



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Research and Information Service Research Paper

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## School inspection

**NIAR 575-12**

This paper provides an overview of approaches to inspection here; in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and internationally.



## Key Points

- The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carries out inspections of educational providers here, and is part of the Department of Education;
- In 2010 a new risk-based approach was introduced using performance indicators and monitoring to determine how often a school should be inspected;
- The notice period given to schools varies from two to four weeks. Unannounced inspections are also conducted focusing on child protection and pastoral care;
- Evidence collected to inform inspection judgements includes classroom observation, interactions with pupils, and parent and staff views;
- Inspection evidence is scanned and stored electronically within the Department's central repository for documentation;
- In England, Ofsted's approach to inspection includes 'almost no notice' inspections and the recent removal of the 'satisfactory' grade;
- The Scottish approach emphasises cooperation and collaboration, while the Welsh approach focuses particularly on the school's self-evaluation;
- In Ireland, a range of inspection models are used, including no notice inspections which aim to evaluate school provision during a normal school day;
- The evidence indicates that the broad approach to school inspection here tends to be in line with international approaches; however, there is variation in regard to the status of inspection bodies;
- Some concerns have been highlighted around the pressures for organisations undergoing inspection, and it has been suggested that evaluation can incentivise schools to prioritise compliance with requirements over innovation;
- The findings highlight a number of areas that could be given further consideration, including:
  - ETI's status as part of the Department of Education;
  - Plans to review the notice period given to schools and the storing of inspection evidence within the Department's central repository;
  - The extent to which a balance is achieved between holding schools to account and allowing innovation and supporting school improvement;
  - The approaches in other jurisdictions, for example: the emphasis on a 'two-way' process in Scotland and Ireland, to the more challenging approach in place in England; and the use of unannounced inspections (such as in Ireland) examining provision during a normal school day.



# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This paper considers the approach to school inspection here, and in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. It also discusses how the approach in place compares internationally.

## Northern Ireland context

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is responsible for carrying out inspections of educational and youth service providers here. ETI is part of the Department of Education (the Department).

In September 2010 a new approach to the frequency of school inspections was introduced. Moving from a model whereby every school was inspected at least once every seven years, the new approach is more risk-based, using information such as school performance indicators and ongoing monitoring to determine when schools should be inspected.

The notice period given to schools varies from two to four weeks. Unannounced inspections are also conducted.

## Inspection process

ETI uses a range of inspection models, ranging from a standard inspection of a post-primary school inspecting leadership and management and specialist areas, to a focused inspection for particular aspects of provision. It also carries out unannounced inspections which focus only on pastoral care and child protection.

A team, ranging from two inspectors for a small primary school to up to eight for a large post-primary, visits the school. The inspectors use a range of evidence to inform judgements, with a focus on classroom observation. Other evidence includes interactions with pupils, the quality of pupils' work, discussions with staff and survey responses from parents, teachers and support staff.

On the final day of inspection inspectors provide an oral report on their findings to staff. Immediately after the inspection a moderation conference is conducted, and a report is drafted which is provided to the principal four weeks later to check for factual detail. The final report is normally published around three months after the inspection.

Inspection evidence is scanned and stored electronically within the Department's central repository for documentation.

NISRA's post-inspection survey of schools that underwent inspection in 2011-12 revealed largely positive attitudes to the process, with 82% agreeing that they were treated fairly by the inspection team throughout.

