



A GUIDE TO INSPECTION IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS



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Inspection in Post-Primary Schools

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1. INTRODUCTION

a. Inspections and this guide

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) works to improve the quality of learning for children and young people in Irish schools, centres for education and other learning settings. A sample of all schools and centres for education¹ is selected for inspection as part of the Inspectorate's annual programme of inspection. The sample includes schools at all levels on the quality continuum, from schools with significant strengths to schools in which significant weaknesses are identified. Our evaluation work in schools is designed to evaluate key aspects of the work of the school and to promote school improvement.

This guide sets out how we conduct inspections in post-primary schools and is effective from 01 September 2016. It replaces previous guides which described each inspection model individually. This guide was developed in the light of our experience in schools and in consultation with the education partners.

Our inspections are carried out in accordance with section 7(2)(b) and section 13(3)(a)(i) of the Education Act 1998 and with the *Code of Practice for the Inspectorate* (Department of Education and Skills 2015) which is available at www.education.ie. During an inspection, a school's board of management and its staff are obliged to accord the inspectors "every reasonable facility and co-operation" in the performance of their duties (section 13(7), Education Act 1998).

b. Evaluation in post-primary schools

Responsibility for school improvement rests primarily with the board of management, principal and staff of individual schools. Effective schools are constantly reviewing their own practice and seeking to find ways to ensure school improvement. School management and teachers reflect on the quality of teaching, learning and student achievement in their schools. They also consider how well the school is run and how this can be improved.

School self-evaluation

Teachers, principals and boards of management can improve the work of their schools significantly through school self-evaluation (SSE). The requirement to engage in school self-evaluation, introduced in 2012, is relatively new but already many schools are using SSE to monitor and improve aspects of their teaching and learning. Circular 0040/2016 reaffirms the requirement on schools to engage in school self-evaluation of teaching and learning and to develop school improvement plans which focus on improving outcomes for students. To facilitate self-evaluation as a central component of the work of a school the Inspectorate has published *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016-2020: Post-Primary* (Department of Education and Skills 2016). This publication provides a framework and structure for schools to use in evaluating teaching and learning. Schools should also familiarise themselves with the requirements set out in the current school self-evaluation circular.

School self-evaluation and external evaluation are complementary processes, both focusing on improvement. The school self-evaluation process gives schools a means of identifying and addressing priorities, and of ensuring a whole-school focus on improving specific aspects of teaching and learning. External evaluations take note of schools' identified priorities and assess their teaching and learning practices. Given this common focus on improvement, the Inspectorate will take account of schools' engagement with, and the outcomes of, self-evaluation in the course of its evaluations while remaining sensitive to the individual context factors of schools at varying stages of SSE development.

External inspection of schools

External inspections also facilitate improvement and change in schools. They provide an external perspective on the work of the school. Inspection reports provide judgements on the quality of provision in a school, affirm the aspects of practice that are working well and assist in confirming the school's judgement about its strengths and priorities for improvement. In this way, they help to inform and complement schools' self-evaluation. Recommendations in inspection reports provide important direction for the school community as it seeks to bring about ongoing school improvement.

All of our inspection models focus on the quality of teaching, learning and student achievement. Depending on the focus of the evaluation, they may also focus on the quality of support for students, the quality of action planning for school improvement and the quality of leadership and management.

In a very small number of cases, inspections may also have any or all of the following purposes:

- To assess the implementation of guidelines, circular letters, regulations and other directions made by the Minister
- To collect information on factors that can be used to identify schools that would benefit from further inspection
- To monitor the progress made by a school in implementing the recommendations of earlier inspections
- To collect information on the operation and effectiveness of schools for research or other purposes, including the provision of information to other sections of the Department

Inspections support co-professional engagement between teachers and the inspector. The majority of the inspector's time during inspection is given to direct observation of teaching and learning at classroom level with a view to assessing the quality of provision, affirming the work of teachers and students and supporting improvement. The inspector's feedback to the teacher and to the school should enhance professional reflection and self-evaluation and ultimately improve outcomes for students.

Inspections aim to support the educational leadership role of the principal by providing the opportunity for professional dialogue with inspectors on matters of particular interest to the school.

Inspections, with the exception of incidental inspections, result in the issuing or publication of an inspection report. This report and, in the case of incidental inspections the oral feedback provided, can assist schools to identify strengths in educational provision and facilitate professional reflection on aspects requiring further development.

The Inspectorate acknowledges that students and their parents are key stakeholders in the school community. Their participation in school inspections, where appropriate, is a necessary component of a valid, authentic school evaluation process. It enhances the quality of the evaluation and the recommendations for school improvement that emerge. Listening to the voices of students and parents, and their opinions on the performance and operation of schools, is an important and integral part of the work of the Inspectorate in schools.

c. Our inspection models

We use a range of inspection models to evaluate schools and other learning settings. These range from one-day, unannounced incidental inspections, to more intensive whole-school evaluations and inspections that follow-through on how schools have implemented recommendations made in previous inspection reports.

This guide provides a general overview of our approach to inspection in post-primary schools. We use a number of models to gather information on the quality of education provision in schools. In Appendix 1 of this guide you will find an outline of each of the seven inspection models used in post-primary schools:

- Incidental Inspection
- Subject Inspection
- Programme Evaluation
- Evaluation of Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Schools
- Evaluation of Centres for Education
- Whole-School Evaluation-Management, Leadership and Learning
- Whole-School Evaluation
- Follow-through Inspection

We have developed this range of models so that we can target our inspection work more effectively where it is likely to have the greatest impact. This helps us to achieve our aims of encouraging improvement for students and providing an assurance of quality for parents, the public and the education system.

Some models, such as the incidental inspections and subject inspections, are quite short inspections that enable us to evaluate the work of the school and provide feedback for improvement to teachers and school leaders relatively quickly. They can be carried out with minimum disruption to the work of the school. They are also very useful in monitoring the overall quality of educational provision. Other more intensive inspections, such as whole-school evaluations and DEIS evaluations, take more time and involve more detailed examinations of the leadership and management of the schools as well as evaluations of teaching and learning.

Using this range of inspection models, varying from very short incidental inspections to more detailed inspections, we can plan our inspections more effectively. For example, if short inspections tell us that the work of a school is progressing well, it may not be necessary to plan an intensive inspection in the school in the near future. Instead, we can focus inspections in other schools where the need for improvement is likely to be greater. Having follow-through inspections which evaluate how schools have implemented recommendations made in previous inspection reports also helps to increase the impact of inspection for improvement.

Each of our inspection models take into account the particular circumstance of the school, centre for education or education setting. Factors such as size, location, socio-economic circumstance of the students and community, students' special needs and the support they require, and other factors impact on the work of the school. We recognize that schools work within a very specific context and we take these context factors into consideration when we evaluate.

d. Key principles that inform our inspections

As an Inspectorate we are focused on ensuring that the learners in schools, centres for education and other settings receive the best possible education in the light of their potential and their learning needs. We promote high standards in teaching and in the learning outcomes and experiences of learners in schools, centres for education and other settings. We strive to enable those learning organisations to improve the quality of the education they provide.

Our work is underpinned by four key principles:

1. A focus on learners
2. Development and improvement
3. Respectful engagement
4. Responsibility and accountability

The four key principles, described in detail in our *Code of Practice for the Inspectorate* (available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills, www.education.ie), provide the standards that inform, guide and govern our work. These principles govern the full range of inspectors' evaluation and advisory work in all settings, including schools, centres for education and a range of other settings.

We are committed to carrying out our inspections in ways that provide real opportunities to affirm good practice and to provide practical advice to individual teachers, to principals and to boards of management with the ultimate aim of improving learning experiences and outcomes for students.

