

# School Evaluation

Including Proceedings of INTO  
Consultative Conference on Education  
Kilkenny, November 2005

Irish National Teachers' Organisation  
35 Parnell Square  
Dublin 1

Telephone: 01 8047700

Fax: 01 872 2462

Email: [info@into.ie](mailto:info@into.ie)

Web: <http://www.into.ie>

General Secretary: John Carr MA (Ed)

Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann  
35 Cearnóg Pharnell  
Baile Atha Cliath 1

Guthán: 01 8047700

Fax: 01 872 2462

Ríomhphost: [info@into.ie](mailto:info@into.ie)

Gréasán: <http://www.into.ie>

Árd Rúnai: John Carr MA (Ed)



# CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b>	1
<b>Part One</b>	
<b>School Evaluation</b>	3
DISCUSSION DOCUMENT AS CIRCULATED PRIOR TO CONFERENCE.	5
<b>Part Two</b>	
<b>Proceedings of the Consulative Conference on Education</b>	43
PRESENTATIONS	45
REPORT OF DISCUSSION GROUPS	57
<b>Appendices</b>	
QUESTIONNAIRE ON TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TO SCHOOL EVALUATION	63
GENERAL COMMENTS FROM TEACHERS ON WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION	67
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION	75
<b>Bibliography</b>	84

# Foreword

During the 1970s, inspectors began to focus on the work of schools as a whole in their evaluation of the system and the concept of *Tuairisc Scoile*, a report on the work of the school, developed. During the 1980s the concept of whole school planning emerged, although it wasn't until the 1990s that its development was properly supported. These developments evolved in the context of quality assurance in education. Today, there is a growing recognition that an integrated quality assurance approach has an important role to play in enhancing the educational experience of children and in improving learning outcomes. This approach emphasises that quality is best achieved through a combination of complementary measures. Some of these are internal to the school and allow the school community to review and enhance the learning experience for children, while others are external. External evaluation, such as whole school evaluation (WSE), can also make its contribution to school quality. The Inspectorate's objective is to provide an evaluation experience that helps to create within schools a dynamic for school self-evaluation and improvement in an open and participative way and in a manner that includes the entire school community. It is the INTO's hope that the external evaluation experienced by schools will serve as a positive element in the overall challenge that the school planning agenda presents.

Quality assurance by the Inspectorate has long been part of the primary school. There were aspects of the old system that the INTO sought to change such as the single focus on classroom activities. Very often, teaching and learning are influenced by factors outside the classroom such as funding, school buildings and support from parents for the school. It is important that all aspects of school life are evaluated in a fair and balanced manner. Following a pilot introduction of WSE, the Department has begun the process of introducing WSE to all primary schools. It was considered, timely, therefore, for the INTO Education Committee to carry out research to assess the initial reaction of teachers to their experiences of the WSE process. The findings of this research, which were presented at the Consultative Conference on Education in Kilkenny, November 2004 are included in this report in addition to the proceedings of the conference.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the INTO Education Committee for their contribution in preparing this report. I would also like to thank Mr Eamon Murtagh, Assistant Chief Inspector with the Department of Education and Science, for presenting the Department's perspective on school evaluation. The contribution of Claire Garvey, Ann McConnell, Lori Kealy and Niamh Corduff in preparing the report

for publication is also acknowledged. In particular I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Deirbhile Nic Craith and Peter Mullan, Senior Officials, who had overall responsibility for compiling this report. It is a further addition to the INTO's contribution to educational research.

John Carr, MA (Ed)  
General Secretary  
March 2006

# **PART ONE**

---

## **SCHOOL EVALUATION DISCUSSION DOCUMENT**

**As Circulated Prior to INTO Consultative  
Conference on Education**





---

# Discussion Document Circulated Prior to Conference

## Introduction

According to T. J. O’Connell in *100 Years of Progress – the Story of the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, 1868 to 1968*, the system of inspection of teachers and schools has been a central concern for the INTO. Devoting a whole chapter (Chapter Ten) of this substantial work to the topic, O’Connell wrote; “Ever since education became the concern of the State, inspection and inspectors have been a significant feature of the educational administrative system.” He also recorded that “the attitude of the teachers towards the inspection system as operated during the greater part of that period could be summed up as one of outspoken criticism.” Perhaps not unsurprisingly, therefore, he noted that inspection was a hardy annual on the INTO congress agenda especially since the beginning of the 20th century.

An examination of Congress agendas since the early 1900s shows that the issue has remained one of concern to primary teachers. However, it must be stated that the concerns of teachers and the context in which teachers and schools are evaluated today have changed radically. This change was evident as far back as 1968 when O’Connell was able to record that “there has come about in recent years a notable lessening of the strained relations which so long existed between the teachers and the education authorities”. O’Connell made reference to “a growing co-operation between inspectors and teachers” and stated that work in such conditions was “more pleasant for all concerned”. In relation to the change that was taking place around this time O’Connell concluded that “already there is evidence to show that the prophets of gloom who believed that a tight rein on the teacher was necessary to bring out his best effort have been confounded”.

This analysis of more cordial relations followed the abolition in the late fifties of the rating system. According to O’Connell it was agreed that the annual voucher would, in future, be a report on the school as a whole and not on the individual teacher and that such general inspections would be held less frequently. This significant change meant that “fault finding, threats and penalties as incentives were to be replaced by

sympathy, friendliness and co-operation.” A second key development that paved the way for a change in relations between teachers and the Inspectorate at that time was the abolition of the Primary Certificate and the subsequent introduction of the 1971 Curriculum with its child centred philosophy. This fundamentally changed the role of the teacher from one who implemented a programme of instruction designed and controlled by others to one in which the teacher was given a central role in the learning process of designing and implementing learning opportunities suited to the child’s needs.

In the intervening thirty years a great deal of further change has taken place in the primary education system in relation to the inspection of teachers and the evaluation of the work of schools. The process of looking at the work of the school as a whole has evolved over the years with the general agreement of the INTO. Responsibility for planning the work of the school as a whole is the prerogative of the board of management of the individual school. The teaching staff of the school have a central, professional role in this matter. Consultation in relation to change at national level is a feature of the education system.

Nevertheless, the re-emergence of matters relating to the evaluation of schools as an item on the INTO Congress agenda over the past number of years makes consideration of the issue a timely and valid one for the INTO Education Conference. Changing emphases within the process of school evaluation such as the introduction of Whole School Evaluation, the implementation of an increasing number of focussed evaluations, changes in legislation and demands for more information on the work of schools are among the many issues that must be considered.

#### INTO RESEARCH PROJECT

The INTO Education Committee, at the request of the CEC, decided to undertake a research project on the issue of school evaluation with particular emphasis on the introduction of Whole School Evaluation (WSE). The objective of the study was to study the change of format from the Tuairisc Scoile school evaluation to the Whole School Evaluation model and its impact on classroom teachers and principal teachers. This was done through the use of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. In each INTO District where a WSE was carried out during the school year 2003-2004 a research project took place in that school. To mirror this study a similar study took place in a school of similar size and background within the same District where a Tuairisc Scoile was undertaken.

Participants were guaranteed that all questionnaire responses and the results of the semi-structured interviews would be anonymous and confidential and that individual schools/teachers and other participating individuals would not be named in the research.

The INTO believes that school evaluation is an essential part of quality assurance

within the education system with the potential to contribute to continual and ongoing improvement. For this process to be successful, it is essential that it retains the confidence and support of teachers and therefore it is vital that teachers are consulted in relation to change and provided with opportunities to make an input into the development of change.

## **The Development of Whole School Evaluation**

The White Paper on Education *Charting our Education Future* outlined proposals in relation to the future of school inspections. In particular it made reference to in-depth inspections on a range of schools to be carried out on a regular basis. It was stated that “school inspection would take place within an agreed time frame, with a whole school focus, and in co-operation with the school in the context of a school plan.”

In December, 1995 the Minister for Education, Niamh Bhreathnach, announced her intention to begin a consultative process with the education partners to gradually introduce a new model of school inspection in both primary and post primary schools. This announcement was made at an Inspectors’ Conference in Limerick. In a press release relating to the announcement, the Department of Education stated that the approach would ensure that each school was inspected and reported upon as a unit. The emphasis would be on evaluation of the school as a whole and not on appraisal of individual teachers. It went on to state that inspection would focus on the development of staff, the quality of school buildings, and on the provision for meeting individual students’ needs. It would be concerned with the manner in which all the resources of the school, human, physical and financial were used.

Whole School Inspection (the term used at the time) was announced as a partnership exercise between the schools and the Inspectorate. The contribution of schools to the inspection process was set out in the context of schools engaging in self-appraisal as a matter of routine. The Department’s announcement stated that criteria for evaluation, which would facilitate fair, objective and balanced judgement, would be developed in consultation with the partners and these would be clear to schools prior to inspection. A timeframe and a scheme of work for the introduction of the new format were laid out by the Minister for Education.

In the first instance, the Inspectorate was requested to undertake preparatory work on Whole School Inspection. This was to be followed by discussions with the partners in early 1996, after which a pilot project in a small number of schools would be established. It was announced that, following the pilot stage and feedback from the schools and the education partners, an inspection document would be drawn up after which Whole School Inspection would eventually be extended to a larger number of schools.

## Conference on Whole School Inspection

In March 1996, a one day seminar was held in Dublin on the issue of Whole School Inspection involving the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and the education partners. The proceedings of this one day seminar were subsequently published by the Department of Education in a document entitled, *Whole School Inspection (WSI) Consultative Conference*.

In his introductory remarks to the conference, Seán McGlennáin, Chief Inspector, stated that the intention of the Department of Education was to ensure that all the partners had an opportunity to hear the Department's view on school inspection. He also stated that the Department was equally determined to listen to what the partners had to say on the issue. He recognised that while inspection could be an emotive issue, there was increasing collaboration in regard to planning and managing change particularly in the area of devising new curricula, organising incareer development programmes for teachers and preparing a legislative framework for the education system.

He outlined the different levels of evaluation from the individual pupil, the class, particular sections of the school up to the whole school itself. He stated that the major part of this process may be the concern of the school itself. He also pointed out that parents and other stakeholders, as well as the wider community needed to be assured that schools were satisfying a number of diverging issues.

At the system level, he pointed out the need for the Department of Education to be aware of the extent to which Government policy in education was being met. However, he acknowledged that schools were complex organisations with many factors influencing effectiveness at any one time. He also acknowledged that schools have internal variance and can vary over time. He pointed out that while many teachers were highly professionally qualified, that teachers themselves had argued for further training and professional development. Another contextual factor was the increasing devolution of authority to schools and the broadening of management structures and the increasing involvement and participation of parents in schools.

At the same conference an overview of the intended Whole School Inspection was provided by Gabriel Harrison. He placed Whole School Inspection in a broad framework consisting of the improvement of individual schools as a first step in developing and improving the system. He stated that among proposals contained in the *White Paper* to bring this about were:

- 1 Whole School collaborative planning.
- 1 School self review.
- 1 School based pupil assessment.

He argued that Whole School Inspection fitted into the context of those practices

and that it was important that inspection procedures would be in keeping with this new reality. He stated that school inspection of the future would assess the quality and nature of the education provided by the schools and the extent to which they were achieving objectives as set out in school plans. It would accommodate the outcomes of school based pupil assessment and of school review. According to Harrison there were a number of underlying purposes of school inspection.

#### SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The improvement of the quality of education in the school is seen as the primary purpose of school inspection. It is intended that inspection will identify and affirm good practice in schools and be supportive of it. It is important also that existing good practices and approaches validated elsewhere can be introduced to schools leading to further improvement. In addition, in order to reflect the strengths of the schools being inspected, the inspection process will also provide strategies for helping schools which may be experiencing difficulties. These strategies will be linked to appropriate in-career development for teachers. Further support will be available to schools from their named school inspector.

#### SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT

Through school inspection, the Department of Education can acquire objective information as to how the aims and policies for the system are being implemented in the schools. This means that where necessary or desirable, policies can be changed or new policies developed.

