An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate

Inspectorate | Updated December 2024

Contents

Terminology used in this document 4

1. Our purpose 5

2. Our Code of Practice 7

3. Our functions 9

4. How we evaluate, advise and support educational provision 11

5. The principles underpinning our work 13
   - Principle 1: A focus on learners 15
   - Principle 2: Development and improvement 16
   - Principle 3: Respectful engagement 17
   - Principle 4: Responsibility and accountability 18

6. Developing and reviewing this *Code of Practice* 19

Appendix 1: Functions of the Inspectorate as set out in section 13 of the Education Act 1998 22

Terminology used in this document

In this document, titles are used as follows:

- *Learners* means: children in early learning and care (ELC) settings and other early years settings, pupils in primary schools, students in post-primary schools and young people attending other publicly-funded education settings or training facilities that we inspect, including Youthreach Centres, Irish language colleges, alternative education settings and Teagasc colleges
- *Education setting* means: an early learning and care or other early years setting receiving public funding; a recognised school or centre for education; any other publicly-funded education or training facility in which the Inspectorate conducts evaluation and advisory work[1]
- *Educational practitioner* means: an early years educator; a teacher in a recognised school or centre for education; a teacher or tutor or instructor in any publicly-funded education or training setting in which the Inspectorate conducts evaluation and/or advisory work
- *Management body* means: an owner/manager of a publicly-funded early learning and care setting; a board of management of a recognised school or centre for education; a formal management body or committee or board of any publicly-funded education or training facility in which the Inspectorate conducts evaluation and advisory work.

[1] Currently, this includes early learning and care settings and schools based in Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; early years settings such as Early Start units in primary schools funded by the Department of Education; recognised primary and post-primary schools funded by the Department of Education; Youthreach centres in which inspections are carried out on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education; Irish language colleges in which inspections are carried out on behalf of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media; and agricultural colleges in which inspections are carried out on behalf of Teagasc.

1

Our purpose

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education works to improve the quality of teaching and learning for all children and young people in Irish education settings and to support the development of the Irish educational system. We strive to improve the quality of teaching and learning through providing high quality evaluation, analysis and advice.

2

Our Code of Practice

This Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate[2] sets out the general principles and standards in accordance with which we, as members of the Inspectorate, carry out our work. These principles govern the full range of inspectors' evaluation and advisory work, including our work and conduct when evaluating and reporting on the quality of provision in a range of educational settings, the work of individual educational practitioners and the implementation of regulations and curricular programmes. The principles are important reference points to inform the development of inspection activities and new ways of working. They provide a benchmark against which we, and others, can judge the quality of our professional practice.

[2] This *Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate* replaces the previous publication, *Professional Code of Practice on Evaluating and Reporting for the Inspectorate*, published in 2015.

3

Our functions

As an Inspectorate, we are focused on ensuring that children and young people in education settings receive the best possible education in accordance with their potential and learning needs. Fundamentally, we strive to improve the learning experiences and learning outcomes of all in the settings that we evaluate. Our specific functions are set out in section 13 of the Education Act 1998.[3] Under the Act, we have a statutory duty to inspect and report on the quality of educational provision in recognised schools, centres for education and other education settings in accordance with procedures that are approved by the Minister, including procedures for the publication of inspection reports. We also have a role in inspecting and reporting on the quality of educational provision in other publicly-funded education or training facilities in accordance with memoranda of agreement between the Department of Education and relevant government Departments or agencies.

Typically, inspectors identify strengths and areas for development in the work of the schools, settings and centres for education that they inspect. The purpose of inspection and reporting is to affirm good practice, promote improvement and to provide an evaluative account of the work of the education setting to the staff and management in the setting itself and to its community, to the Minister and to the wider public.

[3] *Section 13 of the Education Act 1998* is provided in Appendix 1.

4

How we evaluate, advise and support educational provision

One of the central ways in which we evaluate, advise and support is by visiting and conducting inspections in education settings. We engage with educational practitioners, principals, parents,[4] children and young people and management bodies on aspects of educational provision. We disseminate, through discussion and publication, the findings of our evaluations and we publish advice as to how the work of education providers and the learning in educational settings can be improved. We contribute to the development of education policy and provision, and advise the Minister accordingly.

