

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

CHIEF INSPECTOR'S REPORT

JANUARY 2013 - JULY 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ***Chief Inspector's Report 2013-2016*** reports on quality and standards in the primary and post-primary schools and centres for education that were inspected by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills between January 2013 and July 2016. It will be published on Monday, 5th of February at 9.00am.

The report

- Describes briefly the context of the educational system over the period to which the report applies
- Highlights key strengths and key areas for development identified during inspections in schools and centres for education at both levels
- Describes the introduction of education-focussed inspections in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Settings and early findings from these inspections
- Provides some brief summary evaluative information about
 - Arts Education in Primary Schools
 - Schools attached to High Support Units, Special Care Units and Children Detention Centres
- Comments on challenges facing the educational system in the immediate future.

The *Chief Inspector's Report 2013-2016* is presented in two sections, Section 1 sets out the contextual factors which affected the work of teachers and school communities during the period covered by the Report. Section 2 provides a summary of inspection findings in schools and other settings, arising from more than 6,000 inspections.

This executive summary also includes additional comparison data drawn from the previous *Chief Inspector's report 2010-2012* and other reports. In particular, the publication of the *Chief Inspector's Report 2013-16* is complemented by the publication of *A Review of Early Years Education-focussed Inspections: April 2016 - June 2017 – Insights and Developments* which provides a review of the first year of early years inspections from their commencement in spring 2016. This report was published on 31 January 2018.

KEY MESSAGES IN THE CHIEF INSPECTOR'S REPORT

SECTION ONE

Chapter One: Key Factors influencing the work of Schools in the Period January 2013 – July 2016

This chapter acknowledges the context in which the Inspectorate worked in the period covered by the report. It describes some of the key factors that influenced the work of schools in the period covered by the report in which evaluations were taking place.

During this period those factors included:

- Growing numbers of students benefited from the State-funded Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. Education-focussed Early Years Inspections (EYEI) began in trial format in late 2015 and commenced formally in April 2016
- Significant growth continued in student numbers, particularly at primary and lower secondary levels, and staff numbers grew in schools. Expenditure on education grew but it was largely consumed by the growth in student numbers – spending per student was below the OECD average at primary level in 2013 and 2014. This is at least partially a result of strong growth in pupil numbers at this level.

Growing numbers of learners, teachers and other professionals

Learners	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Learners in ECCE programme	69,051	63,104	73,852

Early years settings	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Settings in ECCE scheme	4,259	4,371	4,431

Learners	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Primary and special schools	536,317	544,696	553,380
Second-level schools	333,175	339,207	345,550

Teachers (whole-time equivalents)	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Primary and special schools	32,828	33,613	34,567
Second-level schools	25,626	26,174	26,804

Special Needs Assistants	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Primary, special & second-level schools	10,669	11,175	11,924

Growing expenditure

Total spending (capital and current)	2013 €bn	2014 €bn	2015 €bn	2016 €bn
Primary	3.502	3.550	3.737	3.747
Post-primary	3.120	3.213	3.340	3.430
Total	6.622	6.763	7.077	7.177

Per student spending

Expenditure per student	Primary in US\$		Lower secondary in US\$		Upper secondary in US\$	
	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014
Ireland	8,002	8,007	10,773	10,518	10,840	10,837
OECD average	8,477	8,733	9,980	10,235	9,990	10,182
EU average	8,545	8,803	10,210	10,413	10,087	10,494

Spending converted to US dollars for comparison purposes. Source: OECD, Education at a Glance

- Funding for initiatives to combat disadvantage and to provide support for children with special educational needs grew.
- A revised model for the allocation of special needs teaching resources was piloted during this period. An Inspectorate evaluation of the pilot phase of implementation was largely positive about the model. The recent introduction of the revised model to all schools will give greater autonomy to each school to deploy its special needs resources.
- The range of measures to improve teaching, learning and assessment of literacy and numeracy taken under the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, supported by school self-evaluation, brought about significant improvement in these core skills.
- There was significant curriculum reform at both primary and post-primary levels, supported by the provision of professional support to school leaders and teachers.
- The implementation of junior cycle reform progressed more slowly than intended especially in some schools. The resolution of industrial relations issues regarding implementation saw the introduction of time for collaborative professional work within teachers' contracted time.
- Growing societal concerns about the mental health of children and young people, and about the impact of bullying, focussed attention on the role that schools can play to help students develop resilience and coping skills.
- Structures for the management of schools remained generally unchanged in the period under review. The impact of the moratorium on posts of responsibility continued to be felt by schools.
- The establishment of Education and Training Boards marked a significant reform in the Irish system.