## England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland

There are some differences between inspection approaches in these jurisdictions. An overview of the systems is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1: Overview of key features of inspection in other jurisdictions**

	Inspectorate	Status of Inspectorate	Frequency of inspection	Notice given for inspections
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	ETI	Part of the Department	Risk-based approach	4 weeks for focused and standard inspections/ 2 weeks for short inspection and pre-school
<b>England</b>	Ofsted	Independent, non-ministerial government department	At least every 5 years, depending on previous inspection	Day before the inspection
<b>Scotland</b>	Education Scotland	Executive Agency	n/a: sampling approach used	2 weeks for primaries; 3 for post-primaries
<b>Wales</b>	Estyn	Independent body	At least once every six years	4 weeks
<b>Ireland</b>	The Inspectorate	Part of the Department of Education and Skills	Whole-school or subject inspection approx every 18 months	3 weeks for whole school/ no notice given for incidental inspections

Ofsted's inspection regime has recently undergone changes, such as the introduction of '*almost no notice*' inspections and the removal of the 'satisfactory' grade (such schools are now judged as '*requiring improvement*'). The school is provided with a report on the outcomes of inspection within ten working days, and this is published within 15 days.

In Scotland, inspection emphasises a collaborative approach, aiming to work with staff in a "*constructive, positive and professional manner*". The inspection report is published within eight weeks of the inspection.

Estyn, the schools Inspectorate in Wales, makes much use of the school's self-evaluation, inspecting aspects of it to test the school's evaluation of its own work, rather than inspecting all aspects of the school's work.

In Ireland, a range of approaches are used to inspect educational providers. These include no notice inspections which aim to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of

aspects of school provision under normal circumstances. As in Scotland, the emphasis is on cooperation and collaboration. While some have identified the avoidance of conflict with teachers as a weakness in the process, others report that inspection can be an affirming experience.

### **International comparison**

The evidence suggests that the broad approach to school inspection here tends to be in line with international approaches. This is the case in regard to the qualifications required by inspectors; the use of self-evaluation; the approach to frequency of inspection; and the aspects inspected.

However, there is variation internationally in terms of the status of inspection bodies. In some countries the inspectorate makes up part of a governmental department, while in others it is a standalone department. While there are differing views, one argument is that independent inspectorates can hold government to account, as well as educational services.

There is relatively little proof of the relationship between school inspection and school improvement, although it is known that school accountability links to student outcomes (other accountability measures include the use of examination results and market choice). In addition, concerns have been highlighted on the challenges for organisations undergoing inspection, and it has been suggested that evaluation can incentivise schools to prioritise compliance over innovation and improvement.

### **Conclusion**

The findings highlight a number of areas that could be given further consideration, including:

- ETI's status as part of the Department of Education;
- Plans to review the notice period given to schools;
- The storing of inspection evidence within the Department's central repository;
- The extent to which a balance is achieved between holding schools to account and allowing innovation and supporting school improvement;
- The approaches in other jurisdictions, for example:
  - The emphasis on a 'two-way' process in Scotland and Ireland, to the more challenging approach in place in England;
  - The use of unannounced inspections in other jurisdictions such as Ireland, which aim to determine the effectiveness of education during a normal school day (as opposed to the focus only on pastoral care and child protection for unannounced inspections here).





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## 1 Introduction

This paper provides an overview of approaches to inspection here; in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland; and internationally.

## 2 The Education and Training Inspectorate

In Northern Ireland school inspections are carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Initially founded as the Inspectorate in 1832 by the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, in 1989 its work was expanded to include the training service and it became known as the ETI.<sup>1</sup>

The Education and Training Inspectorate is part of the Department of Education (the Department). It inspects a range of providers, including schools; pre-schools; the youth service; institutes of further and higher education; the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise; and educational provision in the prison service.

### Frequency of inspections and notice given

A new approach to the frequency of school inspections was introduced in September 2010 (prior to this schools were inspected at least once every seven years with more frequent inspection where necessary). This aims to be a more proportionate and risk-based approach whereby a range of information is used to inform requirements:<sup>2</sup>

- Information from school performance indicators;
- Risk factors such as the length of time since the last formal inspection;
- Ongoing monitoring of schools by inspectors at a local level.

Primaries undergoing a focused inspection and post-primaries undergoing a standard inspection receive four weeks' notice of inspection. Primary schools undergoing a short inspection and pre-schools receive two weeks' notice.