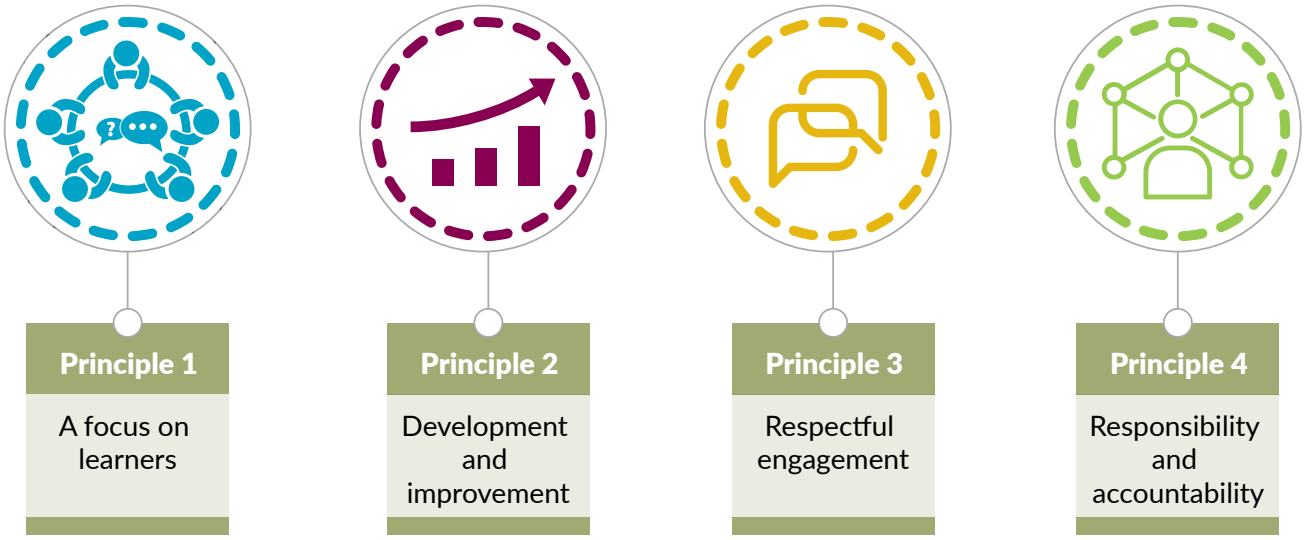
[4] Throughout this *Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate (2022)*, the term parent is used to refer to a child's father(s) and/or mother(s) and/or guardian(s).

5

The principles underpinning our work

Effecting improvement in education is at the heart of our purpose and work. In this regard, we aim to promote high standards in teaching and in the learning outcomes and experiences of the children and young people in education settings. We strive to enable learning settings to improve the quality of the education they provide. As a learning organisation ourselves, we seek to improve our way of doing things, so that we can more effectively and more efficiently fulfil our functions.

Our work is underpinned by four key principles:



These four key principles, described in detail below, inform, guide and govern our work. We also publish several guides that describe how we conduct different types of inspections. These guides are available here.

Principle 1 A focus on learners

Our focus as an Inspectorate is on children and young people in education settings. This means that:

- we focus on the learning experiences and on the educational outcomes and standards that learners achieve when evaluating and reporting on the work of educational practitioners and education settings

- we keep the observation of teaching and learning in classrooms and other learning settings central in inspection activity

- we seek and give due consideration to the views and opinions of children and young people, according to their age and maturity

- we evaluate and report on the quality of support provided by education settings for the wellbeing of learners

- we help to ensure that education settings provide a safe, inclusive environment for all learners and we report on settings' adherence to the Department of Education's child protection and safeguarding procedures and anti-bullying procedures.