#### ACCOUNTABILITY

Schools have very definite accountability to their pupils, parents, management boards and indeed to the wider community served by them. The State, through the Inspectorate, acts on behalf of these, and provides appropriate information to them on the functioning of schools.

He proceeded to outline a number of characteristics or features of Whole School Inspection. In the first instance, Whole School Inspection was envisaged as a form of inspection in evaluating a school as a unit. It recognised that the individual was an important axis – a key focus in the effort to evaluate and improve the education system. He also placed this in the context of a strong movement, particularly in OECD countries, to try to measure ‘School Effect’ and to assess ‘Value Added’ through new statistical techniques.

A second feature of Whole School Inspection was that it would always focus on the following features of schools:

- 1 the quality of school management;
- 1 the quality of school planning; and
- 1 the quality of teaching and learning.

He stated that it would be general practice at primary level as heretofore to inspect a school in its totality and that this would be possible in some post primary schools as well. However, he pointed out that Whole School Inspection might focus on certain aspects of work throughout the whole school such as:

- 1 the inspection of a particular subject or range of subjects across a school;
- 1 the inspection of a particular course; and
- 1 the inspection of a particular theme or aspect of school life, such as literacy, early childhood education or special needs education.

Other characteristics of Whole School Inspection would include the following.

- 1 It would be conducted on a range of schools on a regular cyclical basis, length of the cycle being related to the numbers of inspectors.
- 1 Whole school Inspection would be agreed within a definite timeframe. A team approach to inspection would be used. The larger the school, the larger the team would be.
- 1 The Whole School Evaluation would be more transparent than any previous inspection process. It would be carried out on a partnership basis, between schools and the Inspectorate. There would be a shared collaborative approach arising from discussions and consultation with the partners.
- 1 There would be a strong attempt at making Whole School Inspection a more valid and reliable evaluation of school performance and effectiveness. This would be achieved through the clear elaboration of what was being inspected and the use of agreed performance indicators and criteria of evaluation.
- 1 Whole School Inspection would move towards an agreed system for taking school context factors into account, when evaluations were made and reports furnished.
- 1 The Department of Education hoped to introduce a 'value added' component in school inspection and reporting.
- 1 A further feature of Whole School Inspection was that it would evaluate much more than student achievement. Such evaluation would include the deployment of staff, the quality of school buildings, the extent to which educational guidelines were being followed, the provision for pupils with special educational needs and the manner in which the resources of the school were being used.

- 1 It would involve discussions with school management, teaching staff and representatives of parents to ensure that the particular circumstances of each school are taken fully into account.

A Discussion Document on Whole School Inspection was produced in conjunction with the Conference in March 1996. It dealt with various issues including the rationale for inspection and the organisation of the Inspectorate. The latter, based on proposals to organise the Inspectorate on regional and central levels, was subsequently revised in the context of overall education policy.

A number of procedures were put forward for consideration by the partners. These included:

- 1 Notification of a WSI to the board of management and staff of the school before the end of September in the year of inspection.
- 1 Pre-inspection meetings with management, school staff and parents to clarify the issues that need to be evaluated in the school; to orient the inspection in a way that is designed to gain all the partners' co-operation; and to bring about the maximum benefit for the school of the future.
- 1 Study of the school plan.
- 1 Analysis of school data sources within the Department of Education.
- 1 Study of quantitative data supplied by the school such as pupil assessment records, enrolment and attendance figures.
- 1 Analysis of school context factors such as resources, staffing and socio-economic indicators.
- 1 Agreement on the inspection plan and communication of this to the partners
- 1 Evaluation of the outcomes of school self-review.
- 1 Actual evaluation of the school.
- 1 Collation and analysis of school inspection data.
- 1 Preparation of a draft report.
- 1 Post-inspection meetings with management, staff and parents.
- 1 Final report forwarded to the Department, board of management and staff within agreed timeframes.
- 1 Copy of the school report to be available to parents on request.

The document also noted that a set of performance indicators and evaluation criteria would be designed and made available to the partners at an early stage. These were intended to ensure objective measurement and consistency in the procedures. It was also hoped that these would be adopted by schools as an aid to internal evaluation.

A report on the Whole School Inspection Conference was prepared by Dr Seamus McGuinness of Trinity College. The report noted that WSI had been a feature of the

primary system since the mid 1980s and had worked successfully. However, the rationale for the introduction of the new system was questioned, particularly the proposal to involve inspectors who were not familiar with the background of the school. It expressed a number of reservations. Among these were:

- 1 Reports could be misinterpreted or even misquoted.
- 1 Unhealthy and unfair comparison of schools, running counter to the aim of WSI could result.
- 1 Additional workload for schools, especially for principal teachers.
- 1 Interruption to the work of the school.
- 1 The lack of a systemic approach to the introduction of innovation could lead to system and teacher overload.
- 1 The need to develop a culture of planning and self review in schools over time.
- 1 There was a need to manage the process with sensitivity so that teacher confidence was not undermined.
- 1 Performance indicators would impose an objectives model of evaluation on the system and important factors, less amenable to precise measurement, might be excluded.
- 1 The development of performance indicators for principal teachers unfairly singled out principals in the process.

### **Pilot Project on Whole School Evaluation**

Following the conference the term Whole School Evaluation was adopted to replace the term Whole School Inspection and a pilot project on Whole School Evaluation was organised during 1998 and 1999. A report on the Pilot Project was published by the Department of Education and Science in September 1999. Eighteen primary schools and seventeen post primary schools took part in the project which was held in two phases. The first took place between March and May 1998 and involved twenty-four schools while the second took place in February and March 1999 and involved eleven schools.

At primary level at least two inspectors were involved including the local inspector. In the case of larger schools, where a number of inspectors were involved, these usually came from the same division as the local inspector. As part of the pilot project, meetings with the teaching staff were held as well as meetings with the board of management, including the parents' representatives.

The report identified a number of issues which needed to be addressed in the context of moving the process forward. These included resource provision, time, the need for 'hard' data and the importance of parents in the process.

In regard to one aspect of Whole School Evaluation – parental involvement in the

process – the report stated that, “the WSE process needs to explore how to best incorporate the parents’ perspective in both the evaluation by the Inspectorate and in the report”. As part of the pilot project, parent representatives on the board of management were met both at pre- and post-evaluation meetings. The report recommended that ways should be found in which parents could be given the opportunity to express their views both through questionnaires and through meetings of a wider range of groupings such as parents’ associations, parents’ councils and also through meetings with individual parents in schools.

## Evaluation Criteria

Following INTO representations, there was substantial redrafting and redesign of the performance indicators as outlined at the 1996 Conference. The original proposal contained a four point scale attaching to each indicator including the evaluation ratings very good, good, fair and weak.

In September 2001, the Inspectorate wrote to the INTO enclosing what it termed a pre-press copy of the criteria for school evaluation. Entitled *Evaluating Schools – Criteria for Use in Self-Evaluation and in External Evaluation*, this document stated that the evaluation criteria incorporated five broad dimensions of quality in the operation of a school. The document referred to these areas as follows:

- 1 Quality of School Management.
- 1 Quality of School Planning.
- 1 Quality of Curriculum Planning.
- 1 Quality of Learning and Teaching in Subject/ Curriculum Area.
- 1 Quality of Support for Students.

Each of these areas was divided into aspects representing the different activities collectively constituting the area of the school’s operation which was to be evaluated. The aspects were further broken down into components. Each component contained a statement of performance delineating two levels of performance by a school. These were an optimal level of achievement and a related level of achievement where there was scope for further development.

The INTO produced a comprehensive response to this document which resulted in a major redrafting. Among the issues raised by the INTO were that it was preferable to produce separate documents for primary and second level schools which would reduce the apparent number of the criteria and allow each sector to focus on what was relevant to them. The INTO response to the document proposed that there be only one level within each criteria. It argued that the production of two levels would crudely divide schools into what might be considered as pass and fail categories with

respect to each criteria. The INTO argued that the Department of Education and Science levels were at best arbitrary descriptions that did no justice to the complexity and uniqueness of school organisation, development and operation. It was argued that they could lead to crude tallying of level one and level two descriptions and subsequent rating of schools.

It was suggested that by providing one general description, the document could serve as the basis for internal development as well as for external evaluation.

The INTO stated its belief that the Inspectorate could qualify and/or add description to the statements based on the evaluation process. This would allow inspectors to take into account the specific and unique context in which schools operate. It would also allow inspectors to write reports in a non-threatening way that contained worthwhile and meaningful suggestions for future development.

Following this, the DES substantially redrafted the document, produced different documents for primary and post primary schools and included only one level of descriptor for each of the criteria. These were contained in the document *Looking at our School* which was published by the Department of Education and Science and circulated to all schools in 2003.

## **Introduction of Whole School Evaluation**

In April 2003, the Minister for Education and Science announced that he had decided to begin the process of introducing Whole School Evaluation and that he would develop the role of parents in the process as highlighted in 1998/99 pilot project report. He stated that it was his strong view that parents, duly elected as officers of Parents' Associations established under the Education Act, had a legitimate role to play in Whole School Evaluation process.

Following this announcement, the INTO met with members of the Inspectorate who informed INTO representatives that the implementation of WSE would commence in a small number of primary schools (approximately 20) of varying sizes in the school year 2003/04 (and a proportionate number of second level schools). They stated their intention that WSE would only gradually replace Tuairiscí Scoile and that the 20 WSE evaluations planned in 2003 would take place instead of Tuairiscí Scoile that were already planned for those schools.

The Inspectorate informed the INTO that in schools where WSE was to take place, their intention was to meet with elected officers of Parents' Associations, where such Parents' Associations were affiliated to the National Parents' Council. Where Parents' Associations do not exist or where they were not affiliated to the NPC, it was the intention to meet with parental representatives on the board of management.

The Inspectorate stated that parameters would be set around these meetings and that safeguards would be in place, in particular where difficulties arise or where

allegations are made against particular teachers. It was their intention to draw up a pro-forma agenda which would form the basis for the meeting, and matters raised at the meeting would be confined to items on the agenda. They also stated that this process would not in any way bypass the established complaints procedure.

Where a properly constituted parents' association exists, the inspector would formally write to the parents' association inviting three officers to meet with the inspector carrying out the WSE to discuss aspects of the work of the school. It was envisaged that this letter of invitation would outline the purpose of whole school evaluation, provide a pro form agenda and format for the meeting, suggest a time and venue for the meeting, and set down the procedures to be followed during the meeting. The Inspectorate informed the INTO that the standard agenda would provide for discussion on the following topics.

- 1 The school environment.
- 1 School policies, eg, homework and discipline.
- 1 Parental perspectives on the work and organisation of the school as a whole.
- 1 Arrangements by the school for consultation with parents (individually and as a group).
- 1 Procedures for providing written reports to parents on the progress of their children.
- 1 Future development of the school.

In addition to meeting with representatives of the Parents' Association, the inspector (as part of the WSE process) would meet with the board of management. The pre-evaluation and post-evaluation meetings with members of the teaching staff would be held in the same way as Tuairiscí Scoile. A summary of the main points of the discussion with parental representatives, duly verified for accuracy by the principal teacher and the chairperson of the board of management, would be included in the WSE report.

The Inspectorate informed the INTO of their intention to review with the partners the process of WSE after a period of one year.

The Central Executive Committee considered these matters at its meeting on 9 and 10 October 2003. In particular, the CEC noted DES assurances that such consultations with parents would not address or discuss complaints by individual parents about the running of the school or the work of individual teachers. This was consistent with the principles of due process and with the implementation of agreed complaints and other appropriate procedures. Notwithstanding this assurance, the Executive remained concerned that the proposed consultation between the Inspectorate and Officers of the Parents' Association were to take place without direct input from representatives of the school – principal or the chairperson of the board of management.

The INTO argued that consultations with parents at local level would be more beneficial if the school was in a position to have a direct input into the discussions – particularly where issues such as school policies, communication between the school and parents, school ethos, environment and facilities were discussed.

