



Chief Inspector's Report

January 2013–July 2016

Excellence in Learning for All



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS



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We thank the following schools and Early Years setting for permission to use photographs.

Little Stars Pre-School, Moville, County Donegal

St Oliver's NS, Killarney, Co Kerry

Scoil Íosagáin, Ballybunion, Co Kerry

Meánscoil na mBráithre Criostaí, Cill Chainnigh

FOREWORD

This *Chief Inspector's Report* from the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills, covers the three-and-a-half year period from January 2013 to July 2016. It summarises the key findings that inspectors have made as they have conducted inspections in schools and centres for education, and in the latter part of the period, in early years settings.

The most important work that inspectors undertake is the individual evaluations that we carry out in Early Years settings, schools and centres for education. In each case, we seek to understand the context in which teachers and practitioners are working and young people are learning. Our primary purposes are to affirm good practice, to provide practicable advice for improvement and to report clearly to the communities served by the settings, schools and centres and to the wider public. Through working with these communities we seek to improve learning for young people.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the many individuals with whom we have worked over this period – learners, parents, practitioners, teachers, setting leaders, principals, members of boards of management, patrons and others. The many instances of good and excellent practice that we see are a result of their work and commitment, and it is heartening to be able to report positively on their work and the outcomes for learners.

We have also identified areas for improvement in the settings, schools and centres that we have visited. This report contains summaries of the recommendations that we have made as we have conducted evaluations. Much of the advice that we give to practitioners, teachers and others in schools is provided in detailed conversations, feedback and advisory visits. This *Chief Inspector's Report* seeks to capture a flavour of that advice and to identify common patterns and areas for development. We hope that this will be useful for all involved in educational provision and leadership in the early years, primary and post-primary sectors. We also hope that it will help to inform the work of those involved in support services and in the professional development of teachers, and the work of policy makers at every level of the educational system.

Harold Hislop
Chief Inspector





INTRODUCTION

This *Chief Inspector's Report* covers the period from January 2013 to July 2016. During that time, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills engaged in a wide range of activities, including evaluation, support and advisory work. This report focusses in particular on our evaluation of the quality of education in Early Years settings, schools and centres for education. It draws on the data which that work provides to present our key findings and to identify aspects of provision which should be improved.

The report is presented in two sections:

Section I: The context in which we work

Much of the work of the Inspectorate is concerned with evaluating the education provided for learners in various settings, at early years, primary and post-primary levels. As we carry out those evaluations, we make judgements about the quality of provision and practice, conscious of the context in which each setting or school is working. In the same way, as we examine the general trends and patterns in educational provision, it is important that we are conscious of the general context in the Irish educational system.

Chapter 1 describes some of the key factors that influenced the work of schools in the period January 2013 to July 2016, during which we were conducting evaluations. Chapter 2 provides a general description of the Inspectorate and our work. It describes how we conduct our evaluation and advisory work, and the ways in which that changed during the period covered in this *Chief Inspector's Report*.

Section II: Findings about the quality of provision

This section provides a detailed account of our operations across the education system during the period. It presents our findings on the quality of teaching and learning and leadership and management arising from our inspection work in schools and in other settings.

Chapters 3 to 5 outline the key findings from our inspection and evaluation work in Early Years settings, primary and post-primary schools. These chapters provide our summary of the standards that are being achieved in teaching, learning, leadership and management in the various settings and they identify where improvements are most needed.

Chapter 6 describes a range of actions which we have implemented in the period January 2013 - July 2016 to support school improvement, including our support for school self-evaluation and our implementation of systematic follow-up procedures that enable us to engage with schools on the implementation of recommendations arising from inspection.

We have also included two 'Spotlights' in section 2 which focus on specific areas of provision to which we have given particular attention during the period January 2013 - July 2016: Arts Education in primary schools; and evaluations in education settings attached to High Support Units, Special Care Units and Children Detention Centres.

Finally, chapter 7 reflects on the experience of the period covered by this report and identifies some of the broad approaches needed to guide educational policy and practice if we are to achieve the ambitious target set out in the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* that the Irish education and training system should become the best in Europe over the next decade.

Throughout this report, we use the word "schools" to include schools, centres for education and education settings attached to Special Care Units, to High Support Units and Children Detention Centres.



SECTION 1

THE CONTEXT IN WHICH WE WORK

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills carries out evaluation and advisory work in a range of education settings. These include recognised primary and post-primary schools, centres for education which offer the Youthreach Programme, agricultural colleges and, since late 2015, Early Years settings that participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme.

This section examines some of the important trends and factors that influenced the Irish education system and hence the context in which the schools and other settings that we inspect were working in the period January 2013 to July 2016. In Chapter 1 these factors are discussed under five headings:

- Learners, teachers and other professionals
- Education expenditure
- The management of schools
- The learning experience
- Self-evaluation in Early Years settings and in schools

Chapter 2 describes the work of the Inspectorate and the way that we have developed our inspection approaches in schools in response to the evolving quality assurance needs of the system during the period. An appreciation of these contextual factors is essential to understand the findings that we describe in subsequent chapters about standards in schools and other settings.

Excellence in Learning for All

CHAPTER ONE

KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING THE
WORK OF SCHOOLS IN THE PERIOD
JANUARY 2013 - JULY 2016



1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Inspectorate is committed to respecting the context within which schools and other education settings operate. This means that, while we set out clear expectations of the quality standards for schools, when we evaluate and report we take account of the various contextual factors which affect the work of teachers and school communities. During the period January 2013 to July 2016, those factors included a number of significant developments which impacted on schools.

1.2 LEARNERS, TEACHERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

1.2.1 Growing student and teacher numbers at primary and post-primary levels

During the period January 2013 to July 2016 Irish schools served a growing number of students at both primary and post-primary levels. The data available shows that student numbers continued to grow from over 526,000 to more than 558,000 in primary schools and from 327,000 to 352,000 in post-primary schools. Projections suggest that this growth in primary schools will peak in 2018 but that it will continue until 2024/25 at post-primary level.

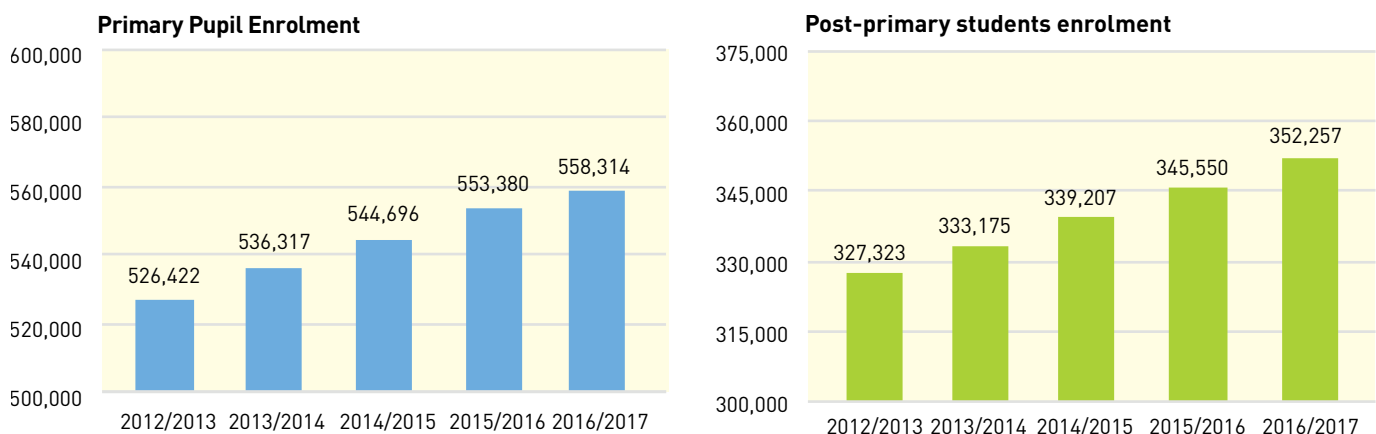


Chart 1.1a and 1.1b: Number of students enrolled (full-time) in Department-aided schools

Against this background and despite the constrained levels of public expenditure which characterised much of the period covered in this report, the Department continued to invest in a programme of capital investment which provided new school buildings and major extensions to existing schools. In November 2015, the Minister announced a new programme of capital investment in schools which will run from 2016 to 2021 to provide funding for 310 major school projects, resulting in an additional 62,000 permanent school places.

Table 1.1: Expenditure on schools' infrastructure January 2013 - July 2016

	Total Spend on schools' infrastructure ^a	Completed large-scale projects	Permanent student places provided ^b	Completed large-scale projects	Permanent student places provided ^b
		Primary		Post-Primary	
2013	€361m of which €213m on large scale projects	29, including 18 new schools	10,192 of which 8,036 are additional	15, including 7 new schools	3,575 of which 2,835 are additional
2014	€438.5m of which €241m on large scale projects	30, including 20 new schools	12,672 of which 10,292 are additional	12, including 7 new schools	5,550 of which 2,600 are additional
2015	€506.5m of which €302.5m on large scale projects	33, including 20 new schools	9,772 of which 8,148 are additional	17, including 7 new schools	6,592 of which 5,257 are additional
2016	€530m of which €334m on large scale projects	32, including 20 new schools	10,726 of which 9,550 are additional	18, including 10 new schools	9,310 of which 5,740 are additional

(a) The total spend includes all elements of the school capital programme (large scale projects, additional accommodation scheme, summer works scheme, emergency works scheme, furniture and equipment, minor works grant to primary schools, site acquisition etc).

(b) Does not include student places delivered under the Additional Accommodation Scheme and Prefab Replacement Initiatives (21,948 primary; 3,983 post-primary over the period)

1.2.2 Staffing in schools expanded

Teacher numbers also increased with an additional 2,238 teachers employed in schools since the publication of the last *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013. There was a similar increase in the number of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) working in schools during this period, rising from 10,669 in 2013/2014 to 11,924 in 2015/2016.

Table 1.2: Number of teachers and special needs assistants (whole-time equivalents) in Department-aided schools

Year	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Primary Teachers	32,828	33,613	34,576
Post-primary Teachers	25,626	26,174	26,804
SNAs	10,669	11,175	11,924

Most of the growth in teacher numbers occurred to address rising student numbers and this meant that schools experienced only a very slight improvement in the pupil-teacher ratio¹ during the period covered by this report, dropping marginally from 16.4 and 14.3 in primary and post-primary schools respectively, to 16.2 and 13.9 in 2014/2015.

The latest edition of *Education at a Glance* (EAG) was published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in September 2017. The reference year for the data it reported on is the school year 2014/2015. It showed that, despite this slight improvement, Ireland's

¹ The pupil-teacher ratio at primary level is calculated by dividing the total enrolment in all primary schools as of 30 September in a given year by the number of teaching posts (classroom teachers and support teachers) in June of the following year. At post-primary level, the pupil-teacher ratio is calculated by dividing the full-time enrolment in all second-level schools as of 30 September in a given academic year by the number of full-time equivalent teachers (classroom teachers and support teachers) in the same year.

pupil-teacher ratios still compare unfavourably with ratios in the twenty-two European countries and in the OECD countries reported on.

Table 1.3: Pupil-Teacher ratios and average class size in primary and post-primary schools in 2014/2015

2014-2015	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools	
	Pupil-teacher ratio	Average class size	Pupil-teacher ratio	Average class size ²
Ireland	16	25	14	-
OECD average	15	21	13	23
EU22 average	14	20	12	21
Rank position(OECD)	12th highest of 32	5th highest of 31	9th highest of 29	-

1.2.3 The number of children availing of State-provided Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) grew

The establishment of the ECCE Programme in 2009 provided, for the first time, universal access to State-provided ECCE. This was a very significant change in the Irish education system. The policy recognises the importance of the first years of life to later learning and social development and provides equal access for all children to Early Years education.

Table 1.4: Participation in the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) Programme

Year	Early Childhood Care and Education							TOTAL
	Centres ^a	Girls			Boys			
		Age 3	Age 4	Age 5	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5	
2013/2014 ^b	4,259	14,010	17,941	50	13,800	23,165	85	69,051
2014/2015	4,371	11,754	19,408	-	11,430	20,512	-	63,104
2015/2016	4,431	15,123	20,865	-	15,435	22,429	-	73,852

a: Centres registered with TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency

b: ECCE session for 3 hours 30 minutes or less per day

During the period January 2013 - July 2016, the number of children availing of the scheme grew, partly because of a growth in the population of children between the ages of three and five and partly because of increasing uptake of the programme. This Early Years provision is delivered in a diverse range of settings. Private, community and voluntary interests are involved in crèches, nurseries, pre-schools, naíonraí (Irish language pre-schools), playgroups and day-care services.

In the period covered by this report, public policy initiatives in early childhood education and care focussed to a considerable degree on strengthening and raising the quality of the existing practice in the wide range of settings involved. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs, with the assistance of the Department of Education and Skills and a wide range of stakeholders in the Early Years sector, led a number of initiatives to improve the quality of provision across the sector. Among these was the establishment of Early Years Education-focussed Inspection conducted by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills. Chapter 3 of this report provides further detail about these inspections.

² A figure for average class sizes in post-primary schools is not readily calculable as the number of students varies considerably from subject lesson to subject lesson depending on the number of students opting for each subject and each syllabus level.

1.2.4 Irish teachers spend more time teaching their students than teachers in other countries

The OECD comparative data on instruction time³ set out in table 1.5 below indicates that, at both primary and lower-secondary level, net teaching time in Ireland is greater than the OECD average. Ireland is unusual in that the calculation of teachers' time in school refers almost exclusively to time spent in classrooms teaching, and does not take account of the range of other teaching-related tasks (such as planning, assessment of students' work) which form part of teachers' professional practice. In contrast, internationally the teachers' contract in many OECD countries includes additional non-class contact time and the overall statutory working time of teachers extends well beyond their compulsory teaching time. As a result, the working time required of teachers in Ireland appears to be one of the lowest in the OECD at both primary and post-primary levels.

Table 1.5: Details of teachers' working time – comparison with OECD and EU22 countries

	Ireland	OECD average	EU22 average	Ireland	OECD average	EU22 average
2014/2015	Primary			Post-primary*		
Number of weeks of instruction	37	38	37	33	38	37
Number of days of instruction	183	183	180	167	182	178
Net teaching time, in hours	915	799	767	735	721	668
Working time required at school, in hours	1,073	1,144	1,067	768	1,125	1,033
Total statutory working time, in hours	n/a	1,612	1,557	n/a	1,636	1,593

* Calculated for compulsory second-level only.

Irish teachers contribute to the learning experiences of their students through the often significant time they give in lesson preparation and assessment of students' work, much of which, currently, is not recognised in table 1.5 above. In addition, time is given at school-level to curriculum planning, school self-evaluation and improvement activities and to staff and parent meetings outside of the school day. Research across many countries has demonstrated that where teachers engage in significant and meaningful collaborative practice, including time spent reviewing and planning improvement in their teaching approaches and the outcomes that they enable students to achieve, the overall quality of students' learning improves. It is to be welcomed, therefore, that recent developments in relation to Junior Cycle education recognise and, for the first time, provide time for this collaborative professional work within the teachers' contracted hours. The appendix to the *Junior Cycle Reform: Joint Statement on Principles and Implementation*,⁴ which was agreed between teacher unions at post-primary level and the Department of Education and Skills in July 2015, provides for twenty-two hours annually of professional time to support implementation of Junior Cycle reforms.⁵ This is a practical recognition of the value of professional collaboration in schools to support teaching, learning and assessment practices.

³ OECD (2017) *Education At a Glance* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/International-Statistical-Reports/education-at-a-glance-oecd-indicators-2017-briefing-note.pdf>

⁴ Available at <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Junior-Cycle-Reform-Joint-Statement-on-Principles-and-implementation.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Junior-Cycle/Junior-Cycle-Reform-Appendix-to-Joint-Statement-on-Principles-and-Implementation.pdf>

1.3 EDUCATION EXPENDITURE

1.3.1 Overall expenditure on Early Years, primary and post-primary education has continued to rise

As the Irish government continued to cope with the outcomes of the financial crisis, expenditure on primary and post-primary education grew in the period from 2013 to 2016. This took place against a backdrop of significant growth in the numbers of students in the school system, particularly at primary level, and of increasing demands for additional teaching resources for children with special educational needs.

Table 1.6: Education expenditure January 2013 - July 2016 (Excluding DEIS and Special Education)

		2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m	2016 €m
Primary	Current	3,263	3,268	3,450	3,450
	Capital	239	282	287	297
	Total	3,502	3,550	3,737	3,747
Post-Primary	Current	2,992	3,021	3,093	3,109
	Capital	128	192	247	321
	Total	3,120	3,213	3,340	3,430
Overall Total		6,622	6,763	7,077	7,177

Much of the additional spending was absorbed by the appointment of additional teachers and by pay restoration for education sector staff. This meant that additional funding was unavailable for other current costs. For example, the levels of capitation grants paid to schools, which were significantly reduced during the economic crisis, were not restored to schools. School management authorities have pointed out that the level of capitation funding provided to them has challenged the ability of schools to fund day-to-day running costs (such as heating, lighting, maintenance, insurance, purchase of teaching materials). They report that there is a heavy reliance on parents' voluntary subscriptions and fund-raising efforts to meet shortfalls in schools' budgets. The situation regarding capitation funding to schools remains unchanged since the publication of the previous *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013.

When Ireland's expenditure on education is compared to that in other countries, it is evident that spending on education as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) remained at or about the OECD average for the period up to the end of 2014 (the most recent date for which international data is available). Data in the OECD's *Education at a Glance 2017* report show that, in Ireland, public and private spending on education at the levels below higher education (pre-primary, primary, second level and further education) represented 3.7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014. This is above the OECD average.⁶ OECD data also show that, as a percentage of total public expenditure, public spending on education in Ireland was 12.9% in 2014 compared to 9.1% in 2010, and Ireland was ranked 9th of 35 countries on this indicator in 2014.

However, the available OECD data also highlight the challenge that has been posed by the growth in

⁶ OECD (2017) *Ireland - Country Note - Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators* OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2017-en>.

student numbers in Ireland and by the lack of significant increases in spending in the period to 2014. Expenditure per student (primary, second level and further education) has fallen by 15% since 2010 and, at primary level, in 2013 it fell below the OECD average. This apparent decrease in per-student spending reflects the growth in student numbers at primary level.

Table 1.7: Expenditure per-student*

	Primary Schools		Post-Primary Schools			
			Lower Secondary		Upper Secondary	
	2013 US\$	2014 US\$	2013 US\$	2014 US\$	2013 US\$	2014 US\$
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

*Values reported in equivalent US dollars (USD) have been converted using purchasing power parities (PPPs). Source – Education at a Glance 2017 Table B1:1

1.3.2 Spending on initiatives to promote equity made up a substantial proportion of overall expenditure

Improving equity – both equity of access and equity of outcomes – remained an important policy priority in the Irish education system during the period under review. Funding for the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion and for additional resources to support children with special educational needs continued to increase during the period. The increase in DEIS funding was in line with growth in student numbers.

Table 1.8: DEIS and Special Education expenditure January 2013 - July 2016

DEIS/Special Needs Expenditure				
	2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m	2016 €m
DEIS Total	176.05	152.45	174.25	176.27
Early Years	7.38	7.36	7.36	6.50
Primary	74.10	72.78	73.02	72.60
Post-primary	31.32	30.95	30.31	30.41
School Completion Programme*	26.45	24.76	24.76	24.76
School Meals Programme**	36.80	16.60	38.80	42.00
Special Needs*** Total	1,276	1,292	1,397	1,524

* Funded by Department of Children and Youth Affairs

** Funded by Department of Social Protection

***Includes National Training Fund expenditure

There is clear evidence from research undertaken to date that the DEIS programme is having a positive effect on tackling educational disadvantage. Research conducted by the Educational

Research Centre (ERC) has found a consistent overall improvement in both the mathematics and reading levels of pupils in DEIS urban primary schools and there are encouraging trends in terms of both attainment and pupil retention at post-primary level, for example. However, the research also shows that overall performance in DEIS schools continues to remain below the national average indicating that continued supports are required to maintain and build on the gains made. In 2015 and 2016, the Department facilitated extensive consultation on DEIS in order to ensure that future delivery of interventions is fully informed by the practical experience of teachers, parents, students and non-governmental organisations working on behalf of children at risk of educational disadvantage and their families. As a result, a new approach to the identification of schools for participation in DEIS was designed, drawing on centrally held data and the *DEIS Plan 2017*⁷ was published.

In 2016, the Department of Education and Skills spent some €1.5bn on providing for additional educational supports for students with special educational needs, which represented approximately 17.8% of the total education budget for 2016. This figure included provision for 12,990 special needs assistants (SNAs), at an estimated annual cost of approximately €425 million. It also included provision for up to 12,500 resource teachers and learning support posts, which are allocated to schools either under the General Allocation Model, or the model for Learning Support and high incidence special needs at post primary level. This is, in conjunction with allocations made to schools by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to support children with low incidence special educational needs, at an estimated annual cost of some €750 million.

Further provision was also made for additional teaching posts in special schools, special classes, a special transport scheme, assistive technology, and further additional supports such as enhanced capitation for students with special educational needs.

In 2014, the process by which resources, including SNAs, are allocated to a school was reviewed by the National Council for Special Education. The Council published *A Proposed New Model for Allocating Teaching Resources for Students* which focussed on teaching resources and which set out a better way to deliver additional teaching supports. The model removes the reliance on a diagnosis of special educational need and is linked to the educational need for such supports in schools, rather than to the number of teachers or students in a school. During the 2015/2016 school year, a project commenced involving forty-seven schools both at primary and post-primary levels, to examine the feasibility of the new system. The Inspectorate was asked to review the operation of the project at school level and a report on this was published in 2016.⁸ The new model was implemented for all schools in September 2017. Consequently, during the period covered by this report, resource teachers and SNAs continued to be allocated under the old model. The numbers of SNAs grew in both sectors year-on-year, illustrating the Department's commitment to maintain support for this group of students. At the time of writing, a comprehensive assessment of the SNA scheme has commenced. The purpose of the assessment is to identify the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with special educational needs.

⁷ DES (2017) *DEIS Plan 2017* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/DEIS-Plan-2017.pdf>

⁸ DES (2016) *Review of the Pilot of a New Model for Allocating Teaching Resources to Mainstream Schools to Support Pupils with Special Educational Needs*, available at http://www.sess.ie/sites/default/files/inline-files/Review_Pilot_New_Model_SEN_18.01.17.pdf

1.4 THE MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS

1.4.1 Voluntary boards of management are challenged to meet a growing range of responsibilities

Structures for the management of schools generally remained unchanged in the period under review. Boards of management, made up of voluntary members representing patronal interests, school leaders and teachers, parents and community representatives, continued to manage the vast majority of schools.

Boards have significant responsibilities, notwithstanding their voluntary nature. The board is responsible for ensuring that an appropriate programme of education is put in place for the students of the school and that the school is well-run. The board oversees all aspects of the school's management, including the appointment of teachers and management of finances. The commitment of board members to supporting schools in this way is a most significant contribution to the running of the Irish education system, and may indeed contribute to the close relationship of schools and the communities that they serve.