Principle 2 Development and improvement

We are committed to ongoing development and improvement of education provision. This means that:

- we engage with the communities working in education settings to promote improvement in education provision
- we promote and support self-evaluation as a mechanism for improvement in education settings
- we advise on, affirm and disseminate best practice in education provision
- we support and affirm the work of professional educators and contribute to the research and policy processes relating to teacher professionalism
- we identify education provision and practice that is of poor quality in education settings; we provide advice on how these settings may improve their practice and we follow up as necessary; this includes drawing the attention of those responsible for the management of the education setting to the need to improve and referring education settings of concern to relevant bodies
- we actively support and promote national priorities and policies to improve learners' educational experiences and outcomes and to raise national education standards
- we promote and support the use of the Irish language
- we respect diversity and promote equity, equality and inclusion in the education system and in the education settings that we evaluate.

Principle 3 Respectful engagement

We are committed to respectful engagement with others in the course of our work. This means that:

- we work co-operatively and fairly with children and young people, educational practitioners, leaders of education settings, management bodies, parents, patrons and trustees in a spirit of mutual respect and reciprocity
- we work co-operatively and fairly with the education partners and relevant statutory bodies
- we are open about our evaluation models, activities, criteria and priorities
- we recognise and acknowledge effective work, progress and achievement
- we ensure that all communications, oral, written and digital, are clear
- we promote professional dialogue
- we seek and consider the views of the education partners and others when designing and developing our inspection models and processes
- we promote trust in our working relationships with others
- we understand the importance of fairness in our dealings with others
- we respect the right of all to their good name and their right of response.

Principle 4 Responsibility and accountability

We are committed to promoting accountability and responsibility in schools, classrooms and other settings, in the education system generally and within the Inspectorate. This means that:

- we provide the public with an assurance of the quality of teaching and learning in publicly-funded education settings
- we report objectively and fairly on the quality of education provision, based on the collection of objective, dependable, high-quality data, having taken the context of the education setting into consideration
- we are committed to fair procedures in how we engage with others in the course of our work
- we make the best use of the resources available to us in our evaluation, support and advisory work
- we adhere to our published guidelines as they relate to inspection activity
- we are open to our work being reviewed and have fair and transparent processes to examine concerns raised about inspections (as set out in Procedure for the review of inspections carried out by the Department of Education Inspectorate under Section 13(9) of the Education Act 1998).
- we, as a learning organisation, systematically enquire into and report on how we perform our functions, and take the actions necessary to improve our performance.

6

Developing and reviewing this *Code of Practice*

This *Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate* has been developed following detailed consultation with the education partners as required under Section 13(8) of the Education Act 1998, including representatives of school management bodies, teachers, parents and learners, and a range of other bodies with whom we work and co-operate.

This edition of the *Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate* replaces an earlier version published in 2015, which is now withdrawn. The Inspectorate is committed to reviewing this *Code of Practice* from time to time following consultation with the relevant stakeholders and in the light of changes that may occur to legislation and/or developing best practice in public services.

The Inspectorate retains the right to make necessary technical adjustments or updates to the *Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate* from time to time. The most up-to-date version of the Code will be available at www.gov.ie .

Appendix

Appendix 1: Functions of the Inspectorate as set out in *Section 13 of the Education Act 1998*

The functions of the Inspectorate are set out in *Section 13 of the Education Act 1998* [Number 51 of 1998] as amended by

Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007 [Number 9 of 2007]
Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007 (Commencement) Order 2014 (SI No.274 of 2014)
Education and Training Boards Act 2013 [Number 11 of 2013]
Education and Training Boards Act 2013 (Commencement) Order 2013 (SI No. 211 of 2013)

13 (1) The Minister shall appoint a Chief Inspector and such and so many Inspectors as the Minister considers appropriate and the Chief Inspector and Inspectors collectively shall be known and are referred to in this Act as the "Inspectorate".

13 (2) The Minister shall include amongst those he or she appoints as Inspectors under subsection (1) persons who hold qualifications as psychologists or who have other expertise, including expertise in the education of students with special educational needs.

