



Evaluation for School Improvement

A Guide to Follow-Through Inspection



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INSPECTORATE

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1. Ensuring that improvement happens

Effective schools, teachers and boards of management are constantly reviewing their own practice and seeking to find ways to ensure school improvement. They reflect on the quality of teaching, learning and pupil/student achievement in their schools. They also consider how well the school is run and how this can be improved. Responsibility for school improvement rests primarily with the board of management, principal and staff of individual schools. Effective schools engage all of the school community including pupils/students, parents, patrons and trustees in this process of ongoing improvement, which is at the heart of school self-evaluation. These effective schools and their communities develop and implement school improvement plans focused on enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in their schools and they engage in ongoing review to monitor their progress.

Inspection findings also facilitate improvement and change in schools. They provide an external perspective on the work of the school. Inspection reports affirm the aspects of practice that are working well and assist in confirming the school's judgement about its strengths and priorities for improvement. They also 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.

2. What should a school do after an inspection?

At the conclusion of all inspections, inspectors provide oral feedback about the findings of the evaluation. They affirm good practice and provide advice on how to address recommendations. Schools should use the oral feedback session to reflect on the findings of the inspection.

Where inspections result in the publication or issuing of a report, the school receives a draft report for factual verification. Following factual verification, the report is issued and the school is invited to provide a school response.

The school response should indicate the actions the school intends to take to address the recommendations. Ideally, it should indicate that the school has reflected on the steps necessary to effect improvement. The members of the school community should reflect upon the report and give consideration to the strengths identified and to the recommendations for further development. The outcomes of the evaluation should help to inform and complement a school's self-evaluation and should be used by the school community to improve the quality of the school's work.

3. What are follow-through inspections and what is their purpose?

The main purpose of a follow-through inspection is to determine the extent to which a school has made progress on implementing the main recommendations in a previous inspection report. 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.

Follow-through inspection is a process of external evaluation of the work of schools and centres for education carried out by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in accordance with its remit under section 13 of the Education Act 1998. It is one of a range of evaluation models employed by the Inspectorate. Its purpose is to evaluate the progress a school has made on implementing recommendations made in an earlier inspection where a written report has been published or issued to the school.

Follow-through inspections are carried out in accordance with *The Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate* available at www.education.ie. They focus on quality assuring the work of schools and on supporting school improvement, taking cognisance of the school's own context.

This guide sets out the procedures and practices involved in follow-through inspections.

4. How do follow-through inspections help school improvement?

Follow-through inspections provide an opportunity for a school to show the progress it has made in improving practice in areas where recommendations were made in a previous inspection report. They provide an opportunity for inspectors to support and advise schools. Inspectors and school staff engage in co-professional discussion about the school's progress.

During follow-through inspections, inspectors look at how the school has improved. They 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.

5. How are schools selected for follow-through inspections?

Follow-through inspection can take place in any school or centre for education where a previous inspection was held and where a report was published or issued to the school. A sample of all schools and centres for education is selected for follow-through inspections as part of the Inspectorate's annual programme of inspection. The sample includes schools found to be at all levels on the quality continuum, from schools with significant strengths to schools in which significant weaknesses were identified.

Follow-through inspections take place within a timeframe that allows fair and reasonable time for schools to make progress on addressing the recommendations made in a previous evaluation. The timeframe will be appropriate to the nature of the recommendations and will take cognisance of the context of the school. Generally, follow-through inspections take place within a three-year period from the date of issue or publication of the original report.

6. What happens when follow-through inspections take place?

6.1 Notice

Typically an inspector contacts the principal two school days in advance of the planned inspection. However, circumstances can arise where advance notification is not provided. For example, where serious breaches of compliance with legislation or regulation are reported, an unannounced follow-through inspection visit may be necessary.

During the initial contact, the inspector explains the follow-through process to the principal. The inspector provides details of the earlier inspection, indicating the type of inspection and date of issue or publication of the report. The principal is advised that the inspection will focus on the progress that the school has made in addressing some or all of the main recommendations made in the specified report. The principal should inform relevant teachers as appropriate.

6.2 Scheduling

Follow-through inspections generally take the form of a one-day inspection. In certain circumstances, a number of follow-through inspection visits may occur.

