evaluation, to improve? That is where we are. We are not there yet, because there is still considerable work to be done, but we are certainly having that discussion and dialogue.

Mr Craig: I know that you did not create the system and you have to live within it, but is there an acceptance and realisation of the damage that it can potentially do to a school?

Mrs Buick: We have to report without fear or favour, as we find. All of us in this room have one focus and one interest: improving the quality of provision for learners. We will always have to do that. What happens with the inspection outcome once we report is out of our hands. If there is anything that we can do jointly to moderate the reporting of that more widely in the media, that would be beneficial to all, I guess. We can never walk away from saying that provision is not good enough, but we make sure that, though the supportive process of the interim follow-up visits, the follow-up inspection and the district inspector activity, we do our bit to support the schools to improve the quality of provision, which I hope we are demonstrating that we are doing, alongside our CASS colleagues.

Mr Craig: If we are asking the press to take part in all of that, I think we are on a hiding to nothing. Bad news sells papers, unfortunately. They never sell good news. Scotland has reviewed that process and come up with completely different wording. Has that been looked at, Noelle?

Mrs Buick: The wording in Scotland, as Heather described, is almost identical to our current wording. They write a letter to parents, which does not have the performance levels in it, but it is put on the website. They also have a more detailed document that does have the performance levels attached to a series of indicators. That is on the website right alongside the parents' letter. So they do report exactly as we do at the moment, except that they have the separate letter that goes out to parents. However, if you look at any school, you will see performance levels one to six attached to that school.

Mr Craig: One to six, but do they use those emotive words "satisfactory" and "inadequate"?

Mrs Buick: They are very similar. Heather probably has them. They use "weak".

Mrs Jackson: Yes, the inspectorate in Scotland, HMIE, still makes the call on the standards and quality of the learning and teaching in the school. That is a separate document. I have read out the wording for the letter to parents — "no further inspection activity", "additional support for improvement", "continued inspection" and "innovative practice". That is the wording that will be sent to parents, but, as Noelle has rightly pointed out, a separate sheet stands alongside that gives quality indicators such as "weak" and "satisfactory", so they still make the call on the overall standing, benchmarked across Scotland, similar to what we do in Northern Ireland.

Mr Craig: That is interesting: "weak" and "satisfactory".

Mrs Buick: They go from one to six. There are six levels. I cannot remember the exact wording for each.

Mrs Jackson: "Weak" would be equivalent to our "inadequate". They are very similar.

Mr Craig: They may be equivalent, but do they actually use the word "inadequate"?

Mrs Jackson: No, equivalent to our "inadequate" would be their "weak". They use the word "weak".

Mr Craig: You will understand why I am asking about this. I find that language around education in schools is incredibly important. The difference between a parent making a choice to send a child to an "inadequate" school and a "weak" school is massive. You may well make the decision to send your child to a "weak" school, but once the word "inadequate" is used, you start to ask all sorts of questions. As a parent, I would ask the same questions. If a school is labelled "inadequate", why would I ever send my child there? That is why I ask whether you are looking at that specific word that is used. It has all sorts of negative connotations that do not necessarily reflect the school at all.

Mrs Buick: We are looking at the performance levels and the language because that is the feedback that we have had. Work is in progress to do that. The direction of travel that we are going in is that it will not be one word but it will be a statement. Nevertheless, whatever the wording is, at the end of the day, we will still have schools that are better performing than others. The language might be different, but the reality will be the same.

Mrs Graham: We also accept that everything is of its time. From what you are saying and from what we are seeing, in some instances, people are reducing the inspection report to the one word, which does not mean that the school itself is inadequate but is about the quality of teaching. That is how people interpret it, and I fully accept what you are saying. As former teachers, we know that no one wants even a pupil to look just at what it says at the end. We want them to look at the annotations and at the areas that you have identified in the body of a report. If schools are not using that information from the report effectively, it starts to become counterproductive, and I think that we have to take that into account. We might even be ahead of Scotland by taking that into account and reviewing it. I would like to think that we can do things better here, as opposed to just emulating what other people do. I think that what you are saying is accurate in that, when we introduced the six performance levels, we carried out an extensive consultation with the system, but times change. At that time, there was absolutely not the same press interest, for example, in inspection reports. I think that it was done with the right intentions in the interests of transparency, but we accept that, at this time, we need to review that. Hopefully, we will be in a better place with that.

Mr Kinahan: I know that inspection is absolutely vital, so any question that I ask or anything that I say from a negative point of view is meant to be helpful. One of the matters that really bothers me is how you assess before you get to a school. You talked about objectivity, greater partnerships and dialogue. How do you assess whether the school has had time to do all of the things that we are asking of it? So, my question is more on the longitudinal process of studying the schools. What are you putting in place to ensure that, when you get there, with the cuts that are coming in or the mass of paperwork of assessment systems that are being put in place and the lack of time that they have to do the training that they are meant to be doing, they can do it and that you are assessing them fairly, if I can put it that way, against a system that is cutting more and more and making their lives busier and busier? Most teachers and principals I talk to seem to be working until midnight almost every day.