The CEC did, however, note that the Inspectorate proposed keeping a record of meetings with the officers of the parents' association and furnishing that record to the chairperson of the board of management and the principal teacher or observation and verification for accuracy.

Following this meeting, the INTO Education Committee began work on the issue of school evaluation. Each of the schools where WSE was to take place was written to by the General Secretary informing them of the proposed research and seeking their co-operation. This was followed by contact with the Education Committee representative who arranged for structured interviews to take place and for the completion of questionnaires by members of staff. Additional comments by teachers in relation to the process were noted and included.

## **INTO SURVEY ON WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION**

### **Survey Results**

A total of 115 responses to the questionnaire were received from teachers in 15 schools where Whole School Evaluations were carried out during the school year 2003-2004.

### **Teacher Accountability for their Work**

There was universal agreement that teachers should be accountable for their work in schools. Nine out of ten teachers either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposition that “teachers are already accountable for their work”. However, more than 50% of those who responded were of the opinion that there were better ways of evaluating the work of teachers than currently exist. Analysis of follow up interviews showed that teachers were of the opinion that there was a need to refine some procedures involved in inspection and introduce more consistency into the process.

### **Teaching in Front of Inspectors**

On the issue of experienced teachers being required to teach in front of an inspector as part of school evaluation, almost forty percent of those surveyed were in agreement with the proposition that teachers with over ten years experience should not be expected to teach in front of an inspector. Interviews with teachers showed that many viewed the process as having to put on a performance for the inspector which was variously described as stressful, professionally demeaning and unrelated to teaching in an everyday context.

The INTO notes the current position of the Inspectorate to deal sensitively with the issue of teachers who find teaching in front of an inspector an extraordinarily stressful activity. In this regard the INTO would welcome further discussions on this matter.

### **Advance Notice/Information to Schools**

Sixty Five percent of teachers surveyed stated that they were concerned when they were informed that WSE was to take place in their schools. Only 20% were not concerned. One third of teachers stated that pre-inspection literature from the Department of Education and Science clarified issues relating to school evaluation. A number of issues arose regarding the provision of information to schools in relation to the expected time frames for evaluation. A number of schools reported that they would wish to see indicative dates for the evaluation provided with the notice

informing schools that a WSE was to take place. It was also recommended that information leaflets would issue to schools outlining the process in detail, particularly in the context of moving from one form of evaluation to another.

There was general satisfaction with the pre-evaluation meeting, with a majority of teachers surveyed stating that there was ample opportunity at the meeting to discuss the format and details of whole school evaluation. Eighty four percent of teachers stated that the pre-inspection meeting with the inspector clarified the process of WSE compared to 11% who said that the pre-inspection meeting did not clarify the process. While this is welcome, the survey also showed that many teachers (one in five) were not satisfied that there was sufficient opportunity to discuss the format or details of the forthcoming WSE.

There is a need for more detailed examination of these findings as there appear to be ad hoc arrangements made to facilitate such meetings. This is unsatisfactory and improvement might be achieved through the scheduling of discrete time for the meeting at a time when all teachers are free to attend. Advance notice of the meeting should also be provided along with an agenda for the meeting. Seventy percent of teachers were of the opinion that the pre-inspection meeting set a positive context for the subsequent process. This is welcomed by the INTO.

## **Classroom Visits**

Teachers' opinions of actual classroom visits were, in general, very positive. Seventy seven percent were of the opinion that the inspector's visit to the classroom was thorough compared to less than 20% who said that it was not. High satisfaction ratings were achieved for the way in which the inspector carried out duties in the classroom. Ninety six percent of teachers were of the opinion that the inspector was courteous during the visit to the classroom, while 92% were of the opinion that the inspector carried out her/his duties in relation to WSE in a professional manner. Other comments received by the INTO included "inspector was respectful of the professional position of the teacher".

On the issue of the inspection process being overly concerned with written preparation, 47% of those surveyed were of the opinion that the process was overly concerned with the teachers' written preparation. Almost four in five teachers stated that the inspection process involved a fair examination of interactions in the classroom.

Eighty four percent of those surveyed were of the opinion that the inspectors' evaluation was objective, while 92% of teachers said that the inspector, whilst in the classroom, demonstrated a good understanding of the primary school curriculum. That said, a number of teachers pointed out specific incidences of inspectors not having "a proper understanding" of the roles of resource and learning support teachers.

Over four out of every five teachers found teaching in the presence of an inspector a stressful activity. Four out of five of those rated it as a very stressful activity and 37% rated it as stressful. Only one in ten teachers found it to be not stressful. Twenty percent of those surveyed did not find the oral feedback given by the inspector at the end of the class useful while 64% of those surveyed found this feedback useful.

Almost one in nine of the teachers surveyed were of the opinion that the inspector had agreed to the format / details as outlined in the pre-inspection meeting.

### **Meetings with Boards of Management**

Eighty nine percent of those surveyed had no objection to the inspectors meeting with members of the board of management as part of the whole school evaluation process. That said, the INTO received several reports of meetings with members of boards of management where the complete responsibility for responding to questions and providing information fell to the principal teacher. This may have been a factor of newly established boards of management, where a large number of board members were first time members and unable to make a substantial contribution. In this context, the INTO notes that there is a need for a substantial investment in training for members of boards of management and would welcome the support of the Inspectorate in seeking resource provision for same.

### **Parental Consultation**

Thirty six percent of teachers were of the opinion that parents had a right to access **all** information contained in a WSE Report. However, 60% of teachers disagreed with this proposition and were of the opinion that there were a number of professional issues that could be regarded as best communicated to teachers only. Sixty two percent of teachers were not opposed to parental consultation as part of the WSE process compared to 20% who were opposed.

In relation to the use of a questionnaire to sample or survey parental attitudes to aspects of the operation of a school almost 50% of teachers stated that it would not be a fair way of assessing parental opinion.

### **Publication of School Reports**

Only a small number (6%) of teachers were in favour of primary school reports being published on the internet compared to nearly ninety percent of teachers who opposed such publication. Ninety percent of teachers disagreed with the proposition that primary school reports should be available on request to the media compared to only 5% who stated that these reports should be available.

## Issuing of Reports to Schools

Over the course of the last year the INTO has been made aware of significant delays in issuing reports of school evaluations to schools. The INTO recognises that in the recent past the Inspectorate has been under-resourced in terms of personnel and has had to undertake a significant other amount of case work.

Nevertheless, the INTO believes that delays of the scale reported are unacceptable and in the long term damaging to the process of school evaluation. A school report is a snapshot of the operation of a school at a particular time. Schools develop and change over time and consequently, a delay of up to twelve months in forwarding a report to a school can devalue its contents in terms of relevancy. It can also de-motivate a school staff in that realistic expectations of bringing the evaluative process to a conclusion are not being met in some cases.

## General Observations of Teachers

Thirty eight percent of teachers reported that WSE was an improvement over Tuairisc Scoile. However, a significant number (44%) expressed no opinion in relation to this matter. Nearly three quarters of teachers were of the opinion that WSE could be improved. Two thirds of teachers stated their belief that WSE would contribute to school improvement while 62% rated WSE, as carried out, a positive experience.

## Various issues Emerging from Interviews

### ENGAGING WITH TEACHERS

Among the descriptions of the engagement by inspectors with teachers were: courteous, pleasant, kind, helpful, friendly and professional.

Teachers were of the view that more time was needed to evaluate non-classroom situations such as the yard and school-wide events such as assemblies. It was argued that inspectors should sit down with staff members after each classroom visit and listen to what the teachers wanted to tell them about their work in the school. Many were critical about what they saw as “little or no oral feedback at the end of the visits”.

A number of teachers stated that, while in general they considered the WSE a satisfactory experience, with a few modifications it could be significantly improved. These all revolved around making the process more of a genuine partnership without compromising the Inspectorate’s responsibilities. In particular, these related to the inspectors being more prepared to listen to staff opinions on aspects of school life in pre-evaluation meetings “in addition to their own checklists”.

Teachers stated their belief that at the post-evaluation meetings the inspectors should discuss their suggestions for future development with the staff and principal in

a genuine way and not present as a 'fait accompli'. This would ensure the school buying into the recommendations. It would also avoid the situation of some recommendations being "based on inspectors simply getting it wrong due to lack of understanding and over reliance on written documentation".

There was a suggestion that specific help should be available to schools such as SDP (School Development Planning) to enable real follow-up to take place. It was stated that follow-up in the way of ongoing development and advice on resources was poor.

However, some did not feel that WSE was a worthwhile exercise. Teachers criticised the delivering of a verbal report and providing only a minimum time for discussion. Others stated that there was no opportunity to discuss the report.

#### WRITTEN REPORTS

Teachers stated their desire for dialogue at national level in terms of how school reports would be written up in future given that, to date, the circulation of these reports had been confined to teachers. Many argued that there would be a need to ensure that reports could not be misinterpreted by non-professionals.

Teachers expressed concern and disappointment at the long time taken to get the written report into schools after the WSE. They argued that this time lag often made elements of the report redundant, leading to a weakening of the effect of the overall report.

Others pointed to a need to vary the format/presentation of the report. One teacher reported that regarding the format "everything is fine but... gets very repetitive and depressing".

#### CONSULTATION WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Some teachers described the WSE process as a "positive experience for the school" and stated that the "involvement of the board of management and the parents' association is a good thing". Others expressed reservations that while a questionnaire to parents could be very informative it could also open a "can of worms" if the questionnaire was not specific and simple.

Some teachers feared that parental involvement in WSE might lead to a small minority of parents "nit-picking" when principals and teachers were working flat out to provide an excellent quality of education. Teachers were adamant that parents were not qualified to give a fair opinion on curriculum matters.

#### WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION

Some teachers argued that while WSE was in general positive, large parts of reports were based on the 'cuntas miosúil' (monthly report) provided in advance, and many comments in the report were based on information in the monthly report rather than on what was seen and observed. Teachers complained that there was too much

emphasis on ‘cuntas míosúil’, ‘notaí seachtaine’ (weekly notes), organisational plans, policies and legal documents.

Many teachers were highly critical of the amount of paper work which takes away from the overall service to parents and pupils. Comments about the over-emphasis on paper work were frequent.

## **Additional Comments**

A number of teachers raised the issue of untrained personnel, acting as substitutes or temporary teachers, as having a distorting effect on the overall, long-term work of the school. This they argued should be acknowledged where it occurs.

The issue of teachers who were recovering from serious illness needs to be examined in the context of WSE in terms of the extra stress and workload involved.

It was also suggested that all the inspectors involved in the evaluation should attend a school’s post-evaluation meetings.

There were several complaints about aspects of the evaluation not taking place at the time agreed. One was postponed a number of times which was seen as unprofessional.

There was strong criticism that some of the meetings were held outside of school time. Some details of School Evaluation also require examination. One teacher argued that classroom visits in the afternoon are not as positive as those held in the morning as both children and teachers can be tired. There is a need to ensure that this is taken into account.

Another teacher reported that one positive aspect was “knowing the exact date the inspectors were to call and exactly which subjects they would examine”.

## **Interviews with Schools where WSE was Implemented.**

### **SCHOOL ONE**

The teaching staff in this school consists of a teaching principal, five class teachers, a shared learning support teacher and a special class teacher. The school also shares a Home School Community Liaison Teacher who is based in another school. The school is designated as disadvantaged. The school is located in the north of the country and is a mixed school enrolling pupils from junior infants to sixth class.

This school was due to have a Tuairisc Scoile during the school year 2003-2004. The school was notified that this was to be changed to a Whole School Evaluation in October 2003. The teachers stated that they would have liked to have received a definite date for this process. The principal had to ring the inspector at Easter to enquire about the process and the intended timeframe.

One inspector who was the local school inspector met with the principal teacher

first and then with the teaching staff. The teachers described the meeting as being very much a discussion and there was an opportunity for specific questions to be asked and answered. The staff described the meeting as “quite official”.

