



Office for Standards
in Education

THE FUTURE OF INSPECTION

OPENING COMMENTS AT THE LAUNCH OF A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOLS EVENT: 15 JUNE 2004

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School inspection has served the country well over the past decade. The current arrangements have underpinned a steady improvement in educational standards. They have ensured that millions of parents and other stakeholders are better informed about schools than ever before. As headteachers, you will have undergone inspection first-hand and I am confident that the majority of you will have found it a beneficial and constructive experience for your school.

But, as the Minister has just made clear, the context is changing. There is much more information about schools and what and how pupils achieve. Since Ofsted was established, school inspection has become increasingly better focussed and effective. But the basic model has not changed substantially. We now need to acknowledge the changes in the environment in which schools are operating and we need to recognise the increase in performance data as well as the demand for proportionate and economic inspection.

As Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, and long before that too, I have always been very clear about the benefits of inspection, not least to the pupils in our schools. Nothing that I do in this post will compromise my commitment to defend the interests of learners, of whatever age, and their families. Yet, it is because inspection **has** achieved so much that we can move to a system that emphasises self-assessment and makes a more direct contribution to school improvement. At the same time, we need to, and we can, lighten the burden on schools, release money for the front line and increase the focus on safeguarding children.

These considerations have led to our present proposals. They can be summed up in a single sentence: we shall introduce lighter-touch inspections, carried out every three years, which emphasise the importance of schools' self-assessment, and have much-reduced notice. Our proposals will allow parents access to much more up-to-date information on the quality of education offered by schools in their local area.

I have been heartened at the positive response to our proposals. Three quarters of respondents expressed support during our recent consultation. I am pleased at this vote of confidence in the inspection system. Of course there have been shades of opinion, particularly on the question of giving much less notice than we currently do before an inspection. But, with very few exceptions, national organisations and individuals – heads, classroom teachers, governors and parents – have welcomed the thrust of our proposals. We can therefore move forward confidently together.

The details of the new arrangements are in the booklet which you have today. I want to paint a picture of how the new inspections will work and what they will look like. Again, I can do so with confidence because we are piloting important aspects of the new approach. We are already demonstrating that the model works and produces good results.

The authority of any inspection system rests on the professionalism of the inspectors. For the first time, Ofsted will be running an integrated school inspection system in which Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) as well as contracted inspectors will play a part. HMI will lead many inspections, especially in the secondary phase, and will have a management role in relation to others.

Contracted inspectors will nevertheless continue to lead and be team members in the large majority of inspections. We have consulted, and shall be consulting further, the contractors who currently manage school inspections on Ofsted's behalf, to discuss the kind of arrangements we shall need in the future. It is central to these proposals that we shall need to make full use of the expertise of the best contracted inspectors.

Schools currently have 6 to 10 weeks' notice of an inspection. Too many fill this time with "preparing for Ofsted". Parents on the other hand find it hard to understand why there should be any notice at all; "why can't the inspectors just come in and see the school as it is?" was a view frequently expressed during consultation.

I have a lot of sympathy with that view. We have listened carefully to those who argued for, say, two or three weeks' notice. But I believe that that would be likely, in too many schools, to produce a period of frenetic pre-inspection activity. We therefore propose to give as little notice as practicable, which will probably mean at least two working days, and at most five. We will see schools as they really are. But there may be a few occasions in which we need to see schools without any notice at all and I propose to reserve this right for my inspectors.

Inspectors do not improve schools: teachers do. But in order to do so, teachers need to have a clear and dispassionate view of what they are doing well, and where they need to improve. That is why the school's self-evaluation, whilst at the heart of the new inspections, can never replace the independent perspective brought from outside. No modern public service should be without rigorous, external scrutiny. However, the relationship between what the school thinks and what the inspectors find will become a powerful lever for improvement.

Make no mistake; the increasing emphasis on self-evaluation is no soft touch. It places an even greater premium on school leaders to know their schools and know them well. And this is very important because the school that knows itself well is likely to be achieving well and be best placed to achieve even more in the future.

The first thing teachers will notice about the actual inspection is that there are fewer inspectors: no more than five in a large school, and just one in a small primary school. These inspectors will be in the school for no more than two days. They will not usually look at lessons in all subjects. They **will** make judgements about pupils' progress through a combination of the school's performance data and first-hand observation.

Where either of those throws up significant issues, inspectors will follow “inspection trails”, using case study material, discussion with pupils and members of staff. The inspection team will make judgements on the areas which have been central since Ofsted was established: quality of education, educational standards, leadership and management, and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. At the same time, inspectors will assess the contribution of the school to the five outcomes for children and young people set out in *Every Child Matters* namely; being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and social and economic well-being.

How will the new inspections be reported? Inspectors will, of course, give feedback as they go. The first draft of the report will be discussed with the school for factual accuracy by the end of the week of the inspection. The final report will be published and available to parents within three weeks of the inspection. Currently, from start to finish, from notification of an inspection to publication of a report, usually takes four or five months. Under the new arrangements inspection, from start to finish will be completed in under – and often well under – a month. This will greatly reduce the waiting time for parents and staff in a school and ensure that up-to-date information is available to the local community, and more widely, as soon as possible.

The reports produced will be much shorter than they are now: four or so pages compared with up to 50. They will not contain the often minute detail on individual subjects that goes into current reports. Much of this detail was and is interesting, but not essential. The important judgements about the overall health of the school and its approach to education are what matter. They are all that most parents see now, because they feature in the summary version sent to parents. They will still be there – even more clearly – in the new reports.

Finally, something about the evaluations under the new inspections. We shall use a four-point scale, ranging from 1, very good, to 4, inadequate. Where schools fall into that fourth category, they may be placed in one of two categories of schools causing concern: schools which require special measures because they are failing to provide an acceptable standard of education and show insufficient capacity to improve; and those that, while providing an acceptable standard of education, are nevertheless not

performing as well as they should, and will be subject to a notice to improve and be re-inspected after a year. Thus we retain the well-understood and highly effective special measures category and replace the serious weaknesses and underachieving categories with this single notice to improve. That will enable us to go further in our drive for clarity and efficiency in our reporting arrangements.

These are the most radical changes to school inspection since Ofsted was established. Radical, yes, but by no means a leap in the dark. We are building on a decade of experience within Ofsted. Those who have commented on our proposals have broadly supported our vision. Pilot inspections are beginning to confirm that that vision is achievable. There is a great deal more to do in order to make it happen, working in partnership with schools, contracted inspectors and contractors.

If the necessary legislation receives Parliament's approval, the new inspections will start in the autumn of next year. Their impact will be felt from the word go. They will be a force for improvement in our schools. And we can be sure that those who will benefit most are those who matter the most: the children and young people in England's schools.