



**Inspectorate**

# Publication of School Inspection Reports

## Guidelines

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	
1.1	School evaluation and information on schools	3
1.2	Why publish?	4
1.3	What reports will be published?	5
1.4	What reports will not be published?	6
1.5	Will school data be included in the reports?	6
1.6	Review	7
<b>2</b>	<b>General principles</b>	
2.1	Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting	8
2.2	The inspection process	8
2.3	The publication process	8
2.4	The published reports	9
<b>3</b>	<b>The publication process</b>	
3.1	Publication procedures	10
3.2	School response	12
3.3	Schools under the management of a vocational education committee	13
3.4	Access	13
Appendix 1	Inspection report factual verification form	14
Appendix 2	Inspection report school response form	15

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 School evaluation and information on schools

School inspection and evaluation make an important contribution to promoting quality in the educational experiences provided for students in primary and post-primary education. External evaluation by inspectors complements the continuing efforts of schools and centres for education<sup>1</sup> to review and improve their own work. During evaluations, the inspectors seek to

- identify, acknowledge and affirm good practice in schools
- promote continuing improvement in the quality of education offered by schools
- promote self-evaluation and continuous development by schools and their staffs
- provide an assurance of quality in the educational system as a whole, based on the collection of objective, dependable, high-quality data.

The reports that arise from the Inspectorate's evaluations play an important role in this process and provide valuable information about schools and centres for education. Inspection reports take cognisance of the context in which schools are operating and contain carefully balanced accounts of the strengths and areas of development identified by the inspectors.

Since 1998, when the work of the Inspectorate was placed on a statutory basis by section 13 of the Education Act, school inspection systems have developed considerably. Whole-school evaluation has been introduced at primary and post-primary levels, following extensive consultation, and subject inspection at post-primary level has been revised. These forms of evaluation have been refined in the light of experience and following valuable contributions and suggestions from the education partners. It is generally acknowledged that these evaluations provide balanced and informed evaluations of the work of schools.

Parents and members of the school community make an important contribution to the school's self-review and planning process. In

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<sup>1</sup> Section 13 of the Education Act, 1998, provides that the Inspectorate carries out its evaluative, advisory and other functions in both schools and centres for education. In all instances in these guidelines the word "school" refers to both schools and centres for education.

addition, schools provide a range of information to parents in a variety of ways, including newsletters, annual reports, and reports on the progress of individual students. Much valuable information is also provided to parents through personal contact and more formal teacher-parent meetings.

As inspection systems have developed, and as parents' involvement in schools has grown, there has been an increased demand from parents and the public generally for access to school inspection reports. This growing demand for information is not unique to the educational system: in recent years all public services have sought to operate in ways that are more open and transparent. Legislation, such as the Freedom of Information Act, has given the public the right to obtain information about publicly funded bodies.

The Department of Education and Science recognises the need to provide balanced information that takes into account the wide range of work undertaken by schools. School inspection reports provide one effective way of meeting that need. The publication of school inspection reports is intended to improve customer service and promote openness within the educational system. More importantly, the publication of school inspection reports is designed to make a real contribution to the quality of schools and educational provision.

These guidelines set out the general principles and procedures in accordance with which the Inspectorate will publish school inspection reports. The publication of inspection reports is underpinned by provisions contained in regulations made by the Minister for Education and Science entitled the *Education Act 1998 (Publication of Inspection Reports on Schools and Centres for Education) Regulations 2006*. Under these regulations, reports arising from inspections begun on or after 6 February 2006 will be published in accordance with these guidelines.

## **1.2 Why publish?**

The Education Act, 1998, places a duty on inspectors to report the outcome of their evaluations of schools and centres for education to the Minister, the board of management of the school or centre, teachers, parents, and the school patron. The publishing of reports will make an important contribution towards achieving this aim and to promoting improvement and quality in the educational system.

*Through publishing school inspection reports the Inspectorate seeks to*

- acknowledge and affirm good practice in schools
- provide an assurance of quality in the education system

- identify areas for development and contribute to real improvement in schools
- encourage school self-review and development
- ensure a wider dissemination of good practice in and among schools
- provide authoritative and balanced information on the effectiveness of schools
- provide valuable information to parents, prospective parents, and students
- promote greater accountability and transparency.

### **1.3 What reports will be published?**

The Inspectorate operates a general inspection programme for schools and centres for education. Under this programme a selected number of schools is inspected in a cyclical manner. These evaluations and the subsequent reports are undertaken in accordance with the *Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate*.