Chapter Two: The Inspectorate

Chapter Two provides a general description of the Inspectorate and its work. It describes how the Inspectorate conduct our evaluation and advisory work and the ways in which that changed in the period covered by this report

Key messages include the following:

- Inspections are focused on the key factors that influence the learning experience of students. Primarily, these are the quality of teaching and learning, and the quality of leadership and management.
- Inspections also consider the capacity/ability of the school to drive improvement and change.
- Intensive consultation and development work was undertaken in the period under review to finalise a suite of new or revised inspection models for use in primary and post-primary schools. By June 2016, these were ready for implementation in schools from September 2016. (Consequently, the inspections reported upon in the 2013-2016 report are based on the older inspection arrangements).
- The introduction and early implementation of school self-evaluation took place in primary and post-primary schools.
- At the request of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills, the Inspectorate developed and began the implementation of education-focussed inspections in Early Years settings. These complement the regulatory inspections carried out by Tusla.
- Inspection reports arising from the general inspection programme for Early Years settings, schools and centres for education are published in accordance with an agreed set of principles and protocols. Work was undertaken to make these reports more accessible and new report format were readied for use from September 2016.

SECTION TWO

The findings in this section, in Chapters Three to Five, on Early Years settings, primary schools and post-primary schools are based on information collected during a wide range of inspection models including:

- Almost 240 education-focussed Early Years inspections
- Over 800 whole-school evaluations at primary level and over 250 at post-primary level
- Almost 1,500 Incidental Inspections at primary level and over 800 Incidental Inspections at post-primary level
- Thematic inspections of planning and target setting in thirty-eight DEIS schools (20 primary and 18 post-primary)
- Over 1,100 Subject Inspections and ninety-two programme evaluations at post-primary level
- Almost 38,000 pupil questionnaires at primary level and over 41,000 student questionnaires at post-primary level
- Approximately 51,000 confidential parental questionnaires at primary level and 26,500 confidential parental questionnaires at post-primary level.

Chapter 3: The quality of teaching and learning in settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme

- In 2015, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (DES), at the request of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), developed a model of inspection that focuses on the quality of education provision in Early Years settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The ECCE provides a free pre-school experience for children prior to starting primary school. The majority of children now participate in the ECCE programme.
- An Education-focussed Early Years Inspection (EYEI) model was developed in 2015 based on research in Early Years education and in collaboration with practitioners, setting owners/managers and Early Years experts. The EYEI Quality Framework to be used in inspections was informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and *Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*.
- In November 2015 a team of Early Years inspectors was recruited and from November 2015 to the end of February 2016 a number of pilot inspections were completed. In April 2016 formal inspection activity in Early Years settings commenced.
- The first EYEI reports were published on the Departments website at the end of June 2016.
- Inspectors found that the atmosphere in Early Years settings was warm and respectful, that children were generally happy and settled and that settings were well-resourced. Responses from settings appeared to indicate a positive reaction to these inspections.
- The introduction of EYEIs from 2015 marked a significant new era for the Department's Inspectorate and for the Early Years sector alike. The inspection programme for Early Years settings has the potential to positively influence the educational experience of children, both in the settings and as they transition to primary schools, and to contribute strategically to the national policy agenda for quality improvement.
- The Inspectorate report *Insights and Future Developments*, published on 31 January 2018 presents a review of the EYEI model after the first full year of implementation and covers the period April 2016 to June 2017 during which 867 inspections were completed.
- The strengths-based approach of EYEI was strongly endorsed through the consultation processes with many respondents and key stakeholders welcoming the recognition and validation of their professional practice in respect of early education provision. However, it has also raised issues relating to the context in which the ECCE Programme operates and the challenging working conditions of staff in early years services, as a main source of frustration and difficulty in taking action on quality improvement.
- Findings from EY inspection indicate that whilst there is much cause for optimism in relation to the nature of practice in early education, there is still much work to be done in developing the capacity of the early years sector in Ireland to deliver high-

quality early education experiences for children aged from three years until they enrol in primary school. This work relates to:

- the coordination of national evaluation and monitoring processes in the early years sector
 - provision of effective initial and continuing education programmes for staff in early years services and initiatives to improve their working conditions
 - the development of advice and support for the implementation of the national practice frameworks(Aistear and Síolta)
 - better communication of the nature, value and importance of early childhood education in early years services to parents, primary schools and the wider society
- There is a significant, shared challenge for early years services and primary schools to build relationships and develop protocols that support successful transitions from pre-schools to primary schools.
 - The Inspectorate is committed to continuing to work in partnership with all key stakeholders to apply a child-centred, educational lens in the evaluation of State funded early years provision.
 - More detailed information on outcomes from the Early Years inspections is available in the separate report: *A Review of Early Years Education-focussed Inspections: April 2016 - June 2017 – Insights and Developments* (Inspectorate, DES, 2018).