The inspectorate also carries out unannounced inspections; however these focus only on pastoral care and child protection.<sup>3</sup> At the launch of the *Chief Inspector's Report 2010-12*, the Chief Inspector stated that the ETI may revise the notice period given to schools.<sup>4</sup> In regard to the views of school staff, in a recent post-inspection evaluation survey, 13% of respondents stated that the notice period given was too long, while 3% felt it was too short.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ETI: *What are the origins of the Inspectorate?* [online] Available at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/support-material/support-material-general-documents-non-phase-related/support-material-general-documents-about-the-education-and-training-inspectorate/what-are-the-origins-of-the-inspectorate.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by the Department of Education, October 2012

<sup>3</sup> As above

<sup>4</sup> BBC: *'Poor leadership' of NI schools* [online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-19964378>

<sup>5</sup> NISRA *Post-inspection evaluation 2011-12*

## Inspection process

Under the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 schools are required to undertake self-evaluation within school development plans. Self-evaluation also contributes to the inspection process.<sup>6</sup>

The *Chief Inspector's Report 2010-12* states that inspection evidence indicates that self-evaluation was a central feature of the work of organisations rated very good or outstanding, and drove improvement in schools where follow-up was required.<sup>7</sup>

The ETI uses a variety of inspection approaches, outlined in the following table.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 2: Overview of inspection models for schools and pre-schools**

Inspection model	Phase	Overview
Focused inspection	Primary, post-primary, special education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on particular aspects of provision and leadership and management</li> <li>• Aspects include child protection and pastoral care</li> </ul>
Standard inspection	Post-primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A core team (including an Associate Assessor) inspects leadership and management through a focus on aspects of the school development plan</li> <li>• Specialist inspectors (usually four) also report on provision within a specialist area (pastoral care/ child protection always included)</li> </ul>
Inspection	Pre-school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assesses quality of provision across range of activities, including the children's development and learning; pastoral care and child protection; teaching; and leadership and management</li> </ul>
Short inspection	Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluates the quality of the school's ethos, pastoral care, teaching and learning, leadership and management</li> </ul>
Unannounced inspection	All phases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on pastoral care and child protection as evidenced by arrangements and work observed</li> </ul>
Area inspection	All phases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluates provision in a geographical area across phases</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Information provided by the Department of Education, October 2012

<sup>7</sup> Education and Training Inspectorate (2012) *Chief Inspector's Report 2010-12* Bangor: DE

<sup>8</sup> ETI: *An explanation of the types of Inspection* [online] Available at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/support-material/support-material-general-documents-non-phase-related/support-material-general-documents-about-inspection/an-explanation-of-the-types-of-inspection.htm>

A team of inspectors visits the school: this can range from two inspectors for a small primary school to up to eight for a large post-primary undergoing standard inspection. A range of evidence is used to inform judgements, and there is a particular emphasis on classroom observation. Evidence also includes:<sup>9</sup>

- Interactions with pupils during lessons (to determine what pupils understand and the extent to which they are supported);
- Quality of work in pupils' books (to benchmark the work observed with previous learning experiences);
- Conversations with teachers and managers;
- Documentation produced by the school to support teaching and learning and in regard to safeguarding and pastoral care;
- Responses to an ETI questionnaire by parents, teachers and support staff (used to support identification of lines of enquiry); and
- A discussion with senior management on the school's performance data.

Inspectors provide relevant staff with an oral report on the findings on the last day of the inspection.

### ***Moderation and reporting***

Inspection teams take part in a moderation conference immediately following the school's inspection. This aims to ensure that the evidence gathered by members is challenged, moderated and discussed. The reporting inspector drafts the report which is checked by the deputy reporting inspector and the managing inspector with responsibility for the phase.<sup>10</sup>

Principals receive a copy of the report to check factual detail around four weeks later. The final copy of the inspection report is generally published around three months after the inspection. The report is published on the ETI website.<sup>11</sup>

Inspection evidence is scanned and stored electronically within the Department's central repository for documentation. The file containing the evidence is stored for seven years.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Information provided by the Department of Education, October 2012

<sup>10</sup> Information provided by the Department of Education, October 2012

<sup>11</sup> ETI: FAQs [online] Available at:

[http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/faqs.htm#what\\_happens\\_after\\_the\\_inspection\\_and\\_what\\_is\\_the\\_timescale?](http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/faqs.htm#what_happens_after_the_inspection_and_what_is_the_timescale?)