This means that:

1. We are open and transparent about the way we collect and collate evidence for our evaluative judgements:
 - We adhere to our published guidelines as they relate to inspection activity
 - We apply evaluation criteria consistently, drawing on the quality framework in *Looking at Our School 2016*
2. Our evaluative judgements are based on the collection of objective, dependable, high quality data having taken the context of the school into consideration:
 - As part of our evidence-gathering, we engage in dialogue with students, teachers, and school leaders in most of our inspections and with other relevant staff, parents and boards of management in some inspections
 - We use the evidence we gather to support our findings and recommendations in a manner which is fair to all concerned
 - We rely on a range of evidence from a number of different sources
 - We conduct post-evaluation meetings to clarify, inform and confirm our findings
 - We provide the school staff with an opportunity to respond to the relevant main findings at the school post-evaluation meeting and we note the comments made
3. We respect the right of individuals to privacy as far as possible and consistent with our duty to report on quality and standards:
 - We are sensitive towards both the individual persons with whom we engage and the school and we are committed to courtesy, respect and fairness in all interactions with individuals and groups

- Every effort is made to preserve the positive relationships which exist between those involved in managing and leading the school, teachers, parents and students
- Information collected from students, teachers and parents on questionnaires is only used in aggregated format and each questionnaire is entirely confidential
- In certain circumstances, we may receive other information in a manner in which the person providing that information has a reasonable expectation that the information is given in confidence. While we will respect confidences, we cannot guarantee the absolute confidentiality of the information provided, or the anonymity of the individual person or persons providing the information. However, having due regard to statutory provisions, we will seek to protect the anonymity of the person if we believe that he or she believed it was being given in a confidential manner and that to release the information to others would prejudice the receipt of such information in the future

4. We report objectively and fairly on the quality of education provision:

- We set out clearly and unambiguously the main findings and recommendations of the inspection so as to enhance the motivation and overall capacity of the school community to achieve its goals and to bring about improvement in outcomes for students
- Our reports are fair and balanced, particularly where conflicting evidence is presented
- We recognise and acknowledge effective work, progress and achievement
- We provide advice in a supportive and constructive manner and we make recommendations

2. HOW ARE INSPECTIONS CARRIED OUT?

a. Before the inspection visit

Notice

Written notice of a whole-school inspection is generally provided to the principal, the chairperson of the board, the chairperson of the parents' association and the patron in advance of the first in-school day.² For other evaluations, aside from those which are unannounced, the principal is notified via email and requested to forward the notification to the chairperson of the board of management and the patron. The principal may also be contacted by the reporting inspector to outline the format of the evaluation, to arrange meetings, to arrange for distribution and completion of parent and teacher questionnaires and to clarify any specific issues.

No notice is given to a school of an incidental inspection.

In the case of an Education and Training Board (ETB) school, a copy of the written notification is sent to the Chief Executive of the ETB.

Documents

External inspection focuses principally on the work of the school as it transacts daily, and there is a limited emphasis on documentation. Inspectors will request to see and examine a short list of documents relevant to the focus of the particular evaluation model and which schools can reasonably be expected to have available. The particular documents which schools are asked to provide, in electronic format preferably, are set out for each inspection model in Appendix 2 of this guide.

Questionnaires

Parents and students are important stakeholders in schools and the Inspectorate values their views on the quality of provision. We administer questionnaires to a sample of parents and students during some of our evaluations, to capture their perspectives on the work of the school.

Teacher questionnaires are available for completion online in the course of Whole-School Evaluations, Whole-School Evaluation-Management, Leadership and Learning and Evaluations of Centres for Education in larger schools (eight or more mainstream teachers).

Following notification of an evaluation, where questionnaires are to be used, the inspector will arrange with the principal for the distribution of the parent questionnaires in advance of the evaluation.

In schools where teacher questionnaires are administered, the principal is asked to provide information to the school staff regarding the online questionnaire for teachers in advance of the in-school phase.

Information gained from the analysis of questionnaires may be referred to in the inspection report but detailed statistical information is not included. A summary of the aggregated data from these questionnaires is provided to the school. Completed individual questionnaires are confidential to the Inspectorate.

Meetings

Whole-School Evaluations (WSE and WSE-MLL) are the only inspection models where meetings are held prior to the first in-school day of the inspection. The reporting inspector, in consultation with the principal, arranges to hold meetings with representatives of the board of management and patron and with the teaching staff. Inspectors also meet with representatives of the parents' association where the association is affiliated to the National Parents' Council Post-Primary or is in the process of affiliating to the National Parents' Council Post-Primary. Where the school does not have a parents' association, or the association is not affiliated to the National Parents Council Post-Primary, the inspectors will meet with the parents' representatives on the board of management.³

b. During the inspection visit

Inspection visits are conducted by one or more inspectors. The inspection type determines the length of time the inspection takes and the activities undertaken in the course of the evaluation. Typically, the core inspection activity takes place between one and three days and will consist of classroom visits, meetings, the administration of questionnaires, the review of documents and the provision of feedback. The reporting inspector prepares an overall timetable for the evaluation. Any changes to the timetable will be discussed with the school principal in advance, where possible.

Questionnaires

Where they are used, student questionnaires are administered by the inspector to a sample of students either on the first day of the inspection or in the case of a Whole-School Evaluations or a Whole-School Evaluation-Management, Leadership and Learning, on a day shortly before the in-school inspection period.

³ Our practice in this regard is informed by Section 26 of the Education Act 1998 provides as follows:

"(1) The parents of students of a recognised school may establish, and maintain from among their number, a parents' association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of students of that school
(2) A parents' association shall promote the interests of the students in a school in co-operation with the board, Principal, teachers and students of a school...
(3) The board shall promote contact between the school, parents of students in that school and the community and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to parents who wish to establish a parents' association and to a parents' association when it is established.
(4)(a) A parents' association shall, following consultation with its members, make rules governing its meetings and the business and conduct of its affairs.
(b) Where a parents' association is affiliated to a national association of parents, the rules referred to in paragraph (a) shall be in accordance with guidelines issued by that national association of parents with the concurrence of the Minister.

Meetings and interviews

Meetings and interviews are arranged by the inspector in consultation with the principal. Depending on the inspection model, meetings may be held with representatives of the board of management and patron, with representatives of the parents, with the teaching staff, with members of the in-school management team, with the special educational needs team and special needs assistants and with other relevant staff and with groups of students. Where appropriate, the inspector will also meet with a focus group of students. In the case of whole-school inspections (WSE) some of these meetings are held in advance of the in-school inspection period.

Classroom visits

During the inspection visit, inspectors visit classrooms and other learning settings to observe teaching and learning, to interact with students and to review their work.

Teaching and learning in any learning setting in the school may be observed over the course of the evaluation. This may include the work of temporary staff and post-graduate students of education who are working in the school at the time of the inspection visit. It may also include the work of external personnel who are employed by the board of management to provide additional tuition/support to students during school time.

The inspector considers teachers' preparation for the lessons taught, the effectiveness of the teaching approaches utilised, the classroom atmosphere and how students are managed and organised during learning activities.

The inspector evaluates the level to which students' knowledge, skills and attitudes are progressed and the extent to which they are engaged appropriately in their learning. Assessment practices and the progress made by students are also examined. The inspector may also interact with students and review samples of their work.

Oral feedback is provided to individual teachers at the end of lessons, or at another time during the in-school evaluation. The feedback relates to the overall quality of teaching and learning and the quality of students' experiences in the lesson. Observed good practice is acknowledged and affirmed and recommendations for improvement are made where appropriate.