Mrs Buick: I accept that jobs in education, like many others, are demanding. There is no doubt about that, and principals do the job because they are absolutely committed to improving the life chances of young people. On the question of what we do about it, we come back to where we started. School improvement and the sustainability of school improvement rest with the school, and the most important and fundamental thing that a school can do is to carry effective self-evaluation that is a process, not an event. Through that, with the resources and the time that they have, they can identify the priorities that they can improve. That is fundamental to the school improving and is also fundamental to the start of our inspection process because we look at the school's development plan and the self-evaluation process as part of our inspection process. Of course, we have talked about the district inspector's role in supporting a school if it needs some help with the self-evaluation process, although there is also other support through CASS. Schools themselves, post primaries in particular, get good support through the area learning communities, where aspects of good practice are discussed and shared.

Mr J Anderson: I touched on this matter during our meeting a fortnight ago. District inspector knowledge is key. The district inspectors now receive the annual data pack, which the statistics team

in the Department produces for the board of governors of every school. Also, in their link with the school, they will be aware of the school's current work on its development plan priorities and how its action plans are progressing. There is limited time as you heard; nevertheless, specialist inspectors would have time to make some visits to schools, and they will always make a record in our database of their visits so that the district inspector, or the reporting inspector when it comes to planning an inspection visit for the team, can look back over all the information that is available to make some sort of assessment. This information is important to us because it feeds into our proportionate risk-based approach. Schools are not selected randomly for inspection; a percentage is promoted based on the time that they are due for inspection and there is an assessment of some of those risks that are contingent on the performance of the school. If we need to look at the school earlier than we might normally, we will promote it in the inspection schedule. That is the kind of information that allows us to make the assessments that you are asking about.

Mr Kinahan: Is there a feedback system? I know that you give feedback to the Committee to question the Minister on all the policies that are coming through. Is there a feedback system that allows you to say that you need more resources or district inspectors so that you can do your job effectively?

Mrs Buick: We have a business planning process that takes place each year. We talk to each of our commissioning departments; we do not just inspect for DE but for DEL, DCAL, CJI and lots of other departments and inspectorates. It is through that commissioning process that we identify the resources that we need.

Mr Kinahan: I will turn it round slightly. A quote that we had from someone the other day was, "Does it have to be like this?", which really refers to the stress that is often perceived as part of the inspection system. What are you putting in place to try to get rid of the stress factor? Part of it is the area planning and part of it is the viability audits that are loaded on to them, though not necessarily with your agreement. What are you putting in place to try to take the stress out of it so that the moderation becomes a softer process?

Mrs Buick: We have a lot of available guidance about the inspection process, which has been mentioned. We also have the role of the district inspector in liaising with schools around inspection, and we have the pre-inspection meeting, which is important because it outlines how the inspection process will take place during the week. However, it is not just our responsibility to take the stress — if I can use your word — out of inspection; it is a big responsibility for a principal. A principal said to me, "When the letter about the inspection lands on my desk, my first job is to tell the staff about the inspection and say that the inspectors are not looking for anything that we are not already doing". What we are doing is just looking at what a school does normally, and it is the principal's job to make sure that the staff are not stressed. It is a joint role to make sure that the inspection runs smoothly.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you. With regard to the way in which questionnaires are used at the moment, do you accept that they can be used to either abuse the system or to exacerbate problems in the system? There a mechanism there for people who have either decided that they do not like a teacher or do not like the system to load the system by their comments.

Mrs Buick: We have worked very hard to refine our questionnaires and our questionnaire process. For each questionnaire, the teachers have to identify themselves through their teacher number, and support staff have to put their name on the questionnaire, so there is that check and balance that they are authentic. We use the questionnaires to determine lines of inquiry; we do not use them absolutely as part of the inspection process. In any organisation, I guess that there will always be people who, for whatever reason, are unhappy and want to have an opportunity to highlight their issues. However, we take a very balanced view of the information that we get through the questionnaires and use them as lines of inquiry.

Mr J Anderson: I will make two points, if I may. First, we need to recall that the vast majority of parents and teachers' responses in the questionnaires are highly positive. They appreciate the school, they affirm the school, they like having their children there, they like working there and they believe that the school is doing the best job possible. They are not, as they are portrayed sometimes, gripe sheets.

Secondly, rather than the odd negative comment, issues may emerge that may be significant, and there may be a number of comments around the same issue. The first things that we need to know are whether the school is already aware of that, whether it is conducting its own questionnaires with parents and staff and whether it is aware that there are issues. If it is aware, we need to know how it

is managing those issues. That is the line of questioning that we would take. We do not set out to investigate accusations or allegations that are made; that is not our role. That is the role of the principals, the governors and the employing authorities of schools, not the role of the inspectorate. Our interest is in how well the school is managing issues and how aware it is of the views of parents and staff about successful life and work in that school. We absolutely stand over the right of parents and staff, with the opportunity of an inspection visit, to provide their views on the way that we do it. I want to set it in that context.