However, there is evidence that voluntary boards may not be adequately equipped to carry out all of the complex and growing range of responsibilities that are inherent in the management of a modern school. Demands arising from changes in employment law, financial management, health and safety regulations and the lack of growth in capitation funding are placing additional burdens on boards. So also is the need for boards to provide adequate support and challenge to school leaders and the staffs of schools. Many boards of management are now chaired by lay persons rather than religious, and it can be difficult to identify lay chairpersons with adequate time to deal with the range of tasks in this role, particularly in the very large number of primary schools that we have in Ireland.

While many boards operate effectively, there is evidence that when challenging tasks and issues arise, such as the management of a building programme, the handling of complaints or the processing of issues concerning standards and professional responsibilities in the school, a small minority of boards prove inadequate to the task. The lack of adequate professional supports to assist and guide boards in their work is also evident in some cases. For example, some boards of management can find managing a significant large scale capital expenditure project, such as a new school building or extension, requires skills and time that are not readily available within the membership of the board. Similarly, the expertise in employment law that is necessary to process some complaints or grievance procedures involving parents, teachers and school leaders often has to come from outside the membership of boards. Such challenges are likely to grow rather than diminish and it would seem sensible to begin now to consider how the management of schools could evolve to meet the challenges in the years ahead, including ways in which boards could receive technical support and whether some tasks could be better performed by bodies other than the boards of schools.

1.4.2 The establishment of Education and Training Boards marks a significant structural reform in the Irish education system

A major reform of the further education and training sector took place in 2013 with the establishment of the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and SOLAS. The Education and Training Boards Act 2013 was enacted on 8th May 2013 and all of its provisions were commenced by 1st July 2013. This was the most significant development in the administration and management of schools since the establishment of VEC schools in the 1930s and since the provision of free post-primary education in the 1960s.

The Act provided for the establishment of sixteen new Education and Training Boards (ETBs) to replace the thirty-three Vocational Education Committees (VECs). This involved the merger of some of the thirty-three pre-existing VECs. The new legislation, which reforms and modernises the governance provisions and articulates the functions of the boards to better reflect the actual evolution over time of the role of VECs, replaces the nine previous Vocational Education Acts with one piece of primary legislation. Following the enactment of the Further Education and Training Act 2013, SOLAS was established in October 2013 to provide strategic coordination and funding for the further education and training sector.

ETBs manage one third of all post-primary schools, with 269 schools under their patronage. There are also twelve Community National Schools currently under the patronage of ETBs.

1.4.3 Attempts to provide greater diversity of patronage of schools progressed

The report of the advisory group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, which was published in April 2012, recommended steps that could be taken to ensure that the education system would provide a sufficiently diverse number and range of primary schools to cater for all religions and none. The Department has continued to work with patron bodies to advance the implementation of the report recommendations. A progress report on the actions recommended by the Forum report was published in 2014.⁹ As part of the implementation of the Forum report recommendations, in 2013 surveys were conducted to establish the demand for greater diversity of patronage in areas where populations were relatively stable and there was little prospect that new schools would be established over the next number of years for demographic reasons.

From 2013 to 2016, ten new schools have opened under this patronage divesting process, all of which have a multi-denominational ethos. Nine of the schools are under the patronage of Educate Together and one Gaelscoil which opened in 2015 is under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta.

The processes for the establishment of new schools and the divestment of existing schools has been criticised most vocally by bodies representing Irish-medium education. While new gaelscoileanna and gaelcholáistí have been established in the period, bodies that are involved in the Irish-medium sector have pointed out that the implementation of the existing procedures for new schools to be established militate against the extension of the availability of Irish-medium schooling throughout the country.

The Government's commitment to strengthening parental choice and further expanding diversity in our school system, is reflected in the Programme for a Partnership Government, published in 2016. Specifically, there is a commitment to increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030. Providing greater diversity of school patronage is less challenging in areas where the establishment of new schools is warranted by demographic growth. When the need for a new school has been identified, a process is conducted to allow for different patrons' bodies to be considered as the patron of the new school. Since the current arrangements on the establishment of new schools were introduced in 2011, thirty-one new primary schools and thirty-six new post-primary schools have been established. Thirty or some 97% of the thirty-one new primary schools established are multi-denominational and one is inter-denominational. Thirty-one or 86% of the new post-primary schools have a multi-denominational ethos, four have Catholic ethos and one has a Church of Ireland ethos.

1.4.4 The impact of the moratorium on posts of responsibility continued to be felt by schools

In the last *Chief Inspector's Report*, published in 2013, the relatively high numbers of principals and experienced teachers who had retired from teaching under incentivised schemes introduced in 2012 - 2013 was noted. So also was the need for adequate professional development opportunities for existing and aspiring school leaders. While the pace of retirements has declined, it is true to say that there are a significant number of newly-appointed school principals at both primary and post-primary levels. The establishment of the Centre for School Leadership in 2015 recognised the importance of professional support for the development and improvement of leadership in schools and is a welcome development in the school system. The Centre's responsibilities are intended to extend across the full continuum of leadership development, from training for aspiring school leaders through to the induction of newly-appointed principals. The Centre also has responsibility for oversight of continuing professional development throughout the school leader's career. The Inspectorate has supported the development of the Centre and in particular we have developed domains, standards and statements of practice for the self-evaluation of school leadership and management.¹⁰

The impact of the moratorium on posts of responsibility, introduced as one of the cost-saving measures during the financial crisis, continued to be felt by schools. The declining number of teachers who assumed paid responsibility for management of aspects of a school's work meant that, in many instances, the workload of the principal and the deputy principal grew. Representative bodies such as the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) at post-primary level and the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) have consistently drawn attention to the cost in terms of flexibility and capacity to implement a range of professional responsibilities. While there has been some improvement in this situation in respect of the appointment of assistant principals in larger schools, and decisions announced as part of Budget 2016 and 2017 provide specific resources for the appointment of full-time or part-time deputy principals in second-level schools, many schools at both levels still had significantly reduced middle management teams during the period covered by this report.

The Department has made it clear that it is committed to the restoration of middle-management posts and has worked with the partners to review current in-school management structures. Evidence from inspection had frequently demonstrated that the range of tasks associated with posts of responsibility in the past were not always appropriate to the evolving needs of schools or conducive to providing adequate support for school principals. It is very welcome, therefore, that the Inspectorate-developed framework of domains and standards published in *Looking at Our School 2016* has been used to support the discussions engaged in by the Department and education partners about the reconstitution and restoration of middle management posts in schools. At the time of writing, Budget 2017 has provided for the commencement of the restoration of middle management posts in both the primary and post-primary sector with effect from the 2017/18 school year. It is intended that restoration of the posts will develop distributed leadership in schools and will recast the range of responsibilities attaching to middle management posts to ensure that the evolving needs of schools are addressed. These include leadership roles in relation to curriculum and learning, student wellbeing and school improvement.

¹⁰ DES (2016) *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Looking-at-Our-School-2016-A-Quality-Framework-for-Post-Primary-schools.pdf>

1.4.5 The Department published a consultation paper on school autonomy

On a more long-term issue, the period saw the first formal attempt to open a discussion on the nature of the governance relationships that underpin the Irish school system. In December 2015 the Department of Education and Skills published a comprehensive research paper and a consultation paper on the issue of advancing the autonomy of State-funded primary and post-primary schools in Ireland. The papers, which were prepared in response to a number of commitments contained in the 2011 Programme for Government, provided a review of international research on the issue and set out a number of options for increasing school autonomy in an Irish context. The papers considered autonomy under the three broad categories of governance, management and ethos; curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; and budgets and funding.

The papers did not tackle the question of whether greater autonomy in each of these categories is appropriate, but they did examine the extent to which schools had autonomy, the advantages of increased autonomy in each of the three categories and how this might be advanced.

There was no suggestion in the papers that the basic structures that govern most schools would be changed: the papers accepted that schools were State-aided and not State-run, and that they would continue to be managed by boards of management on behalf of the school's patron (normally the founder of the school or the successor to the original founders). It was interesting to note that the EU Courts judgment in *O'Keefe v Minister for Education* took as a given the existing management structures in the Irish system. However, the judgement found that if the State provided public education through using private institutions such as schools managed by patrons (be they religious or non-denominational) the State retained the duty to take the necessary steps to assure itself of adequacy of that provision.

An analysis of the written responses received by the Department to the consultation paper published about school autonomy has not been published to date. However, while many of the submissions expressed satisfaction with schools' autonomy over the school's ethos and over curricular and pedagogical issues, many were critical of the suggestion that greater autonomy would be given to schools in area such as budgets and funding. Many criticised the idea that greater responsibilities would be devolved to schools without the necessary financial resources to carry out existing let alone additional responsibilities.

At the time of writing, no formal decisions have been taken to advance the proposals for greater school autonomy that were contained in the paper. However, aspects of some policy initiatives have reflected the ideas explored in the research paper. For example, the introduction of a new allocation model for special needs teaching resources gives greater autonomy to each school to deploy its special needs resources and the work underway through the School Excellence Fund initiative enables participating schools to advance innovations suited to their own context.

1.5 THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The rapid changes and increased complexity of today's world present challenges to the ways we educate. The challenges include learning, for example, how to live happily and productively in inclusive communities; learning how to respond to the rapid flow and availability of information facilitated through the internet and social media; learning how to interpret and to evaluate the reliability, relevance and usefulness of that information; and, perhaps most crucially, learning how to

learn so that we flourish in a continually changing and highly demanding environment.

Significant steps have been taken to advance change in the nature and quality of the learning experiences and curriculum provided for learners in the Early Years, primary and post-primary sectors. Many of these curricular changes had been signaled in the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy*,¹¹ which continues to be implemented. The overarching themes that informed these changes were:

- An acknowledgement that improvements were required at Early Years, primary and post-primary levels and that the learners' experience at each of these stages needed to be more closely integrated with each other
- A desire to optimise opportunities for children and young people to be creative, innovative and to have agency in their learning
- The need to achieve a better balance of knowledge and skills and to facilitate improved assessment practices; and
- The importance of supporting all children to develop appropriate emotional and affective skills so that they enjoy healthy lives and have a positive sense of self.

At the heart of these reforms is a commitment to continuously improve the quality of teaching, learning and learning outcomes across the education sector to respond to the changing needs of our students, society and the economy.

1.5.1 The implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy strategy continued and the first improvements in literacy and numeracy in 30 years were recorded at primary level

The continued implementation of the Government's *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*, remained a priority in the period under review. The policy had set in train a range of integrated measures to improve teaching, learning and assessment of literacy and numeracy, including curricular reforms, changes to initial and continuing teacher education, and improvements in school self-evaluation and inspection. Emerging evidence suggested that this range of measures appeared to be bringing about improvements in these core skills. Information provided by a range of national and international assessments showed that achievements in Mathematics and English reading had improved significantly.

The most striking evidence of improvements in literacy and mathematics emerged in the National Assessment of Mathematics and Reading at primary level in 2014. This study showed that performance on English reading and Mathematics has improved significantly at second and sixth classes since the last National Assessments in 2009. These were the first significant improvements in these assessments for over thirty years. The study also demonstrated that there had been a reduction in the proportion of lower-achieving students and an increase in the proportion of higher achieving students in both subjects.

These very positive outcomes were confirmed in international assessments also. The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is an international study of the reading and science skills of primary school pupils in fourth class and post-primary students in second year. The results of TIMSS 2015 were published in December 2016. They show a significant improvement

¹¹ DES (2012) *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* available https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/lit_num_strategy_full.pdf

in our students' performance both in Mathematics and Science, since the previous tests in 2011. Improvements were greater among the lowest achieving students at both fourth class and second year. At both levels, the improvements reflect the commitment of school communities to ongoing development in educational provision, including through school self-evaluation. However, the TIMSS 2015 report for Ireland also points out that concentrated efforts are required to improve the performance of our higher-performing students both at primary and at post-primary levels.¹² We need to improve upward differentiation (that is adapting teaching approaches and curriculum concepts and skills to provide high ability students with greater challenge) and develop an awareness among teachers that overreliance and overuse of text books, which may not reflect the breadth of the curriculum, impacts on the learning and performance of students.

At post-primary level, the findings from the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), 2015, which include results from the science, reading and mathematics assessments, were published in 2016. The results show that in 2015, Ireland's results in reading were among the best in the OECD countries and were significantly above the OECD average in mathematics and science. In these tests, lower achieving students in Ireland performed better than the OECD average while our higher achieving students performed in or around the OECD average. Ireland performs less well than its comparison countries for our higher-achieving students. The underperformance of higher-achieving students in Ireland in Mathematics is a matter of concern but is not altogether unexpected. The need to challenge the more-able students is a theme of inspection reports in Mathematics. The new Junior Cycle Framework with its emphasis on formative assessment across all subjects should contribute to an enhanced performance among students when it is fully implemented.

This positive evidence from national and international assessments, and from inspection reports was used to inform an interim review of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy which was conducted by the Department in 2015-2016 and published in 2016.¹³ The review reported that many of the original targets for improvement that had been set out in the strategy in 2012 had been achieved ahead of time. This significant progress reflects the considerable investment of time and effort on the part of many teachers and school leaders. The review report proposed new and more challenging targets to be achieved by 2020 and these were incorporated into the *Action Plan for Education 2017*.

1.5.2 Significant steps were taken to improve the quality of Early Years provision

Early childhood education is a crucial period of development during which the foundations for lifelong learning are nurtured. During the period under review, much of the effort to extend and improve the quality of Early Years provision in Ireland has been focussed on the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE). The programme, established by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in 2010 originally provided one free year of Early Years care and education for children aged between three years two months and four years seven months. The scheme was extended in 2015 to allow children take up a place from when they are three years old up until they are either five and a half years old or they begin primary school.

Both the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and the Department of Education and Skills recognise that provision, of itself, is not enough, and considerable effort has been made to ensure the quality of that provision is high.

¹² Clerkin, A., Perkins, R. and R. Cunningham (2016) *TIMSS 2015 in Ireland: Mathematics and science in primary and post-primary schools* Dublin: Educational Research Centre <http://www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/TIMSS-initial-report-FINAL.pdf>

¹³ *National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011-2020 Interim Review* (2017) Department of Education and Skills https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/pub_ed_interim_review_literacy_numeracy_2011_2020.PDF

An *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide*, which sought to make the existing curriculum framework (*Aistear*) and the complementary quality framework (*Síolta*) more accessible and more practicable for practitioners, was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) at the request of the two Departments. The two Departments in partnership with NCCA in 2016 rolled out the National *Aistear Síolta* Initiative, with two national co-ordinators appointed for the frameworks. For the first time in 2017, a national programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for practitioners in *Aistear* was piloted. The model for delivery is now under review as part of the overall evaluative process.

Both Departments cooperated on a number of measures to establish or improve standards for the professional development of Early Years practitioners. The Department of Education and Skills commissioned Professor Mathias Urban and his team from Roehampton University to conduct a policy and literature review to inform a revised occupational role profile for the sector. His report, published in April 2017, has now informed the drafting of criteria and guidelines for initial professional undergraduate education in Early Years, which will go out to consultation in late 2017, for publication in early 2018. The Department also advises DCYA on the list of approved qualifications for eligibility for minimum statutory and contractual requirements and for a higher capitation to incentivise the professionalisation of the sector.

The DCYA also made a considerable investment in the continuing professional development of Early Years practitioners. This was delivered through the establishment of Better Start, a national mentoring and support service for the Early Years sector, and increased support for city and county childcare committees and many bodies in the voluntary sector.

Initiatives were also taken in the areas of regulation and quality assurance. TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency undertook a revision of the relevant statutory regulations and established revised arrangements for the registration and regulatory inspections of Early Years settings. To complement these regulatory-focussed inspections, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Minister for Education and Skills requested the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills to institute education-focussed inspections in ECCE settings, akin to the dual-inspection arrangement that is in use in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

A specialist team of Early Years inspectors was recruited into the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills on a permanent basis in late 2015. The first trial use of the Education-focussed Early Years inspections (EYEI) began in late 2015 and a quality framework for Early Years settings was developed. The inspections were formally commenced in April 2016.

The focus of the inspections carried out by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills is on improving the quality of educational provision and they complement the regulatory inspections by the TUSLA Early Years Inspectorate. Reports from these education-focussed inspections are published and they provide valuable information to parents and others, and advice for practitioners and those involved in the initial and continuing education of pre-school staff. Chapter 3 provides more information about the development of the EYEI and a summary of our findings from the first round of these evaluations.

1.5.3 A programme of reform of the Primary School Curriculum commenced

The period 2013-2016 was one which saw a significant amount of curriculum reform and development in the primary education system. The Primary Language Curriculum¹⁴ for junior infants

¹⁴ <http://curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Language-New-Junior-infants-2nd-class>

to second class was published in 2015. The Primary Language Curriculum applies in all school contexts and differs from the 1999 curriculum for English and Irish in several respects: it is an integrated curriculum—it has the same curriculum structure and components for English and Gaeilge to support integration across the two languages; it is aligned with the principles and methodologies of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* which emphasises the use of play-based approaches to learning; and it has a learning outcomes focus as opposed to the learning objectives focus of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum.

Work on the development of a new Primary Mathematics Curriculum commenced in November 2014. Like the Primary Language Curriculum, the new Mathematics Curriculum will be consistent with the pedagogical emphases of *Aistear* and it will be presented using broad learning outcomes which will replace the existing content objectives.

1.5.4 The programme of curricular reform continued in post-primary but implementation continued to be slowed at junior cycle

A major reform of junior cycle education commenced with the publication in 2012 of *A Framework for Junior Cycle*. It proposed new approaches to curriculum and to assessment. Responses to the Framework were mixed – there was a broad welcome by student groups, parents, school management authorities, employers and others, but post-primary teacher unions expressed strong reservations about the level of change proposed and about the capacity there was in the system to implement what some of their members considered to be radical changes.

In 2015, following intensive discussions with the teacher unions, a revised *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015* was launched. The original assessment proposals to severely limit external assessment via the State Examinations Commission (SEC) were changed and a dual approach to assessment was adopted. The SEC examinations remain but they are significantly shortened and will, for the majority of subjects, be offered at a common level. The final examinations are complemented by teacher assessment of their students' learning in Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs). This approach brings significant changes to teachers' practice by providing formal opportunities for collaboration on assessment through Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings in schools. The Department has invested significantly to provide, for the first time, dedicated 'Professional Time' of up to twenty-two hours annually for teachers. This time is available to be used by teachers to enable them to participate in SLAR meetings and in a range of activities to support the new Junior Cycle.

The *Framework for Junior Cycle* will be introduced over a phased basis until 2022. It commenced with the implementation of a new specification for English for all first year students in September 2014. The new specifications for Science and Business were introduced in September 2016. The *Framework* sets out a programme which will provide a wider range of learning opportunities for students, and for recognition of that learning. For the first time, a junior cycle programme specifically targeted at students who have mild to moderate general learning disabilities is also available.

The *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015* reduces the number of subjects taken for SEC examination by students to between eight and ten, so as to facilitate other learning opportunities. These will be recognised in a new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement which will recognise learning across a range of assessment modes – SEC examinations, CBAs, short courses and other areas of learning.

This approach to assessment seeks to balance the existing dominance of terminal State examinations at the end of the three-year cycle with classroom-based assessments, designed to recognise a broader range of learning outcomes, some of which cannot be assessed through terminal examination.

A support service for teachers, the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) service has been providing extensive professional support to school leaders and teachers since 2013. Department spending on this support has grown year on year to reflect the phasing in of new subjects, costing in the region of €2.84m in 2016 and rising to €5.22m in 2017. The members of one teacher union did not agree to implement the *Framework* until August 2017 and its members did not agree to participate in related CPD. As a consequence, the situation in schools has been difficult in the period under review, with the student experience varying from one school to another, depending on the union affiliation of teachers. Resolution of the issues involved means that the focus of teachers and the Department is now on ensuring positive and rich learning experiences and outcomes for all students in junior cycle.

1.5.5 Curriculum developments at senior cycle have continued

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) document *“Senior Cycle-Towards Learning”*, which was published in 2009,¹⁵ underpins all current curricular development at senior cycle. Collaborative work between the Department, NCCA, third level, teacher bodies, industry and other relevant and interested bodies has resulted in completion of a number of new subject specifications which are broadly in line with curriculum specifications at junior cycle. These include specifications for the Leaving Certificate sciences (Biology, Chemistry and Physics) and for Agricultural Science, Economics, and Applied Mathematics.

The development of two new specifications has been completed for Physical Education as an examination subject and for a new subject, Politics and Society. The latter is an optional Leaving Certificate subject. It was introduced on a phased basis in forty-one schools in 2016 and will be examined for the first time at the 2018 Leaving Certificate. Following completion of the initial phase, the new subject will be available for all schools from 2018. Physical Education as a Leaving Certificate subject will be available on a phased basis from September 2018.

As the new Junior Cycle Framework is implemented, it has become obvious that a more fundamental review of senior cycle provision may be warranted to ensure continuity between both phases of post-primary education, without compromising the standard at senior cycle. This has been committed to in the *Action Plan for Education*¹⁶ which was launched in 2016, towards the end of the period covered by this report. One element linked to this is the development of a new CAO points scale, launched in 2015, arising from *The Supporting a Better Transition from Second Level to Higher Education* report.¹⁷ This revised common points scale for entry into higher education was developed collaboratively by the universities and Institutes of Technology. This work was prompted by the dual use of the Leaving Certificate both as a final examination and to determine entry to third level, and consideration of how this impacted on the student experience. The first students experiencing this change are the fifth year students of 2015, who sat their Leaving Certificate in 2017. These changes are intended to ensure less pressure on the students to “chase every mark” as a result of the broader grading bands.

1.5.6 There is a renewed focus on student wellbeing

In the period covered by this report, growing societal concerns about the level and impact of bullying, and about the mental health of children and young people have focussed attention on the role schools can play to help students develop resilience and coping skills so that they are better able

¹⁵ NCCA (2009) *Senior Cycle-Towards Learning* http://ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Senior_Cycle/Curriculum-and-Assessment/Towards_Learning_an_overview_of_senior_cycle_education.html

¹⁶ DES (2016) *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/Department-of-Education-and-Skills-Strategy-Statement-2016-2019.pdf>

¹⁷ Higher Education Authority (2015) *Supporting a Better Transition from Second Level to Higher Education* http://transition.ie/files/Supporting%20a%20Better%20Transition%20from%20Second%20Level%20to%20Higher%20Education%20-%20Implementation%20and%20Next%20Steps_April%202015.pdf

to cope with the complex social and emotional challenges of modern living.

Teachers and principals have always been aware of and attentive to their responsibilities for the social, emotional and behavioural support of students and there is a very long established care ethos in our schools. The theme of wellbeing is evident in the curriculum at all levels, Early Years, primary and post-primary. The language used in curriculum documents emphasises interpersonal relationships, a sense of efficacy, resilience, confidence and happiness.

