

Speaking Notes of
Minister Ruairí Quinn, TD
Minister for Education and Skills

at the launch of

The Chief Inspector's Report 2010-12
at the Department of Education and Skills

Monday, 4 November 2013, 11.00AM
Clock Tower, Department of Education and Skills

Ladies and gentlemen

- It is with great pleasure that I greet you this morning to launch the Chief Inspector's Report for the years 2010 to 2012.
- I have read this report with great interest and I believe it gives a very honest account of the quality of education in our primary schools, second-level schools and centres for education.
- The report acknowledges all the good practice that takes place on a daily basis in our schools in terms of quality leadership, management, teaching and learning.
- It also reveals some weaknesses, and it points schools firmly in the direction of improvement.
- Since I became Minister for Education and Skills I have made it my priority to strive for a top-class education system in this country.
- In these challenging times, no country can afford to rest on its laurels or bask in past glories. For years we heard that we had one of the best education systems in the world. We tended –

unwisely in my view – to accept that accolade uncritically. I think that we now developing a more nuanced and realistic picture of our educational system.

- This is not to say that we have a bad system. It has many strengths thanks, in large measure, to the efforts of so many dedicated teachers and school leaders. But there has been a marked reluctance to acknowledge its failings and tackle its shortcomings.
- You are fully aware of the many reforms introduced since I took office. All of these changes have a common purpose: to improve the life chances of all our young people through improving fundamentally the education that we provide to them.
- That's why I want schools to offer a learning experience that is fit for purpose in the 21st century. We need to ensure;
that young people acquire core skills such as literacy and numeracy;
that they develop critical thinking, social skills and cultural understanding;
that their learning is stimulated by enthusiastic, skilled and dedicated teaching; and
that we use assessment practices that support learning and give good information to learners and parents.

- I also believe that **quality assurance** is a core element in guaranteeing the sort of educational experience that I want all students to enjoy.
- This quality assurance has to have both internal *and* external elements. For this reason, I have introduced school self-evaluation into our system and have also supported the Inspectorate in its essential work to improve and extend the external evaluation of schools.
- The inspectors themselves are no strangers to reform. In the past four years they have embarked on an ambitious programme of reform informed by best national and international practice. They have brought modern thinking to the practice of inspection and earlier this year, they led an important EU Presidency conference that disseminated and developed best practice in educational evaluation.
- Their development work, which I have been delighted to encourage and support, has led to the introduction of a range of new models of inspection at primary and post-primary level, including incidental inspections, follow-through inspections and a remodelling of whole-school evaluation.

- The Inspectorate has also developed systems to gather the voices and opinions of parents and learners, and I am delighted to see how these important voices are reflected in the Chief Inspector's report.
- In addition, the Inspectorate has collaborated with the early childhood sector, with the third-level sector and with a number of other Government departments and agencies, including the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to inspect the provision of education in early childhood centres, Teagasc colleges, high support units and children detention centres.
- The Inspectorate has also led the roll out of school self-evaluation and continues to support schools in their engagement with this important process of self-improvement.
- It is only through reflection on the strengths and weaknesses in our education system and in our individual schools and centres for education that we can truly improve.
- That is what this Chief Inspector's Report does: it gives us the information we need, both qualitative and quantitative to allow

us to see the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning, educational provision and management and leadership in our schools.

- However, it does not do this in a vacuum. It describes the context in which schools, inspectors and the Department of Education and Skills had to work in the 2010 to 2012 period. Looking at the summary provided in the report, I was struck again by the complex demographic, financial and organisational challenges that all of us in the political and educational system have faced in the last three years.
- In launching this report I would like to pay tribute to the Chief Inspector, Harold Hislop and his team for their commitment to ensuring quality and ongoing improvement in our education system.
- I have been struck by their vision, motivation and genuine dedication to ensuring that the experience of each and every one of our school children is positive. As I think you will see, their work in schools and other centres, as evidenced from this report, is very impressive. It makes a very important contribution to ensuring the best possible standards for learners. I am glad to

have this opportunity to thank the Inspectorate for its work and to reaffirm my support for their key role in the school system.

- Finally, before I hand you over to Harold, I would like to pay tribute to schools and their staffs for their dedication and hard work in schools. I think you will find that this can be seen from many of the positive findings in this report. Educationalists can also take pride in the positive views of parents and learners about their experience of schools in this report.
- This report is part of the ongoing picture provided by the Inspectorate of quality in our education system. Hundreds of inspection reports are published each year by my Department. This Chief Inspector's Report provides an overall picture of quality in the system. I am sure that you will find it fascinating and thought-provoking and I am delighted to launch it formally.
- Thank you.