6.3 In-school phase

The format of the follow-through inspection is determined by the recommendations in the published or issued report. The process allows for sufficient flexibility to gather evidence relating to the progress made on implementing some or all of the main recommendations in the original inspection report.

Among the activities that may take place in the course of a follow-through inspection are:

- Meeting with principal and/or senior management team
- Meeting with members of the in-school management team or subject co-ordinator
- Meeting with other relevant teachers/members of staff
- Observation of teaching and learning and other relevant activities
- Interaction with pupils/students
- Review of school documentation and records, and pupils'/students' work
- Review of resources and facilities
- Communication with the chairperson of the board of management
- Communication with parents

6.4 Feedback

Feedback and discussion take place with individual teachers in all cases where observation of teaching and learning has taken place. Opportunities for discussion and feedback may be provided to subject departments or other groups where appropriate.

Inspectors meet with the principal and/or deputy principal or another person nominated by the principal at the conclusion of the follow-through inspection. The purpose of this meeting is to enable professional discussion about improving the quality of provision in the school. Inspectors discuss the findings and provide clarification and feedback. They acknowledge the progress the school has made on the implementation of recommendations from the previous inspection. They provide advice about further actions required to fully address the recommendations, as appropriate.

Inspectors may engage in discussion and provide feedback to the chairperson of the board of management, where appropriate.

6.5 Reporting

After the follow-through inspection visit (or in some cases, after a number of follow-through inspection visits) the inspector prepares a follow-through inspection report. Follow-through inspection reports provide a brief outline of the activities

undertaken, an evaluation of the progress the school has made in addressing some or all of the main recommendations, and recommendations to assist the school in making further progress where appropriate. An outline of the structure of the report is provided in Appendix 1.

Follow-through inspection reports are subject to the normal quality assurance procedures of the Inspectorate. They are issued to the school for factual verification and later for school response as prescribed in *Publication of School Inspection Reports: Guidelines (2006)*. The final report and the school's response are published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

On receiving the report, the chairperson of the board of management (or a person authorised by him or her) will provide a copy to each teacher affected by the inspection and to each member of the board of management.

7. Publication of the follow-through inspection report

The final follow-through inspection reports 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 *Publication of School Inspection Reports: Guidelines (2006)* (www.education.ie).

8. What happens if the school has not made progress in addressing recommendations?

Inspection reports should assist schools in their ongoing efforts to improve practice. The principal, staff and board of management of the school should reflect on the recommendations in inspection reports and address them in their school self-evaluation and improvement processes. Experience has shown that most school communities take very seriously the recommendations in inspection reports and seek to address them in their ongoing improvement work.

In the exceptional cases where the findings of a follow-through inspection indicate that the school has not made sufficient progress in implementing the recommendations from an earlier inspection report, the Inspectorate may continue to monitor the quality of the work of the school, with a specific focus on the recommendations made in the original report. Where there are serious concerns regarding the progress that the school has made in addressing recommendations, the Department may seek to engage directly with the board of management and/or the patron of the school on the matter.

9. Review of inspections

A teacher or a board of management of a school may request the Chief Inspector to review any inspection carried out that affects the teacher or the school. They 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) (Revised 2006)*.

10. 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: Structure of follow-through inspection report

The findings of follow-through inspection are reported under the following headings.

Introduction

- School name, address and roll number
- Type and date of original inspection
- Date of follow-through inspection

Activities

The report will outline the activities that took place. Among the activities that may take place are:

- Meeting with principal and/or senior management team
- Meeting with members of the in-school management team or subject co-ordinator
- Meeting with relevant teachers/members of staff
- Observation of teaching and learning
- Interaction with pupils/students
- Review of school documentation and records and pupils'/students' work
- Review of resources and facilities
- Communication with chairperson of board of management
- Communication with parents

Progress on main recommendations

- Recommendation in original report
- Comment on progress made
- Level of progress made using the following continuum:

Very good progress	Good progress	Partial progress	No progress
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Summary of findings

- Summary of overall findings

Recommendations

- Further recommendations to assist the school in fully addressing recommendations, where appropriate