A number of supports have been put in place to provide advice and guidance to schools in this area. The Department's *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2013)¹⁸ and the *Wellbeing in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* (2013)¹⁹ with a companion set of guidelines for primary schools (2015), were published.

The new procedures and the associated Department Circular 0045/2013 apply to all recognised primary and post-primary schools and to centres for education, as defined in the Education Act 1998, which are attended by pupils under the age of eighteen years. School authorities and school personnel are required to adhere to these procedures in dealing with allegations and incidents of bullying.

The Inspectorate has a role in monitoring schools' implementation of policies and procedures to support students' wellbeing, and on the actions taken by schools to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle bullying.

1.5.7 A new strategy to promote the use of digital technology to advance learning has been advanced

A new digital strategy was published by the Department in 2015.²⁰ It is backed by an investment of €210m in digital technology in schools. The strategy sets out a comprehensive set of actions to be achieved in a five-year programme from 2015 to 2020 to maximise the use of digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning and assessment at primary and post primary level. It has been developed around four key themes: Teaching, Learning and Assessment using ICT, Teacher Professional Learning, Leadership, Research and Policy and ICT Infrastructure.

The Inspectorate is committed to playing its part in encouraging teachers to explore new methodologies for teaching and engaging their students and in using ICT in a seamless way in teaching, learning and assessment. A new *Digital Learning Framework*²¹ for primary and post-primary schools has been developed by the Department. At the time of writing, the Framework was being piloted in thirty primary and twenty post-primary schools in the 2017/2018 school year. The *Digital Learning Framework* articulates effective and highly effective practice and its structure is directly aligned to *Looking at Our School 2016*, which sets out the quality standards used by inspectors in evaluation work and by schools generally in their school self-evaluation work.

¹⁸ DES (2013) *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Anti-Bullying-Procedures-for-Primary-and-Post-Primary-Schools.pdf>

¹⁹ DES (2013) *Wellbeing in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Resources-Guidance/Wellbeing-in-Post-Primary-Schools-Guidelines-for-Mental-Health-Promotion-and-Suicide-Prevention-2013.pdf>

²⁰ DES (2015) *Digital Strategy for Schools: Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Digital-Strategy-for-Schools-2015-2020.pdf>

²¹ DES (2017) *Digital learning Framework for Primary Schools* <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Information-Communications-Technology-ICT-in-Schools/digital-learning-framework-primary.pdf> and *Digital Learning Framework for Post-Primary Schools* <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Information-Communications-Technology-ICT-in-Schools/digital-learning-framework-post-primary.pdf>

1.6 SELF-EVALUATION IN EARLY YEARS SETTINGS AND IN SCHOOLS

The period covered by this report saw significant efforts being made to advance self-evaluation in Schools and Early Years settings. This reflected international research which has indicated the significant benefits to be achieved through using both self-evaluation and external inspection in a complimentary way. The Inspectorate has led the development of policy and guidance on school self-evaluation.

School self-evaluation (SSE) was introduced in 2012. It provides teachers with a means of systematically looking at how they teach and how students learn and helps schools and teachers to improve outcomes for learners. The Department of Education and Skills published *School Self-Evaluation: Guidelines for Schools* to support the process. The Guidelines set out the evaluation criteria and quality statements to be used at the time²² for SSE by schools. Since its introduction, inspectors have conducted in excess of 5,000 visits to schools to provide support and advice as their SSE processes developed. Evidence presented in Chapter 6 in this report indicates that the majority of schools engaged with the SSE process.

The second phase of SSE commenced in 2016. Schools will have experience gained in areas such as gathering baseline data, establishing meaningful targets, and whole-school implementation of actions which will be useful to them over the coming years.

In Early Years settings, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) have supported the use of *Siolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*²³ as a self-evaluation process. Since its publication in 2006, the principles, standards and components of quality set out in *Siolta* have provided a framework for self-evaluation in ECCE settings. Settings are encouraged to use *Siolta* informally to reflect on the quality of their practice against the quality standards. They can also engage formally in a ten-step quality assurance programme which engages the support of a mentor (*Siolta* Coordinator) who has been trained to guide the setting through each step of the quality assurance programme.

Whilst *Siolta* was designed to support self-evaluation and reflection on the quality of practice in Early Years settings, it has been reported that engagement in the formal quality assurance programme is very challenging for many settings. The advent of Early Years Education-focussed Inspections provides the context for review of the contribution of the *Siolta* national quality framework to self-evaluation and quality improvement in the sector.

²² More recently, *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework* has extended the 2012 quality framework, which focussed on teaching and learning, to include leadership and management in schools.

²³ DES (2017) *Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* <http://siolta.ie/media/pdfs/siolta-manual-2017.pdf>

KEY MESSAGES FROM THIS CHAPTER

- Growing numbers of young learners benefitted from the State-funded Early Childhood Care and Education programme Education-focussed Early Years Inspections (EYEI) began in late 2015
- Significant growth continued in student numbers, particularly at primary and lower secondary levels, and staff numbers grew in schools
- Expenditure on primary and post-primary education grew but it was largely consumed by the growth in student numbers – spending per student fell as a result
- There was no change to the rates of capitation grants paid to schools which had decreased during the financial crisis
- Funding for initiatives to combat disadvantage and to provide support for children with special educational needs grew
- A revised allocation model for special needs teaching resources was piloted during this period. Its introduction in 2016 gives 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, brought about improvements in these core skills
- There was significant curriculum reform at both levels, supported by the provision of professional support to school leaders and teachers
- The implementation of junior cycle reform has seen the introduction of time for collaborative professional work within teachers' contracted time. Such collaborative work has been shown in other countries to have the potential to improve teaching and learning significantly
- Growing societal concerns about the mental health of children and young people, and about the level and impact of bullying, focussed attention on the role schools can play to help students develop resilience and coping skills
- Structures for the management of schools generally remained unchanged in the period under review. There is some evidence that a small minority of voluntary boards of management are challenged to meet their significant responsibilities.
- The impact of the moratorium on posts of responsibility continued to be felt by schools. The reinstatement of these posts commenced in 2016
- The establishment of Education and Training Boards marks a significant structural reform in the Irish system

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CHAPTER TWO

THE INSPECTORATE



2.1 INTRODUCTION

Inspectors work to improve the quality of learning and teaching that children and young people experience in Irish schools, centres for education and other settings, and to support the development of the Irish educational system. We do this through providing high quality evaluation, analysis, support and advice in relation to educational provision mainly at Early Years, primary and post-primary levels. This chapter describes how we do our inspection work in schools and how this work has developed in the period 2013-2016.

2.2 OUR INSPECTION PROGRAMME

2.2.1 The learning settings we inspect

We inspect in all mainstream school settings, primary and post-primary, and in special schools. We also inspect schools attached to Special Care Units, to High Support Units and Children Detention Centres.

The Inspectorate also has responsibility for evaluating the quality of education provision in Early Years settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. In late 2015, Early Years Education-Focussed Inspections were trialled in a number of Early Years settings participating in the free pre-school year scheme and they have been fully implemented for that sector since April 2016.

Evaluations of Centres for Education are conducted mainly in Youthreach centres that provide “second-chance” educational opportunities for young people who have disengaged from mainstream schooling.

We select schools for evaluation based on a range of criteria, ensuring that the annual programme includes schools which we believe will benefit from inspection, as well as those whose good practice ought to be recognised and affirmed.

At primary level the inspection planning process involves risk assessment based on data from the range of inspections conducted in schools, including a significant number of unannounced Incidental Inspections together with other data, including school size, for example.

At post-primary level, data from stand-alone Subject Inspections, Incidental Inspections and other school evaluations facilitate risk-based assessment in the selection of schools for Whole-School Evaluation (WSE) or other forms of inspection. Other data available to the Department such as performance in certificate examinations, student attendance and student retention data are considered as part of the risk assessment process.

2.2.2 How we inspected in the period covered by this report

We use a range of inspection models to evaluate schools and other learning settings. These vary from one-day, unannounced, Incidental Inspections, to more intensive whole-school type evaluations, to inspections which follow-through on how schools have implemented recommendations made in previous inspection reports. We expanded our range of inspection models so that we are better able to provide supportive evaluation in particular contexts. For example, the schools attached to High

Support Units, Special Care Units and Child Detention Centres have always been subject to the same inspection processes as other schools. However, because the students attending these schools are particularly vulnerable, we made the decision to inspect these schools on an annual basis since 2011. Initially, inspectors carried out these inspections using the established, unannounced, Incidental Inspection model. In 2013, we developed a new inspection model specifically for these settings and we have used that model for the last three years to quality assure the education provided for the students, and to provide advice and support to the teachers, principals and the managements of these schools.

Other new inspection models include *Curriculum Evaluation in the Primary School* and *Evaluating Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Primary Schools*. The first of these enables in-depth evaluation of pupils' learning in particular aspects of the primary curriculum, for example, in Visual Arts or in Geography. The second focuses the quality of a school's provision for pupils with special educational needs. Both these models have been piloted in a number of primary schools and, following consultation with the education partners, have been implemented in schools since September 2016.

Inspectors use different inspection models in different schools and circumstances, but all models share certain characteristics. Inspectors:

- observe teaching and learning activities for substantial periods
- interact with learners in classrooms and other settings
- examine learners' work, including written work, projects, other work on display
- examine records of learners' assessment tests and examinations
- interview key staff (such as the principal teacher or the centre leader, members of specific teams (e.g. the special needs team, or a subject department representative in a post-primary school), teachers and Early Years professionals).

Whole-school type inspections also involve:

- the review of school planning/centre planning and self-review documentation
- interviews with the board of management of the school or centre
- interviews with learners and with parents of learners
- the use of data from questionnaires completed by large samples of parents and students
- the use of questionnaire data from on-line questionnaires completed by teachers.

At the conclusion of inspections:

- Inspectors provide detailed oral feedback to individual teachers, to the principal and the teaching staff and, depending on the model, to the board of management, and to parents
- In the case of all of the models other than Incidental Inspection, a written inspection report is also provided to the school or centre which includes detailed recommendations for improvement, where necessary.

Reports arising from all of these inspection types are published on the Department's website at <https://www.education.ie>

2.2.3 How we involve parents, students and teachers in our inspections

We meet with students and teachers during our school inspections and with parents, where this is practicable. For example, we meet representatives of the school's Parents' Association during all whole-school type evaluations because the notice periods facilitate parents who need to plan their attendance. Inspections with shorter notice periods do not generally support such a meeting.

We also use confidential questionnaires for parents, students, and for teachers in schools with a teaching staff of eight or more. Questionnaires carry a number of positive statements, with which respondents are asked to agree or disagree. Primary students are provided with Yes/No options and 'Don't Know'. Table 2.1 sets out how we analyse and report questionnaire responses in this report.

Table 2.1: Terms used in this report when describing responses to questionnaires

Categories used in this report	Response Options for Primary Pupils	Response options for parents, teachers and post-primary students.
Agree	Yes	Strongly Agree
		Agree
Disagree	No	Disagree
		Strongly Disagree
Don't Know	Don't Know	Don't Know

2.3 THE KEY QUESTIONS WE ASK IN INSPECTION

Inspections are focussed on the key factors that influence the learning experience for students. Primarily, these are the quality of teaching and learning and the quality of leadership and management. These are the dimensions of school quality. We also consider the capacity/ability of the school to drive improvement and change.

Figure 2.1: The key dimensions of quality in schools



We have engaged in extensive consultation with our education partners to develop criteria and statements of standard in relation to these two dimensions of school quality. In 2012, we published guidelines for school evaluation which shared the criteria and standards we use for evaluating

teaching and learning.²⁴ In the period covered by this report, we continued to develop our thinking and practice in relation to quality standards and we involved our partners in this reflection and development. A dedicated unit within the Inspectorate, working with the School Self-Evaluation Advisory Group and a high-level working group within the Department, has set out our shared understanding of what is required of leadership in a well-functioning school. A draft document setting out the proposed domains, standards and statements of practice was shared with the education partners as part of an extensive consultative process towards the end of 2015. Following this consultation in 2016, this work was included, along with a re-presentation of the domains and standards for teaching and learning, into the first comprehensive framework for school quality, *Looking at Our School 2016* published in 2016.

2.3.1 How we describe school quality

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in schools along a quality continuum with which schools are familiar. For this report, inspectors' judgements are analysed using the continuum that was in use up to June 2016.

Table 2.2: The Quality Continuum

Categories used in this report	Quality Level	Example of descriptive terms
Very good	Significant strengths	Excellent; of a very high quality; very effective; highly commendable; very good; very successful; few areas for improvement
Good	Strengths outweigh weaknesses	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; fully appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Less than satisfactory/ Not appropriate	Weaknesses outweigh strengths	Fair in certain areas but with evident weaknesses that are impacting significantly on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory in some areas; experiencing difficulty
	Significant weaknesses	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties

2.3.2 How we inform the public about our inspection findings

Inspection reports arising from our general inspection programme for Early Years settings, schools and centres for education are published in accordance with a set of principles and procedures which are described in *Publication of School Inspection Reports – Guidelines (revised 2015)*.

Inspection reports which do not arise from our general programme of inspection are generally exempt from publication. These reports include, for example, reports written following inspections carried out for the purpose of research and the development and trial of new inspection practices/ models in schools. In these instances reports are issued to the school but are not published.

²⁴ DES (2012) *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Primary Schools and School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*, which have been further developed in DES (2016) *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Looking-at-Our-School-2016-A-Quality-Framework-for-Primary-Schools.pdf> and <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Looking-at-Our-School-2016-A-Quality-Framework-for-Post-Primary-schools.pdf>

Reports on inspections carried out for the purpose of assessing the performance of his or her duties by an individual teacher, are also not subject to publication.

The publication of school inspection reports on the Department's website makes the findings and recommendations of inspections available to all members of the school community and to the wider public. The reports provide one important source of information about the work of schools and having them publicly available is intended to make a real contribution to the quality of schools and educational provision.

2.4 OUR GUIDES TO INSPECTION²⁵

Our published inspection guides include a description of the focus of each model of inspection which we use in schools and centres for education. The guides outline the headings or areas of enquiry under which the inspectors evaluate and report on the work of the school or setting. The guides were revised and updated in 2016 in consultation with our education partners and are presented in four volumes which provide a comprehensive overview of the inspection models which are used in schools, Early Years settings and centres for education:

- A Guide to Early Years Education-focussed Inspection (EYEI) in Early Years Settings Participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme
- A Guide to Inspection in Primary Schools
- A Guide to Inspection in Post-primary Schools
- A Guide to Inspection in High Support Units, Special Care Units and Children Detention Schools

This new presentation of our inspection guides is intended to describe all our inspection models using a consistent format and to set out clearly the rationale and procedures for each of the models of inspection which we use in schools and Early Years settings. Each guide provides a 'one-stop' location for principals, parents, students, school communities and the wider community who want to know how we evaluate and report on quality in our schools and settings. This communicates more clearly the consistency of our approach to inspections in schools.

2.5 DEVELOPMENTS IN HOW WE INSPECT

We are committed to ongoing review and development of the way that we evaluate in schools and the quality of the feedback which we provide to school leaders, teachers and the wider education system. The key developments during the period January 2013 – July 2016 have been:

- The notice given to schools in advance of inspections has been progressively reduced
- There is a very much reduced emphasis on reviewing documentation during inspections so that inspectors spend the bulk of their time in schools in classrooms, observing teaching and learning
- We have introduced teacher questionnaires as a further mechanism for incorporating the perspectives of school staff in our evaluations of schools and other settings
- The time between inspection activities in schools and the publication of written reports has been reduced

During 2015, we consulted widely with our partners on further enhancing our inspection processes. Following consultation with our education partners, we revised three documents which underpin the inspection work we do in schools and other settings and the publication of inspection reports that arise from these inspections.²⁶ These were

- The Code of Practice for the Inspectorate
- Guidelines for Publication of School Inspection Reports
- Procedure for Review of Inspections

We have also introduced a number of changes to make our reports more reader-friendly. These include providing a short description of the focus of the inspection and of the school context. A summary of the main findings of the inspection and the recommendations for improvement is provided at the start of each report. Inspectors also use evaluative words from a standard quality continuum which is included in each inspection report, so that readers can understand what the standards in the school are. We hope that this will make our reports much more accessible and useful for parents. These changes came into force in September 2016 and inspection reports published since then reflect these changes.

The most significant change in the Inspectorate's work in the period covered by this report was the introduction of inspections of Early Years provision. The framework²⁷ for the Early Years' Education-focussed Inspections (EYEI) identifies key outcomes across four broad areas of provision:

- The quality of the context to support children's learning and development
- The quality of the processes to support children's learning and development
- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements
- The quality of management and leadership for learning.

We commenced EYEI in April 2016. We committed to reviewing the implementation of these inspections following the first year of their implementation. At the time of publication, this had been completed and a report on the review will be published in early 2018.

2.6 THE STAFF OF THE INSPECTORATE

The Inspectorate is led by the Chief Inspector and a senior management team. The Inspectorate is divided into nine business units. Five regionally-based business units are responsible for planning and undertaking the main activity of the Inspectorate in primary and post-primary schools – the programme of inspections and advisory visits to schools. The majority of inspectors are assigned full-time or part-time to these units. A sixth business unit is responsible for education-focussed inspections in ECCE settings. These inspections are undertaken on behalf of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs under a memorandum of understanding between the two departments. In addition, Assistant Chief Inspectors in the five regional units and in the Early Years unit also carry responsibility for some aspects of the policy-development/advisory work of the Inspectorate.

²⁶ These documents are available on www.education.ie

²⁷ DES (2016) *A Guide to Early-years Education-focussed Inspection (EYEI) in Early-years Settings Participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/A-Guide-to-Early-years-Education-focussed-Inspection-EYEI-in-Early-years-Settings-Participating-ECCE-Programme.pdf>

Table 2.3: Number of inspectors and secretariat staff in service January 2013-July 2016, expressed as whole-time equivalents

	31/12/13	31/12/14	31/12/15	30/06/2016
Senior Management	10	10	10	11
Early years Inspectors	0	0	9	9
Primary Divisional Inspectors	24	25	24	25
Primary Inspectors	33	32	35	30
Post-primary Senior Inspectors	22.6	24.6	22.6	22.7
Post-primary Inspectors	32.1	21.3	26.3	26.3
Secretariat	9.3	8.9	8.9	8.9

While all our business units work closely with officials in other divisions of the Department on policy development and implementation, three of the Inspectorate's business units have specific policy support responsibilities. These include matters such as teacher education, school improvement, curriculum and assessment policy, and Irish in the school system. One Inspectorate business unit – the Evaluation Support and Research Unit – is responsible for the development of inspection models, research and analysis. It also provides support services for inspectors assigned to the regional business units of the Inspectorate so that they can plan and carry out inspection and advisory work.

The administrative work of the Inspectorate is supported by a secretariat, the staffing of which is also outlined in Table 2.3.

SECTION II

Findings about the quality of provision

In the period covered by this report, the Inspectorate conducted more than 6,000 inspections. These included 237 education-focussed inspections in Early Years settings,²⁸ 2,851 inspections in primary schools and 2,668 in post-primary schools. These figures include inspections in centres for education (Youthreach), schools attached to Children Detention Centres, Special Support Units and High Support Units, as well as schools participating in the Delivering Equality in Schools (DEIS) programme.

In this section of the report, we set out a summary of our findings in relation to the quality of learning, teaching and leadership and management in these inspections.

Chapter 3 provides a summary of the development and implementation of the model of inspection we use to evaluate and report on the quality of educational provision in Early Years settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme.

Chapters 4 and 5, which focus on primary schools and post-primary schools respectively, present our key findings from inspections in schools over the period covered by the report.

We are committed to supporting school and system improvement through our evaluation work in schools. Chapter 6 outlines the range of actions which we have implemented to meet this commitment.

²⁸ 55 EYEI were conducted in the pilot phase November 2015 to the end of February 2016 and 182 from 14th April 2016 to June 2016

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CHAPTER THREE

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING
IN SETTINGS PARTICIPATING IN THE EARLY
CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (ECCE)
PROGRAMME



3.1 INTRODUCTION

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 educational provision in Early Years settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme.

The ECCE programme provides a free pre-school experience for children prior to starting primary school. This scheme was introduced in 2010 by DCYA for children aged more than three years two months and less than four years seven months on 1 September in the relevant pre-school year. In Budget 2016, this Programme was enhanced to allow children aged three years avail of free pre-school until they commence primary school with an upper age limit of participation set at five years six months. Both the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills recognise the critical importance of high quality early education for optimising children's learning and development.

The Early Years Education-focussed Inspections (EYEI) are intended to complement a range of other measures that have been taken to support the ongoing improvement of quality in early education. EYEI explore the extent to which the work of Early Years practitioners participating in the ECCE Programme is informed by the existing national frameworks: *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, and *Síolta: the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*. They also seek to ascertain the nature, range and appropriateness of the early educational experiences for children who are participating in the ECCE Programme.

3.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE INSPECTION MODEL

A key objective of the Department's Inspectorate was to develop the Education-focussed Early Years Inspection (EYEI) model based on research in Early Years education and in collaboration with practitioners, setting owners/managers and Early Years experts.

In advance of the introduction of EYEIs, we conducted extensive research on best practice in Early Years education and care, in preparation for the development work on the inspection model. A draft Quality Framework was developed and an inspection process designed. The draft Early Years Education-focussed Inspection (EYEI) model was shared with stakeholders in the Early Years sector in May 2015. At a consultation event in the Department, a full briefing on the proposed inspection model was provided and stakeholders were invited to provide comment and responses in writing. A total of thirty-four feedback submissions were received from individuals and organisations during the period May - October 2015. This was in advance of the commencement of trial inspections and provided the opportunity to identify and address where possible any major concerns regarding the proposed inspection process. The organisations and individuals involved were mainly practitioners or practitioner representatives in the Early Years sector – including employed Early Years practitioners or owner/managers of Early Years settings.

The feedback submitted indicated a predominantly positive response to the introduction of EYEI with almost all submissions recognising the critical purpose of EYEI to improving the quality of early educational provision in Early Years settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme.

As many of the matters raised in the written submissions concerned potential issues that might arise during the inspection process rather than with the EYEI Quality Framework, it was decided to actively monitor these concerns during the trial phase and make a decision on these after the post-trial consultation process. Some small changes that were suggested in relation to the language of the EYEI Quality Framework, particularly in relation to inclusion and closer referencing to *Aistear*, *The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* were made.

In addition to matters related to the EYEI Model, a number of submissions also highlighted concerns regarding national policy developments in the Early Years sector. These included the terms and conditions of staff working in the Early Years sector, the lack of resources to support quality improvement, especially training in the use of *Aistear*, and the need for coordination across all the evaluation and monitoring activity being directed at Early Years settings. These findings were communicated to DCYA and other agencies concerned.

3.2.1 The EYEI model

Early Years Education-focussed Inspection (EYEI) is designed as a collaborative process involving the inspection team, the Early Years practitioner(s) in the setting inspected, and the owner/manager of the setting. Typically, the core inspection activity takes place over one pre-school session. In addition to meetings with the manager of the setting and with practitioners as appropriate, the main activity of EYEI is the observation of the processes and practices that contribute to children's learning experiences and achievements in one or more learning rooms or areas in the Early Years service.