Documents

The focus of the inspection determines the small number of documents which are examined in the course of an evaluation. These are outlined for each of our inspection models in Appendix 2 of this guide. An inspector may also request additional documents or school records relating to specific issues that might arise in the course of the evaluation.

Assessment practices and the progress made by students are also examined. Achievement in certificate examinations, in the context of the school, are also considered. However, no statistical information is presented in written reports.

Evaluating professional practice

While inspections clearly involve an evaluation of the professional practice of teachers and the quality of learning facilitated in the classroom, the inspection process is not a professional competence inspection. Procedures are in place under section 24 of the Education Act 1998 to facilitate schools in dealing with issues relating to professional competence and the inspection arrangements that are part of the section 24 procedures are entirely separate from the inspection. However, where an inspector has serious concerns about the quality of teaching and learning in an individual lesson observed and/or concerns regarding the wellbeing and safety of students, those concerns will be shared with the principal and the teacher as part of the feedback provided. Where concerns relate to management and/or leadership in the school, they are shared with the principal and the chairperson of the board of management of the school as part of the feedback provided (or, in the case of schools under the auspices of an ETB, with the principal, chairperson of the board and the Chief Executive of the ETB).

Compliance with Child Protection Procedures

In September 2011, the Department of Education and Skills issued Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2011). As part of whole-school inspections, the inspector(s) will enquire into a school's general compliance with the requirements of these procedures. Prior to the inspection visit, school management is required to complete a Child Protection School Self-Report Form and, during the inspection visit, the inspector(s) seeks additional confirmatory evidence of the school's compliance with the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2011). The Inspectorate is committed to following up on instances of non-compliance with school authorities.

c. Following the inspection visit

Feedback meetings

Feedback meetings are typically held immediately or shortly after the completion of the inspection. They are an important part of the evaluation process.

During the meetings the inspector(s) seek to:

- provide an evaluation of the work of the school
- acknowledge good practice in the school
- provide opportunities for the clarification of any information
- gather any additional relevant information
- identify areas for development
- discuss how the school can develop through the implementation of the main recommendations of the evaluation

The evaluation report

A draft inspection report is finalised following the completion of the feedback meetings except in the case of incidental inspection where no report is issued to the school. The report presents the main findings and recommendations of the evaluation. It is processed through the normal quality assurance procedures of the Inspectorate and is issued to the school for factual verification and later for school response as prescribed in *Publication of School Inspection Reports: Guidelines* (Department of Education and Skills, 2015).

When issued for factual verification, the principal and chairperson of the board have the opportunity to point out to the Inspectorate what they believe to be any errors of fact in the draft report. Subsequently, the report, amended if necessary, is issued to the school for school response. The board of the school has an opportunity to submit a written response to the report, outlining what it will do to address the recommendations for improvement in the report. The report and normally the school response are then published.

3. PUBLICATION OF THE INSPECTION REPORT

The finalised report and the school response are published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills (www.education.ie). The detailed arrangements for the publication of inspection reports are described in a separate document, *Publication of School Inspection Reports: Guidelines* (Department of Education and Skills, 2015).

4. ACTING ON THE INSPECTION REPORT

The board of management, as part of its agenda for school improvement, should discuss the findings and recommendations of the report and should, along with the school principal, plan for and oversee the implementation of the actions needed to address the report's recommendations. The report along with other types of evidence gathered by the school should also be used by the school to inform its self-evaluation processes and its planning for improvement and development. In the case of an ETB school it is suggested that the Chief Executive of the ETB or his/her deputed officer should be a party to such discussions.

While responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the recommendations and improvements in an inspection report rests mainly with the board and principal (or with the board and principal and the Chief Executive of the Education and Training Board (ETB) in the case of an ETB school), the patron or trustees of the school also have a responsibility to ensure that effective follow-up action is taken. In some cases, schools may wish to access the assistance available from school support services and other sources of advice when planning and implementing improvements.

The Inspectorate and other divisions of the Department of Education and Skills will monitor the implementation of recommendations in selected schools and in the system generally. The degree to which progress has been made on the implementation of recommendations in an inspection report may be evaluated at a later date by the Inspectorate.

5. THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOLS

Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools provides a unified and coherent set of standards for the two dimensions of the work of schools:

- teaching and learning
- leadership and management

It is designed for teachers and for school leaders to use in implementing the most effective and engaging teaching and learning approaches and in enhancing the quality of leadership in their schools. Through the provision of a set of standards describing 'effective practice' and 'highly effective practice', the framework will help schools to identify their strengths and areas for development and will enable them to take ownership of their own development and improvement. In this way, the *Quality Framework for Schools* seeks to embed self-evaluation, reflective practice and responsiveness to the needs of learners in classrooms, schools and other settings.

The *Quality Framework* will be used to inform the work of inspectors as they monitor and report on quality in schools. Evaluation models will draw on the elements of the framework that are most relevant to the focus of the model. In this way, while the framework will be used flexibly, it will ensure consistency in Inspectorate evaluations.

Making *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools* publicly available will help parents and others to understand the evaluative judgements in inspection reports. The common language provided by the framework will facilitate meaningful dialogue between teachers, educational professionals, parents, students, school communities and the wider community about quality in our schools.

Table 1: Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools – Overview

	DOMAINS	STANDARDS
TEACHING AND LEARNING	Learner outcomes	Students: enjoy their learning, are motivated to learn, and expect to achieve as learners have the necessary knowledge and skills to understand themselves and their relationships demonstrate the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the post-primary curriculum attain the stated learning outcomes for each subject, course and programme
	Learner experiences	Students: engage purposefully in meaningful learning activities grow as learners through respectful interactions and experiences that are challenging and supportive reflect on their progress as learners and develop a sense of ownership of and responsibility for their learning experience opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning
	Teachers' individual practice	The teacher: has the requisite subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and classroom management skills selects and uses planning, preparation and assessment practices that progress students' learning selects and uses teaching approaches appropriate to the learning intention and the students' learning needs responds to individual learning needs and differentiates teaching and learning activities as necessary
	Teachers' collective / collaborative practice	Teachers: value and engage in professional development and professional collaboration work together to devise learning opportunities for students across and beyond the curriculum collectively develop and implement consistent and dependable formative and summative assessment practices contribute to building whole-staff capacity by sharing their expertise
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	Leading learning and teaching	School leaders: promote a culture of improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning, teaching and assessment foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each student manage the planning and implementation of the school curriculum foster teacher professional development that enriches teachers' and students' learning
	Managing the organisation	School leaders: establish an orderly, secure and healthy learning environment, and maintain it through effective communication manage the school's human, physical and financial resources so as to create and maintain a learning organisation manage challenging and complex situations in a manner that demonstrates equality, fairness and justice develop and implement a system to promote professional responsibility and accountability
	Leading school development	School leaders: communicate the guiding vision for the school and lead its realisation lead the school's engagement in a continuous process of self-evaluation build and maintain relationships with parents, with other schools, and with the wider community manage, lead and mediate change to respond to the evolving needs of the school and to changes in education
	Developing leadership capacity	School leaders: critique their practice as leaders and develop their understanding of effective and sustainable leadership empower staff to take on and carry out leadership roles promote and facilitate the development of student voice, student participation, and student leadership build professional networks with other school leaders

6. THE QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspections examine the quality of different aspects of the work of the school at the time of the inspection. Naturally, the quality of each aspect of the school's work can vary. For example, inspectors could come to the view that the quality of teaching and learning in a school is at a very high level, while the quality of the school's support for students is in need of improvement.

