

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

CHIEF INSPECTOR'S REPORT 2010-12

BRIEFING NOTE

SUMMARY

The Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012 reports on quality and standards in the primary and post-primary schools and centres for education that were inspected by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills between 2010 and 2012. It will be published on Monday, 4 November 2013 at 11.00AM.

The report:

- Describes briefly the context of the educational system over the period to which the report applies
- Outlines the significant programme of reforms undertaken to improve the inspection of schools and provides details of the range and number of inspections conducted in the period
- Highlights key strengths and key areas for development identified during inspections in schools and centres for education at both levels
- Provides some brief summary evaluative information from a small number of specialised inspections and sub-sets of the school system including:
 - Planning and target setting in DEIS primary and post-primary schools
 - Gaeltacht schools at primary and post-primary levels
 - Youthreach centres
 - The teaching and learning of Social, Personal and Health Education
 - Special Needs provision in post-primary schools.

Chapter One: The Context in Which We Work: The Irish School System 2010 to 2012

The period 2010 to 2012 was one of change and challenge for those involved in providing, leading and quality assuring education in schools and centres for education. These changes and challenges arose from a growth in student numbers, from the financial crisis in which Ireland found itself in the period and from the need to address a number of concerns about the quality of the education provided in Irish schools. All of these factors affected the environment in which the work of schools and the Inspectorate took place. Some key factors and developments included the following:

Student and teacher numbers

- The number of students in schools and centres for education grew by over 27,500 (5.5%) at primary level and by over 21,500 (6.3%) at post-primary level in the period 2010-2012.
- The numbers of whole-time equivalent teachers in primary, special and post-primary schools remained more or less the same, rising only slightly from 57,510 to 57,549.
- Over the period 2010-2012 the pupil-teacher ratio (the number of pupils divided by the number of classroom teachers and support teachers) grew in primary schools from 15.7 to 16.4 and in post-primary schools from 13.6 to 14.3. The impact of growing enrolments and relatively static teacher numbers was reflected in the average class size in primary schools which increased from 24.3 to 24.8.

Spending on education

- Schools, and the education system generally, experienced considerable financial pressures in the period 2010-2012, yet current expenditure on education at primary and second level actually rose slightly from €3.218 billion to €3.263 billion at primary level and from €3.070 billion to €3.147 billion at post-primary level.
- A number of financial and staffing measures impacted on schools and centres for education, including decreases in capitation grants to schools, the non-replacement of many promoted posts in schools and some changes in the staffing schedules used to determine the appointment of teachers to schools. The staffing schedules for primary schools were changed in 2009/10 but were unaltered for most of these schools thereafter.
- Significant changes occurred in the leadership and staffing of schools because of retirement schemes implemented across the public service and the general non-replacement of promoted posts such as assistant principals and special duties posts.
- Despite financial pressures, the Government took measures to protect teaching and learning in schools. Teacher vacancies and vacancies for principal and deputy principal posts were excluded from the moratorium on public service recruitment which was introduced by Government in March 2009. This meant that these posts continued to be filled when they arose in schools in accordance with specified enrolment thresholds (staffing schedules).
- Expenditure on the Department's action plan for educational inclusion (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools – DEIS) was maintained and the first evaluations of DEIS demonstrated the effectiveness of aspects of the plan, especially in primary schools.

- The provision of supports for students with special educational needs increased from €1.2 billion in 2010 to €1.3 billion in 2012 representing a spending increase from 14% to 15% of the total Department budget.

The provision of support services

- The Department continued to fund a range of support services to schools though the spending on these services was curtailed. The services supported initiatives targeted at improving practice and standards in literacy, numeracy, teaching and learning in DEIS schools, improved special education provision, school leadership and management, and the implementation of Project Maths, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and child protection procedures.
- Continuing substantial investment was made over the 2010 to 2012 period in expanding and improving school infrastructure at both primary and post-primary levels. Total capital investment in school infrastructure over the period amounted to €1.327 billion.