Mr Kinahan: Would you encourage them to use third-party questionnaires or to use outside systems?

Mr J Anderson: Effective schools already do that, and the interesting thing for us will be that an effective school that knows its community well and its staff — the internal and external communities — will not be surprised about any issue that we say has come up on a questionnaire. The effective school will be able to tell us what it is doing to address it.

The Chairperson: Jonathan, please be brief, because I am well aware that time has marched on.

Mr Craig: I will be very brief. Do you at some level correlate internal complaints? No matter what questionnaire you use, you will pick up internal politics that go on in any school among the teaching staff. Have you ever correlated that with the performance figures that you gather around some of the teaching staff? To me, there can sometimes be a very interesting correlation between the complainants and the performance issues that adversely affect the school.

Mr J Anderson: There may be.

Mr Craig: Is that taken into account when you are doing the overall report?

Mr J Anderson: When we have the response summarised for us and it is sent to the reporting inspector, the first thing that he or she does is discuss it with the principal and the senior leadership team to ascertain that the questions, as I said in answer to Mr Kinahan —

Mr Craig: And —

Mr J Anderson: Secondly, they will share it with the governors when they meet them so that they are aware of the issue. It may point to an area that needs to be investigated that falls within the inspection, but some issues raised will not.

I will give a real example. If you look across all the questionnaires, you see that, more often than not, the question about careers education gets the lowest score. The reason for that is that parents may often be discontent because their child did not have the career interaction that they wanted. They may therefore give careers education a lower score because they believe that, if the careers education guidance had been better, their young person might have had a better career pathway. If a number of people were saying that, we would discuss it with the school and ask whether it is aware of it.

Secondly, we would inspect careers provision, and we would be able to say, in our view, whether it is just a concern that some parents have because the child did not get the career, the job or go in the direction that they wanted. Or, we would be able to say that there is a weakness in the careers provision, which we would have evaluated independently from anything that the parents might have said, that merits further discussion. That is a way of illustrating it. If it points to an issue that needs inspection, we can look at it, but we do not use the answers themselves as first-hand, prima facie evidence. We use them to prompt a follow-up of our own evaluation.

Mrs Dobson: I will focus my question on parents. The submissions to the Committee from ParentsOutloud and Sir Robert Salisbury highlighted the concerns about limited parental understanding of and engagement with the schools around school improvement. Can you explain why the understanding of the inspection process and inspection reporting is so poor among parents?

Mrs Buick: Our engagement with ParentsOutloud was the first engagement that we had with any parental group in Northern Ireland. We would like to engage with parents more. That is definitely one of the things that we think is important. We have information on the website that is designed for parents. If someone is a parent and their school is being inspected, there is information on the website that they can access.

We would also expect the school, when it is being inspected, to inform parents that it is being inspected and to send out a questionnaire. When the inspection is complete and the report is published, we ask the school to send the inspection report out to parents and to confirm that that has happened. Those are the things that we have in place to engage parents as well as the parental questionnaire, which we highly value, during the inspection process.

I agree that we need to engage more with some parental groups to inform them about the inspection process. One of the things that came out of that parental engagement was the extent to which parents value inspection. It is really reassuring that inspection is highly valued by parents.

Mrs Dobson: It has been said, Noelle, that the ETI not taking the trouble to explain itself to key stakeholders — in this case, the parents — is an example of organisation arrogance. That certainly is a worry, and that is what I am hearing in my constituency. When your inspectors arrive at a school, who, essentially, are they there for? Are they there for the teachers, the principal, the pupils or the parents? Can you rank them in order of priority? How do you see your role? Who are you there for primarily?

Mrs Buick: I will go back to your previous point. If your constituents have ways that they, as parents, would like to engage with us, we would be really interested to hear that feedback, because that is an area of work that we wish to take forward. We are there to promote improvement for learners. That is our purpose. We are there to make sure that —

Mrs Dobson: The pupils.

Mrs Buick: Yes, absolutely. In that, we recognise the role that teachers, leaders and managers have in making sure that all pupils get high-quality teaching and learning and the outcomes that they deserve from their life in school. You will know that the key principles of Every School a Good School are about leadership, good teaching and learning and engaging with parents. So, we are very interested to hear how the school engages with the community, because I think that that is an important aspect of a good school.

Mr J Anderson: I recall — I cannot remember how long ago now, but it was some years back — engaging, for a time, in evening meetings with the parents of a school that was due to be inspected. We discontinued that practice for a couple of reasons. First, the turnout among parents was so small that it simply was not worth the resource. I reiterate what the chief says: we welcome any opportunity that we are offered or can find to meet parents' groups, as opposed to what we already do, which is meet governors routinely when we are inspecting. At the moment, we are involved, or are about to be involved, in a second round of meetings presenting to governors about our role during an inspection, how we look at the governing process and the degree of support and challenge offered to a school through the governors.