Inspectors use the quality continuum below when describing each of the aspects of the school's work during an inspection. The continuum is designed to assist evaluators to arrive at evidence-based evaluative judgements and to accurately describe the quality of a school's provision or aspects of that provision. It has been used by the Inspectorate for a number of years to help inspectors arrive at realistic judgements about the quality of aspects of a school's provision.

A quality continuum was first introduced to schools for the purposes of self-evaluation in *Looking at Our School* (2003) and was presented again in 2012 in *School Self-Evaluation – Guidelines for Schools*. As part of the process of self-evaluation, schools were encouraged to use the continuum to judge the quality of their provision and to place their practice on a continuum.

The continuum reflects the fact that school quality is constantly evolving and developing and acknowledges the unique context of each school. It recognises that most schools are at different stages of the school improvement journey for different aspects of their provision.

Table 2: QUALITY CONTINUUM

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE OF DESCRIPTIVE TERMS
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of students' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a very good standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE OF DESCRIPTIVE TERMS
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on students' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties

7. REVIEW OF INSPECTIONS

A teacher or a board of management affected by an inspection may seek a review of the inspection using the procedures outlined in *Procedures for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13(9) of the Education Act (1998), (2015)*. (www.education.ie).

8. PUBLICATION AND REVISION OF THIS GUIDE

This Guide has been prepared following consultation with the education partners as required under Section 13(8) of the Education Act, 1998.

The Inspectorate is committed to improving the ways in which it carries out its evaluation and advisory work in schools and the provisions of this Guide will be reviewed periodically.

APPENDIX 1

This appendix sets out a brief summary of each of the following inspection models:

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The summaries are intended to provide a brief reference guide to the evaluation focus for each of the models and to set out the inspection activities conducted at each stage of the inspection process.

Compliance with Child Protection Procedures

As part of all whole-school evaluations, inspectors will enquire into a school's general compliance with the requirements of *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2011).

1.1. Incidental Inspection

INTRODUCTION

A key focus of incidental inspection is the quality of the educational provision experienced by students in every-day school situations. The evaluation takes place against the background of the school's normal work, taking account of school context factors, including the school's own mission statement.

The incidental inspection model is designed to be flexible so that it can provide information on a number of different aspects of the work of a school. In a very small number of cases, incidental inspections may also have any or all of the following purposes:

- To assess the implementation of guidelines, circular letters, regulations and other directions made by the Minister
- To collect information on factors that can be used to identify schools which would benefit from further inspection
- To monitor the progress made by a school in implementing the recommendations of earlier inspections
- To collect information on the operation and effectiveness of schools for research or other purposes including the provision of information to other sections of the Department.

The inspector informs the principal about the purpose of his/her visit at the beginning of an incidental inspection.

Incidental inspections are evaluations of aspects of the work of a school under the normal conditions of a regular school day. Typically, they focus on aspects of teaching, learning, students' achievement and support for students. Incidental inspection supports co-professional engagement between teachers and the inspector. The inspector's time is given to direct observation of teaching and learning at the classroom level with a view to assessing the quality of provision, affirming the work of teachers and students and supporting improvement. Incidental inspections provide opportunities for the teacher to discuss issues relevant to the lesson and to seek advice from the inspector.

Incidental inspections support the educational leadership role of the principal by providing the opportunity for professional dialogue with inspectors on matters of particular interest to the school. The inspector's oral feedback can be used to assist schools to identify strengths in educational provision and facilitate professional reflection on aspects requiring further development. In this way, incidental inspections complement the school's own self-evaluation processes. The inspector's feedback to the teacher and to the school should enhance professional reflection and self-evaluation and consequently improve outcomes for students.

EVALUATION FOCUS

The focus of the majority of incidental inspections is on teaching and learning. The inspector considers teachers' preparation for the lessons taught, the effectiveness of the teaching approaches utilised, the classroom atmosphere and how students are managed and organised during learning activities.

The inspector evaluates the level to which students' knowledge, skills and attitudes are progressed and the extent to which they are engaged appropriately in their learning. Assessment practices and the progress made by students are also examined. The inspector may also interact with students and review samples of their work.

The extent to which whole-school improvement targets are impacting on classroom practice and on the quality of learning is evaluated where appropriate.

OVERVIEW OF INSPECTION ACTIVITIES: INCIDENTAL INSPECTION

DURING THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	No advance notice given
		Meeting with principal
		Obtain copy of school timetable
		Draft schedule of classroom visits – this is shared with the principal before visits commence
	Typically one school day	Observation of teaching and learning
		Interaction with students and review of students' work
		Feedback to individual teachers whose practice was observed
		Feedback meeting with principal and/or deputy principal
		No written report issues to the school

1.2. Subject Inspection

INTRODUCTION

Subject inspection is a very important element of the evaluative and advisory work of post-primary inspectors. The process focuses on individual curriculum areas within a school with a view to affirming good practice and making recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the area. A subject inspection may be conducted on a stand-alone basis or as part of a whole-school evaluation.

EVALUATION FOCUS

The inspector evaluates and reports on teaching and learning in the subject under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

- Teaching, learning and assessment
- Subject provision and whole-school support
- Planning and preparation

Learning, teaching and assessment

The inspector considers teachers' preparation for the lessons taught, the effectiveness of the teaching approaches utilised, the classroom atmosphere and how students are managed and organised during learning activities.

The inspector evaluates the level to which students' knowledge, skills and attitudes are progressed and the extent to which they are engaged appropriately in their learning. Assessment practices and the progress made by students are also examined. Achievement in certificate examinations in the context of the school is also considered.

The inclusion of opportunities for students' development of the underlying principles of a programme (e.g. literacy, numeracy, interpersonal skills in the case of the LCA) are examined. The extent to which whole-school improvement targets are impacting on classroom practice and on the quality of learning is evaluated where appropriate.

Subject provision and whole-school support

The inspector examines the arrangements in the school to facilitate students' access to and participation in the subject, including assignment to class groups and the allocation for the subject on the school timetable. The availability of appropriate facilities and resources for teaching and learning in the subject as well as the support provided in the school for teachers' continuing professional development and dissemination of good practice are also considered.

Planning and preparation

The subject department structures and arrangements in the school to facilitate collaborative planning are examined. The subject department plan and teachers' individual planning documentation for the lessons observed are also reviewed, to evaluate whether they are in line with curricular requirements and the needs and interests of the students. The inspector also examines how the subject department monitors and reviews its own subject planning process and plan and the extent to which self-evaluation informs teachers' practice in the classroom.

OVERVIEW OF INSPECTION ACTIVITIES: SUBJECT INSPECTION

BEFORE THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Five days' notification to school/board/patron/ETB by phone and email
		Reporting inspector liaises with school to outline inspection approach and confirm timetable information
	School activity	Principal completes school information form (if this has not been done prior to notification)
		Principal/Subject teachers complete subject information form
Subject-specific planning documents and teacher timetables (if required) forwarded to reporting inspector		
		Records of assessment, attendance records should be available in school
DURING THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Meeting with principal
		Observation of teaching and learning
		Interaction with students
		Review of students' work
	Typically one/two in-school days	Feedback to individual teachers and to the principal
		Meeting with subject team/coordinator (where possible)
		Meeting with SEN coordinator (if required)
		Review of documents – it is expected that teachers will be able to indicate to inspectors a broad written plan of their work on a termly and yearly basis. Teachers are not required to prepare individual written lesson plans for the purpose of subject inspection
Inspectorate activity	Post-evaluation meeting with principal	
	Post-evaluation meeting with subject team (if possible)	
	Draft report prepared by inspector(s)	
AFTER THE INSPECTION VISIT	School activity	Draft report is issued to the principal/chairperson of the board of management for factual verification (five school days) and for school response (ten school days)
	Inspectorate activity	Publication of the final report on the Department website

1.3 Programme Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Programme evaluations focus on specific curriculum programmes offered by schools with a view to affirming good practice and making recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the programme. A programme evaluation may be conducted on a stand-alone basis or as part of a whole-school evaluation.