EYEI evaluates and provides advice and support regarding the quality of education provision in an Early Years service with reference to four areas:

- Area 1: The quality of the context to support children's learning and development
- Area 2: The quality of the processes to support children's learning and development
- Area 3: The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements
- Area 4: The quality of management and leadership for learning

Inspection reports arising from EYEI are published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

3.2.2 Recruitment of inspectors and pilot inspections

In November 2015, a team of Early Years inspectors was recruited from among qualified and highly-skilled practitioners in the Early Years sector. This team was supplemented by a number of primary inspectors who had expertise and experience in Early Years education. By mid-2016, this team comprised nine Early Years inspectors and 1.5 (whole-time equivalent) primary inspectors.

In November and December 2015, Early Years services were invited to send expressions of interest to participate in a number of trial inspections to allow the EYEI model to be tested in practice. In excess of 300 services responded and a total of fifty-five were selected. These services were chosen, in so far as it was possible, to represent the diversity of Early Years provision in Ireland, including geographical location, size, educational philosophy and governance (private for profit or community not for profit). Participating services were given advance notice of the trial inspection and were also invited to share their own observations of the EYEI experience with us. Some participants also agreed to share their experiences with the wider Early Years sector at a series of consultation events which took place in early 2016.

3.3 INSIGHT FROM PILOT INSPECTION PROCESS

From November 2015 to end February 2016, fifty-five pilot inspections were completed and a number of trends were emerging in relation to the findings of the inspection reports. Despite the fact that the services inspected during the pilot phase were self-selecting and therefore likely to be more proactive and improvement-focussed than many others, there was still a great deal of variability across all dimensions of education practice. It was evident that Early Years services were stronger in relation to the quality of the context to support children's learning and development, and in providing good quality learning experiences and achievements, than they were in terms of the quality of the processes to support learning and development and of the quality of management and leadership for learning.

Inspectors noted that the atmosphere in all services was warm, welcoming and respectful of children and their families, children were generally happy and settled in their service, and environments were usually well designed and resourced. Actions advised in these early reports concentrated on supporting Early Years practitioners to engage with the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* developed by the NCCA. They encouraged the use of observation to establish children's interests and made practical suggestions regarding integrating children from diverse backgrounds. Inspectors also identified challenges related to leadership for learning with actions advised promoting the establishment of systematic review processes and improved communication strategies with parents.

In March 2016 a series of national consultation seminars was conducted to afford the opportunity to share the initial experiences of the trial of EYEI with the wider Early Years sector and gather feedback on the perspectives of all stakeholders and partners on the implementation of this new inspection model. These seminars were very well attended with over one thousand participants across the nine venues. In addition to the provision of these seminars, an online survey was developed and distributed through the seminars to allow those not in attendance to provide feedback. In all, over two thousand responses were received. When these were analysed a number of amendments were adopted and integrated into the EYEI model. The most significant was the establishment of a forty-eight hour notification period before EYEI took place in the case of most inspections.

Many practitioners commented on the positive experience of being able to engage in co-professional dialogue with inspectors who had relevant expertise and experience in the operation of Early Years services. It was evident that the majority of staff were very enthusiastic and committed to the provision of high quality early educational experiences for young children. In line with the findings of Early Years inspectors, practitioners identified the need for support in relation to a number of key aspects of educational practice including:

- The use of observation tools and strategies to establish the strengths and interests of children
- Incorporating the child's perspective into programme planning
- Communication with parents regarding children's learning
- Using *Aistear* to support the development of programmes of learning
- Including children with additional needs e.g. disability or English as an additional language
- Documenting and sharing children's learning achievements

Many practitioners cited the challenging context of practice in the Early Years sector, in particular highlighting:

- The lack of non-contact time for planning and preparation of the educational programme
- The part-time nature of staff contracts

- Under-funding of the Early Years sector
- Lack of supports for the inclusion of children with additional needs.

3.4 COMMENCEMENT OF FORMAL INSPECTION

In April 2016, the final guide to EYEI²⁹ was submitted to the Minister of Education and Skills and Minister for Children and Youth Affairs for approval. Formal inspection activity commenced on 14 April 2016 and by 30 June 2016 a total of 182 EYEI had been completed nationally. The first forty-four reports of EYEI were published on the Department's website on June 30th 2016. Responses from Early Years services through the editorial processes associated with the publication of these EYEI reports appeared to indicate a positive reaction to education-focussed inspection. The responses continued to highlight the challenging context being experienced by Early Years services on contract to deliver the ECCE Programme including lack of training in *Aistear* and *Síolta* Frameworks, lack of time for planning and review of practice and difficulties associated with the recruitment and retention of qualified staff. There was also some concern expressed over the potential for confusion regarding the role of the regulatory inspections conducted by TUSLA Early Years inspectors, by the Department of Education and Skills' Early Years inspectors and by other organisations charged with providing support for quality in the Early Years sector. As an attempt to resolve some of the concerns, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs established an Operational Systems Alignment Group with representation from all relevant agencies including the Department's Early Years Inspectorate. This group acts as a forum to discuss and monitor coordination of evaluation, monitoring and support activities in Early Years services funded by the State. Processes to support the scheduling of TUSLA and our inspection activities were subsequently established.

3.5 STANDARDS IN EARLY YEARS PROVISION

While 182 Early Years Education-focussed Inspections had been completed by the end of the period covered by this report, a further 309 were completed in 2016 and the inspections are continuing. A separate analysis of the outcomes of the EYEIs has been prepared and is due for publication in early 2018.

3.6 CONCLUSION

The introduction of Early Years Education-focussed Inspection in 2015 marked a significant new era for the Department's Inspectorate and for the Early Years sector alike. As the majority of children now participate in the ECCE Programme, the operation of an inspection programme in these settings has the potential to positively influence the educational experience of children, both within the settings and as they transition to primary school. Education-focussed inspection has the capacity to identify the strengths and challenges of practitioners in Early Years services and contribute strategically to the national policy agenda for quality improvement

²⁹ The final EYEI Model can be reviewed in the Guide to EYEI (DES 2015b) available at <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/A-Guide-to-Early-Years-Education-focussed-Inspection-EYEI-in-Early-Years-Settings-Participating-ECCE-Programme.pdf>. It contains the Framework for Quality that provides the focus of EYEI, the Quality Continuum, containing the rating scale arrived at as a result of inspection activity and the parameters, procedures and protocols of inspection activity.

KEY MESSAGES FROM THIS CHAPTER

What's working in Early Years provision:

- Early Years practitioners welcome the opportunity for co-professional dialogue with experienced Early Years inspectors and are open to advice on best practice
- ECCE services are reported to be warm and welcoming and provide stimulating and safe environments for children
- There is a good awareness of and respect for play as a pedagogical approach, so that children are enabled to play, develop and learn in accordance with their current stage of development and their own interests

What could be improved:

- Better awareness across the Early Years sector of *Aistear* and *Síolta* as supports for self-evaluation and improvement
- More systematic use by Early Years practitioners of the principles and themes of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. The resources for planning and assessment available in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* offer support here
- Communication with parents needs development to ensure effective sharing of information with families about curriculum, policies, and the children's progression in learning

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND
LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS



4.1 INTRODUCTION

A range of inspections was conducted in primary schools in the period January 2013 – July 2016 as shown in Table 4.1. Each of the inspection models has a particular focus but common to all of them is an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning. This chapter summarises key inspection findings on the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools in the period under review.

Table 4.1 Inspections in primary schools January 2013 - July 2016

INSPECTIONS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS				
Inspection/evaluation activity	2013	2014	2015	To July 2016
Whole-School Evaluation (WSE)	150	73	73	23
Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL)	73	193	145	90
Incidental Inspections	429	503	345	204
DEIS evaluations	-	10	10	-
Follow-Through inspections	126	141	85	66
Evaluation of education settings attached to High Support Units, Special Care Units, and Detention Schools	9	9	7	-
Pilot of Curriculum Evaluation in Primary Schools			24	12
Pilot of Evaluating SEN provision in Mainstream Primary Schools			28	-
Total evaluation activity	787	929	717	395
OTHER DATA CONSIDERED IN THIS REPORT				
	Total number analysed			
Parent Questionnaires	51,050			
Pupil Questionnaires	37,827			

4.2 EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

We consider the following when evaluating the quality of learning in all inspections:

- learner outcomes
- learner experiences and
- teachers' practice

We consider the quality of teaching by examining:

- teachers' preparedness for lessons
- the teaching approaches used
- the nature of teacher-pupil interactions and how pupils are managed and organised during learning activities and
- assessment practice and its impact on teaching and learning

Whole-school evaluations (WSE) are an intensive inspection type, during which the quality of learning in Irish, English, Mathematics and one other curriculum area is evaluated (a fifth curriculum area may be evaluated at the request of the school). In a Whole-school Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL), the overall provision a school makes for pupil learning across the curriculum is evaluated. Both these inspections are notified in advance.³⁰

Incidental Inspections are unannounced and provide a good insight into the everyday experience of children in primary schools. These one-day inspections generally focus on the teaching and learning taking place at the time of the inspection. Lessons are generally observed in a sample of up to three classrooms during the course of a full school day. In the period covered by this report, inspectors visited 7,950 lessons chosen across the curriculum and evaluated teaching and learning in each.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion is designed to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people in disadvantaged communities are met. We inspect in a number of DEIS schools each year. The focus of our evaluations is on the nature and effectiveness of the schools' action planning for improvement which help the school develop each of the seven DEIS themes: Attendance; Retention; Progression; Examination attainment (post-primary only); Literacy; Numeracy; and Partnership with parents and others.

Our evidence base for our evaluation judgements includes the data drawn from analysis of questionnaires completed by parents and pupils and, more recently, by teachers.

4.3 THE QUALITY OF LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

4.3.1 Overall quality of learning

Overall judgements are based on the totality of the evidence available following a number of lesson observations. They describe the level of quality provided across the whole-school rather than at lesson level. The figures provided in table 4.2 represent the overall judgements inspectors made about the quality of learning in the 822 schools in which these inspections have been conducted in the period January 2013 – July 2016. We found learning to be satisfactory or better in 89% to 96% of the settings visited, depending on the model of inspection used.

Table 4.2: Overall quality of learning: Inspectors' findings

Inspection Type	Very Good	Good	Less than satisfactory
Whole-School Evaluation*	27%	67%	6%
WSE-MLL	29%	67%	4%
Incidental Inspection	12%	77%	11%

*In WSE reports, inspectors record the overall quality of learning and teaching as a single judgement.

Parents who responded to questionnaires administered during whole-school inspections were very positive in relation to how their children are progressing in primary school, with 97% agreeing with the statement 'My child is doing well in school.' The majority of primary pupils (83%) indicated that they enjoy learning at school.

³⁰ The period of notification for WSE during the period in question was five weeks and for WSE-MLL was three weeks. Since September 2016, the period of notification has been reduced to ten days for both inspection models.

4.3.2 Quality of learning – English and Mathematics

Several positive findings arise from inspection reports about primary children's learning in English and Mathematics in the period January 2013 - July 2016.

Table 4.3: The quality of learning in English and Mathematics: Inspectors' findings

			Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
English	Whole-School Evaluation - WSE	The quality of teaching and learning	27%	66%	7%
		Pupils' literacy achievements	30%	64%	6%
	Incidental Inspection*	The quality of learning	89%		11%
Mathematics	Whole-School Evaluation - WSE	The quality of teaching and learning	33%	63%	4%
		Pupils' numeracy achievements	43%	55%	2%
	Incidental Inspection*	The quality of learning	87%		13%

* Percentage of lessons in which an inspector agreed with the statement 'The quality of learning outcomes is satisfactory'

Inspectors found the quality of teaching and learning in English to be very good in just over a quarter of the 321 schools in which we conducted a whole-school evaluation. It was good in a further two-thirds. Our findings in relation to learning in Mathematics during whole-school evaluations were slightly more positive, with the quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics described as very good in one third. As well as reporting on quality at whole-school level, inspectors also evaluate the quality of individual lessons. During the course of Incidental Inspections, we found learning to be satisfactory or better in 89% of English lessons and in 87% of Mathematics lessons evaluated.

Increases in children's attainment in literacy and numeracy are substantiated by national and international literacy tests.³¹ In addition to its impact across all curriculum areas, the requirement on schools to focus on both literacy and numeracy as key themes in the school self-evaluation process in the 2012 – 2016 period is likely to have had a positive impact on teaching and learning in English and Mathematics. Table 4.4 indicates that the majority of pupils believed that they were doing well in Mathematics and reading.

Table 4.4 Pupils' perceptions of their learning in English and Mathematics – Questionnaire responses

Question	Yes	No	Don't know
I am doing well at reading	81%	3%	16%
I am doing well at Maths	77%	5%	18%

While this is very positive, closer analysis indicates that there remains room for improvement in some aspects of learning. We are concerned at the numbers of lessons in which pupil learning was deemed to be less than satisfactory in English and Mathematics during Incidental Inspections (11% and 13%

³¹ Clerkin, A., Perkins, R. and R. Cunningham (2016) *TIMSS 2015 in Ireland: Mathematics and Science in primary and post-primary schools* Dublin: Educational Research Centre

respectively). This has only marginally improved since the publication of the last *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013, when the figures were 13% and 15% respectively. We are also concerned at the number of primary pupils who, during whole-school evaluations, indicated that they are unsure of their attainment in both those curriculum areas. The figures in table 4.4 above indicate that there is a need for teachers to communicate more effectively with children regarding their strengths and where they need to improve.

4.3.3 Quality of learning - Irish

Our findings with regard to Irish are significantly less positive than those for English or Mathematics. In fact, a deterioration in outcomes for children in Irish is noted since the last *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013, when inspectors judged the quality of learning to be good or better in 76% of lessons evaluated. A significant cohort of children are not making appropriate progress in Irish.

Table 4.5: The quality of learning in Irish: Inspectors' findings

	Inspection type		Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
Irish	Whole-School Evaluation	The quality of teaching and learning	12%	60%	28%
	Incidental Inspection*	The quality of learning	74%		26%

*Percentage of lessons in which an inspector agreed with the statement, 'The quality of learning outcomes is satisfactory'

4.4 THE QUALITY OF TEACHING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

4.4.1 Overall quality of teaching

We found that teaching is generally of a high standard across the almost 2,000 primary schools which we visited between January 2013 and July 2016. Inspectors rated teaching overall as satisfactory in 88-97% of schools visited, depending on the model of inspection used.

Table 4.6: Overall quality of teaching: Inspectors' findings

Inspection Type	Teaching		
	Very Good	Good	Less than satisfactory
Whole-School Evaluation*	27%	67%	6%
WSE-MLL	31%	66%	3%
Incidental Inspection	13%	75%	12 %

*In WSE reports, inspectors record the overall quality of learning and teaching as a single judgment.

Analysis of individual lessons evaluated in the course of Incidental Inspections indicated that very high levels of satisfactory practice were noted in the classroom management skills of the teachers and in the correction of pupils' work.

Table 4.7: Inspectors' findings - Teaching: Incidental Inspections

All lessons: Incidental Inspections	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
There is satisfactory preparation for the lesson	85%	15%
Appropriate teaching approaches are used	86%	14%
Appropriate learning activities are provided for pupils	85%	15%
Classroom management skills are satisfactory	96%	4%

4.4.2 Quality of teaching approaches

The picture regarding teaching approaches used and the learning experiences provided for pupils is less positive. During Incidental Inspections, inspectors consider whether the teaching approaches are appropriate, keeping in mind the class level, the subject matter and the intended learning outcomes for the lessons observed. In 14% of the lessons, the teaching approaches used were deemed to be less than satisfactory overall. In particular, we noted that children's opportunities to work collaboratively were very limited. 27% of the pupils told us in WSE questionnaires that they do not work in groups most days.

Table 4.8 below provides stark evidence that teachers are not using teaching approaches which encourage children to learn from and with each other and that the learning experiences are not as child-centred as they should be. In Irish and English lessons evaluated, for example, where communication skills are key to effective learning, pupils were facilitated to work collaboratively in only half of the lessons observed. It is also striking that pupils had significantly fewer opportunities to learn through talk and discussion in Irish lessons observed (77%) than they did in English and Mathematics.

Irish is the subject most likely to receive a recommendation for improvement in whole-school evaluation reports. Inspectors advise teachers to ensure that lesson content is appropriately differentiated to reflect the varying learning needs and abilities of pupils. They also point to a need to strengthen pupils' communications skills in Irish through the provision of increased opportunities in the classroom to use the language they have been taught.

Opportunities for collaborative learning in Mathematics lessons were evident in just 58% of lessons observed during whole-school evaluations and, in 16% of lessons, inspectors were not satisfied that the learning activities provided were appropriate. The promotion of positive attitudes towards Mathematics could be accomplished by the use of innovative and child-centred approaches which facilitate pupils' meaningful engagement with lesson content.

Table 4.8 Inspectors' findings - Teaching: Incidental Inspections English, Irish and Mathematics

Incidental Inspections	English		Mathematics		Irish	
	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
Appropriate teaching approaches are used	88%	12%	85%	15%	78%	22%
Pupils learning is developed satisfactorily (knowledge and skills)	89%	11%	86%	14%	76%	24%
Pupils have opportunities to learn through talk and discussion	90%	10%	87%	13%	77%	23%
Pupils are enabled to work collaboratively	57%	43%	58%	42%	54%	46%
ICT is used in the lesson observed	50%	50%	52%	48%	52%	48%
Assessment practices are satisfactory	76%	24%	69%	31%	65%	35%

4.4.3 Quality of teaching – use of ICT

Inspectors found an improvement in the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in Mathematics lessons. In 2010, ICT use was noted in only 30% of Mathematics lessons inspected. That rose to 46% in 2012 and, in the period covered by this report, children benefited from the teacher's or their own use of ICT in 52% of lessons visited. Nevertheless, ICT was not used in just under half of all lessons evaluated across the curriculum during Incidental Inspections. Whilst this suggests that teachers are not exploiting the rich resource which ICT represent, it is important to remember that the usefulness of ICT as a teaching and learning aid is determined by the focus of the lesson. It should be noted that, of the 1,823 teachers who completed online questionnaires during whole-school evaluations, 88% indicated that they have good access to ICT facilities in their schools.

The Department's *Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment*,³² published in October 2015, contains actions that facilitate schools and teachers in adapting new methodologies for teaching and engaging with pupils using ICT in a seamless way in teaching, learning and assessment. It sets out a comprehensive set of actions to be achieved in a five-year programme from 2015 to 2020 developed around four key themes: Teaching, Learning and Assessment using ICT; Teacher Professional Learning; Leadership, Research and Policy; and ICT Infrastructure. Implementation of the strategy in schools should help to support more frequent and effective use of ICT in classrooms.

³² DES (2015) *Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Digital-Strategy-for-Schools-2015-2020.pdf>

4.4.4 Quality of assessment

Assessment is an integral part of teaching and it serves to improve the effectiveness of lessons. The provision of clear and encouraging feedback to pupils on their work is a potential motivator towards improved learning. It lets pupils know what they are doing well and what they can do to improve their learning in the subject. Inspectors found that the quality of assessment practice was less than satisfactory in more than a fifth of the lessons visited during Incidental Inspections. A similar finding arose from the WSEs conducted during this period, with inspectors judging that there was scope for improvement in the quality of assessment in 19% of inspections. Pupils' responses to questionnaires also indicate a greater need to discuss test results with them and to outline how best they might improve.

Table 4.9: Pupil Questionnaires - Teaching: level of feedback on work

	Inspection Type	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
My teacher talks to me about how to improve my work	WSE	87%	5%	8%
My teacher tells me how to improve my work	DEIS	91%	4%	5%
My teacher talks to me about my test results	DEIS	68%	19%	13%

Effective assessment is a key component in supporting pupils' learning. It is very important that teachers are able to assess how well pupils are learning and to recognise how and why they are not progressing. Formative use of assessment data should be utilised to plan programmes of learning and to ensure that those programme are appropriately differentiated in response to the varying needs and abilities of learners. There has been no significant improvement in this particular aspect of teaching since the last *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013.

4.5 THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN'S LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

When we inspect in schools, we are very aware that education is a critical factor in enhancing children's development and in promoting social inclusion, especially for children from disadvantaged circumstances. During WSEs and WSE-MLLs, inspectors examine the work done in schools to support these children to achieve their full educational potential.

The evaluation process facilitates enquiry into how, at a practical level, a school meets the needs of pupils through its admissions and enrolment policy, the allocation of resources to support pupil learning and participation in school life, and school collaboration with community agencies in meeting the pupils' needs. We also look at how pupils from minority groups are supported in the school through, for example, additional English language supports and through policies that promote their inclusion in all aspects of school life. We know that the best outcomes are achieved for children in need of additional support when there are close links between the school and their

families, so we also look at the quality of home-school partnership during inspections. The whole-school evaluations conducted during the period January 2013 – July 2016 found that the overall quality of support for pupils was good or better in 91% of schools visited.

4.5.1 Delivering Equality in Schools (DEIS)

In 2015, the Inspectorate published *Looking at Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Primary Schools*. This presented the findings from forty-four evaluations which specifically focussed on action planning for improvement in DEIS Band 1 primary schools between 2011 and 2014. The report noted that schools report considerable progress in improving pupils' attainment levels in literacy and that progress is evident to a lesser degree in numeracy. However, in the DEIS themes of both literacy and numeracy, a small number of concerns persist. It is apparent that schools have successfully focussed on raising pupils' reading and writing skills but have been less effective in developing pupils' oral language skills. In numeracy and Mathematics, while most schools display strengths in selecting and implementing strategies, the impact of these on attainment is not yet evident in a significant minority of schools. One area of concern highlighted by the evaluations is the need for schools to cater more effectively for individual difference in relation to numeracy. In particular, the needs of pupils of higher academic ability need to be addressed.

Parents and pupils are generally satisfied with the quality of support provided, although it is evident that some pupils in DEIS schools would prefer not to be withdrawn from class and that a more integrated approach to their support would ensure their access to all lessons. There is scope also to develop better feedback practices so that pupils in DEIS schools are better informed about their achievements in tests.

4.5.2 Special Educational Needs

When we evaluate the quality of support provided for pupils with special educational needs (SEN), inspectors consider school policy in relation to the enrolment of pupils with SEN, their inclusion and participation in the life of the school; and the quality of teaching supports provided for them in both classroom and particular support contexts.

Among the strengths in practice recorded by inspectors were the effective implementation of a staged approach to addressing pupils' needs; good use of assessment information; well devised individual education plans with input from parents and pupils as appropriate; and cooperation and collaboration between the class teacher and support teacher.