<sup>12</sup> Information provided by the Department of Education, October 2012

## Follow-up

Formal follow-up is undertaken where a school is given particular ratings in a standard inspection at post-primary; a short or focused inspection at primary or an inspection of a pre-school setting.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 3: ETI follow-up activity**

Rating	Follow-up
Good (with areas for improvement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ETI monitors progress through a more informal visit conducted by the district inspector</li> </ul>
Satisfactory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ETI monitors and reports on progress in addressing areas for improvement over 12-24 months</li> <li>Includes interim follow-up visits and follow-up inspection</li> </ul>
Inadequate/unsatisfactory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ETI monitors and reports on progress in addressing areas for improvement over 12-18 months</li> <li>Includes interim follow-up visits and up to two follow-up inspections</li> </ul>

## Inspector qualification requirements

All inspectors are required to have a qualification at a minimum of degree level or equivalent, in addition to a qualification enabling them to teach in a grant-aided school or further education college.

The Department reports that all inspectors have substantial teaching and/or training experience. The experience required depends on the specialism associated with the post and many inspectors are qualified and/ or experienced “*well beyond the minimum*” requirements.<sup>14</sup>

## Views on the effectiveness of inspections

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) conducts an annual survey with staff who have undergone inspection on the effectiveness of the inspection process. The findings of the 2011-12 survey were largely positive, as outlined in Table 4.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Information provided by the Department of Education, October 2012

<sup>14</sup> Information provided by the Department of Education, October 2012

<sup>15</sup> NISRA *Post-inspection evaluation 2011-12*

**Table 4: Key findings from the 2011-12 post-inspection survey**

Area	Example findings
Pre-inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>79% agreed or strongly agreed that the <b>amount of documentation required was reasonable</b> (8% disagreed or strongly disagreed)</li> </ul>
During inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>81% agreed or strongly agreed that in all spoken reports during the inspection, <b>the team identified the main strengths</b> of the organisation (6% disagreed or strongly disagreed)</li> </ul>
After the inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>83% agreed or strongly agreed that the <b>written report reflected accurately the main messages communicated in the spoken report</b> (4% disagreed)</li> <li>82% agreed or strongly agreed that the <b>process helped the school plan for and promote improvement</b> in outcomes (7% disagreed/ strongly disagreed)</li> </ul>
Overall satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>82% agreed or strongly agreed that they were <b>treated fairly</b> by the inspection team throughout (9% disagreed or strongly disagreed)</li> <li>82% agreed or strongly agreed that they were <b>content with the quality of service</b> provided by ETI and the Inspection Services Branch throughout (9% disagreed or strongly disagreed)</li> </ul>

### 3 England

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) is responsible for inspections on education, children's services, adult learning and skills in England. A non-ministerial government department, Ofsted reports directly to parliament.<sup>16</sup>

From September 2012 Ofsted no longer describes schools, further education and skills providers and teacher training providers as 'satisfactory' where they are not providing a good level of education. Instead the 'satisfactory' grade has been replaced with 'requires improvement'.<sup>17</sup>

#### Frequency of inspections and notice given

The frequency with which schools are inspected depends on the outcomes of previous inspections. Each school must be inspected within five school years of the date of the

<sup>16</sup> Department for Education: *Ofsted* [online] Available at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/delivery/education/a0071033/ofsted>

<sup>17</sup> Ofsted (2012): *Ofsted announces changes to inspections of schools, further education and skills, and initial teacher education* [online] Available at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/ofsted-announces-changes-inspections-of-schools-further-education-and-skills-and-initial-teacher-edu>

previous inspection; however, the following circumstances apply for schools with particular inspection ratings:

- **A school judged as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’:** the timing of its next inspection is determined by a risk assessment of its subsequent performance;
- **A school judged as ‘requiring improvement’:** will be subject to monitoring by Ofsted and will normally have a full re-inspection within two years;
- **A school judged as having serious weaknesses:** will be subject to monitoring and re-inspected within 18 months;
- **A school judged as ‘inadequate’:** will be given a monitoring inspection within three months – it may receive up to five monitoring inspections within 18 months.