Chapter 4 The quality of teaching and learning in primary schools

The quality of teaching and learning in primary schools

- Inspectors judged that the overall quality of teaching in primary schools was generally of a high standard. It was judged as good or better in between 88% and 94% of schools visited, depending on the model of inspection used. This is a slight improvement in the quality of teaching as expressed in the *Chief Inspector's Report* 2010-2012 where the quality of teaching was good or better in over 86% of all inspections.

Teaching and learning in primary schools

Chief Inspector's Report	Overall quality of teaching is good or better	Overall quality of learning is good or better
2013-2016	88% to 94% of schools visited depending on inspection model	89% to 96% of lessons depending on inspection model
2010-2012	86% of all inspections	86% to 91% of lessons depending on inspection model

Overall quality of teaching in the school	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
2013-16 in all incidental inspections	13%	75%	12%

- However, in 12% of schools evaluated during Incidental Inspections, the quality of teaching overall was deemed to be less than satisfactory. Inspectors frequently noted that pupils' opportunities to work actively and collaboratively were limited. This evidence is corroborated by evidence from pupil questionnaires. A stronger focus on planning for meaningful participation of pupils in the learning process and adequate differentiation to cater for the range of needs of pupils is needed
- The overall quality of learning in Incidental Inspections was found to be good or better in 89% of lessons. This compares positively to the 2010-2012 period when the quality of learning was 86% of lessons.

Teaching and learning in English in primary schools

- The data shows that there has been an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning of English in primary schools. The quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory or better in 93% of primary schools in which we conducted a Whole-School Evaluation (WSE) compared to 89% of schools in 2010-2012. In Incidental Inspections, the quality of pupils' learning in English was found to be good or better in 89% of lessons in the period covered by the present report compared to 87% satisfactory or better in the 2010-2012 period. This is a welcome improvement and a very healthy achievement.

Teaching and learning in English in primary schools

Chief Inspector's Report	Overall quality of teaching and learning is good or better	Overall quality of learning is good or better
2013-2016	93% of schools in WSE inspections	89% of lessons in incidental inspections
2010-2012	89% of schools in WSE inspections	87% of lessons in incidental inspections

Overall quality of teaching and learning in the school	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
2013-2016 in WSE inspections	27%	66%	7%

Appropriate teaching approaches are used in lessons	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
2013-2016 in lessons in Incidental Inspections	88%	12%

- Since 2013 we have improved the reporting of data from inspections. We can now say that the quality of teaching and learning in English in 27% of lessons in WSEs was very good and that it was good in a further 66%. This shows that while overall, we have a high number of lessons that are good or better, there is potential to improve lessons further and to move more lessons from satisfactory practice to very good or excellent practice.

Teaching and learning in Mathematics in primary schools

- The quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics in WSEs conducted in primary schools was found to be satisfactory or better in 96% of schools compared to 92% in the 2010-2012 report. An small improvement was also seen in the quality of learning in Incidental Inspections where the quality of pupils' learning in Mathematics was found to be good or better in 87% of lessons in the period covered by the present report compared to 85% satisfactory or better in the 2010-2012 period.
- We can also look at the breakdown in the quality of learning in Mathematics in the 2013-16 data. The quality of pupil learning was very good or better in 33% in schools where we conducted a WSE, in the period covered by this report, and good in another 63%. Again, this shows that there is room to improve further and to increase the percentage of lessons in which pupil learning in Mathematics is of the highest standard.

Teaching and learning in mathematics in primary schools

Chief Inspector's Report	Overall quality of teaching and learning is good or better	Overall quality of learning is good or better
2013-2016	96% of schools in WSE inspections	87% of lessons in incidental inspections
2010-2012	92% of schools in WSE inspections	85% of lessons in incidental inspections

Overall quality of teaching and learning in the school	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
2013-2016 in WSE inspections	33%	63%	4%

Appropriate teaching approaches are used in lessons	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
2013-2016 in lessons in incidental inspections	85%	15%

- These generally positive findings about English and Mathematics reflect increases in children's attainment as substantiated by national and international tests. In addition, the requirements on schools to focus on literacy and numeracy during the period is likely to have had a positive impact.
- However, the proportion of lessons in which less than satisfactory teaching approaches were seen in incidental inspections (12% in English and 15% in Mathematics) shows the need for improvement.

Teaching and learning in Irish in primary schools

- In the 2010-2012 period, inspectors reported that the quality of learning in Irish was satisfactory or better in 74% of lessons observed in incidental inspections with 26% of lessons as less than satisfactory. Despite a number of recommendations to

support improvement in the 2013 report, no improvement in the standard of teaching and learning in Irish was noted in the period covered by this report. In the 2013-2016 period, the quality of teaching and learning was judged to be good or better in 72% of schools evaluated through a WSE and the quality of learning was good or better in 74% of lessons during an Incidental Inspection. This means that it was less than satisfactory in between 26% and 28% of evaluations.