The programme evaluation model of inspection is used to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the following programmes and to provide advice and support to teachers, principals and school management in post-primary schools and centres for education (where applicable):

- Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)
- Transition Year (TY) programme
- Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)

The Junior Certificate School Programme is targeted particularly at junior-cycle (lower secondary) students who are identified as being at risk of early school leaving, perhaps without completing the Junior Certificate. At senior-cycle level, a school may provide an optional Transition Year, which follows immediately after the junior cycle. Transition Year provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience. During the final two years of senior cycle students take one of three programmes, each leading to a state examination: the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme or the Leaving Certificate Applied.

Programme evaluations are intended to promote continuing improvement through the provision of evidence-based feedback and advice which should enhance the programme team's professional reflection and self-evaluation.

EVALUATION FOCUS

Programme evaluations provide an opportunity for teachers and school management to reflect on the rationale for including the programme in the school's curriculum and on the quality of three key dimensions of educational provision in the specified programme. These three dimensions are:

1. Teaching and learning
2. Programme provision and whole-school support
3. Programme planning, co-ordination and evaluation

Teaching, learning and assessment

The inspector considers teachers' preparation for the lessons taught, the effectiveness of the teaching approaches utilised, the classroom atmosphere and how students are managed and organised during learning activities.

The inspector evaluates the level to which students' knowledge, skills and attitudes are progressed and the extent to which they are engaged appropriately in their learning. Assessment practices and the progress made by students are also examined. Achievement in certificate examinations in the context of the school is also considered.

The inclusion of opportunities for students' development of the underlying principles of a programme (for example, literacy, numeracy, interpersonal skills in the case of the LCA) are examined. The extent to which whole-school improvement targets are impacting on classroom practice and on the quality of learning is evaluated where appropriate.

Programme provision and whole-school support

The inspector examines the arrangements in the school to facilitate students' access to and participation in the subject, including assignment to class groups and the allocation for the subject on the school timetable. The availability of appropriate facilities and resources for learning and teaching in the subject as well as the support provided in the school for teachers' continuing professional development and dissemination of good practice are also considered.

Programme planning, co-ordination and evaluation

The programme coordinating structures and arrangements to facilitate collaborative planning are examined. The programme plan and teachers' individual planning documentation for the lessons observed are also reviewed, to evaluate whether they are in line with programme requirements and the needs and interests of the students. The inspector also examines how the programme team monitors and reviews its own planning process and the extent to which outcomes of programme evaluation have impacted positively on students' learning experience within the programme.

OVERVIEW OF INSPECTION ACTIVITIES: PROGRAMME EVALUATION

BEFORE THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Five days' notification to school by phone and email Reporting inspector liaises with school to outline inspection approach and confirm timetable information
	School activity	Principal/Programme teachers complete programme information form Programme-specific planning documents and teacher timetables (if required) forwarded to reporting inspector
DURING THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Meeting with principal and/or programme coordinator
		Observation of teaching and learning
	Typically two in-school days	Interaction with students and review of students' work
		Feedback to individual teachers and to the principal
		Meeting with programme team and/or small group of key staff
		Student focus group meeting
		Review of documents - it is expected that teachers will be able to indicate to inspectors a broad written plan of their work on a termly and yearly basis. Teachers are not required to prepare individual written lesson plans for the purpose of inspection
		Post-evaluation meeting with the principal and/or the deputy principal and the programme coordinator
	Draft report prepared by inspector(s)	
AFTER THE INSPECTION VISIT	School activity	Draft report is issued to the principal/chairperson of the board of management for factual verification (five school days) and for school response (ten school days)
	Inspectorate activity	Publication of the final report on the Department website

1.4 Evaluation of Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Schools

INTRODUCTION

In 2005 the Department published *DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools): An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion*. The aim of the DEIS action plan is to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities are met. Post-Primary schools participating in DEIS receive additional supports and resources, including additional staffing, through the School Support Programme, to assist them in achieving the aims of the action plan. DEIS schools also receive support from a home-school-community liaison coordinator (HSCL) and from the School Completion Programme (SCP).

Schools that receive additional support and resources through participation in DEIS are expected to support the DEIS action plan through a systematic planning and monitoring process at individual school level and at school cluster/community level. The involvement of students, parents, local communities and agencies operating at local level is an important dimension of the DEIS planning and monitoring process.

Schools are expected to develop action plans for improvement in the following areas (referred to as the DEIS themes): attendance; retention; educational progression; literacy; numeracy; educational attainment, partnership with parents; partnership with other schools and educational providers, and with external agencies. Principals, boards of management and in-school management teams are expected to support the implementation of the DEIS action plans by preparing three-year improvement plans. The school should regularly monitor its progress in implementing these plans and make necessary adjustments in light of experience.

The DEIS model of evaluation is a focused evaluation which examines the school's action planning for improvement across the DEIS themes. The evaluation is focused on supporting school improvement and on quality-assuring the work undertaken in schools to deliver equality of educational opportunity to their students. It also enables inspectors to evaluate the effectiveness of schools' implementation of specific interventions and initiatives, and to provide up-to-date information to the system.

DEIS evaluations seek to identify and affirm good practice in the school while providing clear recommendations for further development and improvement. A succinct inspection report is provided to the school and to the public at the end of the DEIS evaluation process.

EVALUATION FOCUS

The DEIS evaluation model evaluates and reports on the school's action planning for improvement. It examines how schools devise, implement and monitor action plans for improvement for the DEIS themes: attendance; retention; educational progression; literacy; numeracy; educational attainment; partnership with parents and others.

Inspectors consider the following aspects of planning when evaluating the school's action planning for improvement: data analysis and target-setting that informs the selection of strategies and interventions; the implementation of strategies and interventions, and the monitoring and measurement of impact and progress made.

DEIS evaluations also consider the quality and effectiveness of the leadership of the DEIS planning process within schools, and the extent to which the school takes a whole-school approach to improvement.

Effective co-ordination of strategies and interventions and effective use of the additional resources available to DEIS schools are key indicators when evaluating the quality of leadership. Inspectors consider the impact of school self-evaluation on planning for improved outcomes for students.

Inspectors review arrangements for and approaches to teaching and learning and the quality of students' learning experiences and outcomes. The impact of action planning for improvement on arrangements for and approaches to teaching and learning and the quality of students' learning experiences and outcomes are key indicators when evaluating implementation and impact.

OVERVIEW OF INSPECTION ACTIVITIES: DEIS

BEFORE THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Ten days' written notification to school/board/patron/ETB (where relevant)
		Reporting inspector liaises with principal to outline evaluation approach and to make relevant arrangements
		Parent questionnaires issued to the school
	School activity	The principal completes school information form
Parent questionnaires are distributed and returned to school		
DURING THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Meeting with school principal/senior management
		Examination of school's current action plans for improvement
		Administration of student questionnaires
		Collection of parent questionnaires
	Typically three in-school days	Meetings with teaching and other staff involved in DEIS-related activities and interventions
		Meeting with focus group of parents
		Meeting with focus group of students (as appropriate)
		Observation of teaching and learning
		Observation of DEIS-related activities and interventions
		Interaction with students and review of students' work and assessment data
		Feedback to individual teachers, other relevant staff and principal
Inspectorate activity	Post-evaluation meeting with principal/chairperson of the board of management/senior management team and other relevant staff	
	Preparation of draft report	
	Communication of collated parent/student questionnaire reports	
School activity	Draft report is issued to the principal/chairperson of the board of management/ETB (where relevant) for factual verification (five school days) and for school response (ten school days)	
Inspectorate activity	Publication of the final report on the Department website	

1.5 Evaluation of Centres for Education

INTRODUCTION

Evaluations of centres for education address the quality and effectiveness of aspects of the education provided in centres for education and they provide advice and support to teaching staffs, resource persons, centre coordinators and centre management.