Schools are given notice of their inspection at or after midday on the working day before the start of the inspection. However, Ofsted has the right to inspect any school without notice where this is judged to be appropriate.<sup>18</sup>

### **Inspection process**

Ofsted inspection teams typically visit schools for no more than two days; the time spent at the school depends on factors such as the school’s size. The inspection process is governed by a framework, and inspectors spend the majority of their time observing lessons and gathering first-hand evidence to inform their judgement. They will also consider performance data and previous inspection findings prior to their visit.<sup>19</sup>

Inspectors engage with headteachers, school staff and governors, and the views of parents, pupils and staff contribute to the inspection. The focus of inspectors is on the aspects of the school’s work that have the greatest impact on student outcomes. They must report on the quality of education provided, particularly:<sup>20</sup>

- The achievement of pupils;
- The quality of teaching;
- The behaviour and safety of pupils;
- The quality of leadership and management.

In addition, inspectors are required to consider the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school; and the extent to which the education provided by

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<sup>18</sup> Ofsted (2012) *The framework for school inspection* Manchester: Ofsted

<sup>19</sup> As above

<sup>20</sup> Ofsted (2012) *The framework for school inspection* Manchester: Ofsted



the school meets the needs of pupils, and in particular the needs of those who have special educational needs.<sup>21</sup>

Inspectors must ensure that before leaving the school, the school is clear about the grades awarded for each judgement. A report is sent to the school within ten working days of the inspection, and published on Ofsted's website within 15 days.<sup>22</sup>

There have been a number of concerns around Ofsted's approach to inspection, including the short period of notice and the removal of the 'satisfactory' rating.<sup>23</sup>

## 4 Scotland

Education Scotland, an agency within the Scottish Government, is responsible for carrying out school inspections. The school inspection framework document for inspecting schools in Scotland sets out the principles and process for inspection.<sup>24</sup>

### Frequency of inspections and notice given

The approach to school inspections was changed in 2011/12, moving from inspecting schools every six-seven years to a sampling approach. This involves inspection of 240 schools annually across all school types, from small island schools to large schools in urban areas.

Primary schools are given two weeks' notice of an inspection and secondary schools are given three weeks' notice.

### Inspection process

The inspection process in Scotland is very much viewed as a 'two-way process' and Education Scotland aims to work with staff in a "*constructive, positive and professional manner*". Inspection lasts for the period of a week.<sup>25</sup>

The inspectorate compiles performance indicators by combining self-evaluation and external inspection data to provide indicators of quality by looking at examination performance and teachers' or parents views.<sup>26</sup> It has been suggested that teachers are more likely to view external inspection in a developmental manner rather than a judgemental one.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ofsted (2012) *The framework for school inspection* Manchester: Ofsted

<sup>22</sup> Ofsted (2012) *The framework for school inspection* Manchester: Ofsted

<sup>23</sup> Times Educational Supplement: *Inspector hits out at 'frightening' new regime* [online] Available at: <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6243023>

<sup>24</sup> Education Scotland (2011) *Arrangements for inspecting schools in Scotland*

<sup>25</sup> Education Scotland (2011) *Arrangements for inspecting schools in Scotland*

<sup>26</sup> Ozga, J. (2003) *Measuring and managing performance in education* [online] Available at: <http://www.ces.ed.ac.uk/PDF%20Files/Brief027.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Livingstone, K. and McCall (2005) "Evaluation: judgemental or developmental?" *The European Journal of Teacher Education* Vol. 28, No 2. Pp.165-178

