**Guide to Inspections**

Preface

Following the 2014 Annual Congress, TUI offers this simple guide to inspections as encountered in second-level in Ireland. It is not intended to be an exhaustive study as inspections and how schools experience them can be as varied as the centres inspected and the inspectors who carry out the visits. Members are strongly advised to read publications from the Inspectorate and also to read TUI submissions on the process. Thanks are due to the Inspectorate for kindly allowing use of their documents.

Introduction

The role of the Inspectorate is set out in Section 13 of the Education Act 1998. This legislation conveys multiple functions on the inspectorate and in turn, inspectors. Two of those functions are

* “to support and advise recognised schools, centres for education and teachers on matters relating to the provision of education” and
* “to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the provision of education in the State, including comparison with relevant international practice and standards, and to report thereon to the Minister”.

The Inspectorate has implemented a number of changes recently. Changes have included:

* Developing a wider range of inspection models in order to match the model more closely to the school circumstances; to allow for more frequent inspections; and to monitor priority areas.
* Inspections are now more focused on the quality of teaching and learning; the quality of leadership and management; and the ability of the school to drive change.
* The Inspectorate has started to roll out questionnaires for parents, students and teachers. TUI has concerns about the use of questionnaires in the longer-term and hence has instructed members not to complete questionnaires as part of the inspection process. The two questionnaires of immediate import to teachers are one of how they assess their school and another, which is a pilot at present, on how they found the inspection process.
* The Inspectorate uses data obtained from the Department to plan for inspections. Such data includes enrolment information, student assessment and examination data, and also school attendance data.

Types of Inspection

*Short, unannounced “incidental” inspections* are carried out in a large number of schools each year. They involve a one-day visit focusing on classroom work. They try to avoid excessive paperwork. They create an opportunity to provide advice and feedback to individual teachers and to the principal teacher. They are also used to collect information about the school, which is then used to plan future inspections.

*Subject inspections* are more intensive than unannounced inspections. They focus on a particular subject department and provide a detailed evaluation of same.

*DEIS evaluations* are also more intensive than unannounced short inspections. They focus on the quality of planning in DEIS schools.

*Programme evaluations* are used to examine the quality of particular curricular programmes such as Transition Year, Junior Cycle School Programme, Leaving Certificate Vocational or Leaving Certificate Applied.

*Specialised HSU/SCU/CDC inspections* take place in schools attached to High Support Units, Special Care Units and Children Detention Centres. These schools are inspected annually due to the higher risk attached to them.

*WSE-MLL (Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning)* is an intensive model of inspection. It examines the quality of teaching and learning but also the quality of leadership and management in the school, including the Board of Management. It uses evidence from the inspectors’ observations, examination of school records and replies from student and parent questionnaires.

*WSE* is a more intensive and time consuming form of inspection of whole school processes.

*Evaluations of Centres for Education* are conducted mainly in Youthreach centres. The process is similar to WSE.

*Inspections of Special Educational Needs Provision* may occur as incidental inspections or dedicated subject inspections, or they may form an element of WSE, or they may take place using specialised SEN inspection models.

*Follow-through inspections* take place in a proportion of schools that have experienced a subject, DEIS, Programme or WSE type inspection. They seek to establish the extent to which earlier recommendations have been implemented.

What are Inspections Designed to Do?

* Seek to provide an external perspective on the quality of the work of a school or centre
* Affirm good practice
* Advise teachers, principal teachers and boards of management on how schools can improve the quality of educational experience they offer
* Act as an accountability measure
* Provide information about the effectiveness of the school, for example through the publication of reports. This causes concerns to TUI particularly in the context of small schools, small subjects departments or small communities.
* Provide information about trends in the education system.

What Happens During an Inspection?

Different inspection models operate differently but a number of common elements can be discerned:

* All involve meetings with key staff
* Inspectors observe teaching and learning
* Inspectors interact with students
* Inspectors examine students’ work
* Inspectors examine records of students’ tests and examinations.

Whole school type inspections also involve:

* Scrutiny of school planning and self-review documentation
* Interviews with the board of management
* Interviews with learners and parents of students
* The use of questionnaire data

At the conclusion of inspections:

* Inspectors provide oral feedback
* In the case of inspections other than incidentals, inspectors provide a written report which include detailed recommendations.

School Self-Evaluation

School self-evaluation (SSE) operates alongside the forms of inspection outlined above. SSE is mandatory and the requirements are set out in circular 0040/2012. The Inspectorate has published guidelines for schools on SSE. The primary aim of SSE is self-improvement. All schools are required to prepare SSE reports and school improvement plans. TUI has considerable concerns about the administrative burden involved.

Quality Assurance

The Inspectorate has a number of internal processes to ensure that inspections carried out in different schools or regions are as similar as possible whilst taking into account the context of the individual school. In the event of a TUI member being unhappy with the outcome of an inspection, they should know that the Inspectorate has both formal and informal processes available to that member. A board of management or individual teacher may seek a review of the work of the inspector concerned or the inspection report. The procedure is available through the Inspectorate website below. Section 13 (9) of the Education Act 1998 is also worth reading if a member is considering appealing the process or outcome of the inspection.

It should be noted that, as outlined earlier in this document, part of the key functions of the inspectorate is to support and advise schools. International evidence finds that teachers find the information emerging from inspections in their schools useful. The process is frequently seen in Ireland as stressful but the outcome is often seen as rewarding.

See for example, OECD (2005), *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* and/orOECD (2013), *Synergies for Better Learning.*

TUI submissions on inspections can be viewed at [www.tui.i](http://www.tui.it)e.

Publications from the Inspectorate can be found at <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications>.

Department of Education and Skills circulars can be accessed at

<http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/>

An overview of evaluation models throughout Europe, and a detailed breakdown of the Irish model, is available at

<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/178en.pdf>