Teaching and learning in Irish in primary schools

Chief Inspector's Report	Overall quality of teaching and learning is good or better	Overall quality of learning is good or better
2013-2016	72% of schools in WSE inspections	74% of lessons in incidental inspections
2010-2012	72% of schools in WSE inspections	76% of lessons in incidental inspections

Overall quality of teaching and learning in the school	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
2013-2016 in WSE inspections	12%	60%	28%

Appropriate teaching approaches are used in lessons	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
2013-2016 in lessons in incidental inspections	78%	22%

- Achievements in Irish are significantly lower than in English and Mathematics. There is thus considerable potential for improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in Irish. If this is to be achieved, significant change is required in terms of the learning experiences provided to pupils.
- We can also look at the breakdown in the quality of teaching/learning in the 2013-16 data. Teaching and learning in Irish was rated as very good or better in only 12% of the schools evaluated in WSEs (compared to 27% in English and 33% in Mathematics) while 60% were rated as good. This again shows a considerable potential for improvement. Indeed, significant change is required to bring a much greater proportion of lessons into the very good category.
- Inspectors recommended that the lesson content in Irish should be appropriately differentiated to reflect the needs and abilities of pupils and that there was a need to provide increased opportunities for pupils to use the language they have been taught.

Quality of assessment in primary schools

- The quality of assessment was less than satisfactory in more than a fifth of lessons visited in primary schools during Incidental Inspections. The quality of assessment was less than satisfactory in 19% of WSEs conducted during this period. Improvement in assessment of learning and in assessment for learning practices is

required in many primary school settings. The results of pupil questionnaires indicate a greater need for teachers to discuss test results with pupils and let them know how they can improve.

Quality of support for children's learning in primary schools

- The overall quality of support for pupils with special education needs (SEN) was good or better in 89% of schools visited. Pupil and parent questionnaires were also very positive in their perceptions of SEN support.
- However, better engagement with parents of children with special educational needs (SEN) is needed as almost 10% of parents in SEN inspections did not agree that they are aware of the learning targets set for their children in individual learning plans.

The quality of leadership and management in primary schools

- The quality of management was good or better in 89%-90% of the schools in which whole-school type evaluations (either WSE or WSE-MLL) were conducted. This is slightly better than the *Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012* where the quality of management was good or better in 88% of primary schools.
- Boards of management were found to be supportive, conscientious, proactive and committed in the more effective schools. In schools where inspectors were less positive about the quality of work of the board, inspectors often found that boards had not ratified organisational policies and curriculum plans and had not effectively communicated about those policies and plans to parents.
- Where serious weaknesses in the work of schools are found during inspection, the capacity at school level to address some serious challenges such as issues of governance, can be compromised by the voluntary nature of the membership of most boards. Some voluntary boards can find it challenging to manage some tasks, including large scale capital projects and parental complaints, and to provide adequate leadership when standards are not satisfactory in the school. Voluntary boards have many advantages, including the linkages that they encourage with school communities, but some are challenged to deal with the increasingly complex managerial tasks that they have to carry out. At the very least, ways in which greater professional support could be provided for boards in these cases needs to be considered.
- The quality of work of the in-school management team (principal and deputy principal) remains of good or very good quality. In WSEs and in WSE-MLLs conducted over the period of the report, the percentage of schools where the quality of the work of in-school management was less than satisfactory was between 11% and 15% in this report compared to 18% in the *Chief Inspector's Report* of 2010-2012. In most schools inspectors, when describing the good practice in this area, comment on the strong and purposeful leadership of the principal, a whole-school focus on teaching and learning and a commitment to raising pupil attainment.

However, the need for the in-school management team to lead a whole-school approach to raising pupils' attainment was mentioned in many recommendations.

- Primary schools were found to be managing their pupils well and the vast majority of parents are happy with their child's school. In particular, questionnaire results from pupils and parents indicate a very high level of satisfaction with the arrangements in place in many schools to promote positive relationships and to tackle bullying. 84% of parents responding to questionnaires in primary schools indicated that they were confident that the school would act promptly and effectively if their child was experiencing bullying.

Bullying: parents' and pupils' questionnaires

Question	Respondent	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I have been informed of the school's anti-bullying policy	Parents	90%	4%	6%
I know who to approach in the school if my child experiences bullying	Parents	93%	2%	5%
If someone is bullying me I can get help from a teacher or other adult in the school	Pupils	95%	1%	4%
I am confident that if my child experiences bullying the school will act promptly and effectively	Parents	84%	5%	11%

Chapter Five: The quality of teaching and learning in post-primary schools

The quality of teaching and learning in post-primary schools and centres

- The report outlines very positive findings for post-primary schools. The overall quality of teaching in post-primary schools was evaluated as good or better in between 88% and 94% of lessons, depending on the model of inspection used.