Prior to the evaluation, a school submits a self-evaluation and the inspection team highlights areas for focused attention. Inspection includes lesson observation and interactions with staff, parents and pupils. The inspection report sets out whether there will need to be further monitoring of the school in relation to the visit.<sup>28</sup>

### **Follow-up**

The inspection report is published within eight weeks of the inspection. With regard to continuing engagement, there are four broad approaches, from working with an establishment to disseminate their innovative practice, to continuing to monitor the progress of the school where issues are identified.

## **5 Wales**

The Welsh schools inspectorate is Estyn, which is independent of the National Assembly for Wales. A Common Inspection Framework is in place which sets out the key questions, quality indicators and aspects of provision inspected.<sup>29</sup>

### **Frequency of inspections and notice given**

All education and training providers are inspected at least once every six years. However, annual visits are made to providers who are deemed to require additional support. Estyn also has powers to make an unannounced visit to any education and training provider in Wales if there are concerns.<sup>30</sup> Schools and other education and training providers are given four weeks' written notice of an inspection.<sup>31</sup>

### **Inspection process**

On average, Estyn inspection teams will spend between 2 and 5 days at the organisation they are inspecting. Typically, between one and three inspectors will conduct the inspection. The length of time they spend on-site depends on how many learners are in the organisation.<sup>32</sup>

The school's self-evaluation report is used as a starting point for the inspection. Indeed the inspection will not consider all aspects of the schools work, but will involve a sampling of evidence to test the school's own evaluation of its work. Inspectors spend around 30%-50% of their time observing lessons in a primary school inspection and will observe 25-35 lessons in secondary schools. They will also sample pupils' work and engage with pupils, parents, staff, governors and stakeholders. Inspection reports are made publicly available.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> As above

<sup>29</sup> Estyn: FAQs [online] Available at: <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/other/faqs/>

<sup>30</sup> As above

<sup>31</sup> Estyn: *Inspection explained* [online] Available at: <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/inspection/inspection-explained/>

<sup>32</sup> Estyn: FAQs [online] Available at: <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/other/faqs/>

<sup>33</sup> Estyn

## Follow-up

Schools for which particular judgements have been made can expect follow-up taking various forms. These range from asking schools with excellent practice to develop case studies, to continued inspection and monitoring for schools experiencing difficulties.

## 6 Ireland

In line with arrangements in Northern Ireland, the Inspectorate is part of the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland. The Inspectorate uses a variety of inspection models, ranging from short, unannounced inspections to longer, more in-depth evaluations.<sup>34</sup>

**Table 5: Overview of inspection models used**

Inspection model	Overview
Whole School Evaluation (WSE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluates key aspects of the work of a school and deals with the work of the school as a whole.</li> </ul>
Whole School Evaluation - Management, Leadership and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complements the standard WSE</li> <li>Provides the school with opportunities to demonstrate its own self-evaluation processes (unlike WSE model)</li> <li>Reviews recommendations arising from previous inspections</li> </ul>
Incidental inspections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No notice given</li> <li>Designed to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of aspects of the education provided in schools under the normal conditions of a regular school day</li> </ul>
Subject inspections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes distinctive criteria regarding the evaluation of subject departments in post-primary schools and the teaching and learning of individual subjects</li> <li>National analysis has been used to compile reports on good practice in the teaching of individual subjects</li> </ul>
Programme evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used to inspect the provision of particular programmes provided in post-primary schools, for example the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)</li> </ul>

<sup>34</sup> National Economic and Social Council (2012) *Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland: the School System* NESDO

Inspection model	Overview
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oral feedback is provided to the school community at the end of the inspections and a printed report is published</li> </ul>
Thematic inspections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to examine the teaching of a specific subject or issue in the educational system</li> <li>• Inspections tend to have a strong research focus. Oral feedback and a written report is provided to the school and often a national report summarising the trends identified</li> </ul>