Two inspectors undertook the Whole School Evaluation. One of the inspectors was the school’s designated inspector and the other was assigned to a neighbouring area.

The teaching staff were informed in advance that Irish, English and mathematics would be inspected along with two other subjects. These were specified as science and music. As part of the Whole School Evaluation the inspectors observed all of the teachers in their teaching. They checked the children’s copybooks as part of the process. They appeared to place an emphasis on the use of concrete materials in mathematics. The use of the ‘thematic web’ was commented upon and praised by the inspectors. The inspector questioned the teachers rather than the pupils. There was a thorough examination of all the teachers’ notes and school plan. The teaching staff were upset that a five year plan was sought by the Inspectorate as this did not form part of the work that they had already undertaken on School Development Planning.

The teachers formed the opinion that there was a big difference between Whole School Evaluation and the more usual Tuairisc Scoile. However, they put this difference down, not to workload, but rather the personalities involved. It was agreed that Whole School Evaluation was not as positive an experience as the general inspection of Tuairisc Scoile. The teachers felt that Whole School Evaluation failed to emphasise and highlight the positive things that were happening.

The learning support teacher in this particular school is very experienced and highly qualified, so the inspector may have been uneasy. The meeting with parents was a bit disorganised as the parents had not received the questions but these were faxed through at a late stage. As this was a new experience, the parents were anxious, as they had great respect for the school and were the parent representatives on a new board of management. The principal teacher had to remind one of the inspectors of the importance to praise and give positive feedback to staff. It was felt that feedback was too impersonal at times. There was no wish to record anything about the proposed school building programme yet suggestions made by one inspector would require more space.

In general, it was felt that Whole School Evaluation had the potential to improve school evaluation. However, there was concern over the fact that time may be devoted to performance and that the staff were glad to be back teaching. The main concern related to differences in personalities. The view of the staff in this particular school was that there was nothing to fear from Whole School Evaluation.

## SCHOOL TWO

School two is a four teacher school in the south of the country. The school is the base

school for a learning support teacher who is shared with three other schools. There is also a part-time resource teacher in the school for children with special needs.

The school was informed six months in advance of the evaluation by letter that a Whole School Evaluation was to take place instead of the expected Tuairisc Scoile. The staff expressed their satisfaction with this level of notice.

The pre-meeting was conducted by the district inspector who, at the time, thought that he would be conducting the Whole School Evaluation on his own. The teachers were very happy with the manner in which the pre-inspection meeting was conducted.

The Whole School Evaluation was carried out by a team of two inspectors consisting of the district inspector and the divisional inspector. All subject areas were evaluated through a mixture of observation, questioning and some teaching. The staff reported that the district inspector tended to rely mainly on questioning and the divisional inspector taught for a while in an infant class.

Teachers' written preparation was thoroughly examined and both inspectors appeared to be satisfied. The situation in relation to the children's written work was similar. The results of standardised tests (Micra T and Sigma T) were requested by the inspectors as part of the evaluation and the staff was happy to supply these. The staff also felt that the evaluation in the resource/learning support areas was informed, fair and balanced.

The inspectors did not request minutes of staff meetings or of board of management meetings as part of the WSE. The staff stated that they would have been "uneasy" if these minutes had been requested. This was not elaborated upon.

The staff felt that the inspectors' engagement with them was courteous, professional and respectful. They felt comfortable with the team approach adopted by the inspectors and reported that in their opinion the feedback that was received was fair and helpful. Overall, the staff seemed to have had a very positive experience of WSE and felt that it had a positive effect on morale. They appear to have a particularly good relationship with their district inspector who conducted both the pre and post-meetings. The divisional inspector was ill when the post-meeting was conducted. The only negative comment made by the staff was the general observation that all inspections are stressful.

### SCHOOL THREE

School Three is an inner city school and has an administrative principal, twelve classroom teachers, three resource teachers, a home school community liaison teacher and a learning support teacher.

The staff was informed by phone that the Whole School Evaluation was to take place instead of a Tuairisc Scoile and while the amount of notice was adequate there seemed to be some confusion about the exact date of the Whole School Evaluation.

The staff would have preferred if they had known the exact date earlier.

The pre-meeting was conducted by the district inspector and the divisional inspector. The meeting had a structured format with the inspectors seemingly intent on adhering to the format and unwilling to say what their own areas of interest were. The meeting was not dominated by a list of demands and the staff were given an opportunity to express their views. Some staff members felt unclear about the amount of written preparation which would be required and felt that templates of the written preparation would have been helpful.

All subject areas were examined but not in every classroom and it was the inspectors who chose which subject areas were to be examined and in which classrooms. The methods used to examine the subjects were varied – in some rooms it was virtually all observation, but most of the time was spent on questioning. Some staff members felt that the time spent on questioning the children was too long and was exhausting for the younger children. The comments on the teachers' written preparation were positive, as were the comments on the children's written work.

The staff felt that the team approach to inspection worked well – including the division of subjects. The inspectors behaved throughout in a professional, courteous and respectful manner. The inspectors were aware of issues surrounding resource teaching and learning support and the staff felt that the evaluation was fair and balanced.

The inspectors gave a power-point presentation at the post-meeting. Some teachers felt that this was a little inhibiting but felt that the feedback was fair and positive. The staff felt that it would have been useful if they had been supplied with a list of questions which the inspectors were going to ask at the post-evaluation meeting.

The inspectors met with the parents' association and reported on this meeting to the principal teacher. The staff seemed to have a particularly good relationship with the parents and would have had no difficulty with any questions which the inspectors might ask of parents. They felt confident that any comments that the parents would make to the inspectors would be positive.

Overall the staff felt happy with the manner in which the Whole School Evaluation was conducted. They were, however, not entirely happy with the Whole School Evaluation concept. For instance, they felt that it was time-consuming and placed a considerable work-load on the staff. They were also unhappy with what they described as "lip-service" to a broad inspection and felt that the real emphasis was on the work of individual teachers. They felt that while there were opportunities for all the school community to express views on the running of the school, there was no real engagement with the teachers in relation to issues about which the teachers felt strongly. Some staff members felt that a Whole School Evaluation should have been an opportunity for the Inspectorate to provide affirmation for the work being done by the staff. They felt that the inspectors missed the opportunity to provide the kind of

affirmation which would have had a positive effect on morale.

#### SCHOOL FOUR

School Four, in Munster, has four classroom teachers, a shared learning support teacher and a shared resource teacher.

The school was originally notified that it was to have a Tuairisc Scoile but it was subsequently informed that it was to have a WSE.

Two inspectors attended the pre-inspection meeting with the staff and both inspectors met with the board of management and the parents' representatives on the board of management. The staff felt that the inspectors' engagement with the staff was professional, courteous and appropriate. The inspection was carried out mainly through observation and the inspectors appeared to be working to a plan contained in a written document. The staff felt that all evaluations were appropriate.

At the post-inspection meeting virtually all of the feedback was positive. The staff felt that what little negative feedback there was, was sensitively handled with the inspectors using phrases like "even in the best of schools..."

The staff felt that the Whole School Evaluation had a positive effect on morale but that it did lead to an increase in workload.

#### SCHOOL FIVE

School Five is a large girls' school which has over 20 teachers on staff. The school was notified that they were to have a Tuairisc Scoile so the announcement of a change to a Whole School Evaluation did not come as a surprise and they received plenty of notice. The WSE took place in February and the team of inspectors spent four days with staff. Prior to the inspection, the inspectors met separately with the principal teacher, the board and the parents' association.

At the pre-evaluation meeting, the teachers were informed of the layout and structure of WSE and what was expected. Each inspector took certain subjects to examine such as English, Irish and mathematics and all other areas. The need for termly notes was emphasised though when some teachers said they did their schemes on a yearly basis, they did not object. The 'cuntas míosúil' was of vital importance and the teacher's own notes were very necessary. The inspectors wanted to see the strands and strand units in teachers' notes, especially in the 'cuntas míosúil' and particularly in Irish, English and maths. The teachers were given time to talk at the pre-meeting but not at post-meeting. The inspectors were new to the school and said they might not be familiar with it, so the teachers would have to make sure to show them anything they wanted seen.

In the classroom inspection, each teacher was seen by two inspectors. They did more writing than observing but listened intently. They appeared, to the staff, to be under pressure to get everything down on paper. One inspector was expressing

opinions on how Irish should be taught and the teacher who did not agree, defended her position. Teachers felt there should be a facility to argue and discuss issues at this stage.

The inspectors did not ‘teach’ the class but took over classes in maths at both middle and senior levels and questioned pupils in Irish classes in fourth and fifth. They looked carefully at wall charts and children’s copies and questioned children on topics exhibited on the classroom walls. The inspectors went through bookshelves meticulously and criticised the use of certain texts as not being Revised Curriculum friendly. They also looked at results of teacher tests in all subjects, made no comment on workbooks, and wanted Individual Education Plans (IEPs) from special needs teachers (resource teachers). They requested something similar to IEPs from the learning support teacher. They received samples to examine, mostly related to the child who was being taught at the time the request was made. One inspector, in particular, wanted to see more of the work being done, while the other seemed to have very little appreciation of what was being done and very little rapport with the children. The inspectors did not comment on the high school numbers.

To the younger teachers who had qualified in recent years, the inspectors emphasised their role as advisors but the teachers felt they were taking advantage of their youth and lack of experience. However, in the draft report there was little reference to the younger teachers and more attention was paid to issues about which the experienced teachers had opinions.

Teachers felt the team approach was “quicker” though the principal teacher felt that the new team had little appreciation “of the essence” of the school. According to the teachers, the inspectors did not always report to the principal teacher on arrival. The post-inspection meeting was held in the afternoon when the teachers were tired. The staff felt that meetings should happen during the morning and that they should have an opportunity to make an input before the final report was drawn up. The principal teacher had seen the draft written report and felt that there were issues there that needed to be “ironed out”. The principal would also have liked more continuous comment while the WSE was taking place, though some of the staff felt that two of the inspectors had been affirming in classroom situations and at break-time. Overall the principal teacher felt the report was “flat”, unclear and couched in language that was difficult to decipher.

At meetings the inspection team focused on communication with parents and appeared to want parents more involved in all aspects of the school, especially in classrooms, though some teachers had difficulties with this. The teachers felt the workload arising from WSE was huge and that the atmosphere in the school was not as relaxed as usual. According to the teachers, the relationship between teachers and pupils suffered as a result. There was also a huge workload for the school secretary in typing up policies and searching for records of school grants.

The inspectors wanted to see the minutes of staff and board of management meetings and the staff had no problem with the minutes being available.

Basketball, hurling and speech and drama coaching was being provided in the school by external staff. The inspectors had a difficulty with this and felt it was “preventing teachers upskilling themselves”. The inspectors criticised the school for not taking children swimming and for using their PE grant for employing sports coaches. Staff members were adamant, however, that they could not teach basketball, for example, as well as the excellent coach did.

Overall, the principal and staff felt that a good job was being done in the school and they hoped the written report would reflect this.

#### SCHOOL SIX

School Six is a four teacher school in the north of the country and interviews in this school were conducted with separate participants in the WSE process.

Initial notice of a Tuairisc Scoile was received in November/December 2002 for a first term Tuairisc Scoile in 2003. In mid May 2003, the school was informed they would be having a WSE during October 2003. This was felt to be “plenty” of notice. WSE was eventually held a week before the Christmas holidays in 2003.

A pre-inspection meeting was held four to five weeks prior to WSE. The inspector said he wanted to allay any fears about WSE. He would be inspecting all curricular areas. There was time for teachers to express concerns and to ask questions. The inspection was to last three days. The inspector stated his intention to review the English curriculum while in the school. The principal teacher could not recall being asked or told if this was separate to the WSE. The pre-evaluation meeting was felt to be excellent and set the tone for subsequent inspection. The inspector was felt to be very thorough and very professional and it was felt that “he put staff at ease and set out his stall”. The teaching staff were allowed to choose the subjects they would teach.