Teaching and learning in post-primary schools

Chief Inspector's Report	Overall quality of teaching is good or better	Overall quality of learning is good or better
2013-2016	88% to 94% of schools visited depending on inspection model	85% to 91% of lessons depending on inspection model
2010-2012		82% to 84% of lessons depending on inspection model

- Notable improvements in planning for teaching to ensure positive outcomes for students were evident in comparison with the last *Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012* with the quality of subject planning being found to be good or very good in 90% of Subject Inspections in the period covered by this report compared with 81% in the previous report.
- Inspection recommendations include: the greater use of active learning including student-centred and student-led activities; creative use and integration of ICT; and in

Youthreach centres raising expectation of achievement. It is evident too that the quality of feedback given to students on their work can be improved in some cases.

- The quality of learning was good or better in 85% to 91% of schools visited, depending on the model of inspection used. This was better than in the 2010-2012 report in which the quality of learning was satisfactory or better in between 82% and 84% of schools.

Teaching and learning in English in post-primary schools

- The data from 2013-2016 shows that the quality of learning observed in lessons during English Subject Inspections remained similar to that of the 2010-2012 period. Learning in English was found to be good or very good in 83% of lessons observed during English Subject Inspection in the 2013-2016 period compared to 84% of lessons in the 2010-2012 period.
- The breakdown now available in this report between lessons where learning was “very good” and “good” is informative. Learning in 34% of English lessons observed during subject inspections in 2013-16 was very good and 49% of lessons evaluated were found to be good. There is scope to improve learning evident here.

Teaching and learning in English in post-primary schools

Chief Inspector's Report	Overall quality of teaching is good or better	Overall quality of learning is good or better
2013-2016	89% of lessons in subject inspections	83% of lessons in subject inspections
2010-2012	87% of lessons in subject inspections	84% of lessons in subject inspections

Overall quality of learning in lessons	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
2013-2016 in subject inspections	34%	49%	17%

Appropriate teaching approaches are used in lessons	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
2013-2016 in lessons in incidental inspections	87%	13%

- The high level of lessons in English that were less than satisfactory (17%) in the present report is of concern. In these lessons inspectors noted poor planning for teaching and learning, a lack of variety in lesson content and insufficient engagement of students.

Teaching and learning in Mathematics in post-primary schools

- Our overall findings from Mathematics Subject Inspections are largely positive. The data from 2013-2016 shows that learning was good or better in 88% of lessons in Mathematics Subject Inspections, which is a significant increase compared to 2010-

2012 where the quality of learning was good or better in 74% of lessons. This is a welcome increase and points to a move towards the successful embedding of the Project Maths curriculum in schools. Post-primary schools also engaged with the literacy and numeracy strategy as part of school self-evaluation in this period. This may also have contributed to the improvements noted.

- Changes in the reporting of data means that for the 2013-2016 period we can now say that learning observed in 41% of Mathematics lessons in Subject Inspections was in the very good category and learning in another 47% of lessons was in the good category. Student learning was less than satisfactory in 12% of lessons in Subject Inspections.
- It is also concerning that in incidental inspections, the use of appropriate teaching approaches was less than satisfactory in 15% of lessons.

Teaching and learning in Mathematics in post-primary schools

Chief Inspector's Report	Overall quality of teaching is good or better	Overall quality of learning is good or better
2013-2016	93% of lessons in Subject Inspections	88% of lessons in Subject Inspections
2010-2012	77% of lessons in Subject Inspections	74% of lessons in Subject Inspections

Overall quality of learning	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
2013-2016 in subject inspections	41%	47%	12%

Appropriate teaching approaches are used in lessons	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
2013-2016 in lessons in incidental inspections	85%	15%

Teaching and learning in Irish in post-primary schools

- Challenges persist with regards to the quality of teaching and learning in Irish. The quality of students' learning in Irish in Subject Inspections showed an improvement in students' learning since the last *Chief Inspector's Report*. The quality of students' learning was judged to be satisfactory or better in 68% of lessons in 2010-12, and this had improved to 79% in 2013-16. Inspectors also noted a higher percentage of lessons (up 10%) that were very good and a matching reduction in the percentage of lessons where lessons were considered to be unsatisfactory.
- However, learning in Irish remains an area of concern. It is poorer than learning in English or Mathematics. The proportion of lessons in Subject Inspections where learning was judged to be very good in Irish was 28% (compared to 34% in English and 41% in Mathematics). In addition, in 21% of lessons observed in Subject Inspections of Irish, learning is less than satisfactory. As at primary level, inspectors recommend more communication opportunities in the target language so that students have experience of speaking the language.