Mrs Dobson: I am glad to hear that pupils form the central reason for inspections when inspectors arrive at a school. I very much welcome your willingness to engage with and get feedback from parents. I hope that you do not regret that.

Mrs Buick: Not at all.

Mrs Dobson: I will certainly pass that on to the parents who contacted me.

That being the case, taking the position of a parent reading through a report, do you feel that you have a long way to go to present your findings in plain English? It seems so overly complicated. Parents want to fully understand what you are saying about their school and how the school is performing in their child's education. Do you agree that you have a way to go to present that in plain English?

Mr J Anderson: I believe that communicating clearly is a work in progress all the time. No matter how well you might think that you are doing it, there is always scope to improve. I would like to think that, if you looked back at inspection reports from five years ago, you would find that they are clearer now than they were then. However, that does not mean that there is not scope to bring even greater clarity and simplicity of language.

I noticed an example given by Professor Gardner when he spoke to you. I do not think that some of the language that he used would appear in a report, but other language would. I am not sure that we

would use the word "familial", because I am not sure that I would explain that easily. However, we do talk about curriculum breadth, and we assume that people know what that means. Perhaps we need to explain it in a simpler way.

It is my constant work to see whether my colleagues can communicate their findings in a way that makes it clear to parents what evaluations they came to and how they came to them; in other words, that they stand over the evidence. That goes back to a very early part of our meeting here about the process of quality assurance. Apart from ensuring consistency from team to team, very often, it is about ensuring that the report communicates clearly the evaluation that the team came to and the evidence that they based that on. That is, for me, a continued work in progress.

Mrs Buick: We spend a lot of time talking about our reports, their structure and how we can make them clearer. In September, we did a revision of our reports. I hope, as John says, that people think that they are clearer, but I suspect that we will never be done in improving the clarity.

Mr J Anderson: We produced a new editing guide as part of that so that we would have better consistency. Our reports are read by a wide diversity of audiences, all of whom want different things from the report. When writing the reports, one of the challenges is trying to say something that makes sense to an advisory officer, a departmental official, a parent, a teacher and a pupil. They all want to read different things.

Mrs Dobson: It is essential that parents can understand what is in the report. There is a way to go to make it easier.

Mr J Anderson: If it is clearly communicated, it should be clear to all those audiences.

Mrs Dobson: That probably leads into parental engagement, which you spoke about. So, you are keen to facilitate parental engagement.

Mrs Buick: Yes, definitely.

Mrs Dobson: Do you believe that the district inspector should play a larger role with parents, obviously, in communicating the concerns of our schools and in helping to explain self-evaluation to parents? They are still baffled and left in the dark.

Mrs Buick: We still have a finite resource; we cannot stretch it to everything. I certainly get letters from parents. Parents write to me about aspects of their schools' provision. Although we cannot investigate individual complaints or concerns from parents, all those letters are copied to the district inspector, and they pick that concern up on their next visit with the school, in a very open and transparent way, so that the principal is aware that we had the letter and has the opportunity to explain the circumstances. That happens all the time. We pick up on concerns that come directly to us from parents.

Mrs Dobson: At the start of your presentation, Noelle, you said that our inspections are but one dimension. So, it is vital that the information gets out and that the relationship with parents is built up so that they can understand it. It is not just purely about inspection. You have to communicate successfully around self-evaluation, in particular, with the parents. They need to feel involved with their school, which they are passionate about, and understand it.

Mrs Buick: You have probably heard this, but we do see good engagement with parents and schools. Some schools take groups of parents in to talk about various aspects. It might well be to include their views in the self-evaluation process. It is good practice to do that. So, the schools also have a responsibility to make sure that parents are clear about how the school operates, self-evaluation and the priorities for the schools. We see that schools often send out to parents a synopsis of the school development plan or their self-evaluation so that they are clear about those priorities. It is a joint relationship that we need to develop.

Mrs Jackson: Consultation with parents, children, governors and the community are essential aspects of the regulations for the school development plan. Therefore, there should be ongoing annual feedback to parents, and parental involvement, on the creation of a school development plan. If it is not annual, it should be done at least every three years. If the school is not doing that, you have to ask about the communication systems within the school.

Mrs Dobson: In my experience, the communication system with schools and parents is usually very good.

Mr Rogers: Good afternoon, everybody. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: It was the morning when we started.

Mr Rogers: As somebody who is going to another education inquiry at 2.00 pm, I will be brief. In February, you mentioned the unions, and there were certain minor industrial relations situations. Is it a fact that, in 2011-12, about 10% of inspections were not finished and put back until the following year?

Mrs Buick: We did have the action, short of strike, that was taken by the teaching unions. That was nothing to do with inspection as such. The reason for the action was around the discussions, which were then ongoing, about pay and conditions. Inspection was used as the vehicle to articulate that concern. We had non-cooperation in a number of schools. We carried out the inspection activities that we could carry out in the time that we had scheduled, and then we went back and completed those inspections a year later. So, they are all now complete.