An ambitious programme of reform in education

- An ambitious programme of reform in education was initiated in the 2011-2012 period. Several of the significant elements in that programme of reform were outlined in *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020* launched by the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, TD, in July 2011. The Strategy initiated wide-ranging reforms in teacher education, curriculum content, the assessment and reporting of student progress, and evaluation and assessment policies.
- Developments included the continued roll-out of Project Maths at post-primary level, the introduction (from summer 2012) of mandatory standardised testing in primary schools and the introduction of self-evaluation to complement external inspection from the 2012/13 school year. The Minister also announced a fundamental reform of Junior Cycle in October 2012 to affect students commencing second-level schooling in September 2014.

Chapter Two: Reforming How We Work

The period 2010-2012 was a period of significant reform in the work of the Inspectorate. Substantial changes were made to enable the Inspectorate to deliver a more effective quality assurance system for Irish schools while at the same time using the resources available more effectively. The reforms to the work of the Inspectorate were implemented in a context where overall staffing had fallen very considerably and quickly in 2009 and in the following years. Key developments have included the following:

A range of inspection approaches to provide more frequent and more effective inspection

- A range of new or revised inspection models was developed for use in both primary and post-primary schools and in centres for education so that the frequency and effectiveness of inspection could be increased. These changes included the use of unannounced (incidental) inspections in schools and centres for education, more efficient whole-school type evaluations and shorter notice periods for many notified evaluations.
- Inspectors conducted 2,133 inspections in primary schools in the period 2010-2012, excluding inspections of the work of individual teachers on probation. This significant increase in inspection coverage meant that inspection visits of some type took place in over half of all primary schools in the country.
- Inspectors conducted a growing number of inspections of the work of probationary teachers in primary schools on behalf of the Teaching Council. The work of 6,424 newly qualified teachers was inspected in the school years 2009/10, 2010/11, and 2011/12.
- The total number of inspections in post-primary schools and centres for education grew from 706 in 2010 to 903 in 2012. Between 2011-2012 inspections of some type occurred in 93% of second-level schools.
- In 2012, the Inspectorate took a decision to make a once-off reduction in the number of whole-school evaluations to accommodate the introduction of advisory visits to school staffs to support the roll-out of school self-evaluation (SSE). These advisory visits covered 354 primary schools and 160 post-primary schools in November and December 2012. The Inspectorate is on target to have completed at least one advisory visit to all 4,000+ schools by the end of 2013.

More focused external inspection

- All inspections seek to recognise the strengths of schools and encourage good practice. They also focus on how schools can improve and seek to provide sound recommendations for teachers, school leaders and boards of management.
- The Inspectorate chose to place the focus of inspection work on a relatively small number of key features of schools that have most impact on the quality of the learning experience. These include the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms and the quality of leadership and management.
- The planning of inspections has become more focused. Having a range of inspection models available has allowed the Inspectorate to target a proportion of our inspection activity where the risk to students' learning is greatest. For example, information acquired during short, unannounced inspections can now

be used to highlight where further more intensive inspections such as subject inspections or whole-school evaluations, are needed.

A stronger voice for parents and students

- To strengthen the voice of students and parents in evaluations, confidential learner and parental questionnaires were introduced as part of whole-school evaluations in primary and post-primary schools in 2010. These questionnaires collect information on the views of parents and students about the work of the school and their experiences at the school.

Follow-up to inspections

- Systematic follow-up procedures were developed and introduced on a pilot basis in 2012 to enable the Inspectorate to monitor how well school communities had responded to the recommendations made in the previous inspections. These follow-through inspections were conducted in 98 primary schools and 79 post-primary schools in 2012.
- Inspectors prioritised follow-up actions in schools with the most serious weaknesses. Since 2008, inspectors have collaborated with officials from the School Governance section of the Department of Education and Skills on the Department's School Improvement Group. This group seeks to coordinate the Department's engagement with schools where very serious weaknesses are identified. The approaches used vary depending on the nature of the issues in the school.

School self-evaluation

- The Inspectorate has supported the formal introduction of school self-evaluation through the development and publication of School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Primary Schools and School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools, the provision of online support to schools and a programme of advisory visits to schools.