Teaching and learning in Irish in post-primary schools

Chief Inspector's Report	Overall quality of teaching is good or better	Overall quality of learning is good or better
2013-2016	84% of lessons in subject inspections	79% of lessons in subject inspections
2010-2012	72% of lessons in subject inspections	68% of lessons in subject inspections

Overall quality of learning	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
2013-2016 in subject inspections	28%	51%	21%

Appropriate teaching approaches are used in lessons	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
2013-2016 in lessons in incidental inspections	78%	22%

Lack of differentiation in lessons

- Across the three core subjects, English, Mathematics and Irish, inspections found that in a significant number of lessons, teachers did not appropriately differentiate lessons. It was recommended in many reports that effective differentiation strategies should be further developed to ensure the effective inclusion of students of all abilities.

Quality of support for children's learning in post-primary schools

- In 96% of lessons evaluated in the course of subject inspections focussed on Special Educational Needs provision, the quality of teaching and learning was found to be good or better. Responses to parent questionnaires often indicate that schools could be communicating more effectively with parents regarding the difficulties that their child might be experiencing.
- In DEIS evaluations carried out in the period covered by this report, students and their parents are generally happy about the quality of the support they receive in school.

The quality of leadership and management in post-primary schools

- In this period, inspectors judged that the overall quality of management and leadership was good or better in 91% of the WSE-MLLs inspections completed. Most boards of management were described in the report as having a clear vision for the school with a well-chosen focus on the development of teaching and learning
- Inspectors found that schools were very good at communicating with parents about school policies and in keeping parents informed about student progress. Schools

were less successful in communicating information in relation to subject and curriculum choice at key transition points.

- Inspectors found effective senior management in the majority of schools inspected. Parent questionnaires indicate that in the majority of schools, student behaviour is very good and that there are good student management systems in place.

Anti-bullying in post-primary schools: students' and parents' questionnaires

Question	Respondent	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I have been informed of the school's anti-bullying policy	Parents	90%	5%	5%
I know who to approach in the school if my child experiences bullying	Parents	85%	6%	9%
I feel safe and cared for in school	Students	82%	6%	12%
I can talk to an adult in the school if I am having problems	Students	74%	10%	16%
I am confident that if my child experiences bullying the school will act promptly and effectively	Parents	78%	6%	16%
If someone is bullying me I can get help from a teacher or other adult in the school	Students	85%	5%	10%

- Schools are doing good work to tackle bullying and there is a marked improvement since the last report in the percentage of parents and students that are confident that schools will deal with bullying promptly and effectively. During WSE-MLLs conducted in 2010-2012, almost one quarter of parents and almost one fifth of students indicated that they did not know how well their school dealt with bullying. The findings here are more positive. In WSEs conducted in the 2013-2016 period only 16% of parents did not know how well their school dealt with bullying with 78% of parents confident that the school would act promptly and efficiently if their child was being bullied. 85% of students expressed confidence that they could get help from a teacher or adult if they were being bullied in school.

Chapter Six: Supporting improvement

School self-evaluation

- A very significant reform in the quality assurance of the education system has been the introduction of school self-evaluation (SSE) which is being actively promoted by the Department and the Inspectorate.
- Schools have begun to engage with SSE and are increasingly becoming familiar with the six-step SSE process. SSE enables schools to keep their work and standards under review and to action specific improvements in areas identified for development.

- Almost all schools availed of advisory visits from inspectors to assist them in introducing SSE. However, industrial relations issues have impacted negatively on the uptake of SSE in some schools in parts of the period covered by the report.
- Most schools used SSE to focus on improving literacy with some schools reporting improvements as a result of this focus. Challenges relating to data, target-setting and reporting to parents and the school community remain to be addressed.

Follow-through inspections

- The Inspectorate is implementing systematic follow-up procedures to check that inspection recommendations have been implemented by schools. These include Follow-Through inspections for schools to monitor the progress schools have made on addressing the recommendations in previous inspection reports.
- Overall, the data shows that schools take recommendations in inspection reports seriously. Data from Follow-Through inspections show that the majority (76%) of schools make good or very good progress in implementing recommendations made in inspection reports.