Mr Rogers: Do you believe that industrial relations/unions is crucial to the school leadership and the school inspection process?

Mrs Buick: I think so. Relations with the unions have improved since the action, short of strike, was suspended. It has never been formally called off. We have regular meetings with the NITC, which represents most of the teaching unions in Northern Ireland. I think we have good dialogue. We do not always agree, but we have good dialogue now around aspects of inspection, which is the area that I am interested in.

Mr Rogers: The OECD said that the Department could do more to embed self-evaluation in schools. What is your comment on that?

Mrs Buick: More can always be done to improve self-evaluation. We got the revised TTI in 2010, which supports school self-evaluation better. We have also got the new regulations for school development planning, which embeds self-evaluation as part of the process. A light is being shone on self-evaluation, which is helpful, but we can always do more to support the process. The fact that it is absolutely key to post-primary inspections is important.

Mr J Anderson: It is central to the inspection, Seán, but it is also the one measure on our evaluation of schools that is the least effective. Action to promote improvement *[Inaudible.]* underlying action plan in monitoring and evaluation allows the school's priorities to be turned into practice, but it is the weakest area. In almost half the schools that we evaluated in the *[Inaudible.]* it less than effective. It is better in primary, but that is because post-primary schools are more complicated organisations.

The answer has to be yes. There is a lot of work to be done to promote the effectiveness of it in bringing improvement. That is arguably the highest priority.

Mr Rogers: Coming back to Jo-Anne's point, would that also help the link between parents and schools? They would have robust information year on year, which would help that process as well. If it was well enough embedded in schools, would it slightly change the whole inspection process?

Mr J Anderson: Of course it would. We have always described inspection as coming alongside self-evaluation. The schools that are most ready for inspection, as if it could happen tomorrow without any real anxiety, are those that have a really effectively embedded self-evaluation process because they are already engaged with the quality indicators, the evidence and the process that we bring to a school when we carry out our inspection visit. That is where real stress and anxiety would be reduced.

In schools that do not have that as part of their working culture and engage in it only because of a looming inspection, you can see where there might be higher stress as a consequence. They are not, if you like, inspection-ready at any time. Obviously, an objective would be that, because they are sufficiently well engaged in self-evaluation, any school should be inspection-ready.

Mr Rogers: The real question then is this: what can the ETI do to build the capacity for school self-evaluation?

Mr J Anderson: We have been asked that before, and the answer is that we take any opportunity that we can to contribute to helping to promote the use of our self-evaluation process, 'Together Towards Improvement', and understanding the language in it. Some people say that they do not understand the language in it or are not familiar enough with the processes. We will take any opportunity. On a school-to-school basis, that can best be done through the district inspector, but we look for other opportunities and events where we can communicate with other agencies, for example, the regional training unit. Perhaps that whole process should have a much higher profile in leadership development at middle management as well as senior management level.

Mrs Buick: There are also the area learning communities. Post-primary principals certainly value the opportunity to share good practice around a range of things, including self-evaluation.

Mr Rogers: In an answer to Robin about CASS, I heard the expression "outside our control". School inspections, improvements and development and the provision of high-quality staff development are of major concern, but you say that the fact that they cut so much of the budget is outside your control. There was also something you said, John, about levels of progression. It is a programme of government, but it is a crude measure. I am particularly concerned about that, because we know that they are very crude measures. Is your role in the inspectorate compromised because you are part of the Department?

Mrs Buick: No. I have responded to that question before. We are embedded in the Department, but the judgements and evaluations that we make are made without fear or favour and without interference from the Minister or anyone else. Our judgements and evaluations are completely independent. I have said to you before that I have experience of working in an NDPB. I also have experience of working in a non-ministerial government Department, and I now have experience of working in ETI, which is embedded in the Department of Education. There is no difference in terms of our operational independence to be able to make the decisions that we make about inspection. There are benefits from a financial perspective in that we can share human resources, finance and so on, but our decisions are absolutely independent on the quality of provision in schools and all the other areas that we inspect.

Mr Rogers: The levels of progression are crude measures, and I will illustrate one example. A child at level 4 communication could be, in the standardised score, between 95 and 125. A child that scores 95 needs immediate intervention, and a child with a score of 125 is a very competent communicator. If those are crude measures, why can ETI not do something with the Department to make it a better measure?

Mrs Buick: I will ask John to come in in a moment. If we find issues with any aspect of the learning journey or experience, we will report it. For example, we carried out the ETI evaluation of the computer-based assessment arrangements. That is one example, and Faustina very much feeds into discussions about the levels of progression, but there are complications in getting agreement on the moderation of the levels of progression. We all fundamentally agree that the teachers' input into determining the stage that a child is at in their learning experience is fundamentally important, but there are some things that need to be addressed around the moderation process. I think that the principle that we subscribe to is right.