The inspector had a meeting with the board of management before and after the inspection during school hours. The new board of management had only been set up in November 2003 and the principal teacher felt the new board members did not have an in-depth knowledge of the issues and were only learning what was involved in serving on a board of management. Regarding pre-set questions put by the inspectors on issues such as grants, NEPS, enrolment policy, the principal felt he could have given “more comprehensive and accurate answers” if he had been given advance notice of the questions. The principal felt that it was difficult being ‘quizzed’ during a day when he had full teaching duties as well as dealing with all the other things that occur during a day.

The inspector had a one hour meeting with the parents’ association. A parent tried to air a complaint about a teacher and the inspector immediately stated it was not a matter for discussion at that meeting. The inspector did not seek minutes of staff

meetings or board of management meetings.

A half day was spent with the learning support teacher who is shared with four schools and further half days with two part-time resource teachers. The inspector was very aware of the issues and gave an in depth evaluation. The 'plean scoile', school policies, 'cuntais míosúla', fortnightly notes, 'scéim bliana', Sigma T and Micra T results were all taken away for a week and then returned.

During classroom visits the inspector taught for some of the time and questioned the pupils. He asked to be shown teachers' notes, fortnightly notes, Sigma T and Micra T results and he also looked at children's copybooks/folders of work. The inspector was "observant of materials on walls" such as posters and charts, "took his cues from the kids" and worked on any comments they made. He was respectful of them and wanted to find out what they had done. The infant teacher taught all of the time and found the sessions very long. Because infants' concentration span is so short she found she was changing subjects frequently – a bit of drama in Gaeilge, singing, maths. The inspector used his palm-top while she taught and spent five to ten minutes questioning the children referring to the work covered.

The principal teacher felt that overall the inspector gave positive feedback to teachers and was courteous and reasonable when engaging with them. The teachers found the inspector excellent – courteous, professional, cordial and respectful, unlike former inspectors. Comments were found to be fair with no surprises. He complimented one teacher on the level of oral Irish and his feedback was encouraging and constructive. He was felt to be better with senior pupils than with infants. The inspector emphasised that all classrooms should have their own maths equipment. The inspector was very positive in his comments on artwork, in particular when looking at art portfolios and artwork in the corridor.

The inspector told an infant teacher that formal reading or a class reader should not be done in junior infants. He also stated this at the post-inspection meeting with the board of management. The principal teacher was disappointed with this. Otherwise the inspector was full of praise for the infant teacher and complimented her on her use of drama when teaching Gaeilge and said he would love student teachers to come and see how it was taught in her classroom. When another teacher was conducting the "review of English" with the inspector, the infant teacher looked after her pupils, though the infant teacher found this was very disruptive on her work with her own class. Teachers taking part in the "review of English" felt they could have given more complete comprehensive answers to questions if they had known them in advance.

Teachers found WSE "very positive" and felt it gave a "broad picture of where we are with planning and how effective it is", and that it provided impetus to the staff and that the school is now a more efficient place. However, it was felt that six days was too long. It was very time consuming for the staff and for the inspector as well. All staff were stressed coming up to Christmas. Various comments were made in relation to

WSE, including “focussed us on our work,” “revitalised us”, “made us have a fresh look at things”, “it broke the rhythm of first-term and distracted people” and “there was an increase in workload in comparison to a year without WSE”.

#### SCHOOL SEVEN

School Seven is a 12 teacher school which includes an administrative principal and a full time resource teacher. Two of the teachers are temporary teachers. There is a shared learning support with three other schools.

The school got notification by letter during the last week of October 2003 that a whole school evaluation would take place after Easter 2004. The evaluation actually took place for four and a half days at the end of March/beginning of April. The staff were satisfied with this level of notice.

The pre-meeting was held on the day of a staff meeting. No pupils were present at the time. Both inspectors attended and one took the chair of the meeting. Efforts were made to put staff “at ease” and they were told that there was no need to be stressed. Even though the inspectors outlined what WSE entailed some staff were uncomfortable and unsure as to what was involved. Not all the questions asked by younger staff members were answered but there was time to express opinions. All teachers were told that they were expected to teach English, Irish, maths, and one other subject. After the pre-meeting (a week or two later) one of the inspectors invited the principal to a meeting/talk in Navan on the topic of WSE. The principal teacher estimated that approximately 20 people attended this meeting and handouts were distributed which were subsequently shown to staff members, which helped to clarify some of the issues. The principal found this meeting very helpful.

At a subsequent meeting with the principal teacher the other inspector outlined to the principal which classes each inspector would be visiting. The Inspector said he would see the two newly qualified teachers. The principal got the inspector to agree to a full day with each of these to cover both WSE and Diploma inspection. Initially they were to be completed separately. The other inspector was allocated to the two temporary teachers and others. At this meeting it was decided what teachers would teach PE, Art, Music and Science.

All teachers were to be observed teaching Irish, English, maths, history, geography and science on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Thursday was to be spent visiting all classes again to see PE, art and music and Friday morning was to be spent with the principal teacher. However, some teachers were still being inspected on Friday morning and one inspector had to leave on the Wednesday.

The inspectors were also carrying out a curriculum review of mathematics. This involved meeting with the principal, second and sixth class teachers individually on Friday morning. Student teachers who were in the school at the time (and who were not supposed to be present in class during inspection) covered for second and sixth

class teachers during this period.

Between the time of the pre-meeting and the inspection the inspector took away monthly progress reports (principal keeps a copy of all of these) and these were referred to by the inspectors during each classroom inspection either through discussion with the teachers or talking with or questioning pupils.

The inspector also emailed the principal teacher a 'Foirm Eolais for WSE'<sup>1</sup> which contained numerous questions about the school such as ethos and grants received. This form was discussed in depth at a staff meeting and the principal subsequently typed all the answers and emailed it back to the inspector. He stated that he appreciated this greatly.

A pre and post-inspection meeting was held with the board of management by both inspectors. The principal teacher attended both which went very well. At the post-inspection meeting the inspectors were very positive and praised the work of the staff. They also said how impressed they were with the calibre and dedication of the parents on the board of management and acknowledged the difficulty of getting parents to serve on boards of management.

Yearly schemes, short term/fortnightly notes and monthly reports were examined in all classes. The inspectors were felt to be courteous, professional and respectful with teachers. They were interested in finding out what the children knew. The children's copies (which were left out), art folders and workbooks were examined. All equipment in classrooms was noted. This was done very unobtrusively yet very thoroughly. In the junior infants class the teacher taught all the time. In senior infants and first class the inspector spent a full day in each class doing the Diploma<sup>2</sup> in conjunction with WSE. In second class the teacher taught and the inspector talked and questioned the pupils. A thorough examination was made of children's copies. At twelve noon two student teachers returned back to this classroom and the inspector asked them to carry on with the pupils and he had a ten minute discussion with teacher. Feedback provided was very positive.

In third class a temporary teacher taught and the inspector questioned the pupils. The fourth class teacher had been on sick leave with a "long illness" and came back to work before inspection. The inspector was very understanding of this. The inspector was felt to be very good/positive with the pupils. In fifth and sixth class the teachers taught for about half of the allotted time and the inspector interacted with and questioned the pupils for the rest of the time. The team approach of the inspectors was felt to have worked well. All staff felt very at ease with the inspectors by the end of the WSE. Any reservations felt about the process at the pre-meeting were dispelled.

On the final day the inspectors took away the following: monthly reports from

---

1. A form looking for information  
2. Probation

September to February, school plans for all subjects and all policies. Sigma T and Micra T test results were examined. No minutes were sought of either staff or board of management meetings

The Friday morning meeting with the principal and the inspector went very well. Much information had already been supplied in the 'Foirm Eolais WSE already.

Approximately one hour was spent with the learning support and resource teachers. Their notes and plans were examined. The inspector had already cross-checked the work of the resource teacher and the second class teacher's notes on three pupils who were receiving resource hours.

The post inspection meeting was held six weeks later. The oral feedback was excellent and the work of the teachers was praised. No written report had been received by the time the interviews were undertaken.

Teachers were very stressed by the evaluation but it was felt that it "brought everyone closer" because "they all pulled together by helping one another".

#### SCHOOL EIGHT

There are 13 teachers on the staff of school eight, including eight mainstream class teachers, two resource teachers and one shared learning support teacher. It is a co-educational school with eight classes from junior infants to sixth class.

The Principal was notified by phone, followed by a letter, in September 2003 that a Whole School Evaluation was going to take place in March 2004. The evaluation was carried out by two inspectors. The teachers were satisfied with this arrangement.

The pre-meeting took place in January. It was stressed at this meeting that the evaluation would be conducted along the same lines as a Tuairisc Scoile. Although the meeting was dominated by the inspectors they did not make a list of demands. They outlined the areas to be examined and the manner in which they would operate. They were reassuring and this tone carried through to the rest of the evaluation.

All mainstream teachers taught Gaeilge, English and mathematics. The remaining curricular subjects were divided up within each class grouping. This was organised by the teachers, themselves. The inspectors were in the school for five days over a period of two weeks. The teachers knew, in advance, when they were coming. The inspectors spent between two and three hours with every mainstream teacher. The inspectors did not teach during the process but the teachers were observed teaching, on average, for about 50% of the time.

One inspector spent one and a half hours with the resource teacher. She continued working with her pupils while he went through all of her notes. The format was much the same for the learning support teacher but she had an opportunity to talk to him without any children present, also.

In the classrooms little attention was given to children's work. The teachers would have preferred them to take a closer look at such work as it reflected the great efforts

that both they and the children had put in. They were satisfied with how the inspectors engaged with both themselves and the children. They found them to be courteous, professional, respectful, and they engaged in some fun activities with the children. They did not find them, in the least, intimidating.

An inspector spent a day in the office with the principal teacher. He examined paperwork, such as planning notes and school policies. The Principal completed a questionnaire with the inspector during this meeting. She felt she would have been better prepared had she been given a copy of the questions some time prior to the meeting. Monthly reports and the results of standardised tests were taken from the office to be examined.

At the time of interview, the staff had an oral evaluation only. On the whole, the teachers were satisfied with the report as it was very complimentary about the school. However, they did have some comments to make. They felt that two to three hours was not enough time to spend with each class. A lot of the children's work was overlooked. One teacher mentioned that a lot of work which had gone into the 'Write-a-Book' project in his class was not heeded at all. It seems that anything that was not written up was not noticed. They felt that the evaluation, as it was conducted, did not do them or the children full justice. Teachers of mainstream classes also felt a need for one-to-one contact with the inspector. Their only contact was in a classroom setting with the children present. One teacher commented that this was very unprofessional. They would have liked an opportunity to discuss the revised Primary School Curriculum.

With regard to the evaluation, itself, the teachers were a bit puzzled by the recommendations. One recommendation for future development was "oral language". The teachers were very surprised at this as they felt they were doing a very good job in that area. They concluded that the judgement was made on the basis of what was written in the monthly reports. They noted that the work they had done in "oral language" had not been written up very thoroughly. Therefore, they felt that "if it is not in the Cuntaisí Míósúla it has not been done". They felt that this could give rise to great unfairness. It was also stated that the children were "reserved, shy and enthusiastic" whereas they felt that their effort was not noticed. They discussed this and other matters with the inspectors at the oral meeting. The principal teacher was interested to find that in their report to the board of management the inspectors had mellowed the recommendations somewhat, taking into account the comments made by the staff.

The teachers felt that the WSE had a very positive effect on staff morale. However, they did find it very stressful. "Extra hard graft" was how one teacher described it.

The minutes of staff meetings were not sought but were offered. Nobody had any difficulty with this. The minutes of board meetings were not sought. The principal stated that there was a need to include the parent body. Homework and knowledge of

the curriculum and other codes of practice might be discussed.

The written report arrived during the summer holidays and was in the process of being discussed within the school community. It was very positive and reflected well on all members of the community. The school was particularly pleased that a number of issues important to the school were commented upon at length in the report. There was some sense that the tone of the report was, as one teacher put it “qualified”. It was, she said, as if “they were afraid to praise in case we lost the run of ourselves”.