Table 4.10: Quality of SEN provision – Inspectors' judgements (WSE/WSE-MLL)

	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
Quality of support for pupils with SEN	28%	61%	11%
Learning of pupils with SEN	24%	68%	8%
Teaching of pupils with SEN	29%	61%	10%

While the overall picture is very positive, inspectors drew schools' attention to the need to ensure that, where possible, they should deploy experienced and qualified teachers to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs. Areas where improvements could be made are similar to those noted in the *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013. Inspectors continue to encourage schools to explore models of support which allow the child to remain in the classroom (rather than being withdrawn); to ensure that support plans for children are relevant and facilitate incremental improvements; and to engage more with parents (and pupils, as appropriate) when determining the support plan and learning targets for children with SEN.

When we conduct evaluations in special schools and in special classes attached to mainstream schools, we also administer parent and pupil questionnaires as appropriate. The findings from those questionnaires are also very positive in relation to support for pupils with SEN.

Table 4.11: Parent and pupil perceptions of SEN support – Questionnaire responses

Parent Questionnaire (SEN settings)	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
The work my child is asked to do is matched to his/her ability	92%	2%	6%
I am aware of the learning targets established for my child	91%	2%	7%
I am happy with the opportunities I receive to discuss these learning targets with teachers and other professionals	92%	4%	4%
My child receives appropriate opportunities to set and review his/her learning targets	86%	3%	11%
Pupil Questionnaire (SEN Settings)	Yes	No	Don't know
My teacher will always help me if I don't understand something	91%	2%	7%

During 2015, we piloted a new inspection model which has a particular focus on the manner in which mainstream schools provide for pupils with SEN. The findings of the twenty-eight inspections conducted are positive and the parental responses to questions asked during those inspections indicate a high level of satisfaction with the quality of support received by their children who have special educational needs. However, it is evident in table 4.11 that better engagement of parents in planning for and supporting their children is needed. Almost 10% of parents were not able to agree that they are aware of the learning targets set for their children in individual learning plans.

4.6 THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

School leadership and management is the responsibility of boards of management, the principal and deputy principal, and teachers in the school with promoted posts of responsibility.

4.6.1 Boards of management

Inspectors reported on the work of the boards of management in schools where 822 whole-school evaluations were conducted. Parent questionnaires administered in the course of whole-school

evaluations and DEIS evaluations also contained statements regarding the management of the school.

Overall, we found that management was satisfactory or better in 89%-90% of the schools in which we conducted whole-school type evaluations (either WSE or WSE-MLL) during January 2013 - July 2016. In the more effective schools, boards were identified as being supportive, conscientious, proactive, purposeful and committed to the ongoing development of the school. In schools where we were less satisfied with the quality of the work of the board, we found that they had not ratified organisational policies and curriculum plans and that they had not effectively communicated those policies and plans to parents. We also made recommendations in some of our inspection reports that the board should be more actively involved in planning strategically for the ongoing development of their schools and should engage more with the school community to bring about school improvement.

We found a range of strengths in school-to-parent communication, especially in relation to the increased use of technology. Many schools now have a dedicated parents' section on their websites and an increasing number of schools avail of the "text-a-parent" facility to communicate with parents. The majority of parents (93%) said that they were satisfied with the arrangements for parent-teacher meetings and 96% said that they know who to talk to in the school if there is a problem. There is also a high degree of satisfaction with school reports, with 93% of parents saying that school reports give them a good picture of how their child is doing.

However, we also found that improvement in some aspects of communication between schools and parents is warranted. Parent and teacher responses to questionnaires identify communication on school matters and on its work as areas requiring improvement. 12% of parents in mainstream schools and 9% of parents whose children attend special schools or special classes attached to mainstream schools said that they had not been informed about the school's relationship and sexuality education policy (RSE), for example. 20% of parents of pupils in special classes/special school replied don't know to this question, while 24% of parents of pupils in mainstream schools/classes replied that they did not know. This indicates that there is a need for management to effectively communicate the details of this policy to parents.

Nevertheless, there has been a slight improvement in communications between parents and schools. 2% more parents indicated that the school seeks their views on school matters than did so in 2010-2012 and 8% more parents say that the board provides them with an annual report than did so in 2010 - 2012.

Despite all this good work, where serious weaknesses in the work of schools are found during inspection, we also find that the capacity of the board of management and school leaders can be critical factors in addressing the difficulties identified. The ability at school-level to address serious challenges such as, for example, issues of governance and to effectively assume the responsibility of an employer in relation to complaints procedures, can be compromised by the voluntary nature of the membership of most boards.

4.6.2 In-school management

We use the term 'in-school management' to talk about the internal professional leadership in the school, usually provided by the principal and deputy principal. It also includes the work of other

promoted teachers who carry responsibilities for curriculum leadership or other aspects of the work of the school. In evaluating the work of the in-school management team, we keep in mind the impact of the moratorium on public service appointments which has been in place since March 2009. One effect of this has been that promoted posts as assistant principal or special duties teacher have not generally been filled. This has reduced the size of the management team in many schools.

When describing the good practice in this area which they saw in schools, inspectors commented on the strong and purposeful leadership of the principal, a whole-school focus on teaching and learning and a commitment to raising pupil attainment. We have also noted a team-approach to leadership and to distributive leadership where members of the in-school management team share responsibility for school improvement initiatives and the effective running of the school.

Table 4.12: Quality of the work of in-school management: Inspectors' findings

	Inspection Type	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
The effectiveness of the in-school management	WSE	38%	47%	15%
The effectiveness of leadership and management	WSE-MLL	37%	52%	11%

As in the *Chief Inspector's Report* published in 2013, the majority of recommendations made by inspectors refer to the need to review the roles and responsibilities of post-holders and to ensure that the duties assigned to and undertaken by the in-school management personnel were responsive to, and addressed more directly, evolving school needs and priorities. Additionally, the need for the in-school management team to lead a whole-school approach to raising pupils' attainment was mentioned in many recommendations.

We also found that there had been very little improvement since 2013 in the quality of schools' engagement with their pupils as active contributors to decision-making and policy development in the school. Less than half of the pupils who completed a questionnaire (45%) agreed that they had a say in how things are done in their schools.

4.6.3 Management of pupils

A key responsibility of the school management is to maintain good order and positive relationships. This is how schools create a learning environment in which children feel safe and valued and teachers are enabled to contribute most effectively to children's learning. When we inspect in schools, we examine how children are managed and we look at communications within the school. We consider the responses by pupils, parents and teachers to questionnaires which we use during whole-school evaluations. Our findings about pupil management are very positive.

Table 4.13: Quality of pupil management: Inspectors' findings

	Inspection type	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
Management of pupils	WSE	66%	31%	3%
Classroom management	Incidental Inspections	96%		4%
Quality of care and support for pupils	WSE-MLL	76%	22%	2%

There is very good parental and pupil satisfaction overall with how schools implement their codes of behaviour. 82% of primary pupils believe that they are treated fairly and respectfully and their parents are even more positive (95%). Schools continue to foster respectful relationships between children and staff and among children themselves. 91% of primary pupils reported that they get on well with other children in the school. This is a particularly effective way to limit the incidence of bullying in schools, a matter that has been of great public concern during the period covered by this report.

In 2014, under action 4 of the *Action Plan on Bullying*, the questionnaires which are routinely administered to parents and pupils as part of whole-school type evaluations were amended to include a number of statements which ask them for their views on aspects of the school which contribute to a positive school culture. Their responses indicate a very high level of satisfaction with the arrangements in place in many schools to promote positive relationships and to tackle bullying.

Table 4.14: Parent and pupil perspectives on how schools tackle bullying: Questionnaire responses

Question	Respondents	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I have been informed of the schools 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%

A full report on the data which parent and pupil questionnaires provide in relation to their views of actions taken in school to build and maintain a positive school culture was published in July 2017.³³

³³ DES (2017) *Parent and Pupil/Pupil Perceptions of Schools Actions to Create a Positive School Culture and to Prevent and Tackle Bullying*
https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/parent_pupil_perceptions_positive_school_culture.pdf

KEY MESSAGES ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

What's working in primary schools :

- Teaching and learning were found to be good or better in the majority of schools evaluated
- There has been an improvement in the quality of teacher preparation for lessons since the publication of the last *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013
- Pupils were provided with opportunities to learn through talk and discussion in the majority of lessons observed
- Teachers' classroom management skills were satisfactory in almost all lessons observed
- The school self-evaluation process has supported the work in schools to improve literacy outcomes for pupils
- In a period where the number of in-school management personnel has been reduced, the quality of school management has remained high in the majority of schools
- Communication at school level is generally very positive with some specific areas for improvement identified at various levels
- Schools are successful in the creation of a positive school climate for teaching and learning.

What could be improved:

- Significant change is required in terms of the learning experiences provided to pupils if improvement in outcomes in Irish is to be achieved
- A stronger focus on planning for meaningful and active participation of pupils in the learning process is needed. In particular, increased opportunities to work collaboratively should be explored
- The potential of ICT to enable enriched learning experiences should be better exploited in primary schools
- Improvement in assessment of learning and assessment for learning practices is required in many primary school settings
- Schools should improve the opportunities to hear and respond to pupils' opinions and to be active contributors to school life
- Schools should work with parents to ensure effective communication of school policies, including the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy
- Boards of management ensure that schools are well-linked to their communities but voluntary boards can find it challenging to deal with some issues related to governance and to effectively assume the responsibility of an employer in relation to complaints procedures and in managing, where relevant, capital expenditure; ways in which greater professional support could be provided for boards in these cases needs to be considered.

SPOTLIGHT 1

FOCUS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING IN ARTS EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

This chapter summarises key inspection findings on the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools in the area of Arts Education.

S1.1 ARTS EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Arts Education in the Irish Primary School Curriculum is comprised of three curriculum subjects, Drama, Music and Visual Arts. Arts Education provides a unique, aesthetic learning experience for pupils allowing for creative engagement and the development of pupils' imaginative and critical thinking skills. Arts Education enables the child to explore alternative ways of communicating with others. It also encourages ideas that are personal and inventive and makes a vital contribution to the development of a range of intelligences. The child's engagement in Arts Education is integral to primary education in helping to promote thinking, imagination and sensibility and in enabling the child to make sense of the world; to question, to speculate and to find solutions.

As well as the Arts Education curriculum, some pupils also experience arts projects and initiatives that are co-funded by the Department of Education and Skills. Examples of such projects include the artist in residence scheme, CRAFTed and Music Generation. In 2015 the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, jointly launched the Arts in Education Portal, a key national digital resource for arts and education practice in Ireland - <http://www.artsineducation.ie>.

S1.2 EVALUATING ARTS EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The quality of teaching and learning in the arts subjects is evaluated in Incidental Inspections and in Whole School Evaluations (WSEs). Between 2013 and 2016, a total of 588 lessons in Arts Education were evaluated during Incidental Inspections and WSE evaluations.

Table S1.1: Number of Arts-focussed inspections in January 2013 - July 2016

Subject	Incidental Inspections	WSE	Total
Drama	63	48	111
Music	278	36	314
Visual Arts	131	32	163

As well as observing lessons in the arts subjects, inspectors examine records of pupils' learning such as work samples, portfolios, visual scores, pictures and video footage. Inspectors also listen to pupils perform and sometimes ask pupils to complete specific tasks to evaluate pupils' levels of engagement, mastery of specific concepts and facility with particular media or techniques.

During 2014 and 2015 the Inspectorate developed a Curriculum Evaluation Model (CEM) to examine teaching and learning and pupil achievement in specific subject areas. Evaluations of provision in Visual Arts and Music formed part of the pilot for this model. In 2016 the CEM model was formally introduced to the primary system.

S1.2.1 Inspection findings about Arts Education in primary schools

Table S1.2: Quality of pupil learning outcomes: Inspectors' findings

Subject	Inspection model	Overall quality of teaching and learning		
		Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
Drama	Whole-school Evaluation	21%	69%	10%
	Incidental Inspection	89%		11%
Music	Whole-school Evaluation	39%	53%	8%
	Incidental Inspection	94%		6%
Visual Arts	Whole-school Evaluation	34%	56%	10%
	Incidental Inspection	93%		7%

Drama: The findings of inspectors' evaluations suggest that provision in Drama is generally not as strong as the other two arts subjects. Good practice or better was noted in the selection of appropriate teaching approaches and in the learning activities provided for pupils in 90% of lessons observed. Pupils were observed to be engaged appropriately in lessons, their learning developed satisfactorily and they had opportunities to learn through talk and discussion in 92% of lessons.

In the 21% of lessons evaluated where teaching and learning in Drama was found to be of a very high quality, lessons were well structured and appropriately paced and supportive environments were developed. Teachers made good use of the available resources, space and play areas and they implemented a broad variety of active learning approaches, including drama games, narrative mimes, improvisations and post-drama discussions. In inspection reports, common strengths in the teaching of Drama included the use of story and narrative to structure Drama as well as the use of strategies such as teacher-in-role, still images and thought tracking. Pupils' engagement and application levels in Drama were generally praised. Where provision was particularly good pupils' improvisational abilities and their facility to sustain role and character were identified as strengths.

Assessment practices were found to be less than satisfactory in 27% of lessons, with inspectors noting that teachers lacked confidence in measuring how well pupils were progressing in Drama. Inspectors found that teachers should also ensure progression in the content objectives as the pupils move up through the school.

Drama provides rich opportunities for pupils to work together and with their teacher. In those lessons which were weakest, there was a real need to provide a wider and richer experience for the

pupils, based on the methodologies and content objectives of the curriculum. Inspectors noted in 17% of lessons that pupils were not working collaboratively. In 16% of lessons, resources were not used effectively to stimulate imagination and activity.

Inspectors commonly recommended a greater focus on the elements of Drama in the planning and teaching of lessons; that pupils should be provided with more regular opportunities to improvise and to engage in open-ended drama making; and that the range of approaches and strategies be extended. There is evidence also from a small number of reports that provision in Drama may not be embedded in some schools and, in some cases, lessons are provided by an external tutor.

Music: In the lessons inspected, it was evident that children enjoy music and learning in music and pupils were seen to be engaged in 96% of lessons observed. In 94% of lessons, appropriate teaching approaches and learning activities were selected, so that teaching successfully built on pupils' expertise and understanding and developed their musical potential.

Inspectors were very positive where they found that children were exposed to music from a range of cultures and styles, and had plenty of opportunities for music-making themselves. In the best lessons, it was evident that the teacher's planning for teaching music ensured a breadth and balance across all the music strands, the three strands of listening and responding, performing and composing.

In some schools Inspectors found that the whole-school and classroom environments clearly promoted and celebrated music. In these classrooms pupils were confident and displayed high levels of motivation in their learning during the music-making process in both individual and group performances. Pupils learned to read music effectively and could sing clearly and sweetly, their sound production and their abilities to sing in complex parts were highly commendable. They could play a wide range of music with proficiency and skill on tin whistles, accordions, bodhráns and percussion instruments. Teachers ensured that there was appropriate progression in their understanding of musical concepts and skills. The engagement of school communities with Music Generation and the National Children's Choir enhanced pupils' learning and teachers were commended for the ways in which pupils' musical learning from outside the classroom was incorporated into music lessons and school performances. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used very effectively to support learning; pupils recorded their performances and shared their musical compositions with other classes.

Gaps in schools' coverage of the music curriculum were also identified by inspectors both in WSE and in Incidental Inspections. In some instances schools were advised to ensure the inclusion of composition activities, music literacy, exploring sounds and the teaching of instruments as part of provision. Inspectors found that while pupils in some classes had a good foundational understanding of musical literacy, the scope and range of literacy skills often needed to be developed systematically as pupils progressed from class to class. Inspectors advised that whole-school plans should set out a music literacy policy in order to clarify the language register to be taught at each class level. This would ensure a more developmentally appropriate learning experience for pupils. Inspectors have also advised that pupils' listening and responding skills could be developed further through the provision of more regular listening activities across a range of musical genres and by providing opportunities to respond in a more open-ended and playful way. Inspectors noted too that there was scope to further develop practice in relation to differentiation to ensure that lessons provide sufficient challenge for the range of musical ability among pupils. Furthermore, in 31% of

lessons pupils were not enabled to work collaboratively and in 16% of lessons pupils did not have opportunities to learn through talk and discussion. The potential for children to learn from each other was limited in these classrooms, as were the opportunities they had to express and think through their own ideas in Music.

As in the other Arts subjects, assessment practices need to be better developed, with inspectors judging them to be less than satisfactory in 25% of lessons. In many of the Music lessons evaluated, assessment information was not used effectively to inform planning for children's progression in the subject in a way that built and expanded on each of the curriculum strands.

Visual Arts: Inspectors found teaching and learning in the Visual Arts to be of a very high quality in one third of the lessons observed. In those lessons, they commended highly the provision of significant opportunities for pupils to pose questions, reflect on what they see and to become critically aware. In these lessons, children have regular opportunities to observe and respond to their own work and to the work of other artists. There is productive use of the environment, storytelling, music and artists' work to stimulate the pupils' imagination. Giving children opportunities to explore, clarify and express personal and shared ideas, feelings and experiences through their engagement in a range of suitable and age appropriate aesthetic experiences is best practice in Arts Education.

In a further 56% of lessons, we found that pupils were exploring and experimenting with a wide range of materials and techniques through guided-discovery methods. These strategies provided for the acquisition of techniques and skills necessary for creative expression and fostered the children's creativity. The use of construction stations, in keeping with the playful learning methodologies underpinning *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, supports our youngest pupils' creativity in learning in the Visual Arts. This allows pupils to explore, imagine, invent, plan, design and build with appropriate materials. This provides our youngest pupils with opportunities to develop awareness of their visual, spatial and tactile world.

In our recommendations and advice to schools, inspectors identified the need for greater emphasis to be placed on the Looking and Responding strand units in some instances, and for a more consistent focus on the Visual Arts elements. Some reports also highlighted the need for more regular opportunities for pupils to engage with the 3-D strands of Construction, Clay and Fabric, and Fibre. Inspectors also noted that in almost a third of lessons (29%), the opportunity for pupils to learn from one another was limited, as pupils were not enabled to work collaboratively.

Information and communications technology (ICT) can be used creatively and imaginatively by pupils to create work and to present that work. However, it was underused in the teaching of Visual Arts, with its use evident in only 60% of lessons.

In 27% of lessons assessment practices were evaluated as less than satisfactory. Where samples and records of pupils' progress are maintained in portfolios, these could be used by teachers in professional collaborative review of Visual Arts at school and classroom level to review pupils' learning experiences and to plan for improvement in future work in the Visual Arts.

KEY MESSAGES ABOUT ARTS EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

What's working in primary schools:

- Teaching and learning were found to be good or better in the majority of schools where an Arts Education curriculum area was evaluated
- Across the Arts, appropriate use of methodologies and resources, well-planned, well-structured and well-paced lessons was noted
- Pupils engaged appropriately in lessons in the Arts and they were given opportunities to learn through talk and discussion as well as opportunities for reflection and individual creativity

What could be improved:

- In Drama, there is need for a greater focus on the elements of Drama in the planning and teaching of lessons: an extended range of approaches and strategies is needed to provide pupils with more regular opportunities to improvise and engage in open-ended drama making
- In Music, musical literacy skills need to be developed to a greater extent as pupils progress from class to class
- In the Visual Arts, the potential for ICT to be used to a greater extent should be further explored in schools. Greater emphasis should also be placed on the Looking and Responding strand units and on the visual elements of art to support pupils' learning
- There is a need to ensure that pupils are facilitated to engage in collaborative work in the Arts to a greater extent
- There is a need for assessment practices for and of learning in the Arts to be further developed



Excellence in Learning for All

CHAPTER FIVE

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND
LEARNING IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS



5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the key inspection findings on the quality of teaching and learning in post-primary schools in the period January 2013 - July 2016. The set of standards and criteria used by inspectors when we evaluated teaching and learning in post-primary schools during the period January 2013 – July 2016 are the same as those used in primary schools.³⁴

Table 5.1: Inspections in post-primary schools January 2013 - July 2016

INSPECTIONS IN POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS				
Inspection/evaluation activity	2013	2014	2015	To July 2016
Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL)	71	75	65	48
Subject Inspections	404	317	231	172
Programme Evaluations	13	29	31	23
Incidental Inspections in post-primary schools	284	210	184	146
Evaluation of Centres for Education (Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centres)	4	4	5	4
DEIS evaluations	10	10	8	-
Follow-Through inspections	112	101	65	43
Total evaluation activity	898	746	589	436
OTHER DATA CONSIDERED IN THIS REPORT				
	Total number analysed			
Parent Questionnaires	26,586			
Student Questionnaires	41,773			

5.2 EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

During the period January 2013 - July 2016, we inspected 5,697 lessons in the course of WSE-MLL inspections and 3,647 lessons during unannounced (incidental) inspections. Inspectors also evaluated the quality of teaching and learning in 6,384 lessons during Subject Inspections and Programme Evaluations and 147 during Evaluations of Centres for Education/Youthreach evaluations.

We consider the following when evaluating the quality of learning in all inspections:

- learner outcomes
- learner experiences

³⁴ See page 48

We consider the quality of teaching by examining:

- teachers' preparedness for lessons
- the teaching approaches used
- the nature of teacher-student interactions and how students are managed and organised during learning activities
- assessment practice and its impact on teaching and learning

The subject inspections reported on in this report were announced two weeks in advance of the inspector's visit.³⁵ They are conducted by specialist subject inspectors who have substantial experience in teaching the subject themselves. During a Subject Inspection, inspectors consider a range of evidence when evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in a subject, including students' engagement in and progress through the lessons observed and samples of their written work. We also consider students' outcomes in State examinations where this is relevant and we interact with students in the classrooms we visit.

Evaluations of Centres for Education are conducted mainly in Youthreach centres that provide "second-chance" educational opportunities for young people who have dropped out of mainstream schooling. The evaluation process is similar to WSE-MLL in mainstream schools.

Incidental Inspections are unannounced and provide a snapshot of teaching and learning as it transacts in the normal day-to-day life of the school.

5.3 THE QUALITY OF LEARNING IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The figures provided in table 5.2 represent the overall judgements inspectors made about the quality of learning in the post-primary schools and centres for education in which inspections were conducted in the period January 2013 – July 2016. These judgements are made at whole-school level and inspectors consider the totality of the evidence available following a number of lesson observations. Incidental Inspections record inspectors' judgements at the level of the individual classroom.

We found learning to be satisfactory in 85% to 91% of the schools visited, depending on the model of inspection used. This indicates a slight improvement on our findings in the *Chief Inspector's Report* published in 2013.

Table 5.2: Inspectors' findings: Quality of learning

Inspection type	Learning		
	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
WSE-MLL	42%	45%	13%
Centres for Education/ Youthreach	28%	57%	15%
Subject Inspection	40%	49%	11%
Programme Evaluation	48%	43%	9%

³⁵ Since September 2016, the notification period for inspections has reduced, so that five school days' notice is given for subject and programme evaluations, with ten days for WSE-MLL inspections.

Parents who completed inspection questionnaires during whole-school evaluation (WSE-MLL) were positive about their children's learning. 93% agreed that their child was doing well in school. The majority of students indicated that they are getting on well at school (81%). Learners attending Youthreach centres are happy with the progress they are making in reading (92%) and Mathematics (91%). The majority of their parents (97%) were also satisfied that their children were doing well in the centres. This represents no change since the last *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013.