The central purposes of the evaluation are:

1. To monitor the quality of teaching and learning and the learners' overall experience in the centre
2. To identify and affirm good practice in the centre
3. To provide advice to centre management, coordinators and teaching staff about the quality of the education provided in the centre and how this can with be improved and developed in accordance learners' needs
4. To report on the effectiveness of the organisation and management of the centre and the Internal Centre Evaluation (ICE) processes within the centre

EVALUATION FOCUS

The inspectors evaluate learning and teaching under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

- The learners' experience
- Centre organisation and management

The learners' experience

The inspector considers teachers' preparation for the lessons taught, the effectiveness of the teaching approaches utilised, the classroom atmosphere and how students are managed and organised during learning activities.

The inspector evaluates the level to which students' knowledge, skills and attitudes are progressed and the extent to which they are engaged appropriately in their learning. Assessment practices and the progress made by students are also examined. The inspector may also interact with students and review samples of their work.

The extent to which whole-centre improvement targets are impacting on classroom practice and on the quality of learning is evaluated where appropriate.

Information is sought about the support strategies in place in the centre to meet the needs of all students in relating to the development of their literacy and numeracy skills. The inspectors consider the general level of support and guidance available to the students. They consider the quality of the links between the centre and those schools from which students transfer. The provision that the centre is making for the development of students' life skills and the care structures in the centres are also considered.

Centre organisation and management

The inspectors consider the engagement of the Education Training Board (ETB) in the development of policies and procedures to guide the operation of the centre; its involvement with the centre in the Quality Framework Initiative processes and the degree to which it supports quality assurance by organising staff training and policy development. The physical resources and facilities available in the centre to support learning and teaching are also examined.

The quality of in-centre management is also evaluated. The inspectors look at communication structures and the level of cooperation and collaboration within the centre as a learning community. The reporting mechanism by which the centre’s board (if applicable) or coordinator reports to the ETB is examined.

The effectiveness of the centre’s self-evaluation processes, and how well they are being used to improve engagement and outcomes for students, teaching, leadership and management is evaluated.

The centre’s procedures for monitoring student attendance, transitions, retention and progression are examined.

OVERVIEW OF INSPECTION ACTIVITIES: CENTRE FOR EDUCATION

BEFORE THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Five days’ written notification to centre/board/patron/ETB
		Reporting inspector liaises with centre coordinator to outline inspection approach and seek timetable information
		Parent questionnaires issued to the centre
	School activity	Centre coordinator completes centre information form
		Parent questionnaires are distributed and returned to centre
Arrangements made for completion of teacher questionnaires		
Centre timetable forwarded to reporting inspector		
DURING THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Relevant documentation forwarded to reporting inspector
		Meeting with centre senior management (including Chief Executive and/or Education Officer of ETB and the centre coordinator)
		Observation of teaching and learning
		Interaction with learners and review of learners’ work
		Feedback to individual resource persons/teachers and to the coordinator
		Meeting with centre resource persons/teaching staff
		Meeting with focus group of parents
		Meeting with focus group of learners
		Administration of learner questionnaires
		Collection of parent questionnaires
		Review of documents – it is expected that teachers will be able to indicate to inspectors a broad written plan of their work on a termly and yearly basis. Teachers are not required to prepare individual written lesson plans for the purpose of inspection
		Post-evaluation meeting with centre staff
		Post-evaluation meeting with centre coordinator/ETB/representative of board
	Communication of collated parent/learner/teacher questionnaire reports Preparation of draft report	
AFTER THE INSPECTION VISIT	School activity	Draft report is issued to the coordinator/chairperson of the board of management/ETB for factual verification (five school days) and for school response (ten school days)
	Inspectorate activity	Publication of the final report on the Department website

1.6 Whole-School Evaluation-Management, Leadership and Learning

INTRODUCTION

The Whole-School Evaluation-Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) process in a post-primary school is designed to evaluate key aspects of the work of the school and to promote school improvement. The WSE-MLL evaluation is intended to complement the school's own development planning and provides the school with opportunities to demonstrate its own self-evaluation processes.

WSE-MLL focuses on whole-school issues relating to management, leadership, planning, learning, teaching and assessment, along with schools' progress in, and capacity for, self-evaluation. The process also looks at the recommendations of previous external evaluations conducted by the Inspectorate, for example subject inspections and programme evaluations. It facilitates close examination of the development and improvement in which the school has engaged following these evaluations. WSE-MLL identifies and affirms good practice in the school while providing clear recommendations for further development and improvement. An inspection report is provided to the school and to the public at the end of the WSE-MLL process.

The WSE-MLL model of inspection may incorporate the evaluation of a specific theme or issue from time to time; for example, the collection of specific data for a national thematic report which may be published by the Inspectorate.

EVALUATION FOCUS

In the course of a WSE-MLL the inspector evaluates and reports under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

- Quality of school leadership and management
- Quality of teaching and learning
- Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
- The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement

Quality of school management and leadership

The inspection team examines the composition and functioning of the board of management and how it fulfils its statutory obligations. It evaluates the operation of the board, the level of consultation with members of the school community and its role in policy development and review. Inspectors evaluate the school's engagement with the self-evaluation process and the establishment of priorities for the development of the school.

The extent to which the school is a learning community is examined. The role of the in-school management of the school, including the role of the principal, deputy principal(s), and the middle management team in leading learning is considered. Staff engagement in school development planning, school self-evaluation, professional development opportunities, communication structures and the level of cooperation and collaboration among the school community are considered.

The school's procedures for admissions, transitions, inclusion, student management and the operation of the student council are evaluated. Strategies to celebrate student achievement, promote the attendance and retention of students and the general level of support and guidance available to students are reviewed. The school's curriculum and timetable with an emphasis on the breadth and balance in curriculum provision, the arrangements for students' subject choices and how the needs of all students are being met are examined.

Quality of teaching and learning

The WSE-MLL team evaluates the quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed as an indicator of the overall quality of teaching and learning in the school. When evaluating teaching and learning, the evaluation team looks at methodologies, classroom management, classroom atmosphere, assessment practices, students' engagement in lessons and the quality of learning and students' achievement. The team also evaluates evidence of planning for teaching and learning and takes account of self-evaluation relating to work in classrooms. The inspector may also interact with students and review samples of students' work.

The quality of planning and preparation at individual teacher, subject department and whole-school levels is also reviewed as well as the in-school assessment procedures that are in place. As part of the review of self-evaluation in the school, the analysis and planning based on student achievement, both by individual teachers and at whole-school level, are evaluated.

Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations

The WSE-MLL team examines how successful the school has been in implementing the recommendations of previous subject, programme and whole-school evaluation reports and inspection visits with regard to the management of the school and to teaching and learning. The school's level of engagement with the main recommendations regarding the management of the school, staff, students and facilities and the impact of the implementation of these recommendations is evaluated. The team also reviews how the recommended good practice in specific areas has been disseminated to other areas of the school.

The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement

The WSE-MLL team assesses the self-evaluation processes currently taking place in the school, the level of engagement in these processes by the school's stakeholders and how the processes have impacted on the work of the school and the quality of learning. The WSE- MLL team evaluates how targets for improvement are set and monitored within the school and the overall effectiveness of the school's strategies for the assessment and monitoring of student achievement.