There was a strong emphasis in the written report on school documentation. According to the teachers, there is a definite need for the inspection team to spend more time in the school, to sit down individually with each teacher, without the pupils present, to discuss the work. There was agreement that where recommendations were made, practical suggestions as to the changes and approaches to change needed to be articulated in the form of a follow on process. In the case of this school the teachers felt that the findings were visionary but that the recommended areas for development were very mundane with one or two exceptions. In addition, there was some disquiet among the ancillary staff that they were not mentioned in the report despite having met with the inspectors.

#### SCHOOL NINE

Notice of a whole school evaluation was by direct contact from the local inspector and was followed up by letter. The notice was longer than the statutory requirement and was adequate and satisfactory.

The pre-meeting was amicable and professional. The process was outlined and discussed to the satisfaction of all parties. There was adequate time for teacher input and any concerns or fears were taken on board. It set a pleasant and non-threatening tone for the process to begin.

All subjects were thoroughly observed and teaching observation took up about half the time. There was a lot of pupil questioning and stretching of children’s understanding. This appeared to be an attempt to discover what they knew, rather than what they did not. Both formal and informal assessment results were carefully noted and pupils’ work of all types perused. Examination of teacher notes seemed more cursory but was not neglected. Time given to each class averaged half a day and more time was given to learning support teachers.

There was a team of three inspectors. The local inspector was accompanied by two younger and enthusiastic inspectors. The school found the team approach satisfactory, not least because it shortened the whole inspection process. There seemed little difference in reality from previous inspections.

The interaction between the Inspectorate and teachers was at all times courteous and highly professional. The team was cordial and good at putting people at ease. The same could be said for their contact with the pupils. They did not try to catch anybody

out and were direct and open in their questioning. However, they were very thorough and covered all aspects of the curriculum.

Time and support was given to learning support teachers and an awareness of the issues, difficulties and nature of their work was in evidence. Records and assessments were examined and sympathy expressed at lacks in regard to resources, funding, staffing and workload (IEPs), but no reassurances were forthcoming as regards any improvements.

The written feedback was not available at time of interview, but the school was happy to provide a copy of it when it arrived for the purposes of the research project. The publishing of the very first WSE report at the time of interview was mentioned and no-one showed any concern about having their report made widely available. The oral feedback was very positive and no surprises were expected in the written report.

Staff morale has been boosted by the whole process. The teachers did say, however, that they would not like to have to do it all over again for a long period of time. Every effort was made to make the process as painless as possible. However, by its very nature inspection of work is a stressful event and despite reassurances, different people react in different ways to that stress, whether real or imagined. When complete the whole process proved to be quicker and less painful than first thought.

The WSE did prove to be a burden with an increase in workload as teachers always feel obliged to “push out the boat and leave nothing to chance”. However, the increase in workload due to what is only a partially introduced revised curriculum was even more tangible and there was a feeling of ongoing strain arising from that. The WSE experience was intense while it lasted. There was general agreement that increases in workload due to new practices and broader curricula, as well as more reporting and record keeping and more planning and preparation was extending actual working time beyond all proportion.

The Inspectorate did not seek either board of management or staff meeting minutes. The staff agreed that it would have been inappropriate to do so. They also felt that teacher reporting and IEPs need to be written with the Freedom of Information Act in mind. There now exists a danger of records being used in legal matters well into the future. The teachers felt that guidance from the INTO or the DES in this matter would be appreciated.

## Tuairisc Scoile Reports

In order to compare experiences of schools in relation to the evaluation process, the experiences of two schools whose evaluation consisted of the traditional Tuairisc Scoile, were also recorded.

### TUAIRISC SCOILE I

This is a four teacher school with a learning support teacher shared with two other schools. There is a resource teacher employed in a temporary capacity for 25 hours per week. At the time of the Tuairisc Scoile the hours were less. Another teacher takes one pupil for 3.5 hrs a week for resource teaching.

The school was notified by letter in mid October 2003 that a Tuairisc Scoile would take place in January 2004. The principal and staff were quite satisfied with this level of notice. The pre-meeting date was arranged by phone on a day suitable to all. The children were dismissed early and the meeting took place from 2.05 to 2.50 p.m. At this meeting the inspector was “very positive and he relaxed us all”. He explained what he wanted and why the inspection was taking place and there was ample time for teachers to ask questions or have matters clarified. The teachers were told that the inspection would take two days.

The inspector taught classes for some of the time and questioned the pupils also. He was interested in finding out what children knew and was very respectful of them. He questioned them on some things that were covered in monthly reports. Some children were “wary of him” and they took a long time to speak out. The inspector used his palmtop when in classrooms. The ‘cuntais míosúla’, ‘plean scoile’ and school policies were taken away by the inspector for the weekend. Children’s copies and samples of work were available in the classroom but the inspector did not study them in all classrooms. While conducting the Tuairisc Scoile the inspector met with the principal and the first/second class teacher individually and conducted a CIE (Curriculum Implementation Evaluation). Both teachers were asked to be frank and forthright in their views and responses to questions.

The inspector called in on learning support and resource teachers at work. He looked at their records and reports and commented favourably on the work observed.

The principal had “the height of respect” for the inspector regarding his dealings with teaching staff. He felt he was courteous, professional and respectful towards them. He felt the feedback given to the teachers was “absolutely brilliant”. The inspector met with the chairperson of the board of management after the Tuairisc Scoile which was very positive. Teachers felt the inspector was very amicable, courteous and professional with them. The feedback received from the inspector was felt to be “positive and fair”.

Regarding the effect of the Tuairisc Scoile on staff morale the principal felt that there was a substantial increase in workload. Teachers felt it was a “major hassle” with

a lot of time spent wondering about school plans and objectives. One teacher felt she “went overboard” and that her “own common practices would have been less formal”. “Too much time was spent on preparation, writing teachers’ notes rather than checking out resources – looking up internet – and getting activities/ worksheets ready for class”. No minutes were sought of staff or board of management meetings.

## TUAIRISC SCOILE 2

There are 20 teachers on the staff of this school. There are two streams of mixed boys and girls up to first class. The boys go on to another school after that, leaving just one stream from second to sixth class. There are two special needs teachers, one for junior classes and one for senior classes, one resource teacher, two learning support teachers, two language support teachers, one home / school liaison co-ordinator and one shared resource teacher for Travellers.

The principal teacher was informed in September 2003, by phone, followed by a letter, that a Tuirisc Scoile was to take place early in the New Year. They were expecting it after Christmas but it did not begin until 26 February. The assessment continued until early March and was carried out by two inspectors.

Pre-meetings took place at the end of November. They were very informal. A very positive, affirmative tone was set. The inspectors stressed that they were interested in seeing how well things were being done in the school and the teachers were put at ease. They found the meetings informative with guidelines outlined very well. The first meeting was held with all the staff together. Then they met with the mainstream teachers and learning support teachers separately.

For mainstream teachers the inspection was to be subject-orientated. The teachers decided among themselves which subjects they would teach – three per teacher with all subject areas to be covered. This worked very well. The inspectors were very clear about notes and how they were to be presented.

The learning support teachers were not asked to teach any specific subject area but were asked to continue with what they were teaching. They were told to make Individual Education Plans (IEPs) available for inspection. The inspectors were happy to accept individual and group IEPs. Special needs teachers were to make IEPs available also. These would be looked at in terms of how they related to the psychological assessments and how, in turn, they related to the teaching. There were no specific directions given to the language support teachers. They were following the *Integrated Ireland Language Training* programme. The inspectors were satisfied with that.

The classroom inspections were carried out along the guidelines given at the pre-meeting. They stayed in each mainstream class for about three hours, a little longer in the senior classes. The teachers were observed teaching for about an hour of that time, although not continuously. The inspector took the class for the rest of the

time, questioning the children in two subject areas. They brought the teachers' notes, children's copies (except junior and senior infants), portfolios, to another room and examined them thoroughly. Junior and Senior Infant teachers were unhappy that their copies were overlooked.

The learning support teachers were asked for profiles and the reviews of profiles. These and other notes were examined while they continued with their teaching. Special needs resource teachers were asked for their IEPs. The psychological reports were read through thoroughly. In one language support class the inspector quizzed one girl who came in while they were there. The teacher found this to be thorough but not threatening.

All members of staff found both inspectors to be courteous and respectful with both teachers and pupils. They referred on several occasions to how their demeanour had positively influenced the whole proceedings.

The teachers were pleased that the report did them justice. It stated that their planning was excellent and was very positive. It was necessary to make clarifications on both sides. Everybody was satisfied with these. The recommendations made were acceptable.

Teachers felt the whole process of the inspection was quite an ordeal. One person commented she did not realise how stressful it was until it was all over. Another mentioned it was a long time in coming – from September to February. They did not notice an increase in workload as “they always work very hard”. They did, however, feel that they had to pay more attention to notes. One teacher stated that at the beginning of the year she did not know what would be expected by way of personal notes. She had a better idea after the pre-meeting with the inspectors. The consensus was that a positive atmosphere prevailed throughout.

One inspector met with the principal teacher one afternoon. This was a very positive meeting. He mentioned a few times that he was keen to get a full picture of the school. Her notes on planning, development folder, personnel folder, personal planning notes, policies and procedures in school were all examined on the school premises. Cuntais Míósúla (monthly reports) were taken away.

Minutes of staff meetings were sought. The teachers had no problem with this. The chairperson of the board of management was interviewed.

There is a 'Parents' Room' in the school. The inspectors spent an hour with parents there one day. It was not a pre-arranged meeting. They just met the parents who were there at that time on that particular day. There was no teacher present.

In the course of the assessment it came to the attention of the inspectors that personnel other than the teachers were involved in the school. When they had completed their inspection they met with the caretaker and secretary. They also met with two childcare workers funded by the health board and an art therapist with the School Completion Programme. They requested a meeting with a family therapist

working in the school with the local Family Therapy Unit.

Although this inspection was termed a Tuairisc Scoile the teachers commented that it seemed to them to have been conducted more like a Whole School Evaluation.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

A number of themes arise from these interviews which are worthy of comment. The first is that in general the teachers interviewed were satisfied with the manner in which evaluations, especially classroom visits were conducted. Teachers referred to the professional and courteous manner in which inspectors went about their business in the schools.

There appears to be a variety of different practices being adopted by different inspectors in relation to a number of issues. For example, some inspectors examine teachers' notes in great detail and comment upon them while others do not. Some place great emphasis on pupils' written work while others do not examine them in any great detail. Some inspectors expect the teacher to teach for the whole time that they are in the classroom setting while others engage directly with the pupils in the teaching and learning process. In some cases teachers were asked to decide on what curriculum areas would be viewed while in other cases the inspector decided the areas to be observed. There is a need for discussion between the INTO and the Inspectorate on this issue with a view to bringing more consistency into the overall approach while at the same time recognising that there will need to be some level of "local arrangement".

There appears to be a variation in practice in relation to teacher preparation, especially written notes, with some inspectors being prescriptive in relation to how they wished to see notes presented and others who simply evaluated the teachers' notes as presented during the visit. It seems clear that a school evaluation leads to an increase in paperwork for teachers and perhaps this is due to this uncertainty. There is a need to review the issue of teachers' written preparation.

It is clear that teacher stress is significantly related to school evaluation. Issues relating to scheduling need to be examined such as notice, the time gap between notice and the first meeting, the time lapse between the meeting and the actual visits to classrooms and the time between the finish of formal visits and the final meeting. A number of suggestions have been put forward such as written details of the process to issue at the time of notification which can be clarified or examined at the first meeting for appropriateness to the school setting. Time frames in this regard need to be examined.

All of the above reports were compiled prior to schools receiving written reports of the school evaluation. Of those schools who had received written reports, the majority felt that the written reports were accurate and reflected the evaluation process

accurately. A small number of schools expressed reservations relating to what was seen as an over-reliance by inspectors on written documentation such as teachers' notes and policy documents and the need to look at other aspects of the schools' work such as assemblies and playground activities.