Implementation of recommendations as shown in follow-through inspections

PRIMARY SCHOOLS Type of recommendation	Very good progress	Good progress	Partial progress	No progress
Management	46%	36%	10%	8%
Leadership	33%	43%	19%	5%
Planning / SSE	32%	39%	22%	7%
Teaching and learning	29%	43%	25%	3%
Assessment	29%	49%	20%	2%
Compliance	51%	30%	12%	7%
Support for learners	44%	34%	11%	11%

POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS Type of recommendation	Very good progress	Good progress	Partial progress	No progress
Management	46%	31%	18%	5%
Leadership	51%	36%	9%	4%
Planning / SSE	44%	33%	20%	3%
Teaching and learning	34%	40%	21%	5%
Assessment	34%	34%	26%	6%
Compliance	64%	10%	21%	5%
Support for learners	52%	31%	15%	2%

- The data shows that primary schools found the implementation of recommendations concerning planning/SSE and teaching and learning to be the most challenging. More than a quarter of primary schools had made partial or no progress in these areas when the Follow-Through (FT) inspection took place. At post-primary level, the data shows that schools found the implementation of recommendations on teaching and learning, and assessment to be challenging. Inspectors conducting FT inspections found that more than a quarter of schools in the case of teaching and learning and almost a third of schools in the case of assessment had made partial or no progress on recommendations in these areas.

School Improvement Monitoring and School Improvement Group

- Monitoring processes are in place to ensure that improvement happens in the small number of schools where very serious weaknesses have been identified. These monitoring processes encompass the School Improvement Monitoring and the School Improvement Group. School Improvement Monitoring takes place to support schools where recommendations in evaluation reports pertain mainly to the quality of teaching and learning. Six schools were identified as requiring this level of monitoring in 2016 and are currently in the process.

Cases referred to School Improvement Group

	Primary	Post-primary	Total
Active cases 31 December 2012	25	22	47
New cases (Jan 2013 – Jun 2016)	12	4	16
Cases resolved (Jan 2013 – Jun 2016)	21	23	44
Active cases July 2016	16	3	19

- In a very small number of cases, inspections may reveal serious weaknesses in the work of the school, where additional inputs are required to ensure that improvement happens for learners. The School Improvement Group (SIG) was established to provide a co-ordinated approach to supporting these schools. At the outset of 2013 there were 47 schools (25 primary and 22 post primary schools) in the process. Very significant progress has been made by the SIG group with these school communities to the extent that 70% of cases have been resolved. In the other 30% of cases schools have either been engaged in the process for a very short time, or in a minority of cases, did not show sufficient evidence of sustained improvement to be removed from this process. At the end of July 2016 there were 19 active cases. (16 primary and 3 post-primary)

Chapter Seven: Looking forward

This chapter concludes the report. It opens with a summary of Inspectorate findings and, based on the inspection evidence which the Inspectorate collected during the period January 2013 – July 2016, sets out four broad themes that may be useful in guiding policy development and practice into the future.

These are:

1. Developing high quality Early Years' education
 - Investment in the development of a qualified professional workforce to support the delivery of high-quality early educational experiences for children should continue to be a priority into the future
 - Building on the learning from inspection activity in the wider education sector, it is expected that the introduction of additional models of inspection into the sector such as Follow-through and thematic evaluation will further support the development of Early Years education
 - Primary schools will need to respond flexibly to help ease the transition to primary school for the large numbers of pupils who have already completed up to two years ECCE provision
2. Maintaining a strong focus on improved outcomes for learners
 - The wider social, cultural, economic and technological environment within which our schools operate is changing and this requires a culture of responsiveness and innovation in schools. The *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* is providing a strategic approach to tackling many of the challenges involved, such as an increasing emphasis on Early years provision, STEM and languages, and improvements to teachers' professional development
 - As the Action Plan is implemented, it will be very important to give careful consideration to how the many actions in the Plan impact upon individual schools and settings and on the practitioners, teachers and leaders who work in them. This will require a well-managed strategic approach that seeks to ensure that the various developments complement each other, are well paced and well resourced.
 - Findings from national and international assessments indicate that our higher achieving students do less well and are under-achieving, relative to their international counterparts. Approaches to teaching can and must be adapted to complement the various learning styles and aptitudes of children and young people.
 - There has been a renewed focus on promoting the wellbeing of children and young people in schools in order to provide a caring, safe and nurturing learning environment and to enhance their resilience and coping skills. The *Action Plan for Education 2017* includes a commitment to actively support and develop wellbeing initiatives to ensure that mental resilience and personal wellbeing are integral parts of our education and training system.

- The introduction of a new area of learning called Wellbeing in Junior Cycle in September 2017 demonstrates a commitment to this aim. It builds on existing good practice in schools and formalises the work done in schools to foster the personal development, health and wellbeing of learners.