The reports issued following these inspections take a number of forms, including:

- whole-school evaluation (WSE) reports
- subject inspection reports
- programme evaluation reports, for example reports on the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
- thematic inspections, for example *An Evaluation of Curriculum Implementation in Primary Schools: English, Mathematics and Visual Arts (2005)* and *ICT in Primary and Post-primary Schools* (forthcoming).

These inspections evaluate, as appropriate, the work of the school as a whole or the work of the school in the provision of an area of the curriculum. The Inspectorate's evaluation is based not solely on an examination of the work of an individual teacher or teachers but on the quality of the educational experience provided by the teacher or teachers and the board of management, and the quality of students' learning. The reports describe such aspects as the contributions of the school management and school planning as well as the quality of supports available to students. The findings of the evaluation presented in the report take cognisance of the context in which the school or the subject team or subject teacher or teachers in the school are operating.

Reports arising from the general inspection programme for schools and centres for education will be published in accordance with the principles and procedures described in these guidelines. The publication process

will strike a balance between respecting the right of individuals to privacy, on the one hand, and the right of parents and the wider public to information concerning the operation and effectiveness of publicly funded schools and centres for education.

All reports of the types listed above in section 1.3 will be published in their entirety. However, individual teachers, members of boards of management and inspectors will not be named in the reports.

#### **1.4 What reports will not be published?**

The Inspectorate will not publish reports arising solely from the inspection of the work of individual teachers. Examples of these reports include

- reports completed on the work of primary school teachers during their probationary period
- reports arising from the inspection of the work of teachers experiencing professional difficulties (for example inspections carried out under rules 161 and 162 of the *Rules for National Schools*, or circular 43/85 in schools managed by vocational education committees).

From time to time the Inspectorate may be asked by an administrative section of the Department to assist in reviewing how a complaint from a student or parent has been processed by the board of management of a school. Reports supplied by the Inspectorate to the administrative sections in these cases are also excluded from the publication process described in these guidelines.

#### **1.5 Will school data be included in the reports?**

Section 53 of the Education Act permits the Minister for Education and Science to refuse to publish data that would make possible the compilation of comparative tables with respect to the academic performance of students enrolled in schools. The Minister has confirmed that she is opposed to the publication of “league tables” based on examination or test data. The publication of school inspection reports will respect this principle.

Inspectors will continue to draw upon a wide range of evidence when evaluating the work of schools, including such information as students’ results in standardised tests, students’ reading ages, results in the state examinations, and student retention rates. However, inspection reports will not include numerical data that could be used to compile comparative tables.

## **1.6 Review**

These guidelines and the publication procedures they outline will be subject to review from time to time in the light of experience and in consultation with the education partners.

## 2 General principles

### 2.1 Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting

The general principles that guide inspectors as they engage in evaluation and reporting are set out in the *Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate*. The code provides guidance on maintaining professional relationships with the school community and on the standards that apply to the Inspectorate's evaluation procedures and reporting. Copies of the code are available on the web site of the Department of Education and Science ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)).

### 2.2 The inspection process

When carrying out inspections, the Inspectorate aims to ensure that

- the inspection process and outcomes are clear and open to scrutiny and accountability
- reports are clear and unambiguous and provide the appropriate level of detail for decision-making by boards of management, teachers, and others
- reports are written in the language of the school: normally, where the main medium of instruction in schools is Irish, all sections of the reports, other than sections/reports on the teaching of English, will be written in Irish; similarly, where the main medium of instruction is English, all sections/reports, other than those on the teaching of Irish, will be written in English. In addition, a board of management may request that a translation of a report to either language be made available to it
- reports are accurate and provide fair and balanced information that enables the users to make appropriate use of the information with confidence.

### 2.3 The publication process

When publishing inspection reports, the Inspectorate is committed to ensuring that

- boards of management, teachers, chief executive officers of vocational educational committees (where relevant) and parents' associations are informed, in advance of the inspection process, of the intention to publish the final report
- the board of management of the school has a right to respond in writing to the inspection report in advance of publication within the agreed guidelines and time limits

- normally, the response of the school, if furnished by the board of management, will be published with the original report.

## **2.4 The published reports**

The Inspectorate seeks to ensure that published reports are

- accessible: The reports will be disseminated in a way that achieves the highest degree of access by the public. Reports will be published on the department's web site, and in cases of difficulty the department will also provide a printed copy on request
- complete: The full report will be published in order to maintain balance and accuracy and to encourage the reading of the report in its entirety
- timely: The published report will be available in accordance with agreed time schedules.