Mr J Anderson: Let us remember that we are only in the second year of teachers' experience of using the levels of progression across the whole system. The first use of them fully across the whole system was last year. So, in a sense, they are still bedding in. They are perhaps broad rather than crude. You know them well and can understand the breadth within them. They are a broad measure. Schools sometimes express anxiety to us about whether the levels reached at the end of Key Stage 2 for all of their contributory primary schools are consistent or not. Heather may or may not want to comment on that. The issue, as I indicated in an earlier answer, is that you never depend on one single measure. Broadly speaking, if a pupil is at a certain level at Key Stage 2, you ought to expect them to reach a certain level at Key Stage 3 and at GCSE. The school's job is to add value to that — in other words, that they do better than expected. That ought to be the school's mission. However, you would not use that measure alone. You use teachers' judgement, other assessment measures and your knowledge of the pupil, their background and the barriers that the pupil needs to overcome in order to progress and build on their prior learning. I do think that our language around there, as already indicated, is a much more helpful way of looking at it than value added.

Mr Rogers: Yes, but, unfortunately, parents and schools are driven by what is in league tables and whatever else, and once schools see that they are below the Northern Ireland average, it causes problems. Some of that data could possibly be skewed as well. Do you not think that it is a major problem that needs to be addressed?

Mr J Anderson: By whom? I suppose I am asking you to clarify: by whom? I have indicated what we do in inspections, because we have to report on the Programme for Government target. We do not limit ourselves. That would be very narrow, and data like that does not provide a conclusive view about a school. There is a very broad range of learning experiences and improvements that pupils make as they progress through the school. So, we know what we are doing to look at the school in the broader sense. We work within some government statistics that are provided to benchmark that school. If there are ways to improve on those government statistics, we will work in that context, because that is the government context in which we work. You have heard rehearsed throughout this inquiry the difficulties about getting anything that might be more effective and that does not have negative consequences.

Mrs Buick: We have a role in raising expectations too. We know that one of the things that enable a child to be successful is a school having high expectations about their achievement. Comparisons with the Northern Ireland average help to do that. As John said, they are not the only thing, and they are not the only thing that we take into account, but they are helpful in delivering the message that high expectations are important.

Mrs Graham: It is fair to say as well that in the primary sector in particular, we will have plenty of instances of inspection reports which may say precisely that. Those outcomes are reported factually. We are not making an evaluation of those outcomes; they are reported factually as being above or below the average, or if they are above the median with regard to free school meals as a comparator. You will find many examples in the primary sector where it may state "below the average", but that does not mean that achievements in standards of those pupils are evaluated as satisfactory or less. It will often still be good overall, because we look at everything in the school, as John indicated.

In primary, we look at the end-of-key-stage results. As Heather indicated, we are looking progress in English and maths. Most importantly, however, we are looking at what happens in the classroom. That, ultimately, is the thing that we do that no one else has, I suppose, the privilege of doing, which is observing first-hand what is happening in the classroom. We marry that with the teacher's planning and with the assessment processes that are ongoing in the classroom and the work in the children's books. In the primary sector, that is often nearly easier to do because each class has one teacher, as opposed to post-primary, where you have a spread of teachers.

In looking at all of those things holistically and collectively, that is where we make the evaluation. That is much fairer than a school simply being part of a league table, in the sense that we have had what looks like league tables published in the press, but we would never use any one of those indicators on its own as a way of evaluating achievements and standards in the school. That does not mean to say that, as we have talked about this morning, the perception is different to that. We still have to work at clarifying that so that people feel that they are being looked at in that rounded way. They really are.

Mr Rogers: OK. Why are draft inspection reports, then, shared with the Department?

Mrs Buick: They are not.

Mrs Graham: No. The only thing that will ever go to colleagues in the Department is where a school is likely to go into formal intervention and we do what we call the oral report back before it receives the final report. We leave an A4 piece of paper that sums up the strengths that have been identified and the areas for improvement. Those are left with the school so that it can get on with the action planning process and work with the support services to begin to address any of the issues that have been identified.

We also provide that information to the Department: nothing else, simply that one page that the school is in receipt of, so that that process can be enacted as quickly as possible. That is because Every School a Good School states that the school must provide a management response to the Department within 30 days. Therefore, to try and give each party the information, we pass that on to colleagues in the Department. But we would never share a draft report, no. The first time that anyone will see the draft report beyond us is when it goes to the school to be checked for its factual accuracy.

Mr J Anderson: We also tell the Department right away if we evaluate the school as unsatisfactory for child protection. That is the other thing that we communicate immediately.

Mr Rogers: Thanks for clarifying that. Why does the ETI have a role in development proposals for area planning?

Mrs Buick: There are six criteria, as you know, to determine the sustainability of a school, and one of those is the quality of education. Our input into that is only one part. We give a factual outline of what we know about the school from inspection or through the district inspector process, but we have no role or locus in making any decisions around area planning. It is purely one piece of information that feeds in — a development plan, sorry.