Source: National Economic and Social Council (2012) *Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland: the School System*

### Frequency of inspections and notice given

A post-primary school experiences either a WSE or subject inspection every eighteen months on average.<sup>35</sup>

Post-primary schools receive three weeks' notice for a Whole School Evaluation, and are advised which subjects are nominated for deeper inspection. Incidental inspection visits are unannounced.<sup>36</sup>

### Inspection process

School inspection is supported by school self-evaluation and schools are required to self-evaluate under the *Looking At Our School* framework. However, research suggests that self-evaluation tends to be seen as a one-off exercise rather than an ongoing process to support school improvement.<sup>37</sup>

Whole School Evaluations were introduced in 2003/04 and involve a range of activities and meetings with the school principal, teachers, parents and members of the Board of Management. Lesson observations and engagement with students and their teachers, together with reviews of planning documentation, are also included. The emphasis is on cooperation and collaboration. Incidental inspections involve a one-day visit including lesson observations and discussion with the principal.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> National Economic and Social Council (2012) *Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland: the School System*  
NESDO

<sup>36</sup> As above

<sup>37</sup> National Economic and Social Council (2012) *Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland: the School System*  
NESDO

<sup>38</sup> National Economic and Social Council (2012) *Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland: the School System*  
NESDO

## Follow-up

At the end of a Whole School inspection a draft report is prepared by the inspectors and a series of post-inspection meetings takes place with the principal, staff and members of the Board of Management.

The report is subsequently finalised and issued to the school, and is published on the Department's website. For incidental inspections an oral report is delivered to the principal at the end of the same day, and feedback delivered to teachers. It does not normally result in a written report.<sup>39</sup>

The Inspectorate does not have the authority to tell a school what to do with an inspection report. Where issues are identified, the Department's School Improvement Group may initiate an integrated support process.

## Views on the approach to inspection

It has been suggested that the inspection approach used has a number of weaknesses, for example the avoidance of conflict with teachers and their representatives and the reluctance of schools and teachers to engage in systematic approaches to data collection. However, teachers have reported that the process can be positive and affirming.<sup>40</sup>

## 7 International findings

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports that school inspections make up a key part of accountability approaches in many countries. Internationally, inspection tends to focus on the inputs and processes within the school and involves one or more trained inspectors evaluating quality based on a standard procedure. Self-evaluation is often used in conjunction with external school inspections.<sup>41</sup>

School inspections at the lower secondary level are required in 24 of 31 countries (77%), and similar proportions of countries target primary and upper secondary level schools for inspection. While school inspections typically involve all schools, in nine of 23 countries school inspections were targeted at low-performing schools.<sup>42</sup> As such, the broad approach in Northern Ireland is in line with many countries internationally.

In some countries, such as Finland, inspection is not compulsory.<sup>43</sup> In countries where there are no requirements for school inspection, there is often a requirement for school

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<sup>39</sup> National Economic and Social Council (2012) *Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland: the School System* NESDO

<sup>40</sup> McNamara, G., O'Hara, J. (2008) "Trusting Schools and Teachers: Developing Educational Professionalism Through Self-Evaluation" *Irish Studies* 8, Dublin: Peter Lang Publishing.

<sup>41</sup> OECD (2011) *Education at a Glance 2011 OECD Indicators* OECD Publishing

<sup>42</sup> OECD (2011) *Education at a Glance 2011 OECD Indicators* OECD Publishing

<sup>43</sup> Whitby, K. (2010) *School Inspection: recent experiences in high performing education systems* Berkshire: CfBT

self-evaluation. Very few countries do not require either school inspection or school self-evaluation (such countries include Greece, Italy and Mexico).<sup>44</sup>

### **Inspection body**

There is variation internationally in the status of inspection bodies. For example, in Singapore and Hong Kong, the inspectorates are government departments; in New Zealand it is a standalone government department (with its own minister responsible to parliament); and in the Netherlands it is an Executive Agency.<sup>45</sup>