## 3 The publication process

### 3.1 Publication procedures

#### *1. Preparation of the inspection report*

The publication process will not alter the in-school evaluation process that occurs in whole-school evaluation, subject inspection, or other evaluations. As at present, the inspector or inspectors will make an oral presentation of their findings and recommendations to the staff of the school (and to the board of management in the case of WSE evaluations) following the evaluation activity.

The Inspectorate will then complete the inspection report. The report will be subjected to the Inspectorate's normal quality assurance mechanisms.

#### *2. Inspection report issued to the school*

The Inspectorate Secretariat will receive the completed report from the reporting inspector. The Secretariat will send a copy of the report to the school principal, the chairperson of the school's board of management, and the chief executive officer in the case of schools under the management of a vocational education committee.

On receiving the inspection report, the chairperson of the board of management,<sup>2</sup> or a person authorised by him or her, will provide a copy of the report to each of the following:

- each teacher affected by the inspection. For example, a copy of a WSE report will normally be supplied to each member of the teaching staff (including teachers shared with other schools); a copy of a subject inspection report will be supplied to each teacher of the subject and to the principal and deputy principal
- each member of the board of management
- the school's patron or trustees.

It will be open to the chairperson to supply a copy of the report to other members of the staff; for example, in special schools this may include members of multi-disciplinary teams working in the school.

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<sup>2</sup> In the absence of the chairperson of the board of management, his or her duties, as described in sections 3.1 to 3.4 of these guidelines, may be undertaken by an acting chairperson.

### **3. Factual verification of the report**

When the report is issued to the principal and chairperson of the board of management, a *factual verification form* (see appendix 1) will accompany the report. The principal and the chairperson will be invited to draw the attention of the Inspectorate to any errors of fact in the inspection report, using this form. The factual verification form (or forms) will be returned to the Inspectorate Secretariat by the principal<sup>3</sup> or the chairperson of the board of management within twenty school days of the date of issue of the report.

The factual verification form (or forms), when returned to the Inspectorate Secretariat by the principal or chairperson, will be referred to the reporting inspector and the appropriate assistant chief inspector. If any errors of fact have been drawn to the attention of the Inspectorate, the report will be amended, as necessary.

### **4. School response: Options available to the board of management and teachers**

In addition to factual verification, any of the following actions may be taken when the report is issued to the principal and the chairperson of the board of management:

#### *OPTION A*

The board of management of the school may accept the report without comment and record this intention by returning the pro-forma *inspection report response form* to the Inspectorate within twenty school days of the date of issue of the inspection report.

#### *OPTION B*

The board of management may respond formally to the findings and recommendations of the report by using the pro-forma *inspection report response form* (see section 3.2 below and appendix 2). This must be done within twenty school days of the date of issue of the inspection report. Normally, if the board exercises this option, the school response will be included as an appendix to the published report.

#### *OPTION C*

The board of management or any individual teacher affected by the inspection may request a formal review of the inspection under the *Procedure for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13 (9) of the Education Act, 1998*.

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<sup>3</sup> In the absence of the principal, his or her duties, as described in sections 3.1 to 3.4 of these guidelines, may be undertaken by the deputy principal or acting principal.

### **5. Publication**

If the board of management has exercised option A or option B as described above, the Inspectorate will publish the inspection report (amended as a result of factual verification, if necessary) unless option C has been availed of by a teacher in the school. Usually, publication will take place within ten school days of receipt of the completed response form from the school. Normally, the school response will also be published by the Inspectorate (if a response has been supplied).

If the board of management or a teacher in the school has sought a review of the inspection or the inspection report (or both), the Inspectorate will adhere to the *Procedure for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under section 13 (9) of the Education Act, 1998*. The inspection report will not be published until the review has been completed and, if appropriate, any recommendations arising from the review have been addressed. On the completion of this process the publication of the final school inspection report will proceed in accordance with option A or B above.

On publication, a printed copy of the inspection report and the school response will be issued to the school patron or trustees, the chairperson of the board of management, the principal, the chief executive officer (in the case of schools under the management of a vocational education committee), and the parents' association in the school. The Inspectorate will publish the inspection report and the school response (if relevant) on the web site of the Department of Education and Science ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)).

### **6. No response**

If no response is received from the board of management of the school, and if option C has not been availed of by a teacher within the time limit (twenty school days from the date of issue of the report to the school), a null response is assumed, and the report will be published by the Inspectorate within a further ten school days.