Mr J Anderson: The district inspector would, for example, summarise the most recent inspection evidence and inspection history of that school. That is provided as a memo to that division in the Department. And if there are implications for other schools nearby, the inspector would point out that there are other schools enrolling pupils from the same contributing primary.

Mr Rogers: Can you see how that particular practice could actually damage the professional independence of ETI?

Mr J Anderson: No.

Mrs Buick: It is a factual record that is provided; nothing other than that. It is available after the development proposal is made.

Mr J Anderson: Only the inspectorate can tell the Department what the quality and effectiveness of the education provision in that school is, so that is what the district inspectors do. They summarise what has been said about that school through inspection evidence.

Mrs Graham: And we have always done that, even when there has not been the whole emphasis on area-based planning. As John said, we are the professional advisers to the Department in that way. Colleagues in the Department of Education are then free to accept, reject or ignore our advice. That is as it should be, but we will still offer that advice, and it is up to the person who is looking at all the advice — as Noelle said — in the round to make a final decision. If anything, that is more likely to be supportive of the school, because we have first-hand knowledge of it and of the quality of education provision in it. So, on balance, that works more favourably for the school than being likely to be adverse, in summary.

Mr Rogers: Time precludes me from going any further.

Mr Hazzard: I want to touch quickly on Irish-medium education. I think that most of us were quite surprised to learn that inspections were taking place with inspectors who had, let us say, less than proficient understanding of immersion education and use of Irish. I am looking for your view on that, and what is being done to address it.

Mrs Buick: Some 42 of our inspectors mainly undertake school inspection. Of those, about six, or 14%, actually have Irish as one of their language skills.

Mr Hazzard: Sorry, to what level?

Mrs Buick: There are various levels. We have fluency, and we have people who have A-level Irish.

Mr Hazzard: How many of the six are fluent?

Mrs Buick: It depends on how you determine fluency.

Mr Hazzard: How do you determine it?

Mrs Buick: We have people who can undertake observations in Irish, converse in Irish and understand what is happening in the classroom in Irish. That is the lowest level to those who are fluent in Irish. We have six inspectors that we deploy effectively on our Irish-medium school

inspections. As I have said, that is about 14% of our provision. The Irish-medium schools make up something like 2.7% of schools. What I am trying to demonstrate is that we have skills and expertise within the inspectorate commensurate with the number of schools that we have in the Irish-medium sector. We will always have those inspectors also inspecting in English-medium schools, because the Irish-medium sector is part of the schools landscape. It is not apart from it. Therefore, it is important that the standards that we see in English-medium schools are consistent with what we see in Irish-medium schools. We spend a lot of time providing training in language for Irish-medium inspectors. We have a very joined-up process with the South, and we have inspectors going there. The South has a summer school where they talk about inspecting Irish-medium education and conversing in the language of inspection through Irish. Our inspectors attend that, so we have a good staff development programme for those inspectors to improve their skills.

Mr Hazzard: I do not share your confidence with regard to the percentages. We could have a thousand inspectors for Irish-medium, but if they do not have that level of understanding of immersion education, they are still no use. Is there any scope to work with the South to have inspectors from there inspecting schools in the North? Again, despite the explanation that you have given today, the representatives of the sector do not have any confidence whatsoever. They made it very clear that day that they want to see attention put on this. I do not think that the Committee can do anything other than empathise with the situation. Certainly, when it comes to full-immersion Irish-medium education, I think that we are unique here in these isles in that English-speaking inspectors are going in to inspect full-immersion schools in the North.

Mrs Buick: We will always have an Irish-speaking inspector on the team — at least one, if not more. Please be reassured that that always happens. With regard to your question about doing more joint work with the South, yes, I have discussed that with the chief inspector in the South. I think that we are both open to that. What we need to discuss is whether the legal landscape will allow us to do that. We are actually both very open to doing that joint work. We already do North/South exchanges anyway. In fact, our agriculture inspector has gone down and carried out inspection in the agricultural colleges in the South because they are just starting to do that work. I suppose that that has paved the way for that sort of exchange and interaction to take place. So, yes, I am very interested in pursuing that.

Mr Hazzard: I think that it is important that we focus on it. I do not think that we would tolerate someone who was German with A-level English to come in and be fully expected to understand the whole scope of our English-speaking schools. I do not think that it is the same. The same sort of equity should be applied.

Mrs Buick: I think that what I explained, Chris, is that that is the lowest level that we have. We have people who go up to full fluency. In September, we actually recruited a new fluent Irish-speaking inspector. So, we are adding to our resource as resourcing will allow us.

Mr Lunn: Is this not a classic situation in which the role of the associate assessor could be brought into play and an associate assessor who is fluent could be brought in from another Irish-speaking school?

Mrs Buick: Where we can do that, we do. However, you will know that the Irish-speaking community is actually very closely knit —

Mr Lunn: I think that there are enough of them out there that you could find someone.

Mrs Buick: We have associate assessors in Irish, and we do use them, without a shadow of a doubt. However, in some cases, there are conflicts of interest where it is just not possible. We have got them, and we use them where we can.