The WSE-MLL team comments on the school's capacity for change and improvement and its capacity to implement the recommendations of the WSE-MLL report within an appropriate timeframe, based on the development of the school in recent years. This includes observations on the leadership of the school development planning and review process and the culture of the school in planning for and responding to the evolving needs of its student cohort.

OVERVIEW OF INSPECTION ACTIVITIES: WSE-MLL

BEFORE THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Ten days' written notification to school/board/patron/ETB
		Reporting inspector liaises with school and schedules meetings
		Parent/Teacher questionnaire issued to the school
	School activity	Parent questionnaires are distributed and returned to school
		Arrangements put in place for completion of teacher questionnaires
The principal is requested to complete a school information form (if this has not been done prior to notification). This form should be forwarded electronically along with the following documents to the reporting inspector; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The minutes of the five most recent meetings of the board of management • The full school timetable and individual teacher timetables together with an explanation of codes • The school enrolment and admissions policy / procedures, copies of application forms and related material • The school's code of behaviour and school's anti-bullying policy. • The school calendar for the current year and the previous two years with details of opening dates and closures and the schedule of meetings, staff days and major school events 		
ADVANCE IN-SCHOOL DAY	Inspectorate activity	Administration of student questionnaires
		Collection of returned parent questionnaires
	One in-school day	Meeting with members of the board of management
		Meeting with parents
DURING THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Review documentation
		Communication of daily timetable
		Meeting with principal
	Typically three/four in-school days	Meetings and interviews with senior management and teachers
		Meeting with focus group of students
		Meeting with other groups of teachers if appropriate (SEN/ISM)
		Observation of teaching and learning
		Interaction with students and review of students' work
		Review of documents - it is expected that teachers will be able to indicate to inspectors a broad written plan of their work on a termly and yearly basis. Teachers are not required to prepare individual written lesson plans for the purpose of inspection
		Feedback to individual teachers and to the principal
AFTER THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Post-evaluation meeting with the school's senior management (principal and deputy principal(s))
		Post-evaluation meeting with the teaching staff
		Post-evaluation meeting with the members of the board of management
		Communication of collated parent/ student/teacher questionnaire reports
	Preparation of draft report	
School activity	Draft report is issued to the principal/chairperson of the board of management for factual verification (five school days) and for school response (ten school days)	
Inspectorate activity	Publication of the final report on the Department website	

1.7 Whole-School Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Whole-school evaluation is a collaborative process involving the teaching staff, the management of the school, parents, and students. At various stages during the WSE process, members of the school community have the opportunity to interact with the evaluation team to discuss their work, their role, and their vision for the school. These interactions provide the evaluation team with an insight into the structure and dynamics of the school. During a whole-school evaluation the management and planning, teaching and learning and supports for students are evaluated. This enables the evaluation team to identify and affirm the strengths within the school and to make clear recommendations on areas for development and improvement.

Following the in-school evaluation phase of the WSE, the evaluation team discusses the findings and recommendations of the WSE with the board of management, principal and deputy principal (or deputy principals), and all members of the teaching staff. During these meetings the work of the school is discussed and the findings of the evaluation are outlined. Strengths and areas for further development are presented. The WSE report deals with the work of the school as a whole. It affirms positive aspects of the school's work and suggests areas for development. The WSE report provides an external view on the work of the school and it is intended that the report's findings and recommendations facilitate further school self-evaluation and development planning.

EVALUATION FOCUS

The WSE team evaluates and reports on the operation of the school under the following headings or areas of inquiry:

- a) the quality of the school management
- b) the quality of school planning
- c) the quality of curriculum provision
- d) the quality of teaching and learning
- e) the quality of support for students

a) The quality of the school management:

The characteristic spirit of the school

The WSE team examines the characteristic spirit of the school and the awareness of that characteristic spirit within the school community. The team explores its expression and the policies that reflect that spirit. They also observe how the characteristic spirit is reflected in activities, communications and relationships within the school.

School ownership and management

The WSE team examines the composition, role and functioning of the board of management. This area of the WSE also examines the operation of the board of management and its policies and procedures.

In-school management

The WSE team examines the in-school management of the school, including the role of the principal, the deputy principal (or deputy principals), and the middle management team. It looks at the management of students and the management of relationships with parents and the community. It also looks at the level of self-evaluation that is carried out within the school. The evaluation team examines the allocation of members of the teaching staff and compliance with DES requirements relating to material and staff resources. The quality of accommodation in the school, including specialist areas and teaching resources, is also considered.

The management of resources

The WSE team evaluates the effectiveness of the management and allocation of members of the teaching staff, the policy and support for professional development, and the management of external personnel, such as visiting teachers and tutors. The evaluation team also reviews the management of material resources and the use of DES grants and evaluates students' and teachers' access to resources in the various areas of the curriculum.

b) The quality of school planning:

The WSE team examines the school plan and the school planning process, including the monitoring and review of the process. It also examines the action plans set out and staff members' roles and responsibilities within the process. The team also evaluates the implementation, dissemination and impact of the school plan.

c) The quality of curriculum provision:

Curriculum planning and organisation

The WSE team examines curriculum planning and provision in the school, with an emphasis on the breadth and balance in curriculum provision and how the needs of all students are being met. The team also examines the school timetable and the allocation of staff members.

Arrangements for students' choice

The WSE team examines the subject and curriculum options available to all students in the school. It examines subject choice and the provision of guidance, support and advice within this process. This area of inquiry also examines the involvement of staff members, parents and students in the subject choice process.

Co-curricular and extracurricular provision

The team seeks information relating to co-curricular activities (activities that enhance teaching and learning). Equally, the range of extracurricular activities is considered, as is the extent to which all these activities are inclusive of the whole school community.

d) The quality of teaching and learning

Planning and preparation

The subject inspectors evaluate the level of planning for the teaching of individual subjects. They look for evidence of collaborative curricular planning within subjects and planning by individual teachers.

Quality of teaching and learning

The subject inspectors evaluate methodology, classroom management, classroom atmosphere and learning within the lessons observed.

Assessment and achievement

The subject inspectors consider the range of assessment modes, record-keeping, and reporting on students' achievement. Through engagement with the students, the subject inspectors evaluate the level of students' understanding, achievement and enthusiasm for the subject.

e) The quality of support for students

The WSE team examines the school policy on the enrolment and participation of students with general and specific educational needs (SEN). This aspect of the evaluation considers the number of students with SEN and the provision for both classroom inclusion and individual support. The team examines the communication and dissemination of information concerning these students and the provision of learning support and resource teaching.

Other supports for students (disadvantaged, minority and other groups)

The evaluation team examines the support strategies that acknowledge the diversity of the school community and the inclusion of all students in the activities of the school. The team examines special initiatives to meet the needs of these students. It also explores the participation of the parents of these students in the school and any collaboration with other community agencies supporting these students.

Guidance

The evaluation team assesses the provision of individual and group guidance and counselling support in the school. The team examines personal supports for students and liaison with parents and support bodies.

Pastoral care

The evaluation team examines the pastoral care structure and the operation of the care team in the whole school. It assesses the levels of communication within this structure and the involvement of parents. In this area the team also examines the code of student behaviour and the roles of the chaplaincy and the students' council.