Nevertheless, there is a significant number of inspections in which the quality of learning was judged by inspectors to be unsatisfactory. Data from Incidental Inspections may indicate the factors contributing to this, as these inspections record inspectors' judgements at the level of the individual classroom. Inspectors evaluated 3,647 lessons from across the curriculum using this model. We found that in almost 10% of lessons, the learning intention was not clear and that in almost 17% of lessons, students' learning was not monitored, so that in one in ten lessons, students were not engaged in the learning process.

Table 5.3: Inspectors' findings: Learning - Post-primary Incidental Inspections

All lessons: Incidental Inspections	Agree	Disagree
Students were engaged in learning	89%	11%
Student answers show understanding	92%	8%
Students complete tasks successfully	91%	9%
Learning is consolidated	84%	16%

Inspection reports recommend improvement through the greater use of active learning including student-centred and student-led activities, creative use and integration of ICT, and, in Youthreach centres, raising expectations of achievement, so that more appropriate challenging of learners takes place.

We also evaluated students' learning across the curriculum through the Subject Inspection model. Table 5.4 indicates the overall findings in relation to students' learning in English, Mathematics and Irish, as determined during these inspections.

Table 5.4: Inspectors' findings in Subject Inspections: The quality of learning in English, Mathematics and Irish

Quality of Learning: Subject Inspections	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
English	34%	49%	17%
Mathematics	41%	47%	12%
Irish	28%	51%	21%

The high level of unsatisfactory lessons in English noted during Subject Inspections is of concern. In these lessons, inspectors noted poor planning for teaching and learning. Lessons lacked variety in content or in method of teaching and students were not engaged sufficiently.

Resources were not used optimally to focus students' attention and deepen their understanding in 15% of English lessons evaluated during Incidental Inspections. These aspects of teaching remain as under-developed as they were when reported on in the last *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013. In that report, which covered the period 2010-2012, inspectors found little collaboration among teachers in subject departments, a lack of focus on agreed learning outcomes and the skills to be developed, and some poor selection or preparation of teaching methods and/or teaching materials in 23% of schools during Subject Inspections in English at that time.

The consolidation of learning is a key component in effective teaching. It assists students to organise content and make connections in ways that make it easier to remember and build upon over time. It also scaffolds upon previous learning enabling the quick retrieval of key knowledge and skills. This was not done in 16% of English lessons observed.

Table 5.5 sets out our findings during Incidental Inspections in relation to student learning in these three subjects.

Table 5.5: Inspectors' findings in Incidental Inspections: The quality of learning in English, Mathematics and Irish

	Quality of Learning: Incidental Inspections		Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
English	Incidental Inspection	Student answers show understanding	92%	8%
		Students complete tasks successfully	91%	9%
Mathematics	Incidental Inspection	Student answers show understanding	89%	11%
		Students complete tasks successfully	89%	11%
Irish	Incidental Inspection	Student answers show understanding	85%	15%
		Students complete tasks successfully	87%	13%

While our overall findings about the quality of learning in Mathematics are largely positive, learning was unsatisfactory in more than 10% of the classrooms visited. Findings from Incidental Inspections indicate that 12% of students are not engaged appropriately in their learning and that almost 11% of them experience difficulty in completing tasks successfully and reflecting their understanding of new content and skills in their answering of questions. The effective consolidation of student learning also remains a key challenge in Mathematics, where practice in this regard was unsatisfactory in 18% of lessons evaluated.

It is evident that students are not as engaged in their learning in these subjects as necessary to achieve at the highest levels. As at primary, learning and teaching in Irish is more challenging than in either English or Mathematics. Our findings with regard to teaching and learning in Irish indicate a small improvement in students' learning since the last *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013, however it remains an area of real concern. During the years 2010 - 2012, inspectors found that the quality of students' learning in Irish was problematic in almost one in three (32%) of Irish Subject Inspections. The slight improvement since 2012 was at both ends of the quality continuum, which is encouraging, with inspectors reporting a higher percentage of lessons (up 10%) that were very good and a matching reduction in the percentage of lessons in which learning was considered to be unsatisfactory. In the lessons judged to be very good, inspectors commended the emphasis placed

on the communicative approach to language learning and the opportunities for students to be actively engaged in speaking and listening to the language. However, it must be acknowledged that learning remained weak in between 13% - 22% of Irish lessons observed which is significantly poorer than learning in English or Mathematics.

5.4 THE QUALITY OF TEACHING IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

5.4.1 Overall quality of teaching

Inspectors evaluated overall teaching as good or better in 88%-94% of schools, depending on the model of inspection used. Many positive features of teaching were noted during our inspections. They include the development of collaborative practice among teachers, noted particularly in Subject Inspections and Programme Evaluations. Teachers' classroom management skills were satisfactory in almost all lessons observed.

Table 5.6: Inspectors' findings: Quality of teaching

Inspection type	Teaching		
	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
WSE-MLL	45%	45%	10%
Centres for Education / Youthreach	33%	55%	12%
Subject Inspection	44%	48%	8%
Programme Evaluation	51%	43%	6%

Whilst it is particularly positive that teaching was judged to have significant strengths in almost half of the schools inspected, it is a matter for concern that it was less than satisfactory in 10% of the schools and in almost 12% of the Youthreach centres we inspected. This is only marginally better than noted in the *Chief Inspector's Report* published in 2013. In these schools and centres, inspectors were critical of the teaching approaches used which were insufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of students; of under-developed assessment practices; of inappropriate teaching strategies; and of less than effective use of teaching and learning resources.

Students responding to questionnaires distributed during WSE-MLL are less positive than inspectors about the overall quality of teaching in their schools. While students acknowledge the encouragement given to them by their teachers, the level of interest generated by lesson activities is relatively low. It is also evident that improvements in the quality of feedback given to students on their work could be improved.

Table 5.7: Students' perceptions of the quality of teaching – Questionnaire responses

Question	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
My classes are interesting	69%	16%	15%
My teachers encourage me to do the best I can	85%	6%	9%
Teachers talk to me about how to improve my learning	77%	11%	12%

5.4.2 Quality of planning

Planning for teaching is very important to ensure positive outcomes for students. We found notable improvements in the quality of subject and programme planning in post-primary schools since the last *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013. Where inspectors judged the quality of planning to be good or very good, the subject department plan set out the learning objectives to be achieved by each year group and documented schemes of work, resources and assessment policy and practices.

Table 5.8: Inspectors' findings: Quality of planning noted in Subject Inspections and Programme Evaluations

	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
Quality of programme planning and coordination	48%	41%	11%
Quality of subject planning- Subject Inspections	25%	65%	10%

Improvement in teachers' planning practices were noted in the 1,573 Mathematics lessons evaluated during Subject or Incidental Inspections in the period January 2013 - July 2016. Very high quality planning in 34% of schools extended planning to include, for example, the Mathematics department's strategy for managing the transition of students from primary to post-primary school and an end-of-year review in which teachers reflect on what has gone well and any particular areas for further development that have been identified. The 9% of schools in which planning was found to be unsatisfactory were those in which there was little collaborative practice and subject planning was undeveloped. Inspectors noted very good use of ICT in many Mathematics lessons. Video clips, PowerPoint presentations and geometry animations were used effectively to engage students and support learning. Collaborative and independent learning opportunities were evident in 84% of Mathematics lessons visited during Incidental Inspections.

Recommendations in relation to planning for teachers of Irish and of English focussed on the need to agree a common approach to assessment and feedback practices, to use ICT to support students' learning and to inspire and develop their interest in the learning of the language.

5.4.3 Quality of teaching approaches

The selection of appropriate teaching strategies and approaches along with enabling students to work independently and collaboratively are key to effective teaching and learning. Many inspection reports commented on very good practice in relation to the establishment of clear learning expectations for students and the use of student-centred teaching and learning approaches. These included discovery learning, collaborative learning and independent learning activities.

Irish was evaluated in 398 lessons observed in the course of Subject Inspections and in 278 lessons evaluated during Incidental Inspections during the January 2013 - July 2016 period. The improvement in learning in Irish lessons noted above was greatest where the variety of activities which inspectors noted in the very best lessons (29%) ensured that the students' interest in the subject of the lesson was retained and that the lessons had a good pace. Inspectors noted that very good attention was paid to all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in these lessons and students' copies and notebooks provided evidence of high quality and encouraging feedback.

Despite the slightly improved outcomes for students of Irish noted earlier, many challenges to effective teaching in Irish remain. Inspectors commented on over-use of the translation method in many classrooms. They recommended that teachers should provide more communication opportunities in the target language in all lessons so that students have experience of speaking Irish. A particular challenge for teachers is to plan for the variety of language skills represented in the classroom.

In the last *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013, we noted that one of the difficulties specific to lessons in Irish was the narrow range of resources which teachers used, and the limited way in which they were being used, to support learning in Irish. Despite the efforts made by teachers to address this problem, we found that appropriate teaching strategies and approaches and effective use of resources were evident in just 79% of lessons.

5.4.4 Quality of differentiated teaching

Across the three 'core' subjects, English, Mathematics and Irish, inspections found that, in a significant number of lessons, teachers did not appropriately differentiate lessons. Appropriate differentiation at all stages of the teaching, learning and assessment cycle is necessary to ensure that all students can progress in the subject. It requires the teacher to carefully plan for and monitor students' learning and to use information gained from students' feedback to modify the pace, content and presentation of lessons. In this way, all students can be supported to engage in cognitively demanding tasks which stretch them and ensure their learning. Across the curriculum, teachers do not make optimum use of in-class assessment information to inform their planning for lessons and to amend their teaching approaches.

Table 5.9: Inspectors' findings - Differentiation: Post-primary Incidental Inspections

All lessons: Incidental Inspections	Differentiation	
	Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
English	79%	21%
Mathematics	73%	27%
Irish	67%	33%

Overall we found little evidence of differentiation in between 24% and 33% of all lessons evaluated. Students come to lessons with a range of aptitude and with differences in their levels of interest and confidence in the subject. It is important that teachers explore a range of teaching approaches to accommodate these differences in order that all students progress appropriately in the subject.

5.5 THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS' LEARNING IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

5.5.1 The general quality of support for students

Inspectors consider the quality of a school's provision for students with special education needs during WSE-MLL, and we also conduct Subject Inspections of provision for students with special educational needs (SEN). Inspectors consider the quality of support offered both in mainstream classes and in withdrawal settings. In the January 2013 - July 2016 period, thirty-eight Subject Inspections of SEN provision were conducted in post-primary schools. In the course of these inspections, the quality of teaching was found to be satisfactory or higher in 96% of lessons and the quality of learning was found to be satisfactory or higher in the same percentage of lessons.

Where teaching and learning were judged to be good, inspectors noted a number of very supportive practices. These included effective whole-school literacy initiatives; the explicit teaching of subject-specific terminology and the use of appropriate scaffolding and teaching strategies across the curriculum. Very good arrangements were in place in many schools to communicate the strengths and needs of students to subject teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs).

Inspectors made a number of recommendations where provision was less than satisfactory. These included the need for individualised planning to target the specific learning needs of students with low incidence disabilities; to reduce the number of teachers engaged in resource teaching so as to create smaller support teams in order to better facilitate planning and coordination; to ensure that resource teachers plan and record student progress in a consistent manner; and to address the dominance of teacher-led classroom practice in order to maximise opportunities for students to interact, to discuss content and to reflect on learning.

While parents and students were generally satisfied with the quality of support provided in their schools, responses to questionnaires indicate that schools should communicate more effectively with parents regarding the difficulties that their child may be experiencing. 18% of parents who completed WSE-MLL questionnaires disagreed that the school would consult them if their child needed extra help. Parents of children with special educational needs and those whose children are in need of extra support require clear and unbiased information to guide them on the education of their child. They need to know how the school supports their children and what they, as parents, can do to ensure that their child maximises the benefit from their learning.

5.5.2 Youthreach

Youthreach supports adults and young people, aged fifteen to twenty years, in returning to or completing their education. The centres operate on a full-time, year-round basis and cater for almost 3,600 learners annually. Youthreach is funded by the Department of Education and Skills and is managed by the Education and Training Boards. In the period covered by this report, thirteen evaluations were conducted in Youthreach centres.

The quality of teaching and learning in these centres was judged by inspectors to be good, with significantly fewer judgements of very good than in mainstream post-primary schools. Inspectors commended the evidence of affirming and well-structured learning environments in these settings. This supported respectful relationships and the development of mutual trust, required for learning to take place. Inspectors noted also that teaching was purposeful and student-centred, driven by

student needs, with scaffolding and teaching strategies used skilfully by teachers to support students' learning.

Table 5.10: Inspectors' findings: Youthreach evaluations

Youthreach	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
Teaching	33%	55%	12%
Learning	26%	59%	15%
Attainment	30%	60%	10%

Among the good practice we have found in Youthreach centres were an appropriate focus on the holistic development of the learner, including personal and social development; supportive progression planning in the context of the curriculum; work experience; individual supports provided to learners; and highly collaborative attendance strategies which support student motivation to attend school, to behave appropriately, and to engage with their learning and lessons.

In many lessons, the learning objectives were shared with students and teachers generally had a clear understanding of differentiation and the importance of teaching at individual student's instructional levels. Teachers gave clear instructions and explanations and enhanced learning and comprehension through good use of visuals and other resources. Almost all students in the centres inspected reported that their teachers encourage them and talk to them about how to improve their work (98%).

However, to enhance students' learning, teachers were encouraged by inspectors to maximise opportunities for student to interact, to discuss content and reflect on learning. Recommendations referenced the need to review and consolidate the learning achieved in lessons and to further develop the use of differentiated teaching and assessment for learning techniques in all learning activities.

5.5.3 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)

As at primary level, the focus in DEIS evaluations is on the schools' planning processes which help the school develop each of the seven DEIS themes: attendance; retention; progression; examination attainment; literacy; numeracy; and partnership with parents and others.

In the period covered by this report, twenty-eight evaluations of planning for improvement in post-primary DEIS schools were completed. Inspectors noted a number of strengths in many of these schools. These included good use of formative assessment or assessment for learning to raise student attainment and to provide them with a positive experience of school. Inspectors commended teaching approaches that supported active learning and got students thinking about how they were learning. In these instances, teachers challenged students through well-planned learning activities, questions that required more than rote-learned answers, and feedback on homework and tests that gave students pointers for improvement.

Generally, students and their parents are happy about the quality of the support which they receive in these schools. 91% of the 2,159 parents who completed a questionnaire administered during these inspection indicated that their children are doing well at most of their subjects in school. Of the 3,221 students who completed a questionnaire, 83% said that their teachers advise them on how to improve their work and 84% said that teachers encourage them to work. However, there was also evidence that some parents are unaware of the supports available to their children in DEIS schools.

Table 5.11: Parent perceptions of additional support – Questionnaire responses (DEIS)

DEIS evaluations of Planning	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
The school advises parents on how to help their child	76%	14%	10%
If my child finds the work hard the school will give extra help	68%	15%	17%

Inspectors noted that some DEIS schools are challenged to set realistic and attainable targets across the themes and this has an impact on their progress in improving students' attention and progression. Further engagement with the DEIS planning process, based on robust self-evaluation processes, together with attention to the advice available on www.schoolself-evaluation.ie may support their efforts.

5.6 THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

During our evaluations of the quality of management and leadership in post-primary schools, we examine the work of the board of management, the work of the senior management team (the principal and deputy principal) in leading staff and students as well as issues such as the general management of the school's resources and the school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement.

During the period covered by this report, the introduction of the new Junior Cycle Framework posed a number of challenges to leadership in schools. These included implications for timetabling and managing arrangements which facilitated both whole-staff and subject-focussed continuing professional development (CPD) events. The industrial relations environment was also challenging, most particularly in schools where the teachers belonged to a union which was in dispute with the Department and which had directed its members not to participate in CPD for the Junior Cycle Framework, as well as a number of other directives. A different, but equally difficult situation was evident in dual-union schools. In conducting our evaluations of leadership and management, inspectors were cognisant of the additional burden that these challenges placed on school leaders.

5.6.1 Boards of management

During WSE-MLL inspections of post-primary schools in January 2013 - July 2016, inspectors judged that the overall quality of leadership and management was satisfactory or better in 91% of the 258 schools visited. In the more effective schools, inspectors noted that the boards of management engaged in a collaborative and communicative manner with key stakeholders in the school including staff, the parents' association and the student council. Most of these boards were also described as having a well-chosen focus on the development of teaching and learning in the school including, in some cases, strongly endorsing and supporting professional development opportunities for staff. These boards of management also had a clear vision for the school with established priorities for development.

Table 5.12: Inspectors' findings: School Leadership and Management

	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
Overall quality of management and leadership	45%	46%	9%

We found that schools are very successful in communicating particular aspects of their policies to parents, as they are in keeping parents informed about students' progress. 95% of parents agreed that they had been informed about the school's behaviour policy. 91% of parents also agreed that school reports gave them a good picture of how their child was doing at school and 85% of parents agreed that arrangements for parent/teacher meetings were good in their child's school. Schools were noticeably less successful in communicating information in relation to subject and curriculum choice at key transition points to parents and students. Just 60% of parents in January 2013 - July 2016 agreed that they received helpful advice from the school when their child was choosing subjects and a further 11% responded 'don't know' to this question. 27% of students did not agree that they received helpful advice and information when choosing subjects.

A core responsibility of school leadership is to ensure that the curriculum offered in a school is sufficiently broad to meet the needs of its students and that they have equality of access to the learning opportunities it provides. Many schools provide information evenings, informative booklets and inputs by the Guidance teacher and others at key moments during the student's time in school. Nevertheless, given the data from the questionnaires, schools should engage further with parents and students to determine how best to communicate their options to them.

Inspections found that parents' associations also needed to improve how they communicated with parents. Responses to parents' questionnaires showed that 28% of parents disagreed that the school's parents' association kept them informed about its work.

5.6.2 In-school management

In-school management refers to the quality of the internal professional leadership in the school, usually provided by the principal and deputy principal. It also includes the work of other promoted teachers who carry responsibilities for many aspects of the work of the school. As at primary level, the public service moratorium on recruitment has affected the filling of promoted posts in schools. While the posts of principal and deputy principal continue to be filled, vacancies for other promoted posts as assistant principal or special duties teacher have not generally been filled since March 2009.

Inspectors found effective senior management teams in the majority of schools inspected. We noted their ability to ensure good communication among staff, to maintain a clear focus on teaching and learning, and to provide opportunities for post-holders to build their leadership capacity. 85% of teachers report in questionnaires that in-school management in their schools is effective and 94% agreed that there are good facilities in their schools to support students' learning, including their own access to ICT (90%).

Parents and teachers agree that, in the majority of schools, student behaviour is very good and that there are good student management systems in place. Students are less certain with 24% indicating that they did not know and 14% actively disagree with this statement on student questionnaires. This is a matter for concern and warrants discussion at school level. Their responses to a question on school atmosphere indicate more positive perceptions of their schools.

Table 5.13: Parent and student perspectives on discipline – Questionnaire responses

Question	Respondent	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Discipline is good in the school	Parents	88%	6%	6%
	Students	62%	14%	24%
There is a good atmosphere in the school	Parents	86%	3%	11%
	Students	82%	6%	12%
I feel safe and cared for in school	Students	82%	6%	12%

There is much that is positive in table 5.14, which sets out the questionnaire responses of parents and students on how schools tackle bullying. Schools are doing very good work to tackle bullying and there is a marked improvement since the 2010-2012 report in the percentage of parents who are aware of the actions taken by schools. 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 but schools still have some work to do to gain the confidence of 6% of parents who disagree that the school will address bullying promptly and effectively.

Table 5.14: Parent and student perspectives on how schools tackle bullying – Questionnaire responses

Question	Respondents	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I have been informed of the schools 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 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%

A full report on the data which parent and student questionnaires provide in relation to their views of actions taken in school to build and maintain a positive school culture was published in July 2017.³⁶

³⁶ DES (2017) *Parent and Pupil/Pupil Perceptions of Schools Actions to Create a Positive School Culture and to Prevent and Tackle Bullying*
https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/parent_pupil_perceptions_positive_school_culture.pdf

KEY MESSAGES ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

What's working in post-primary schools :

- Inspectors have found that the overall quality of teaching and learning at post-primary was good or better in the majority of schools
- Subject and programme planning has improved significantly
- There has been an improvement in the quality of teacher preparation for lessons since the last *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013
- Students were provided with opportunities to learning through talk and discussion in the majority of lessons observed
- Teachers' classroom management skills were satisfactory in almost all lessons observed
- The school self-evaluation process has supported the work in schools to improve literacy outcomes for students
- Schools are well governed and have made significant strides in addressing the issue of bullying

What could be improved:

- Full co-operation with the CPD opportunities provided by the Junior Cycle for Teachers support service by all teachers will contribute to a better understanding and implementation of the new Junior Cycle Framework
- Differentiated teaching strategies should be further developed to ensure the effective inclusion of students of all abilities
- The quality of students' learning in Irish remains an area of concern. Many challenges to effective teaching in Irish persist. More communication opportunities in the target language are needed in all lessons so that students have experience of speaking Irish. Teachers should plan for the variety of language skills represented in the classroom
- While the monitoring of students' work has improved, a more planned and systematic use of assessment data to inform teaching methods is needed
- The potential of ICT to enable enriched learning experiences is not being exploited sufficiently in post-primary schools
- Schools should engage further with parents and students to determine how to make communication about subject and programme options more effective

SPOTLIGHT 2

FOCUS ON EDUCATION SETTINGS ATTACHED TO HIGH SUPPORT UNITS, SPECIAL CARE UNITS AND CHILDREN DETENTION CENTRES

This Chapter summarises key findings on the quality of teaching and learning in education settings attached to High Support Units, Special Care Units and Children Detention Centres.

S2.1 BACKGROUND

Currently there are seven schools and one special class attached to a mainstream school that cater for children in detention and care in the State. These can be categorised as schools at Children Detention Centres (CDC), High Support Units (HSU), and Special Care Units (SCU). Schools at CDCs generally cater for children who have been convicted or placed on remand by the courts. Schools at HSUs are primarily for children with severe emotional and behavioural challenges and schools at SCUs cater for children who are the subject of special care orders granted by the courts. However, these distinctions are not absolute and some of the settings cater for children from more than one of these categories.

In 2013, the Inspectorate committed to a programme of annual inspections of schools at HSUs, SCUs and CDCs in order to quality assure the education provided for the children, and to provide advice and support to the teachers, principals and the managements of the schools. The inspection approach used in evaluating provision in these schools is designed to address the particular circumstances in which they operate. The areas of enquiry which are central to the evaluation model take into account the varied personal, social, and educational experiences of the students prior to placement in the HSU, SCU or CDC, which may impact on their participation, achievement and progression in school.

Between January 2013 and July 2016, twenty-six evaluations were conducted in schools attached to HSUs, SCUs, and CDCs with each school being evaluated at least twice in those years. A composite report, based on the published reports arising from these evaluations was published in 2017.³⁷ Towards the end of 2016, inspectors conducted Follow-through inspections in these schools to examine the extent to which they had addressed the main recommendations made in earlier reports

The composite report identifies and affirms good practice which was evident across the schools. It also highlights particular aspects of provision that these schools can focus upon in seeking to continually improve and develop the quality of their provision. The findings and recommendations are also intended to be used by other government Departments and State agencies in planning for provision for children in detention and care in the State.