Collaboration with others

- The Inspectorate collaborated closely with stakeholders in the school system and beyond in the development of its inspection processes. It has also cooperated with other Inspectorates and research bodies. This has helped to evolve robust yet well-accepted evaluation models and to communicate that the primary focus of school inspection is on improving learning and teaching.

Staffing

- Owing to the effect of the public service recruitment moratorium, the staffing of the Inspectorate declined from 154 inspectors at the beginning of 2009 to 116 inspectors in June 2012 and, following a recruitment campaign, rose to 124 inspectors by December 2012.

Chapter Three: What Does Inspection Tell Us About Primary Schools?

Chapter Four: What Does Inspection Tell Us About Post-Primary Schools?

The findings in the *Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012* are based on information collected during a wide range of inspections, including:

- almost 800 whole-school evaluations (WSE) at primary level and almost 190 whole-school evaluations – management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLLs) at post-primary level
- over 1,100 incidental inspections at primary level and over 430 incidental inspections at post-primary level
- thematic inspections of planning and target setting in 68 DEIS schools (34 primary and 34 post-primary)
- over 1,400 subject inspections and 62 programme evaluations at post-primary level
- almost 36,000 pupil questionnaires at primary level and over 29,000 student questionnaires at post-primary level
- over 47,600 parental questionnaires at primary level and over 20,000 parental questionnaires at post-primary level.

The report focuses on key aspects of schools and centres for education, including the teaching of English, Irish and Mathematics. Findings in other subject areas are not included but will be published in forthcoming reports.

The report presents *Spotlights* on educational provision in DEIS schools, Gaeltacht schools, and Youthreach centres. It also includes *Spotlights* on the quality of special educational needs provision in post-primary schools and on the quality of SPHE provision in primary and post-primary schools.

Quality of school management

- Primary WSE reports indicate that the quality of management was satisfactory or better in 88% of the primary schools inspected.
- 82% of whole-school evaluations reported that principals, deputy principals and other members of the in-school management team provided satisfactory or better leadership to their primary schools. While such findings are positive, inspectors found that the work of in-school management teams required improvement in 18% of schools.
- Primary schools were found to be managing their pupils well and the vast majority of parents were happy with their child's school.
- At post-primary level, inspectors found that most boards of management provided good strategic leadership in their schools. Inspectors judged that the overall quality of leadership and management was satisfactory or better in 89% of schools.

- The critical role played by principals and deputy principals, in particular, was emphasised in post-primary inspection reports. One of the most common features of successful senior management teams observed during inspections was their ability to distribute leadership across the school.
- Parents were also well satisfied with the management of post-primary schools and the level of care that their child received.
- The findings from questionnaires at both primary and post-primary level point to a need for schools to raise awareness of their anti-bullying measures, to strengthen communication with parents and to take the pupil/student voice more into account in their decision-making processes.
- Questionnaire findings at post-primary level also highlight the need for schools to improve the information that they give to parents in relation to subject and curriculum choice at key transition points for their child.

Quality of planning

- School planning processes were found to be satisfactory or better in almost three quarters of the primary schools inspected. However, less than satisfactory planning processes were in place in over one quarter of schools.
- The outcomes of incidental inspection at primary level indicate that teachers were not adequately prepared to teach in 18% of the lessons evaluated. Less than satisfactory planning by teachers was also reported in a significant minority of English, Mathematics and Irish lessons.
- Just 81% of subject departments in post-primary schools had good or better planning processes in place. In 77% of schools, the quality of planning and preparation in English departments was satisfactory or better, while the comparable figure for Mathematics was 80%. Worryingly, the quality of planning and preparation in Irish departments was satisfactory or better in just 70% of schools.
- There is evidently a need for better planning processes at subject department level and at whole school level in a significant number of primary and post-primary schools. Effective planning and review can and should drive improvement and lead to better outcomes for learners.

Quality of teaching and learning

- The Chief Inspector's Report provides evidence that most primary schools are working satisfactorily with regard to the quality of the teaching they provide and the progress of their learners. Incidental inspections found that the quality of teaching overall was satisfactory or better in 86% of schools while the quality of learning overall was satisfactory or better in 87% of schools.