OVERVIEW OF INSPECTION ACTIVITIES: WSE

BEFORE THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Ten days' written notification to school/board/patron/ETB
		Reporting inspector liaises with school and schedules meetings
		Parent/Teacher questionnaire issued to the school
	School activity	Parent questionnaires are distributed and returned to school
		Arrangements put in place for completion of teacher questionnaires
		Subject coordinators or subject teachers complete information forms on subjects to be evaluated
		The principal is requested to complete a school information form (if this has not been done prior to notification). This form should be forwarded electronically along with the following documents to the reporting inspector; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The minutes of the five most recent meetings of the board of management • The full school timetable and individual teacher timetables together with an explanation of codes • The school enrolment and admissions policy / procedures, copies of application forms and related material. • The school's code of behaviour and school's anti-bullying policy. • The school calendar for the current year and the previous two years with details of opening dates and closures and the schedule of meetings, staff days and major school events
ADVANCE IN-SCHOOL DAY	Inspectorate activity	Administration of student questionnaires
		Collection of returned parent questionnaires
		Meeting with members of the board of management and patron's representative
	One in-school day	Meeting with board of management
		Meeting with teachers
		Meeting with principal and deputy principal(s)
		Meeting with parents
		Review documentation
DURING THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Communication of daily timetable
		Meeting with principal
		Meetings and interviews with in-school management team
		Meeting with subject teachers
		Meeting with school planning, education support and pastoral care teams
		Meeting with other groups of teachers if appropriate (SEN)
	Typically three/four in-school days	Observation of teaching and learning
		Interaction with students and review of students' work
		Review of documents – it is expected that teachers will be able to indicate to inspectors a broad written plan of their work on a termly and yearly basis. Teachers are not required to prepare individual written lesson plans for the purpose of inspection
		Feedback to individual teachers and to the principal

AFTER THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	Post-evaluation meeting with the teaching staff
		Post-evaluation meeting with the members of the board of management, a representative of the patron/trustee(s) and a representative of the parents' association
		Communication of collated parent/ student/teacher questionnaire report Preparation of draft report
	School activity	Draft report is issued to the principal/chairperson of the board of management for factual verification (five school days) and for school response (ten school days)
Inspectorate activity	Publication of the final report on the Department website	

1.8 Follow-through Inspection

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of a follow-through inspection is to evaluate the progress a school has made on implementing main recommendations made in an earlier inspection where a written report has been published or issued to the school. This is facilitated through a consultative, co-professional engagement between the inspector and relevant school management and staff. Inspectors also advise the school on strategies and actions to enable them to fully address recommendations. Any inspection model that results in a written or published report is subject to a follow-through inspection

Follow-through inspections provide an opportunity for the school to show the progress it has made in improving practice in areas where recommendations were made in previous inspection reports. Inspectors discuss the improvements with individual teachers, groups of teachers and others where appropriate.

At the conclusion of a follow-through inspection, inspectors discuss their overall findings with the principal and/or deputy principal, and, where relevant, with the chairperson of the board of management. They acknowledge the progress made and provide advice on further actions required to ensure the full implementation of each recommendation. The findings from a follow-through inspection add to the school's own information as they engage in self-evaluation and school improvement.

EVALUATION FOCUS

Follow-through inspections focus on the level of progress made by a school in implementing the main recommendations for improvement outlined in a previous inspection report, rather than the overall educational provision that the school makes.

OVERVIEW OF INSPECTION ACTIVITIES: FOLLOW-THROUGH INSPECTION

BEFORE THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity	The inspector contacts the principal two days in advance of the inspection Arrangements are made for any meeting which may be required and for any documentation which the inspector may wish to view
	School activity	Principal prepares any documents, arranges meetings that may be required
DURING THE INSPECTION VISIT	Inspectorate activity Typically one school day	Among the activities that may take place in the course of a follow-through inspection are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with principal and/or senior management team • Meeting with members of the in-school management team or subject coordinator • Meeting with other relevant teachers/members of staff • Observation of teaching and learning and other relevant activities • Interaction with students • Review of school documentation and records, and students' work • Review of resources and facilities • Communication with the chairperson of the board of management • Communication with parents
		Post-evaluation meeting with principal
AFTER THE INSPECTION VISIT	School activity	Draft report is issued to the principal/chairperson of the board of management for factual verification (five school days) and for school response (ten school days)
	Inspectorate activity	Publication of the final report on the Department website

APPENDIX 2

Documentation Requested

Inspectors will request to see and examine documents relevant to the focus of the particular evaluation model. Many of these are prepared by schools as part of their normal planning and work and should be readily available in the school. The table below outlines the documentation typically requested in the course of each particular inspection model. An inspector may also request additional documents or school records relating to specific issues that might arise in the course of the evaluation.

DOCUMENT	II	SI	PE	DEIS	CfE	WSE-MLL	WSE
Enrolment and admissions policy			√		√	√	√
Documents related to enrolment - School prospectus, leaflets, newsletters, materials provided to parents							√
Procedures for enrolment and admissions to specific programmes (JCSP, TY, LCA, LCVP)			√			√	√
School attendance policy				√	√	√	√
The school's code of behaviour and anti-bullying policy (including evidence of the principal's report to the board of management on incidents of bullying and evidence of annual review of policy)					√	√	√
The school's child protection policy including the principal's report to the board of child protection concerns and evidence of annual review of policy and Child Protection School Self-Report form	√				√	√	√
The full school timetable and individual teacher timetables together with an explanation of codes				√		√	√
The school calendar for the current year and the previous two years with details of opening dates and closures and the schedule of meetings, staff days and major school events.						√	√
The school plan – including Health and Safety statement and other policies (this may include draft policies); guidance plan; curriculum plans and documents specific to particular curriculum programmes					√	√	√
Subject department plans / Programme plan (including records of subject department/ programme team meetings)		√	√			√	√
Literacy and Numeracy					√		
Teachers' individual planning documents – on a termly and yearly basis only	√	√		√	√		

DOCUMENT	II	SI	PE	DEIS	CfE	WSE- MLL	WSE
Policy relating to Special Education Needs Assistants (SNA)						√	√
Policy on support for students (learning support/ resource teaching)				√		√	√
Assessment policy and assessment and examination results				√		√	√
Records of student attainment		√			√	√	√
Programme coursework-related materials (as appropriate) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JSCP – Student Profile Folders • TY – Portfolios • LCVP – Links Module Coursework • LCA – Key Assignments and Tasks 			√				
Records relating to work experience (where relevant)			√			√	√
Information on learner transfer and progression				√	√		
School self-evaluation reports and school improvement plans OR DEIS Action plan for school improvement OR Internal Centre Evaluation (ICE) (as relevant)		√		√	√	√	√
Minutes of three most recent staff meetings						√	√
Minutes of five most recent meetings of the board of management						√	√
Staff Deployment Policy (if available)						√	√
Vocational Services Support Unit (VSSU) evaluation reports					√		
List of extra-curricular activities, clubs and sporting activities		√	√	√		√	√
School handbook for staff						√	√
Student journal						√	√

APPENDIX 3

School Information Forms

In order to prepare for an evaluation the Inspectorate will need to collect information from you about your school. This information will help us better understand the context of your school, and may also help you in preparing for the evaluation. The information is collected through a School Information Form. This form collects general information about the school and includes specific sections which are applicable to more focused evaluations, such as Subject Inspections, Programme Evaluations, and Evaluations of Centres for Education and for Evaluations of Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS schools. The form is available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills (www.education.ie), together with instructions on how to complete the form.

Schools can access School Information Forms by clicking on the hyperlink below.

Schools, or specific subject departments within schools, may access these forms at any stage and complete them at a time that is convenient for them. Alternatively, if your school is selected for an evaluation the reporting inspector will forward to you, via email, the information form. You will be asked to complete this form and return it to the reporting inspector prior to the evaluation taking place.

Please note that the information collected will only be used by the Department to inform inspection planning and reporting.

<http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/>