³⁷ DES (2017) *Education of Children in Detention and Care: Schools at High Support Units, Special Care Units and Children Detention Centres* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/education-of-children-in-detention-and-care.pdf>

S2.2 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The composite report identifies similarities between the cohort of students attending these schools and students in Youth Encounter Projects (YEP) and in Youthreach Centres (YR). Thus, the report recommends that any future rationalisation of the management structures of schools at CDCs, HSUs and SCUs should include the YEP schools and should also consider the inclusion of YR centres. The report recommended that a facility for all of these schools to build and maintain productive relationships with each other and to share best practice in teaching and learning for children in detention and care should be included in any possible rationalisation programme. This is in line with and builds on a recommendation contained in an earlier Department of Education and Skills Review of the YEP schools.

S2.3 MAIN FINDINGS

Inspectors found that the overall quality of provision in these schools is good or very good in most cases. For example, inspectors were positive about the quality of teaching in the vast majority of lessons observed. Classrooms were described as suitable and stimulating learning environments in most instances. Teachers' expectations were appropriate and it was generally observed that respectful relationships between teachers and students were encouraged. Teaching was pitched and paced at a level suitable to the range of student aptitudes and abilities.

Table S2.1: Inspectors' findings: HSU/SCU/CDS inspections

HSU/SCU/CDU	Very good	Good	Less than satisfactory
Support for students	42%	43%	15%
Teaching	8%	80%	12%
Learning and attainment	8%	80%	12%

Positive references were made in the reports to the provision of a broad range of subject choices across the post-primary junior and senior cycle syllabuses. Inspectors expressed satisfaction with the extent to which students were enabled to pursue accreditation for their learning at Junior Certificate Schools Programme, Junior Certificate, Further Education and Training Awards Council, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied Certification levels. Inspectors were equally complimentary about students' engagement with their learning. Reports regularly cite the use of active learning methodologies aimed at motivating students and promoting high levels of engagement and participation. Most reports refer to students being taught in small group settings, in pairs or individually, with the provision of programmes tailored to meet specific student needs. Inspectors were generally complimentary about the benefit of this approach in promoting independent learning.

In one of the settings, where a high support special class operates within a mainstream primary school, inspectors raised concerns about the appropriateness of the provision. In particular, they noted significant variance between the quality of provision for the pupils who were fully integrated into mainstream settings and those in the special class. They recommended therefore that the school's approach to the inclusion of learners from the special class should be reviewed with 'a view to achieving full inclusion of all learners.'

S2.4 MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Inspectors made recommendations in relation to the following areas in the schools:

1. Initial assessment of learner needs
2. Personalised planning and target setting
3. Ongoing assessment of learners' needs
4. Literacy and numeracy
5. Attendance
6. Whole-school planning
7. Management structures

S2.4.1 Initial assessment of learner needs

Information provided by teachers during the inspections suggests that they are not sufficiently informed about new students' needs and educational backgrounds when they join the school. Poor communication with learners' previous schools and lack of transfer of educational records is a particular challenge. In a small number of cases, teachers reported that the initial assessment of a student's needs did not inform the programme provided.

The report recommended that all schools for children in detention and care should have robust and dependable procedures for assessing learners' needs on enrolment and that data garnered from this assessment should be used to inform future planning for teaching and learning.

S2.4.2 Personalised planning and target setting

Target setting is a critical part of effective personalised planning and involves establishing learning targets for learners that are clear, realistic, measureable and not too narrowly focussed. (National Council for Special Education, 2014³⁸)

The composite report referred to the need for schools to ensure that personalised planning documents contained targets relevant to self-management, social skills and behavioural and emotional issues. Inspectors drew clear links between personalised planning documents and teachers' short-term planning, which in turn informed classroom practice. Inspectors highlighted the importance of personalised planning as a means of tracking student progress.

S2.4.3 Ongoing assessment of learners' needs

The composite report highlighted the need for ongoing assessment of learners' needs in these schools. While summative assessment practices were regarded as being generally good, the need for teachers to balance this form of assessment with formative assessment, or assessment for learning was raised. In making their recommendations regarding assessment for learning, inspectors asserted that a greater emphasis on this form of assessment would encourage students to think more about their own learning and encourage a greater sense of personal responsibility.

The need for a consistent, whole-school approach to assessment was also raised. Overall, while inspectors saw examples of good practice in student assessment, there was variation in practice within schools. Where this occurred, inspectors recommended greater consistency in the approaches adopted in the schools.

³⁸ NCSE (2014) *Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs: A Better and More Equitable Way*: NCSE 2014

S2.4.4 Literacy and Numeracy

Whole-school approaches to literacy, such as 'Drop everything and read' were affirmed in the composite report. The development of whole-school approaches to literacy and numeracy was frequently considered in the context of the school's engagement with school self-evaluation. In most cases, inspectors found that self-evaluation was having a positive impact on students' learning. The main challenge for schools in adopting whole-school approaches was to ensure consistency of implementation in classrooms. Schools were advised to facilitate teachers to discuss their practice with their colleagues as a means of developing this consistency.

The composite report highlighted the particular importance of developing students' functional skills in literacy and numeracy, of developing their abilities to use and apply their knowledge in 'real life and cross-curricular contexts' and to the teaching of skills 'which are of relevance to the future needs of students.'

S2.4.5 Attendance

The issue of students' challenging behaviour and its impact on their attendance in schools was raised in the report. When this occurred, some students were spending part of the normal school day under the supervision of the care staff due to restrictions imposed on foot of their behaviour. In some cases there were difficulties regarding transitioning procedures between residential homes / care facilities and the school that impacted negatively on students' attendance and punctuality.

Schools were advised to reflect on their existing strategies to promote student attendance and to devise or update an agreed whole-school approach to student attendance.

S2.4.6 Whole-school planning

The quality of whole-school planning was judged to be satisfactory or better in the majority of schools. Where recommendations were made they involved developing or reviewing policies in areas of particular importance to these schools; including attendance, drug and substance abuse, transition processes, behavioural management and continuing professional development for staff members.

Inspectors however were somewhat more critical of whole-school curriculum planning. The need for these schools to have whole-school curriculum plans that meet the unique needs of the learners, including any special educational needs they may have, was raised in the report

S2.4.7 Management structures

While the general organisation and management of the school was satisfactory or better in most of the evaluations, the composite report highlighted the variance across these schools in terms of patronage and management structure. This resulted in some inconsistencies in the compliance of these schools with some regulations of the Department, particularly in relation to the role of the board of management and patron.

KEY MESSAGES

What's working in these schools:

- The overall quality of educational provision in these schools is good or very good in most cases
- Teaching was pitched and paced at a level suitable to the range of student aptitudes and abilities
- Inspectors were generally complimentary about the work of schools in tailoring programmes to meet the needs of individual learners

What could be improved:

- These schools require a more effective governance and management structure
- A robust system of communication that will ensure continuity of learning for children in detention and care and include an effective means of transferring relevant data between mainstream schools and schools for children in detention and care is needed
- More effective procedures for assessing learners' needs on enrolment are required
- Teachers need to set appropriate targets for the learners and to ensure that progress is monitored and tracked effectively
- Schools were advised to reflect on their existing strategies to promote student attendance and to devise or update an agreed whole-school approach to learner attendance

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CHAPTER SIX

SUPPORTING IMPROVEMENT



6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we describe a range of actions which we have implemented in the period from January 2013 - July 2016 to support school improvement. They include:

- Supporting the formal introduction of school self-evaluation to enable school leaders to build excellence in teaching and learning in their schools
- Implementing systematic follow-up procedures to check that inspection recommendations have been implemented by schools

6.2 SUPPORTING SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

A very significant reform in the quality assurance of the system has been the introduction of school self-evaluation (SSE) which is being actively promoted by the Department and the Inspectorate. SSE involves schools themselves gathering evidence and making decisions about how well they are doing and where they need to improve. It enables teachers, principals and school management, in consultation with students and parents, to keep the standards and work of the school under review and to action specific improvements in areas identified for development.

The Inspectorate has devoted considerable resources to the introduction of SSE. A range of supports was provided to assist schools in introducing and embedding SSE, including the publication in 2012 of the initial *School Self-Evaluation: Guidelines for Schools* and circulars 0039/2012 and 0040/2012. In addition:

- A dedicated SSE website, www.schoolself-evaluation.ie was established. The website provides a wide variety of advice, support and practical resources for schools. It includes several samples of SSE reports and school improvement plans (SIPs) which schools have agreed to share. It also contains a number of videos in which school principals and teachers describe their SSE journeys
- A newsletter for schools, *SSE Update*, is published on the SSE website twice annually. In the period covered by this report, seven issues of the Update were published.³⁹ A broad range of topics has been addressed in the seven issues and schools are encouraged to check these regularly. Schools are also invited to submit ideas for future publications
- The Inspectorate's SSE Twitter page (@SSEinspectorate) and Facebook page provide up-to-date news and information for schools. This has proven to be an efficient way to disseminate information and to share ideas on SSE
- As part of the ongoing development of SSE, a national seminar was organised in October 2014. The purpose of the seminar was to provide an international perspective on school self-evaluation and to share SSE experiences and practices
- As a means of responding to the very high level of interest in the seminar, a series of regional seminars was organised in 2015. The seminars provided an opportunity for school principals and other school leaders to share their SSE experiences
- To provide support on a very practical level, from 2012, inspectors at primary and post-primary levels visited schools by invitation to provide advice on the SSE process. Schools were also invited to seek a second SSE advisory visit from inspectors in 2014/2015. In the period covered by this report, we conducted more than 4,750 visits to schools. The purpose of these visits was

³⁹ Two further updates have been published up to the date of publication of this report. <http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/primary/updates/newsletters/>

to affirm good practice and to provide advice about how schools could move their SSE process forward.

The majority of schools have embraced SSE and have focussed on improving literacy and numeracy as their main focus. Principals have reported that teachers are talking about teaching and learning and that these are regular items on the agenda of meetings. A small number of schools have already reported improvements in literacy as a result of SSE.

Through the ongoing embedding of SSE in every school throughout the country, schools themselves are now beginning to play a more practical and effective role in the school improvement process. With SSE continuing to expand and develop, the benefits for pupils and students will increasingly be felt in the years to come.

In responding to a Department survey, conducted in 2015, schools self-reported on their progress in implementing SSE. We know that schools are at different stages on their SSE journey and that challenges remain which need to be addressed. Many schools have difficulty in setting targets and using data. Schools are aware of the importance of including test and examination results and the views of pupils / students and their parents in their self-evaluation process. The capacity to analyse and use this evidence effectively has yet to be built.

Schools have been advised to maintain a brief record of their SSE findings and to develop a school improvement plan and to share summaries of these with parents and the school community. While the majority of schools have maintained internal records, there appears to be a reluctance to provide meaningful summary reports to parents and school communities.

In 2016, a new circular advising schools on the next phase of School Self-Evaluation issued. The key focus of SSE will remain on teaching and learning as the core work of the school. Working with the SSE Advisory Group and a high-level working group within the Department, the Inspectorate has developed a set of domains, standards and quality statements for leadership and management. Following this work, we published the first complete quality framework for schools with domains and standards in two dimensions – teaching and learning and leadership and management in *Looking at Our School 2016*. Inspectors will continue to provide advice and support to schools as they fully embed SSE as a way of working in the second four-year cycle of SSE implementation.

6.3 SYSTEMATIC FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES

Responsibility for implementing the recommendations we make in our evaluation reports rests with school management and teachers. They are best placed to implement recommendations and act on our advice within the context of their school. There is a lot of evidence available to demonstrate that schools take our recommendations seriously and, in the majority of cases, implement them as they work to bring about improvement in their schools.

6.3.1 Follow-through inspections

We have introduced dedicated Follow-through inspections for schools to monitor the progress schools have made on addressing the recommendations in previous inspection reports. Follow-

through inspection visits allow inspectors assess the progress made by schools in addressing the recommendations made in previous inspection reports. The reports from Follow-through Inspections are published on the Department's website.

A sample of all schools and centres for education which have had an inspection is selected for follow-through inspection as part of the Inspectorate's annual programme of inspection. In the period January 2013 - July 2016, we conducted follow-through inspections in 418 primary schools and 321 post-primary schools. Those schools represented a variety of school contexts - mainstream schools at primary and post-primary level, including English-medium and Irish-medium schools and schools within the Gaeltacht, special schools and centres for education.

We have found that schools work to implement recommendations made in inspection reports and table 6.1 below provides an analysis of the progress made in terms of the recommendations made in those follow-through inspections.

Table 6.1: Schools' implementation of recommendations made in inspection reports

	PRIMARY (N=1,401)				POST PRIMARY (N=1,068)			
Categories of recommendations	Very good progress	Good progress	Partial progress	No progress	Very good progress	Good progress	Partial progress	No progress
Management	46%	36%	10%	8%	46%	31%	18%	5%
Leadership	33%	43%	19%	5%	51%	36%	9%	4%
Planning-SSE	32%	39%	22%	7%	44%	33%	20%	3%
T&L	29%	43%	25%	3%	34%	40%	21%	5%
Assessment	29%	49%	20%	2%	34%	34%	26%	6%
Compliance	51%	30%	12%	7%	64%	10%	21%	5%
Support for pupils	44%	34%	11%	11%	52%	31%	15%	2%

6.3.2 School Improvement Monitoring (SIM)

Where a school does not have the capacity to act on our recommendations and advice, or chooses not to do so, we have implemented monitoring systems to provide encouragement and to ensure appropriate action is taken.

In 2015, an Inspectorate-led and managed school improvement monitoring (SIM) process was initiated. The SIM process was developed to support schools when recommendations in evaluation reports pertain mainly to the quality of teaching and learning. A range of actions may be taken to ensure recommendations are addressed including:

- Prioritisation of schools for the provision of assistance from the school support services such as the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) the Special Education Support Service (SESS) or from the patron or trustee bodies

- Seeking an action plan or a progress report from the school authorities as to how the recommendations made in an evaluation report will be progressed within a specified time-frame
- Meetings with the management of the school or the patron body
- Further inspection / monitoring visits

Six schools were identified as requiring this level of monitoring in 2016 and are currently in the process.

6.3.3 School Improvement Group (SIG)

In a very small number of cases, inspections may reveal very serious weaknesses in the work of the school, where additional inputs are required to ensure that improvement happens for learners. In 2008, a School Improvement Group (SIG) was established to provide a co-ordinated approach to supporting these schools.⁴⁰ At the outset of 2013 there were twenty-five primary schools and twenty-two post-primary schools that had been referred to the school improvement group for very specific monitoring processes. Table 6.2 indicates the numbers of SIG cases closed and the new cases presented to the school improvement group in the period January 2013 - July 2016.

Table 6.2: School Improvement Group (SIG) cases in the period January 2013 - July 2016

	Primary	Post-primary	Total
Active cases 31 December 2012	25	22	47
Schools referred to the School Improvement Group January 2013-July 2016 (New cases)	12	4	16
Cases resolved January 2013-July 2016	21	23	44
Active cases July 2016	16	3	19

The Inspectorate reports to the school improvement group (SIG) on a regular basis about the progress made by schools in the school improvement monitoring process in addressing the recommendations made in inspection reports. Table 6.2 above includes one school which was referred to SIG in 2015 from the Inspectorate's school improvement monitoring process, as it was found to be making limited progress and engagement with SIG was warranted.

Very significant progress has been made by SIG's intervention with these school communities to the extent that 70% of cases have been resolved. These schools have successfully returned to normal monitoring and inspection activities. In the other 30% of cases, the schools have either only been engaged in the school improvement 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.

⁴⁰ The school improvement group is an internal coordinating group of senior officials drawn from the Department's School Governance Section and the Inspectorate (and involving officials from other sections of the Department, as necessary). SIG oversees engagement with the patron, trustees or management of schools in which significant weaknesses have been identified

KEY MESSAGES FROM THIS CHAPTER

- Schools have begun to engage with school self-evaluation and are increasingly becoming familiar with the six-step SSE process
- Almost all schools availed of advisory visits from inspectors to assist them in introducing SSE.
- Most schools used SSE to focus on improving literacy with some schools reporting improvements as a result of this focus
- SSE fostered discussion about teaching and learning among teachers and school leaders
- Challenges related to data, target setting and reporting to parents and the school community remain to be addressed
- Industrial relations issues have impacted negatively on the uptake of SSE in some schools
- Schools are successfully implementing the recommendations contained in evaluation reports
- Monitoring processes are in place to ensure that improvement happens in the small number of schools where very serious weaknesses have been identified

Excellence in Learning for All

CHAPTER SEVEN

LOOKING FORWARD



7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this report, we have focussed on the core work of the Inspectorate in schools – evaluating and reporting on school quality and supporting school improvement. This report describes the context within which those inspections occurred and the significant factors which affected the environment in which the work of schools and the Inspectorate took place. It sets out our findings in relation to the quality of teaching, learning, management and leadership in the schools and other settings in which we conducted inspections in the period January 2013 to July 2016. It also includes two ‘Spotlights’ which focus on specific areas of provision to which we have given particular attention during the period: Arts Education in primary schools and evaluations in schools attached to High Support Units, Special Care Units and Children Detention Centres.

The findings reported in Section 2 of this report are based on information collected during a wide range of inspections, 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
- Over 51,000 parental questionnaires at primary level and over 26,000 parental questionnaires at post-primary level.

In brief, we found that there is a lot that is good in schools.⁴¹ Learning was evaluated as satisfactory or better in the majority of the settings we visited; teaching is generally of a high standard and we noted an improvement in the quality of teacher preparation and planning for lessons since the last *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013. In a period where the number of in-school management personnel has been reduced, the quality of school management has remained high in the majority of schools. However, the challenge noted at the end of the *Chief Inspector's Report* in 2013 remains – we have too many instances where aspects of provision are good, rather than very good. If we are to meet the ambitions set out in the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*⁴² that the Irish education and training system should become the best in Europe over the next decade, all those tasked with providing, leading and quality assuring education in schools and centres for education will need to work together to address the challenge so that excellence in terms of learning experiences and outcomes can be achieved.

We know that there is no one action or approach which will, by itself, enhance quality or accelerate progress towards achieving the ambitious target set out in *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*. However, based on the inspection evidence which we collected during the period January 2013 – July 2016, it is possible to identify some of the broad approaches needed to guide policy and practice to this end.

⁴¹ The term ‘schools’ is used to describe all the settings in which we inspect, including for example, High Support Units, early years settings and centres for education.

⁴² DES (2016) *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/Department-of-Education-and-Skills-Strategy-Statement-2016-2019.pdf> p.1

These include:

1. Developing high-quality Early Years education
 - The provision of excellent initial and continuing professional development for EY practitioners
 - The role of education-focussed inspection for improvement and advisory initiatives in the promotion of high-quality early education
 - The impact of high-quality early education experiences on participation in primary school
2. Maintaining a strong focus on improved outcomes for learners:
 - Ensuring that our education system is responsive and innovative
 - Meeting the needs of high performing students
 - Promoting the wellbeing of children and young adults
3. Building the professional practice of teachers:
 - Providing high-quality initial teacher education and continuing professional development
 - Ensuring teacher supply, competence and professionalism
 - Supporting professional collaboration among teachers
 - Enabling teacher autonomy in curriculum planning at the level of the classroom
4. Working with and supporting leadership in schools and other settings:
 - Addressing the challenge of sustainable leadership
 - Supporting leadership of teaching and learning

7.2 DEVELOPING HIGH-QUALITY EARLY YEARS EDUCATION

7.2.1 The provision of excellent initial and continuing professional development for EY practitioners

Early childhood is a vital stage of a child's life and education and therefore it is essential that the educational experiences that he or she receives are of the highest quality. The role of the adult is central and State-funded Early Years education needs high calibre professionals to ensure the quality of provision. Ensuring that such professional practitioners are present in Early Year services delivering the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) Programme requires high quality professional development programmes for both initial practitioner education and for continuing professional development (CPD). Unlike other professionals in the education system, there is no tradition in the Early Years sector of a formalised professional infrastructure or formal registration of practitioners. This, combined with evidence that the salaries and working terms and conditions are not conducive to attracting and retaining the highest calibre staff within the profession, presents a very real challenge for the delivery of high-quality early educational experiences for young children in State-funded preschools.

In order to begin to address this particular challenge, there have been some welcome initiatives including significant investment by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in the funding of initial and continuing professional education (e.g. The Learner Fund and the National *Aistear Síolta* Initiative). This is going some way to address the very extensive need for professional education in

the implementation of *Aistear* in Early Years settings. In addition, the work done by the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to examine and identify effective professional courses for those entering the profession and the steps taken to develop professional profiles for the sector are important contributors to the quality of provision in this sector. Whilst acknowledging these good beginnings, investment in the development of a qualified professional workforce to support the delivery of high-quality early educational experience for children should continue to be a priority into the future.

7.2.2 The role of education-focussed inspection for improvement and advisory initiatives in the promotion of high-quality early education

The Early Years Education-focussed mode of inspection operationalises an approach to inspection in Early Years services that is designed to identify strengths in practice and scaffold improvement in areas of challenge. This approach also has, as a core principle, reciprocal respectful professional dialogue as a key to change and improvement. Evidence from the first year of implementation already demonstrates a strong engagement and positive response to education focussed inspection from the Early Years sector. Learning from the evidence of inspection activity in the wider education sector, it is anticipated that this positive response will be further energised by the deployment of additional models of inspection such as follow through and thematic evaluation.

7.2.3 The impact of high-quality early education experiences on participation in primary school

Continuity and cohesion of experiences that are child-centred, appropriately challenging and skilfully supported by qualified professionals are acknowledged widely as vital to ensuing children transition smoothly from one educational context to the next. The impact of children's access to and participation in high-quality early education in Ireland has yet to be researched fully. However, there is already evidence that parents are making choices to enrol their children at an older age than previously. As a result fewer 'young' four year olds are enrolling in infant classes in primary schools. It is also reasonable to assume that the more 'mature' junior infant pupils will also have attended up to two years of early education prior to enrolment in primary school and therefore, depending on the quality of the provision they have experienced, will present very different challenges for the primary school than heretofore. It will be important, therefore, that primary schools are ready to respond flexibly and deliver the continuity of experience and positive transition that children require.

7.3 MAINTAINING A STRONG FOCUS ON IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR LEARNERS

7.3.1 Ensuring that our education system is responsive and innovative

This *Chief Inspector's Report* provides a lot of evidence that provision in a majority of our schools is good or better and that our education system overall is functioning well. However, the wider social, cultural, economic and technological environment within which our schools operate is changing. New areas of priority are constantly surfacing and we need to make sure that our strategies for change in teaching, learning, assessment, school leadership and school organisation are clear, focussed and well aligned.