There are differing views on this issue; however Barber argues that a system with independence from government is the most effective as it allows government, as well as the education service, to be held to account. For example, it allows for entire government programmes to be evaluated.<sup>46</sup>

### **Qualifications of inspectors**

The requirements in Northern Ireland are broadly in line with those in place across OECD countries. In most countries inspectors must have a teaching qualification and must have completed several years of service as teachers. However in some countries, such as Germany and Poland, inspectors must have experience as headteachers or in a managerial position in a school.<sup>47</sup>

### **Frequency of inspection**

In most countries the frequency of inspection is decided using a largely a risk-based approach depending on a range of information about the school (such as performance data and the most recent inspection).<sup>48</sup> This is broadly in line with the new approach in place here.

### **Aspects assessed**

OECD reports that certain aspects of school life, such as teaching and learning and support for pupils are almost always included in inspection frameworks. The management of human, financial and material resources is often considered. Lesson observation is a commonly used approach as are interviews with staff. Parent and pupil interviews are used in several countries.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> OECD (2011) *Education at a Glance 2011 OECD Indicators* OECD Publishing

<sup>45</sup> Whitby, K. (2010) *School Inspection: recent experiences in high performing education systems* Berkshire: CfBT

<sup>46</sup> Barber, M. (2004) "The virtue of accountability: system redesign, inspection and incentives in the era of informed professionalism" in *Journal of Education*. Vol 185, No.1 pp7-38

<sup>47</sup> Faubert, V. (2009) "School Evaluation: Current Practices in OECD Countries and a Literature Review" *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 42, OECD Publishing

<sup>48</sup> Whitby, K. (2010) *School Inspection: recent experiences in high performing education systems* Berkshire: CfBT

<sup>49</sup> As above

Inspection findings tend to be reported back to the school within a few days of inspection, and one study has found a statistically significant relationship between constructive oral feedback and overall satisfaction with the inspection process.<sup>50</sup>

The findings of inspection are made public in most countries. OECD notes that the pressure on schools is stronger when this is the case.<sup>51</sup> Other commentators have criticised Ofsted's "*name and shame*" approach, suggesting that it can have a negative impact on teachers.<sup>52</sup>

### **Effectiveness of inspection**

Holding schools accountable is known to contribute to improved student outcomes. However, there is relatively little proof of the relationship between inspection and school improvement.<sup>53</sup>

In addition, there are conflicting perceptions on evaluation. For example, while inspectorates presume that evaluation will lead to improvements, others argue that the stress of observation can be detrimental. It has also been suggested that increased pressure from evaluation may incentivise schools to prioritise compliance over improvement and innovation.<sup>54</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The findings in this paper highlight a number of areas that could be given further consideration, including:

- ETI's status as part of the Department;
- Plans to review the notice period given to schools;
- The storing of inspection evidence within the Department's central repository;
- The extent to which a balance is achieved between holding schools to account and allowing innovation and supporting school improvement;
- The approaches in other jurisdictions, for example:
  - The emphasis on a 'two-way' process in Scotland and Ireland, to the more challenging approach in place in England;
  - The use of unannounced inspections in other jurisdictions such as Ireland, which aim to determine the effectiveness of education during a normal school day.

<sup>50</sup> McCrone, T. (2009) *Evaluation of the Impact of the Section 5 Inspection – Strand 3: Final Report for Ofsted Slough*: NFER

<sup>51</sup> Faubert, V. (2009) "School Evaluation: Current Practices in OECD Countries and a Literature Review" *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 42, OECD Publishing

<sup>52</sup> Vass, P. and Simmonds, G. (2001) *The role of external review in improving performance*

<sup>53</sup> Whitby, K. (2010) *School Inspection: recent experiences in high performing education systems* Berkshire: CfBT

<sup>54</sup> Faubert, V. (2009) "School Evaluation: Current Practices in OECD Countries and a Literature Review" *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 42, OECD Publishing