## SCHOOL EVALUATION AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

In 2001, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act, *The Irish Times* sought access to reports of inspections of certain primary schools in Dublin. The Department of Education and Science refused access to these reports on the grounds such access was prohibited by Section 53 of the Education Act 1998. Section 53 of this Act enables the Minister for Education and Science to refuse “access to any information which could enable the compilation of information in relation to the comparative performance of schools”. The Department also refused access on the grounds that the staff of the schools provided information in confidence to the inspectors during the course of their inspections, that disclosure could prejudice the effectiveness of future inspections and also that its functions relating to its management of schools could be adversely affected.

On 5 March 2003 the then Information Commissioner, Mr Kevin Murphy, ruled that in relation to the contents of the reports he did not accept that access to them could have the harm envisaged by the Department. The Commissioner commented that while the reports gave an overall impression of the schools they did not contain any specific references to the academic achievements of students in each school. The Commissioner went on to find that the comments in the reports were of such a general nature that no meaningful comparison could be drawn between the schools. He did not accept that the information in the reports could be described as information given in confidence to the inspectors as the reports were the inspectors’ own opinions and observations formed during the course of visits to the schools.

The INTO, believing that the release of school reports would lead to crude comparisons of schools in an unfair manner, supported Mr Barney Sheedy, Principal of Scoil Choilm in Crumlin, Dublin, in taking a case to the High Court to appeal the decision to make inspectors’ reports available to the media. It was felt that experiences in England and in other jurisdictions had shown that the publication of information in the form of school league tables had a most damaging effect on the whole school system.

The High Court concurred with the Information Commissioner’s decision and the appeal was overturned. Subsequently, the case was appealed to the Supreme Court. A more detailed account is included in Appendix 3. In May 2005, the Supreme Court upheld the appeal against the decision of the High Court, and in passing judgement, it was noted that, “Schools are complex organisations and comparisons on the basis of crude league tables could not do justice to the work of schools. Judging schools on a single snap shot is always unwise.”

In responding to the successful appeal, the INTO welcomed the decision of the Supreme Court and noted that the publication of inspectors’ reports in other countries had radically changed professional relationships between inspectors and

schools. The Irish experience to date had been one of co-operation between the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science and primary teachers. It was also emphasised that school evaluations cover a range of issues over and above the academic attainment of children, and that the ruling did not prevent parents having access to school information.<sup>3</sup>

---

3. *The Minister for Education and Science has since announced that whole school evaluation reports will be available on the Department's website.*

# **PART TWO**

---

## **PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION**

**Kilkenny, November 2005**



# 2

## Presentations

### WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION – AN INTO PERSPECTIVE

DYMPNA MULKERRINS, EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The inspection, evaluation and rating of anyone’s work is never a comfortable task, particularly for the person being examined. Over the years, few professions have been subjected to the same level of scrutiny as teachers, particularly primary teachers. The issue of evaluation, therefore, is one of huge interest to teachers. And increasingly it is a topic of interest to parents and members of the general public.

The development of WSE and its recent gradual introduction into schools provides a timely opportunity to examine current policy and practice. It presents us with a valuable opportunity to examine the variety of related issues, consider possible lines of development and make a valuable contribution to the development of INTO policy. This in turn will enable the INTO to make a positive, well informed contribution to discussions about future developments.

A primary teacher working in a school a hundred years ago would find it difficult to believe that we would have this opportunity. But a characteristic of the last one hundred years has been the steady improvement in relations between inspectors and teachers. TJ O’Connell in his book *A Hundred Years of Progress* reported that, in September 1958, discussions took place with the INTO on the issue of inspection with the Chief Inspector and the Deputy Chief Inspector. The *CEC Report* presented to the 1959 INTO Congress contained the following sentence, which O’Connell describes as significant: “The Conferences were conducted in the friendliest of atmospheres.”

O’Connell remarks that about this time fault finding, threats and penalties as incentives were replaced by sympathy, friendliness and co-operation. He states that how different this was to the position 50 years earlier when Catherine Mahon in her evidence before the Dill committee stated:

*“The one unerring test by which the pupils always recognise an inspector is that he*

*does not shake hands with the teacher. Every visitor, high or low, from the King's deputy to the parent of the newest scholar, and from the Cardinal to the youngest curate, walks in with outstretched hand and kindly word of greeting to the teacher. The one exception is the National Board's inspector."*

Humorously, O'Connell tells the tale of how the *Rules for National Schools* stated that all visitors should be admitted and received with courtesy by the teacher but that occasionally unscrupulous people misused this privilege by pretending they were inspectors. A case came before the court in which an individual visited a convent school. One of the sisters grew suspicious and rang the Gardaí. They had been looking for him for some time for other offences. When the sister was asked in court how she knew he wasn't an inspector she replied: "He knocked at the door before entering."

The document before you today shows how different things are today. A striking feature of the reports from schools is the number of very positive comments from teachers relating to the professionalism and courtesy shown by inspectors in their dealings with teachers and children. I would even contrast that with newspaper reports of INTO Congress eighteen months ago where teachers complained of bullying, unrealistic demands and negative critical behaviour.

After that Congress, these issues were raised with the Inspectorate by INTO officials and guarantees were given by the Inspectorate, in particular by the Deputy Chief Inspector Gearoid Ó Conluain, that these concerns would be dealt with as part of inspectors' training and inservice. I think today's report shows that the inservice is working. The report does, however, show a number of areas that might usefully be included in further training courses. More importantly, it points to issues that must be addressed at the highest level within the Department of Education and Science.

Just as all in the North are working to take the gun out of politics it is important down here to work to take the pen out of preparation. A common theme in the school reports is the amount of written preparation involved in the process and the apparent centrality of that paperwork to the process. Another feature of school evaluation is stress but, as I said at the start, the external evaluation of anyone's work is never comfortable. However, that said, there are aspects of the process that should be examined here today to see if they contribute to stress and if so what possible solutions can be put in place to reduce, if not eliminate stress. I would ask you to examine issues such as the notice given of WSE – is it hanging over our heads for too long? The lack of published agreed guidelines in relation to WSE – inspectors having different ways of working and the scheduling of classroom visits.

While WSE is in many ways like a Tuairisc Scoile there are significant changes which we must examine. We have, for years, protested against school evaluation that was solely focussed on classroom competence and children's learning. How many times have we heard teachers criticise the fact that there was never a mention of the

lack of resources in the school, the management of the school, the state of the building, or the environment of the children. All of these impact on teaching and learning and, therefore, must be included in any evaluation of the work of the school. These elements are part of WSE and the Education Committee believes this to be positive development.

But as the scope of school evaluation is widened and there is a focus on more than teachers there is also a need to consult and assess the role played by other partners. Boards of management and parents' associations, where the latter are affiliated to the National Parents' Council (NPC), are to be consulted and invited to contribute to the evaluation. I believe that this will only enhance the process. I also believe that it sends a clear signal to parents and management that they have a vital and significant role to play in ensuring that children are provided with the optimal conditions in which to learn.

There is also a need to look at how self-evaluation and school development planning, well advanced in the majority of our schools, can contribute to the process of WSE and how WSE can in turn contribute to further development. In how many of our schools is the written report simply another document to be filed away or left to gather dust on a shelf? How can we, as teachers, take the process forward. How can reports be written and presented in terms that feed into and guide subsequent planning and development? There are obvious ones like the compilation of reports within an agreed time frame, but I believe that we, as a profession, must also look at some of the more complex issues like teacher professional development.

To date, the Inspectorate has engaged with the INTO in the development of WSE. As our discussion document shows, this process has been a number of years in the making and at vital stages along the way INTO has made significant contributions to that process. Like in any process no one side gets everything they want, but the inspectors have engaged with INTO representatives and agreement has been reached in many areas. The Inspectorate is conducting on-going research on the process and the INTO has written to schools undergoing WSE this term to state that the Organisation will continue to monitor the process, collect teachers' feedback and use that information to ensure that the process is fair, objective and reliable. This conference also has a role to play in contributing to that process.

One issue that is outside our control is the issue of the publication of reports. The discussion document before you contains an account of how a newspaper applied under the Freedom of Information Act to have access to these reports. This matter was the subject of a High Court case and ultimately a Supreme Court case. Teachers in the survey expressed their strong opposition to the publication of reports and while the publication of the reports technically falls into the category of a hypothetical situation, I believe that a small amount of time might be given over, just this once, to a "what if" discussion.

I want to conclude by thanking all the teachers who took part in our research work. I appreciate the difficulty in having just gone through a school evaluation that we immediately asked them to do an evaluation of the evaluation. They were generous with their time, forthcoming with opinions and for this we are grateful. At least, we didn't ask them to write too much about it! That task was undertaken by the Education Committee members who have not received individual public acknowledgement of their work because we said we would not identify individual schools or inspectors! However, I now thank them for their work.

Finally, on behalf of my colleagues on the Education Committee I want to welcome Eamonn Murtagh, Assistant Chief Inspector in the Department of Education and Science. I'm sure that his presentation will inform and challenge, provide issues for discussion and make a valuable contribution to future developments. I began by looking back at the change that has taken place over the past decades. I hope it will not be too long before a practising teacher, (and I'm not looking for a job here), is invited to a conference of inspectors to provide a teachers' perspective on school evaluation. After all, it's important that we all hear each other's perspectives.

## **WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION – PERSPECTIVE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE**

AMONN MURTAGH, ASSISTANT CHIEF INSPECTOR, EVALUATION SUPPORT AND RESEARCH UNIT, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

### **Background and Context**

A dhaoine uaisle, a chairde, ar dtús ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le Cumann Múinteoirí na hÉireann agus go háirithe leis an gCoiste Oideachais, as an gcuireadh a bheith anseo libh inniu.

I am very pleased to be invited to present the Department of Education and Science perspective on Whole-School Evaluation in primary schools. Before I deal specifically with issues in relation to Whole-School Evaluation I want to give you the background and context to the changes that have taken place within the Inspectorate in recent years.

For some time now the Inspectorate has been engaged in a process of review and development. The development of the Inspectorate was given added impetus by the enactment of the Education Act 1998 and by the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) which has been promoting improvement and change throughout the Civil Service.

A concern to promote an improved professional service to schools and the education community generally is the main motivating factor behind the reform of the Inspectorate.

Up to seven years ago the Inspectorate was divided into three sections. The Primary Inspectorate, the Post-primary Inspectorate and the Psychological Service. Each of these sections was managed separately and went about its work more or less independently.

The Inspectorate is now a largely integrated service consisting of inspectors working at primary and post-primary levels. Almost all of the psychologists who previously worked within the Inspectorate are now part of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

While inspectors are generally recruited to work at either primary or post-primary levels, the management and operation of the Inspectorate is now fully integrated. Initial training, ongoing staff development and regional management of both primary and post-primary inspectors are entirely integrated. The Inspectorate is one of five divisions within the Department, in addition to the emerging regional office structure.

The revised structure and management of the Inspectorate is as follows: It is divided into two subdivisions – Regional Services subdivision and Policy Support

subdivision. Each is headed by a deputy chief inspector.

The Regional Services subdivision is responsible for the delivery and management of inspection and evaluation of services and related advisory activities in schools and centres for education in the five regional business units covering the country. Carl Ó Dálaigh is the Deputy Chief Inspector with responsibility for this subdivision.

The Policy Support subdivision is responsible for contributing to the development of Department policy across a range of areas as well as planning, designing and supporting inspection and evaluation activity, research, curriculum and assessment, teacher education, corporate services of the Inspectorate and relevant international evaluation activities. It is also divided into five business units. Gearóid Ó Conluain is the Deputy Chief Inspector with responsibility for this subdivision.

This refocusing and reorganisation of the Inspectorate has coincided with significant recruitment. We have also put in place an extensive programme of professional development for newly recruited and established inspectors.