The current priorities include better Early Years provision; ongoing curricular reform in schools (including digital literacy, wellbeing and mental health, literacy and numeracy, STEM and foreign languages). They also include reform of assessment arrangements; the development of professional expertise in assessment processes and the use of assessment data; and improvements in leadership. In all of these areas, improvements are needed and would bring many benefits for young people in the education system and in their adult lives. It is to be welcomed, therefore, that the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019* is providing a strategic approach to tackling these many areas, all of which could help to ensure that Irish children acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that they need now and in the future.

As the *Action Plan* is implemented, it will be very important to give careful consideration to how these actions will impact upon individual schools and settings and on the practitioners, teachers and leaders who work in them. The programme of change demands a culture of responsiveness and innovation in schools, but it will also require a well-managed strategic approach that seeks to ensure that the various developments complement each other, are well paced and are supported by adequate professional development and resources. This is a collective responsibility of everyone involved in education and it challenges us all to ensure that our actions and strategic efforts align effectively around our most important educational priorities.

7.3.2 Meeting the needs of high performing students

The findings from PISA 2015 and TIMSS 2015 clearly illustrate that, while our overall performance in these assessments is at or above the OECD average, our higher performing students do less well and are underachieving, relative to their international counterparts. We know that there is scope to improve outcomes for these learners both at primary and at post-primary levels. In order to challenge higher-performing students to achieve to their full potential, we need to focus on developing their cognitive skills to a greater extent by focusing on skills development as provided for in the primary and post-primary curricula.

Critical to this is the need to ensure that teachers have the requisite skills to differentiate effectively in their classrooms so that the needs of all students across the ability spectrum are met. Our data from inspection shows that teachers continue to find it challenging to respond appropriately to learner differences in diverse classrooms. Approaches to teaching can and must be adapted to complement the various learning styles and aptitudes of children and young people. This requires teachers to have professional knowledge and understanding of the most appropriate and effective means of ensuring that learning is meaningful and rewarding for the individual student.

There is some evidence that initial teacher education programmes and continuing professional development courses for teachers are placing a greater focus on such differentiation, and we have already seen welcome improvements in recent years in national and international surveys at primary and post-primary level. It is to be hoped therefore, that further development will address the needs of higher performing students as successfully as we have addressed that of lower achievers.

7.3.3 Promoting the wellbeing of children and young people in schools

Schools play a key role in fostering the wellbeing of children and young people. They do this by providing a caring, safe and nurturing environment and through formal teaching of social skills, problem-solving skills and emotional competence. The provision of positive, high-quality learning

experiences and opportunities for success for all students and the implementation of appropriate support and intervention processes where needed also make important contributions to learners' wellbeing. Over the period covered by this report, there has been a renewed focus on wellbeing as an important outcome for all students in all settings.⁴³ 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 the education and training system.

Schools and other settings, and the education system more generally, need to provide and reward learning experiences that promote not only academic learning but also the development of a range of social and emotional competencies such as empathy, decision-making, and conflict-resolution skills; the ability to work well with others from diverse backgrounds, to practice healthy behaviours, and to behave responsibly and respectfully. The introduction of a new area of learning called Wellbeing at junior cycle in September 2017 builds on existing good practice in schools and formalises the work done in schools to foster the personal development, health and wellbeing of learners.⁴⁴

It will be important to ensure that teachers and school leaders have the necessary knowledge and skill sets to deliver these outcomes. We need to facilitate professional learning which raises teacher awareness of student wellbeing and to ensure that continuing professional development opportunities communicate that promotion of and support for student wellbeing is the responsibility of all members of school staff.

7.4 BUILDING THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF TEACHERS

Improving outcomes for students is reliant on the professional practice of teachers. Research and experience tells us that teacher quality is the single most important school-related factor in student achievement. Teachers who have adequate subject and pedagogical content knowledge and are sensitive to the diverse needs of learners can make a huge difference to the educational outcomes for students.⁴⁵

7.4.1 Providing high-quality initial and continuing professional development of teachers

The Irish education system needs to ensure that we continue to attract and develop the brightest graduates into the teaching profession. Significant and very welcome developments in teacher education took place during the period covered by this report. Since 2011, both the primary and post-primary Initial teacher education (ITE) sectors have extended the duration of their ITE programmes, and their programme content was reconceptualised under the Teaching Council's accreditation reviews to ensure that future teachers acquired critical pedagogical understandings and skills. Postgraduate programmes of initial teacher education accredited by the Teaching Council were extended to two years' full-time study with effect from September 2014, and an integrated professional induction framework for newly qualified teachers, *Droichead*, has been introduced by the Teaching Council. The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011-2020 also suggested that some greater use of concurrent teacher education programmes would be explored and it is hoped that

⁴³ In 2013, the Department, in collaboration with the Health Service Executive and the Department of Health, published *Wellbeing in Post-Primary Schools - Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention*. This was followed in 2015 by *Wellbeing in Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion*.

⁴⁴ NCCA (2017) Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines https://www.juniorcycle.ie/NCCA_JuniorCycle/media/NCCA/Curriculum/Wellbeing/Wellbeing-Guidelines-for-Junior-Cycle.pdf

⁴⁵ EFA Global Monitoring Report team (2015) *Investing in Teachers is Investing in Learning: a Prerequisite for the Transformative Power of Education* - Background paper for the Oslo Summit on Education for Development <https://www.oas.org/cotep/GetAttach.aspx?lang=es&cld=323&aid=528>

the potential that this could have for better learning – for example in ensuring the integration of knowledge and skills or in the use of applied and appropriate methodologies in subject areas could also enhance teacher supply.

The Department's investment in teachers' professional development also grew over the course of the period under review and was set to rise to €90 million in 2017. This investment in continuing professional development for teachers has focussed primarily on supporting their understanding of and facility to implement, revised curricula at both primary and post-primary levels.

At the same time, we changed school inspection practices to focus on teachers' practice and the quality of students' learning, and the new quality framework, *Looking at Our School 2016*, establishes and articulates a clear sense of what constitutes good teaching, to support the profession and to enhance the trust of the public in the profession.

These developments reflect an ongoing commitment on the part of Government to supporting the professional practice of teachers so that they 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. This will be all the more important as our education system evolves to provide learners with the learning opportunities that they will need to prepare them for a rapidly changing social, economic and technological context. As Linda Darling Hammond and her colleagues have observed in *Empowered Educators: How High Performing Systems Shape Teaching Quality Around the World*, 'The kind of teaching required to support contemporary learning goals in this context is very different from what was required when the goal was merely to "cover the curriculum" and "get through the book", enabling some students to succeed if they could and others to fail.'⁴⁶

7.4.2 Ensuring teacher supply, competence and professionalism

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. At post-primary, for example, the management bodies report shortages of teachers in certain subject areas, particularly Irish; Modern Foreign Languages; Home Economics; and Mathematics. Primary principals also report significant challenges in sourcing teachers, particularly for substitution purposes. There is a real need to examine the actual extent, the possible causes and the available solutions to these reported shortages.

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. The final report of the Technical Working Group on Teacher Supply, *Striking the Balance*, was published in mid-2017.⁴⁷ This examined a range of issues related to teacher supply across the primary and post-primary sectors and made a number of recommendations to ensure a sufficient supply of teachers to meet demand. Better data on teacher supply and demand would enable the recommendations of this group to be examined so that their feasibility and the practical steps that need to be taken to secure the long-term supply of high calibre teachers are clearer. Action on those recommendations and engagement with initial teacher education providers will go some way to addressing those issues and ensure that we continue to have a strong, informed and effective teaching force.

The continuum of teacher education encompasses initial teacher education, induction, early and continuing professional development (CPD). In the context of curriculum reform, support and

⁴⁶ Darling-Hammond, L. et al. (2017). *Empowered Educators: How High Performing Systems Shape Teaching Quality Around the World*, Jossey-Bass and The Stanford Centre for Opportunity in Policy Education (SCOPE).

⁴⁷ Teaching Council (2017) *Striking the Balance* <http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Publications/Teacher-Education/Teacher-Supply-in-Ireland.pdf>

development opportunities through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) service are provided and the recent suspension of industrial action which prevented some post-primary teachers from accessing this support is to be welcomed. So, too, is the initiation of *Droichead*, the school-based induction programme for newly qualified teachers established by the Teaching Council. It is essential that teachers have available to them and avail of opportunities to develop their professional practice throughout their careers, through participation in a range of continuing professional development (CPD) courses intended to advance the teaching, learning and/or management skills of all teachers in order to bring about improved learning outcomes for students.

Given the importance of all of this professional development for teachers, it is really important that its quality is maintained, monitored and enhanced. The second round of the Teaching Council accreditation reviews of teacher education programmes will be a very significant step in this process, as will continuing investment in teacher education programmes. The degree to which school staffs and principals use *Droichead* to engage with newly qualified teachers about the quality of their work and support them to engage in career-long development and improvement of their practice will also be important.

The quality of teachers continuing professional development and the degree to which it addresses the needs of individual schools and the Irish school system more generally will be a challenge in the years ahead. There are some measures in place to ensure the quality of CPD provided by the Department-funded PDST and JCT. For example, both organisations work closely with the NCCA, the Inspectorate and others to ensure that their programmes address the needs of teachers as they grapple with the introduction of new curricular initiatives. JCT and PDST use a range of mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of their work, including self-review, and extensive use of customer surveys among the teachers who undertake courses and programmes. A proportion of summer CPD courses provided by a range of CPD suppliers is monitored by the Inspectorate on behalf of the Department's Teacher Education Section, but the Inspectorate itself is not satisfied with the adequacy of its monitoring.

More significantly, there is relatively little attention paid to the degree to which existing CPD courses match the needs of individual teachers and schools. The provision of continuing professional development opportunities has been heavily weighted toward the provision of national CPD programmes to support curricular change. However, schools and teachers vary in their CPD needs. Many teachers, on their own initiative, undertake a wide range of CPD courses, with summer courses for primary teachers being one popular option. However, there is a need to ensure that the investment made in CPD addresses more specifically the needs of individual teachers and schools. For example, in some schools, there can be very good engagement between the school principal and individual teachers when decisions are being made about the courses to be selected by individual teachers or groups of teachers in a school and this can help to ensure that the improvement needs of the teachers and school are properly prioritised. It would be highly beneficial if this practice was more prevalent, but this would also require the school and its teachers to have available to them a range of sources and modes through which they could access CPD.

7.4.3 Supporting professional collaboration among teachers

In addition to the formal opportunities provided by CPD, teachers also learn informally, through their engagement with colleagues and through professional self-reflection. By working together and talking about their professional practice, teachers can play an important role in developing the

professional learning of their colleagues. However, because teachers generally work alone with a classroom of students, informal learning can be more difficult for them than in other professions and deliberate interventions are needed to facilitate these learning opportunities.

Research emphasises the absolute need for a strong collaborative culture among teachers⁴⁸ – one in which students' learning, the progression that students are making, and the practices that foster that learning are at the heart of searching professional conversations. Ideas and materials can be shared, better strategies can be developed and problems solved as teachers learn from one another.

We know that collaboration supports improvements in teacher practice and student achievement. When teachers engage in high-quality collaboration that they perceive as extensive and helpful, there is both an individual and collective benefit.⁴⁹ Meaningful collaboration requires support, however. It means that time has to be made available for collaborative dialogue; that purposeful discussions focussed on the progress that students are making, and why differences are occurring, take place during that time and that teachers are open to reviewing their own practice and changing it where a change is needed.

A number of initiatives underway currently provide rich opportunities to build collaborative practices in Irish schools. The revised model for the allocation of additional teaching resources to schools to support children with special educational needs (SEN) is one. It provides schools with the autonomy to allocate teaching supports according to students' needs. The Inspectorate's evaluation of the pilot which preceded implementation of the model found that involvement in the model had facilitated greater reflection and collaboration among teachers in relation to SEN. Close professional collaboration supported schools to make good decisions regarding the deployment of their resources and personnel. Teachers in most of the primary and post-primary schools visited during the evaluation spoke positively about the impact of the allocation model on teaching and learning in their schools.

The Department's School Excellence Fund will promote collaboration within and networking between schools participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme. The fund is intended to support and encourage innovation through school clustering which is aimed at improving student outcomes.

The *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015* recognises that teachers need professional time to engage in a range of professional collaborative activities, a proportion of which will involve collaboration with teaching colleagues, to support teaching, learning and assessment. To ensure that the necessary time and resources are available to implement the new Junior Cycle, for the first time, professional time has been provided for teachers (i.e. non-student contact time in which teachers will participate in a range of professional and collaborative activities to support the implementation of Junior Cycle).

We must continue to build school cultures which promote teacher collaboration. That means that school leaders and teachers must design and implement structures, routines, and protocols to establish and facilitate teacher interaction focussed on instructional issues. We also need to pay attention to nurturing school-wide behavioural norms that underpin collaborative practices, such as collective responsibility for student learning. The important role that the leadership of the school, including the principal and other promoted teachers, can play in fostering and supporting this teacher collaboration is emphasised in *Looking at Our School 2016*. The challenge in the years ahead will be to enable school leaders to effectively engage in this work.

⁴⁸ Hattie, J. (2012) *Visible Learning for Teachers – Maximising impact on Learning* Routledge.

⁴⁹ Ronfeldt, M., Farmer, S., McQueen, K., & Grissom, J. (2015) "Teacher collaboration in instructional teams and student achievement" in *American Educational Research Journal*, 52(3), 475-514.

7.4.4 Enabling teacher autonomy in curriculum planning at the level of the classroom

Current curriculum reforms have shifted the organising principle at the core of subject syllabuses from content objectives, which are focussed on the conceptual structures of a subject discipline, to a learning outcomes-based approach. The new specifications at primary and post-primary levels set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and values that students should be able to demonstrate on completion of a course. This shifts the focus from the teacher to the child and his/her learning and allows the teacher autonomy in designing appropriate learning experiences which will take account of the learning styles and abilities of their students. It is a more learner-centred approach to curriculum.

This approach is in keeping with international trends in curriculum specification. In many countries, a national core curriculum that describes general goals, core contents and principles is set out. This in turn is interpreted by teachers, supported by a local or regional education board, for example, the local authorities in Scotland and the Education Authority in Northern Ireland.

The challenge of curriculum reform in Ireland, however, is our reliance on teachers' ability to interpret specifications described as learning outcomes in the absence of such intermediate supports and structures. Continuing professional development (CPD) to support curriculum implementation can only go so far – we know that teachers can struggle with 'designing down' the outcomes in order to identify the appropriate learning experiences which will lead to the stated outcomes and that there is a reliance on the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) service for guidance. We are conscious too of the risk there is that a dependence on textbooks, rather than active engagement with the learning outcomes in specifications, will be deepened. Mindful of this, the Department has established a high-level co-ordinating committee to oversee development of detailed work needed to support successful implementation of the new curricula for primary and post-primary schools and there is evidence that some schools and teachers have been meeting the challenge successfully.

The role of the principal in leading learning in the school is critical. However, teachers cannot be expected to work with framework curricula alone. They need more detailed guidance that is consistent with the original intentions of the curriculum. There is also a need to look at how curriculum design at national level and CPD are aligned so that consistency and coherence in the messages communicated to teachers and school leaders is maintained and the relevant supports are put in place for teachers to enable them mediate the new subject specifications to their students.

7.5 WORKING WITH AND SUPPORTING THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL AND SETTING LEADERS

The task of building a collaborative culture among teachers is often a challenge for school leaders. It requires them to invest time in establishing goals and expectations for collaboration and in maintaining a school environment which promotes professional conversations and collegiality among teachers. The assumption that principals have the capacity to do so is not one we can rely on – professional learning opportunities for principals have been underdeveloped in Ireland and there is an ongoing requirement to develop programmes that nurture relevant leadership skills to cultivate

collaborative, reflective cultures in schools and engage in the challenging conversations that will be necessary.

The OECD publication *Leadership for 21st Century Learning* notes with regard to leadership that 'Leadership is so influential of direction and outcomes whether at the micro level of schools and learning environments, or of broader systems ...if we are interested in the future of education and learning we must be interested in leadership – its enhancement, and its failures.'⁵⁰ A number of supports are in place for school leaders, most notably the *Centre for School Leadership* which was established in December 2015. The Centre is operating on a partnership basis between the Department, the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD). It will lead and manage a pilot programme of leadership development for newly appointed principals and a coaching service for serving principals. The continuing development of its work will be very important in achieving the changes in our education system that we desire.

7.5.1 The challenge of sustainable leadership

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. In the past, middle management posts in schools did not support effective distributed leadership and accountability to best effect in all schools. During our economic recession, middle management posts in schools were cut severely. This meant that leadership and management tasks that could be delegated to senior teachers remained undone, or reverted to the principal, or to those teachers who undertook to assist him or her. Recent developments in relation to a new leadership and management framework in schools are intended to address this. They allow for greater flexibility at school level to identify and prioritise the evolving leadership and management needs of the school and to assign and re-assign responsibilities as needed. They also support a better alignment of the responsibilities of senior (Principal/Deputy Principal) and middle leadership more clearly to the needs and priorities of the school than in the past. The new arrangements recognise the range of leadership roles for which teachers can take responsibility and they provide opportunities for teachers to develop their leadership capacity.

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. All schools, irrespective of their ownership or patronage, are run by boards made up of volunteers including representatives of the owner/founders, teachers, parents and community members. Legally, they are responsible for all employment matters, human resources and financial management, and often capital expenditure, too. They are required to hold the school leader to account and they should play a key role in determining the direction and purpose of the school. It is not realistic to expect that these complex tasks can be carried out entirely by volunteer boards. In fact, it may be that the nature of the responsibilities is contributing to the difficulties many schools face in recruiting board members. We have to look at the complex tasks that are required of boards, especially if Irish schools are to enjoy the levels of autonomy common in many other education systems. We have to consider how some of these management tasks could be done in alternative ways. This need not imply an erosion of the autonomy of schools but rather more effective and professionalised ways of working.

Therefore, 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.

⁵⁰ OECD (2013) *Leadership for 21st Century Learning* http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/leadership-for-21st-century-learning_9789264205406-en

7.5.2 Supporting leadership of teaching and learning

The policy context within which schools' development is being promoted at a system level includes two significant elements: *Looking at Our School, A Quality Framework for Schools* (2016), which sets out, for the first time, a comprehensive statement of standards for Irish schools, and school self-evaluation (SSE), the school-led strategy for school improvement.⁵¹

Looking at Our School 2016 provides a set of standards that can help the school to assess how good practice is and to indicate where improvement is needed. Through our inspection, advisory and reporting activities, the Inspectorate is working to embed both *Looking at Our School 2016* and school self-evaluation within the school system. We have made numerous presentations to groups of teachers and school leaders on how to get good self-evaluation working in schools, we undertake advisory visits to schools to help school leaders and teachers use self-evaluation effectively, and we provide a range of guides and supports for them to help them engage in this work. We are beginning to see evidence that effective and improving schools are using self-evaluation to make a difference.

We are also using the standards in *Looking at Our School 2016* 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. As a system, we have a way to go yet to achieve an appropriate balance between SSE and external inspection, but we are on our way. Looking to the future, inspection activities will continue to evolve, informed by schools' engagement with school self-evaluation, by feedback from the education partners arising from the Inspectorate's various quality assurance processes, and by ongoing engagement with research.

The Inspectorate is developing new ways of working with schools to drive innovation and improvement. In 2017/18 we have embarked on some experimental trials of a new type of engagement with schools. The aim of this activity is to work with schools that are eager to drive improvement in their work or adopt new innovative approaches. Inspectors will be working with the schools involved to identify how they might improve and what sort of targets for improvement they should set for themselves. During their work with these schools, inspectors will also help the school leaders to identify what assistance and help they could use – for example from school support services – to drive the innovation and change. The inspectors will also be helping the school to monitor how effectively the change is happening and its impact on children's learning.

We are using this approach to support the implementation of the Gaeltacht Schools Recognition scheme (to improve Irish-medium schooling in the Gaeltacht) and we have begun to work in a similar way with some DEIS schools that are willing to try new innovative approaches. We plan to extend the trials into other priority areas in due course.

⁵¹ DES (2016) *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016-2020 Primary* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/School-Self-Evaluation-Guidelines-2016-2020-Primary.pdf> and *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016-2020 Post-primary* <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/School-Self-Evaluation-Guidelines-2016-2020-Post-Primary.pdf>

7.6 CONCLUSION

There is much that is good in our Early Years, primary and post-primary education provision. However, 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, as an Inspectorate, we plan to embed the standards for educational provision we have set out in *Looking at Our School 2016* in our work and to communicate a systems-wide understanding of what good practice in schools looks like. We will continue to look at ways in which we can increase the impact of inspections in schools, including listening carefully to feedback from stakeholders on how to improve our inspection models. We are committed to ongoing improvement in the ways in which we engage with parents and students during inspections and the ways that we support and work with school leaders.

The Inspectorate has also adopted a particular approach to the evaluation of schools. Like almost all inspectorates, we fulfil an accountability function, inspecting and reporting on the work of schools and the effectiveness of school leaders. However, we have made a strong public commitment that our focus is inspection for improvement and we have an equally strong commitment to co-professional working with teachers, parents and the education partners.

The discussion in this chapter is framed within that context – we have identified a set of themes which need to be explored further and/or advanced if we are to shift our schools from good to very good. We are committed to leveraging the insights we have gained and continue to gain from our inspection work in schools (and the conversations we have 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.

APPENDIX

Inspectorate Staff as at 30 June 2016

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Harold Hislop

Deputy Chief Inspector

Emer Egan

Assistant Chief Inspectors

Suzanne Conneely

Suzanne Dillon

Brendan Doody

Maresa Duignan

Mary Gilbride

Martin Lally

Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha

Deirdre Mathews

Doreen McMorris

Senior Post-primary Inspectors

Declan Cahalane

Gráinne Conachy

Oilibhéar de Búrca

Carmel Donoghue

Alan Dunne

Domnall Fleming

Amanda Geary

Miriam Horgan

Niall Kelly

Seamus Knox

Maria Lorigan

Kevin McCarthy

Kevin McClean

Linda Neary

Nóra Nic Aodha

Jacqueline Ní Fhearghusa

Kate O'Carroll

Orlaith O'Connor

Liz O'Neill

Lynda O'Toole

Ger Power

Linda Ramsbottom

Tony Weir

Post-primary Inspectors

Siobhán Aherne

Charlene Brazil

Siobhán Broderick

Elaine Collins

Ann Daly

Gavin Doyle

Rebecca Galligan

Richard Galvin

Aisling Kearney

Jason Kelly

Julia Lynch

Noreen McMorrow

Frances Moss

Shirley Murphy

Niamh Murray

Ailbhíne Ní Bhroin

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Bernadette Ní Ruairc

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Niamh Ní Fhoighil
Máire Ní Mháirtín
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Executive Officers

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Clerical Officers

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Cyriline Duff
Anne-Marie Ennis
Bernie Flannery
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Margaret O'Grady
Joanne O'Sullivan

Career Breaks and Secondments

Muireann Ní Mhóráin, Senior Inspector
Fionnbarra Ó Murchú, Senior Inspector
Carmel O'Doherty, Divisional Inspector
Anne O'Gara, District Inspector

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