Mrs Graham: And we need more. We will appoint people who apply and who meet those competencies at interview. However, we would also encourage more people from the Irish-medium sector to apply for associate assessor roles, because we have struggled with recruitment in the past. It would be really helpful if we could get more people to apply for the posts, as well.

The Chairperson: Robin, you have one final question. I need to bring this to a conclusion.

Mr Newton: Very quickly, Chair. You know that we had a meeting with district inspectors. There were a number of features and points made in the discussions about their role and their ability to visit. I think that they quoted something like it could be five-plus years before they actually get a chance to visit a school. You made the point that CASS is outside your control. I just wonder whether there is not the potential to use the district inspectors to help a school in a pastoral role, I suppose, and to help the improving school, rather than concentrating on inspections? Is that not perhaps a more constructive role than an inspection one?

Mrs Buick: I think that I mentioned earlier that 14% — in fact, if you include the work that district inspectors do with follow-up inspections, it is 21% — of our resourcing available days are used for district inspection. At the moment, what they do is challenge and support schools outside the regular inspection process. That is really beneficial and very useful. However, at the same time, we need to carry out the inspections of individual schools and institutions to give a broad view and picture of what the quality of provision is like. As Jo-Anne has mentioned, parents value that information about schools. So, we are trying to balance those two resources all of the time. I know that the district inspectors carry out good work in the schools that they are able to visit. However, we have only a certain amount of resource to be able to do that. At the same time, the actual institutional inspections are really important, too. So, we need to balance that all of the time.

Mrs Graham: I think you really have to look at being very clear about what people's roles and responsibilities are. To just go into a support process from the point of view of ETI would not necessarily be appropriate. Professor Gardner spoke to you last week. He sees the two things as being very separate and distinct. An inspector gains the expertise and experience they have, first and foremost, through being a teacher, but then through the broad experience they get in visiting so many schools, seeing so much practice and beginning to see how those standards actually work across the sector.

If you are working only in support, on what basis are you supporting the school? It has to be on the basis of the knowledge and expertise that you have gained. So I think it is about being very clear about what you would be doing in that particular situation, as opposed to it just being an easy move from being an evaluator to being someone who is offering support. In the same way that our colleagues in CASS are trained in providing support, you have to be sure and there has to be clarity around the role that you are carrying out. I am not saying that that cannot be done, but I am saying that there would need to be a very clear strategy that outlined either that we were evaluating and providing some sort of support or not, as the case may be. It cannot be just slipping in and out of one to the other.

The Chairperson: Members, the PAC has to be in here for 2.00 pm, so we are really under time pressure.

Mr Rogers: I am part of the PAC, so I am fine.

The Chairperson: Unless the inspector wants to stay and be quizzed by the PAC. That would be fun.

Mr Rogers: It is a very quick one. You talked about the Irish medium. Will you just clarify? You said that one of the team had Irish. It is that one has some Irish, or that one is fluent in Irish?

Mrs Buick: At least one of the team will be highly proficient in Irish. At least one; it could be more.

Mrs Dobson: Finally, in your submission you said that most inspection teams include associate assessors who, as we know, are practising principals, vice-principals and senior managers. Obviously, they will have considerable experience. Are you not concerned that that creates inconsistency in inspection outcomes?

Mrs Buick: In what respect?

Mrs Dobson: You said "most". You did not say all inspections.

Mr J Anderson: It is a logistic point.

Mrs Dobson: But to be consistent —

Mr J Anderson: In a small school, for example, where there may only be 17 teachers — I am talking about a very small post-primary school — the team has to be kept at a reasonable level. You do not want to swamp the school.

Mrs Dobson: I understand. I am just thinking from a constituency angle. I understand that you have over 200 associated assessors. How many are you using at any one time? What percentage of inspection teams includes associate assessors? Obviously, you have alluded to smaller schools.

Mr J Anderson: I will leave Heather to comment on the primary sector, but in the post-primary sector, for example, there are three inspections under way this week, and there are associated assessors on all of them. In one team, there are two.

Mrs Jackson: It is similar in the primary sector, where they are available. They are not always available, because they have responsibility in their own school and they also have periods, for example, at Christmastime, with school plays and carol services, so they would not be available and we would inspect. It is by mutual agreement that they are on the team.

Mrs Buick: It is a mutually valuable experience. We [*Inaudible.*] inspection teams, and, where we can, that is what we do. I am sure that you heard from them that they find value in being on the team too.

Mr J Anderson: It is also worth adding, since you are asking about this area, that we are always looking for ways to develop the role of the associate assessor. We have already had one instance, and we intend to have more, where, on the follow-up inspection, the associate assessor who was on the original inspection, if available, may be a member of that team, so that we get more consistency and more involvement of associate assessors throughout.

The Chairperson: Noelle, Faustina, Heather and John, thank you very much. It has been a long session, but I think it has been very productive and worthwhile. I am sure that you will look forward to our report, and we look forward to working with you.