- Incidental inspections in primary schools showed that the learning outcomes for pupils were satisfactory in 87% of the English lessons inspected and that the teaching approaches used in those lessons were appropriate in 86% of cases.
- The report makes specific recommendations in relation to teaching approaches and the use of resources for English, Irish and Mathematics.
- Inspectors reported that teaching approaches in mathematics lessons were satisfactory or better in 83% of lessons evaluated during incidental inspections and that learning outcomes for pupils were satisfactory or better in 85% of lessons.
- Inspectors' findings with regard to Irish in primary schools were significantly less positive than those for English or Mathematics. The quality of Irish teaching was problematic in one fifth of the lessons observed and the quality of learning was problematic in almost one quarter of the lessons observed.
- Inspectors judged that the standard of teaching observed at post-primary level was satisfactory or better in over 85% of all inspections. The report makes specific recommendations in relation to teaching approaches in English, Mathematics and Irish.
- Evidence from subject inspections in post-primary schools indicates that the quality of teaching of English was satisfactory or better in 87% of English lessons and the quality of learning was satisfactory or better in 84% of lessons.
- It is of concern that the quality of Mathematics teaching was satisfactory or better in just 77% of the lessons observed in subject inspections in post-primary schools. Inspectors also found that student learning was less than satisfactory in more than one quarter (26%) of the lessons.
- The quality of students' learning in Irish was found to be problematic in almost one in three (32%) of the Irish subject inspections conducted in post-primary schools. Deficiencies in how the subject was taught were evident in 28% of the lessons.

Quality of assessment

- There were significant shortcomings in assessment practices in almost one quarter of the English lessons, in 29% of the mathematics lessons and in 35% of the Irish lessons evaluated through incidental inspection in primary schools during the period 2010-2012.
- At post-primary level, evidence available from subject inspections shows that assessment practices were less than satisfactory in 23% of schools.

- Many inspection reports recommended increased use of the outcomes of assessment to aid planning to inform teaching and learning at primary and post-primary levels.

Chapter Five: Making Sure Improvement Happens

Follow-through inspections

- Pilot follow-through inspections, introduced in 2012, indicated that schools were generally making good efforts to implement the recommendations made in previous inspection reports.
- A small number of schools where very serious weaknesses were identified during inspections were referred to the Department's Schools Improvement Group (SIG). Follow-through inspections were among the range of measures taken by the Department to ensure that patrons and school management took steps to improve school quality in these cases,

Chapter Six: In Summary

A generally positive picture of the work of schools is evident from the inspections conducted during the period 2010 to 2012, at a time when schools and the educational system faced a number of challenges. At both primary and post-primary levels, inspections found that the majority of schools are well managed, most teachers work effectively, and the overall learning of students is generally satisfactory.

However, there are, as the evaluations clearly show, dimensions of education delivery that are, to varying degrees, problematic. The findings point to satisfactory or better practice in the vast majority of our schools, but what about those schools and lessons, between 10% and 15% at the very least, where less than satisfactory practices exist?

Fundamentally, there are weaknesses in the teaching and learning of Irish in particular and, to a lesser degree in Mathematics in a significant proportion of our schools. Definite shortcomings in approaches to planning and preparation for students' learning exist in both the primary and post-primary sectors. Critically related to this are the crucial issues of how students' learning is assessed, and how assessment information is used in planning programmes of work that ensure that learners receive an education that challenges them and is appropriate to their needs. Improvements in how schools assess and monitor the learning experiences and performances of their learners and in how they use the resulting information to plan for future teaching and learning are particularly important. Indeed, this approach is what should inform all schools' implementation of the newly introduced school self-evaluation process.

The picture that emerges in this report lays down challenges for everyone who works in the educational system – to teachers and school leaders, to managers and patrons of schools, to policy makers and teacher educators and to the Department and Inspectorate. Fundamentally, this report challenges schools and the educational

system 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 can be achieved.