13 (3) The functions of an Inspector shall be:

(a) to support and advise recognised schools, centres for education and teachers on matters relating to the provision of education and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, an Inspector—

(i) shall visit recognised schools and centres for education on the initiative of the Inspectorate, and, following consultation with the board, patron, parents of students and teachers, as appropriate, do any or all of the following:

(I) evaluate the organisation and operation of those schools and centres and the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools or centres, including the quality of teaching and effectiveness of individual teachers;

(II) evaluate the education standards in such schools or centres;

(III) assess the implementation and effectiveness of any programmes of education which have been devised in respect of individual students who have a disability or other special educational needs;

(IV) assess the implementation of regulations made by the Minister, and

(V) report to the Minister, or to the board, patron, parents of students and teachers, as appropriate, and as prescribed, on these matters or on any other matter relating to the activities of those schools or centres and the needs of students attending those schools or centres,

(ii) *Deleted by Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007, Section 3(a)*

(iii) shall advise teachers and boards in respect of the performance of their duties, and, in particular, assist teachers in employing improved methods of teaching and conducting classes, and

(iv) shall advise parents and parents' associations;

(b) to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the provision of education in the State, including comparison with relevant international practice and standards, and to report thereon to the Minister;

(c) to conduct research into education and to provide support in the formulation of policy by the Minister;

(d) to promote excellence in the management of, teaching in and the use of support services by schools and in the procedures for consultation and co-operation within and between schools and centres for education;

(e) to disseminate information relating to—

(i) the performance by the Inspectorate of the functions provided for in this section, and

(ii) successful educational initiatives which have been implemented by schools and centres for education, and promote informed debate on those matters;

(f) to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching, development, promotion and use of Irish in schools and centres for education and to report to the Minister on those matters;

(g) to advise the Minister on any matter relating to education policy and provision, including the curriculum taught in recognised schools, assessment and teaching methods,

(h) *Deleted by Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007, Section 3(a)*

---

13 (4) *Deleted by Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007, Section 3(b)*

---

13 (5) Where an Inspector has carried out an evaluation or an assessment under subsection (3)(a)(i), he or she may make recommendations to the Minister in respect of improvements that he or she considers appropriate.

---

13 (6) The Minister may, if a teacher and the board consent, second that teacher to the Inspectorate for such period as the Minister shall determine, to carry out any or all of the functions conferred on an Inspector.

---

13 (7) An Inspector shall have all such powers as are necessary or expedient for the purpose of performing his or her functions and shall be accorded every reasonable facility and co-operation by the board and the staff of a school or centre for education.

13 (8) An Inspector, including the Chief Inspector, shall carry out his or her functions in accordance with such procedures for, and criteria of, inspections as may be determined by the Minister from time to time, following consultation with patrons, school management organisations, recognised trade unions and staff associations representing teachers and such other persons as the Minister considers appropriate, and such directions as may be given by the Minister from time to time.

13 (9) A teacher or the board of a school may request the Chief Inspector to review any inspection carried out by an Inspector which affects the teacher or the school and the Chief Inspector shall review the inspection in accordance with such procedures as the Chief Inspector shall determine.

13 (10) A person who immediately before the commencement of this Part holds an office as Chief Inspector, Inspector or Inspector of Guidance Service/Psychologist or who is seconded to the Inspectorate shall on the commencement of this Part continue to hold that office or be so seconded as appropriate and this section shall apply to any such person.

13 (11) The Civil Service Commissioners Act, 1956, and the Civil Service Regulation Acts, 1956 to 1996, shall apply to Inspectors.

13 (12) The Minister shall appoint Inspectors or second teachers to the Inspectorate, in accordance with this section, with the concurrence of the Minister for Finance.

13.(12A) A person who obstructs or interferes with an Inspector in the course of exercising a power conferred on the Inspector by this section or impedes the exercise by the Inspector of such a power commits an offence and is liable—

(a) on summary conviction to a Class A fine, or

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine not exceeding €100,000.

13.(13) The Chief Inspector, with the consent of the Minister, may delegate the performance of one or more of his functions to an Inspector nominated by the Chief Inspector and functions so delegated to such an inspector shall be performable by him or her accordingly.

13.(14) The Minister may appoint an Inspector to perform the functions of the Chief Inspector during an period in which the Chief Inspector is temporarily unable to perform his or her functions, whether because of absence, ill-health or for any other reason, and, for the duration of that period, the functions of the Chief Inspector shall be performable by the Inspector so appointed accordingly.