3. Building the professional practice of teachers

- Curriculum changes, which have shifted the focus to a more skills-based approach to teaching and learning, may also require a different approach to initial teacher education and to continuing teacher education programmes so that teachers are prepared and able to identify learning needs, implement a variety of appropriate teaching strategies, assess learning and provide feedback focussed on improving learning outcomes.
- The quality of future educational provision in Ireland is dependent on a supply of highly-qualified, motivated, teachers. That supply cannot be taken for granted. There is a need to ensure that we continue to attract and develop the brightest graduates into the teaching profession. Action on the recommendations made in the final report of the Technical Working Group on Teacher Supply, *Striking the Balance* (2017), will go some way to ensuring that we continue to have a strong, informed and effective teaching force.
- A number of initiatives are underway that provide rich opportunities to build collaborative practices in schools, such as, the revised model for the allocation of additional teaching resources to schools to support students with SEN and the *Droichead* arrangements for newly qualified teachers. For the first time professional time has been provided to teachers. This has been provided to teachers of Junior Cycle to support implementation of the new Junior Cycle Framework.
- The Inspectorate is leading on the development and implementation of initiatives in the Gaeltacht Education Policy and the Schools Excellence Fund, where school staffs are being encouraged and supported to work collaboratively to devise innovative ways to improve their practice.

4. Working with and supporting the quality of school leaders

- The role of school leaders in leading learning and building a collaborative culture in the school is critical. A key barrier that prevents school leaders from engaging in leadership for learning is management capacity within Irish schools and within the boards of management of these schools. Recent developments in relation to a new leadership and management framework in schools are intended to go some way to address this
- An equally pressing gap in the Irish system – more at primary level than at second level – is the reliance that we place on voluntary boards of management. There is a need for reflection and planning to provide a more sustainable form of school management, particularly at primary level, and adequate professional supports for school management. This is not to imply an erosion of the autonomy of schools but rather to promote a more effective and professionalised way of working.

- *Looking at Our School, A Quality Framework for Schools*, published by the Inspectorate in 2016, sets out for the first time a comprehensive set of standards for Irish schools to guide the schools in its self-evaluation processes. This will help support the leadership of teaching and learning in schools. We are also using the standards in our inspections. By our shared use of the standards, internal self-evaluation in a school and external inspection by the Inspectorate will act as complementary quality assurance processes.

Final comment

The *Chief Inspector's Report 2013-2016* concludes that there is much that is good in our Early Years, primary and post-primary education provision. It states that the quality of the learning experiences and the quality of learning experienced by young people in the educational system is generally of a very good quality.

However, the report points out that if we are to achieve the goal set in the *Action Plan for Education 2016 -2019* to be the best education system in Europe within the next decade, we need to ensure that our learners experience very good, not just good, teaching and learning, that satisfactory provision becomes better, and that excellence in terms of learning experiences and standards is achieved.

Looking to the future, the Inspectorate, plans to embed the standards for educational provision that have been set out in *Looking at Our Schools 2016* in inspection and advisory work. *Looking at Our Schools* will be used to communicate a systems-wide understanding of what good practice in schools looks like. The Inspectorate will continue to look at ways in which it can increase the impact of inspections in schools, including listening carefully to feedback from stakeholders on how to improve inspection models. A particular focus in the immediate future will be to improve the ways in which inspectors engage with parents and students during inspections and the ways that inspectors support and work with school leaders.

The Inspectorate has also adopted a particular approach to the evaluation of schools. Like almost all inspectorates, it fulfils an accountability function, inspecting and reporting on the work of schools and the effectiveness of school leaders. However, it has made a strong public commitment that the focus is on inspection for improvement and it has made equally strong commitments to co-professional working with teachers, parents and the education partners. Its work to support the Schools Excellence Fund and Gaeltacht Education Policy are in line with this commitment.

The Inspectorate is committed to leveraging the insights it gains from inspection work in schools (and the conversations it has with school leaders, teachers, parents and students) to inform policy development and to feed back to schools and the system more generally the areas which merit closer attention.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Copies of the following publication re available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills, www.education.ie

Chief Inspector's Report: January 2013-July 2016 (Inspectorate, DES, 2018)

Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012 (Inspectorate, DES, 2013)

A Review of Early Years Education-focussed Inspections: April 2016 - June 2017 – Insights and Developments (Inspectorate, DES, 2018)

Review of the Pilot of a New Model for Allocating teaching Resources to Mainstream Schools to Support Pupils with Special Educational Needs (Inspectorate, DES, 2016)

Education of Children in Detention and Care: Schools at High Support Units, Special Care Units and Children Detention Centres: A composite report based on evaluations conducted from 2013 to 2015 (Inspectorate, DES, 2017)

Parent and Student/Pupil Perceptions of Schools' Actions to Create a Positive School Culture and to Prevent and Tackle Bullying (DES, 2017)

A report on Irish-Medium Educational Provision in Gaeltacht Schools: Primary and Post-Primary Case-Studies (DES, 2015)