## **3.2 School response**

The purpose of the school response is

- to allow the board of management of the school to respond to, and make observations on, the contents of the inspection report
- to allow the board of management to set out how it will use the report in the context of the school's ongoing programme of self-evaluation, planning, and improvement. A school will be able to demonstrate how it is engaged in self-improvement and development in response to the school inspection report.

Where a board of management chooses to furnish a school response to the Inspectorate, the response will be completed by using the pro-forma *inspection report response form* (see appendix 2).

- As a suggested guide, the total length of the school response will be approximately 500 words.
- Restrictions governing the content of the inspection report will also apply to the school response. For example, such individuals as teachers, members of the board of management and inspectors may not be named in the school response.
- The school response must be submitted to the Inspectorate by the chairperson of the board of management.
- Other than in exceptional circumstances, the school response will be published in its entirety, with the exception of the signature of the chairperson (section 4, inspection report response form), at the same time and in the same format as the school inspection report. If, for any exceptional reason, the Department decides not to publish the school response, the Inspectorate will inform the board of management of this decision and the reason or reasons for it.

### **3.3 Schools under the management of a vocational education committee**

In the case of schools operating under the authority of a vocational education committee, the duties of the chairperson and the board of management (as described in sections 3.1 and 3.2 of these guidelines) should be undertaken in consultation with the chief executive officer of the VEC. For example, the factual verification form will be completed by the chairperson in consultation with the chief executive officer of the VEC. Similarly, the school response should be formulated by the board of management in consultation with the chief executive officer of the VEC.

### **3.4 Access**

School inspection reports and the accompanying school responses (where relevant) will be available on the Department of Education and Science web site ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)).

## Appendix 1



### INSPECTION REPORT FACTUAL VERIFICATION FORM

<b>For office use</b>	
<b>School name:</b>	
<b>School roll number:</b>	
<b>Report type:</b>	WSE / subject inspection / other (delete as appropriate)
<b>Date of inspection:</b>	
<b>Verification by:</b>	Principal / Chairperson of BoM / CEO of VEC (delete as appropriate)

Please note below any errors of fact that you believe are included in the inspection report issued to your school. This factual verification may be completed in written or electronic format.

Page number:	Factual inaccuracy:

<b>Verification completed by:</b>	<b>Signature(s):</b>	<b>Date:</b>
School principal / Chairperson of BoM / CEO (delete as appropriate):		

Please return completed form (within 20 school days of the date of issue of the inspection report) to:

Inspectorate Secretariat  
 Block 3  
 Department of Education and Science  
 Marlborough Street  
 Dublin 1

Or e-mail to: [reports\\_inspectorate@education.gov.ie](mailto:reports_inspectorate@education.gov.ie)

## Appendix 2



### INSPECTION REPORT SCHOOL RESPONSE FORM

#### Section 1

<b>School name:</b>	
<b>School address:</b>	
<b>School roll number:</b>	
<b>Type of inspection report:</b>	WSE report / subject inspection report (delete as appropriate) Other (please specify):
<b>Date of issue of report to chairperson and principal:</b>	
<b>Office ref:</b>	

#### Section 2

Please indicate option A, B, or C ()

Option A	The board accepts the report as the final report available for publication.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Option B	The board wishes to formally respond to the findings and recommendations and agrees that this response will be included as an appendix to the published report.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Option C	The board wishes to request a review of the inspection. Requests for review of an inspection under the <i>Procedures for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13 (9) of the Education Act, 1998</i> , must be made in writing to the Chief Inspector.	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Please note:* If the school chooses either option A or option B it may not subsequently seek a review of the inspection in accordance with option C.

### Section 3

#### Option B: School response to inspection report finding and recommendations

This response should be a short document (a length of approximately 500 words is suggested as a guide). Please note that this section should NOT be completed in the case of an application for a review of the inspection in accordance with section 13 (9) of the Education Act, 1998.

**Area 1**

**Observations on the content of the inspection report**

**Area 2**

**Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

### Section 4

Signed:

Chairperson of BoM Date:

Signed:

CEO of VEC Date:

Please return the completed form (within 20 school days of the date of issue of the inspection report) to:  
Inspectorate Secretariat  
Block 3  
Department of Education and Science  
Marlborough Street  
Dublin 1  
or e-mail to [reports\\_inspectorate@education.gov.ie](mailto:reports_inspectorate@education.gov.ie)