The Inspectorate is committed to evaluation of schools and teachers in a spirit of professional collaboration and in accordance with the highest professional standards. Our *Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate* sets out the general principles and guidelines under which members of the Inspectorate engage in the process of evaluation and reporting. A school or teacher may seek a review of the work of an inspector or an inspection report. The procedure for such a review has also been published as *Procedure for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13 (9) of the Education Act 1998*.

The Education Act (1998) recognises that the external evaluation of schools should be carried out by educational professionals, trained in the observation of classroom activities and sensitive to the multifaceted relationship that exists between pupils and teachers.

We in the Inspectorate are also convinced that a constructive, professional relationship between principals, teachers and the Inspectorate can contribute to real improvement and development in schools.

We also believe that the Inspectorate has a role to play in educating the broader public about the vital contribution that teachers and schools make to society. Publications such as our recent report *Fifty School Reports – What Inspectors Say*, at primary level, can facilitate an informed and serious consideration of the education system. We are committed to more openness and transparency along these lines.

So, what are the aims of Inspectorate evaluations? They can be summarised as follow:

1. to identify, acknowledge and affirm good practice in schools;
2. to promote continuing improvement in the quality of education offered by schools;

3. to promote self-evaluation and continuous development by schools and staffs;
4. to provide an assurance of quality in the education system as a whole based on the collection of objective, dependable, high quality data; and
5. to inform policy formulation and assess the impact of policy initiatives.

In accordance with the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI), the Inspectorate now prepares an annual business plan. This is based on the Department's strategy statement. Within our business plan there are five specific objectives. These are:

1. operating a programme of inspection in schools and centres for education;
2. monitoring and evaluating particular aspects of educational provision;
3. assessing and advising on the implementation of the Education Act and other relevant acts and Department regulations generally;
4. contributing to and supporting policy development, research and review; and
5. co-operating in north/south and international education activities.

Today, I am concentrating mainly on the first of these objectives as it applies to the primary sector. The programme of inspection in primary schools consists of three main areas of activity – inspection of probationary teachers' work, whole-school evaluation and thematic evaluation. Inspectors are also periodically involved in administration of national and international surveys of achievement and in providing advice to the administrative sections of the Department.

### **Whole School Evaluation**

Currently there are two forms of school evaluation in operation at primary level. The first, generally referred to by its Irish title *Tuairisc Scoile* has been in operation since the 1970s but was formalised and regulated by circular letter in 1983. When the *Tuairisc Scoile* was first introduced, it was intended that every school would be inspected every four years. The second main area of inspection activity at primary level is Whole-School Evaluation or WSE. This was initially piloted in 18 primary and 17 second-level schools in 1998/99. The Whole School Evaluation pilot involved extensive consultation with representatives of school management, teachers and parents and has resulted in the development of an evaluation system that is clear in its purposes and which takes account of the diversity in the Irish education system.

Whole-school evaluation was designed to be implemented in both primary and post-primary schools. The principles and the procedures for WSE are more or less consistent and the reporting templates are broadly similar at primary and second level. The introduction of WSE as a mainstream inspection process was delayed for a number of reasons mainly related to the establishment of the State Examinations

Commission and to an adverse industrial relations climate in secondary schools. Both of these issues have been resolved and WSE has now been introduced in both primary and second-level schools in the past year.

In the 2003/2004 school year, WSE evaluations were conducted in twenty primary schools. A further 40 primary schools are participating in WSE during the current term and 60 schools have been notified of a WSE for the period January to June 2005. WSEs were conducted in 12 post-primary schools in the current year. As we move forward, WSE activity will be scaled up considerably in both primary and second level schools and Tuairiscí Scoile will be phased out.

## Principles of WSE

The framework for Inspectorate evaluation of schools, and in particular for whole school evaluation is *Looking at Our School*, which we published in 2003. *Looking at Our School* was disseminated to all schools as an aid to self-evaluation and as a tool to support the school development planning process.

The WSE framework, mirroring the school self-evaluation framework presented in *Looking at Our Schools*, encompasses the evaluation of the:

- 1 quality of management;
- 1 planning;
- 1 curriculum provision;
- 1 teaching and learning; and
- 1 support for students.

At the core of whole school evaluation is the quality of learning and teaching.

In the *Looking at Our Schools* framework, the area of *quality of teaching and learning* is divided into three aspects: *planning and preparation*, *teaching and learning* and *assessment and achievement*. These are further subdivided into a number of components.

The area of teaching and learning has four components: *methodology*, *classroom management*, *classroom atmosphere* and *learning*.

Each of these is broken down further into key themes or areas of inquiry. This is designed to assist a meaningful and objective evaluation exercise taking place, be it a self-evaluation exercise or an external evaluation.

WSE is designed to be open, inclusive and transparent and to contribute to school improvement. The WSE process is intended to foster professional working relationships both within the school and between inspectors and school staff. WSE complements school development planning and school self-evaluation.

In carrying out WSE in a school, inspectors acknowledge and affirm good practice and achievement. They also report and comment on areas where there is scope for development.

While WSE sets an agenda for improvement in the school, it does not concern itself only with the improvement of the individual school. Through being standardised and broadly consistent, WSE will, as we move forward, provide evidence from which a composite picture can be drawn of our education system at primary and at post-primary levels. Last year the Inspectorate published a second-level composite report entitled *Inspection of Modern Languages: Observations and Issues*.

A composite report on Gaeilge at primary and post-primary level will be published next year. The composite report on Gaeilge will draw on thematic evaluations of Gaeilge in over 40 primary schools and evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning in Gaeilge in second-level schools based on subject inspections and whole-school evaluations. Composite reports such as these are intended to assist in the development and implementation of appropriate policies to secure the future excellence of our education system.

## **WSE Process**

How does WSE work on the ground? How are the principles, to which I have been referring, put into practice?

The first stage in Whole School Evaluation is the selection of schools for evaluation. Primary schools are evaluated cyclically. For a variety of reasons, mainly related to the staffing of the Inspectorate, the length of the cycle varies from region to region, but is generally about six years. The regional assistant chief inspector, in consultation with divisional and district inspectors, selects the schools for evaluation by reference to the date of the previous evaluation of the school.

The regional assistant chief inspector notifies the principal teacher and the board of management of each selected school by letter. The reporting inspector, who is the person responsible for planning and leading the evaluation team, then contacts the school principal to plan the evaluation visits to the school. In most cases, the reporting inspector is the district inspector for the school. The notification is followed by the preparation phase where arrangements are made for the school visits by inspectors and the necessary documentation is obtained from the Department's database. Information is also collected from the schools via a questionnaire to the principal teacher.

The in-school phase of WSE commences with meetings of the inspectors with the board of management at which the whole-school evaluation process is presented and explained and the work of the board is discussed. Inspectors also hold a preliminary meeting with school staff before the in-school evaluation commences. The meeting with the school staff is normally scheduled to take place during school time, and pupils are dismissed early to allow the meeting to take place. A meeting is also convened between the inspectors and officers of the school's parents' council. If possible, these

meetings take place on the same day.

Whole school evaluations in schools with more than five class teachers are normally conducted by a team of two inspectors. Where there are 12 or more class teachers, the team consists of three inspectors and, in very large schools, there may be four inspectors involved. The in-school evaluation is intended to be completed in one week. This is one of the main differences from Tuairisc Scoile evaluations, which are normally conducted by one inspector. In smaller schools, the WSE evaluation will continue to be done by one inspector. A crucial feature of whole school evaluation, as far as schools and inspectors are concerned, is the team working and sharing of information and insights that takes place among the Inspectorate team. These are essential to ensure that evaluations, judgements, and recommendations for the school are consistent and soundly based.

## **Post Evaluation and Reporting**

Following a whole school evaluation, an extensive written report is prepared. The WSE report includes findings on the school as a whole in each of the areas of the evaluation framework. The report concludes with recommendations for further development of the school. The reporting inspector compiles the report on the evaluation. Individual teachers are not identified in the report.

The findings and recommendations of the WSE report are processed through a number of stages before being issued to the school. Following initial drafting, the report is agreed by the team of inspectors conducting the evaluation. The findings and recommendations are then presented to the school staff, and the board of management of the school at separate post-evaluation meetings. The report is then finalised by the reporting inspector and before completion, it is factually verified with the school principal. Following clearance by the regional assistant chief inspector, the report is issued to the principal and the board of management of the school.

## **Future Developments**

Whole-school evaluation is now part of the educational landscape. But we have just begun. As the Inspectorate aims to bring about school improvement, we are conscious of the fact that we need to improve as evaluators. This is why we have an Evaluation Support and Research Unit within the Inspectorate. One of the main focuses of the work of ESRU is to ensure consistency and reliability in the quality of evaluations done by the inspectors. We do this by providing professional development for all inspectors annually and by rigorously monitoring the effectiveness of the evaluation instruments and procedures used by the inspectorate.

We published *A Guide to Subject Inspection* for second-level schools following some

years' experience of the process of subject inspection over a number of years. We will publish *A Guide to Whole School Evaluation*, following the experience gained from the current phase of WSE. Before we publish the guide, we will issue a draft to all participants in the WSE process, including the INTO, for their views and observations.

Effective whole-school evaluation requires the active participation in the process of the whole-school community, including the school management, teachers, support staff, parents and pupils. We will shortly publish an information leaflet for members of school boards of management and members of parents' associations giving a brief description of whole-school evaluation and the respective roles of members of boards of management and parents' councils in the WSE process. Our current approach to capturing the views of parents through meeting members of parents' associations or parents' representatives on boards of management has obvious limitations. This approach has obvious shortcomings, in that it gives very limited scope to individual parents to contribute to school development. We would welcome suggestions for a more comprehensive system, consistent with the legal and constitutional recognition that all parents have a right to a say in the education of their children.

While an external perspective on school quality through Whole-School Evaluation can contribute to school development, by far the most effective form of evaluation for schools is an ongoing process of self-review and planning by schools themselves. The *Looking at Our Schools* booklet and the work of the School Development Planning Initiative represents an excellent opportunity for schools to plan and implement change. We look forward to conducting whole-school evaluations that are much more collaborative, where we will be working with schools in carrying out their own self-evaluation, based on targets that schools set for themselves. Our vision of whole-school evaluation in the future is that it will be largely an internal evaluation undertaken by schools themselves, with the Inspectorate providing external support and quality assurance.

## **Conclusion**

There is a growing recognition that an integrated quality assurance approach has an important role to play in enhancing the educational experience of children and in improving learning outcomes. This approach emphasises that quality is best achieved through a combination of complementary measures. Some of these are internal to the school and allow the school community to review and enhance the learning experience for children.

The issue of quality of teaching and learning within any school is, first and foremost, the responsibility of that school. As you are aware the guidance and direction of teachers is part of the day-to-day management of a school. In the past there may have been some ambivalence in this area and maybe a general view that issues

around the quality of teaching and learning within schools was a matter for somebody external to the school. Quality is best achieved within a school by putting teaching and learning at the centre of the school planning process and by providing appropriate support and advice to all teachers.

External evaluation, such as WSE, can also make its contribution to this. Our objective is to provide an evaluation experience that helps to create within schools a dynamic for school self-evaluation and improvement in an open and participative way and in a manner that includes the entire school community. It is our hope that the external evaluation experienced by schools will serve as a positive element in the overall challenge that the school planning agenda presents.

## REPORT OF DISCUSSION GROUPS

All delegates to the conference were allocated to discussion groups which were facilitated by members of the Education Committee. The topics discussed in the groups reflected the themes addressed in the presentations and in the discussion document presented at the conference. The reports of the discussion groups were compiled by members of the Education Committee and have been collated thematically.

### Parental Consultation

All seven groups discussed parental consultation. The discussion centred mainly on concerns regarding the choice of parents' representatives and the safeguarding of teachers and schools.

#### CHOICE OF PARENT REPRESENTATIVES

- 1 Two groups stated a preference for the parents' representative on the board of management to be consulted rather than consultation with the entire parent body.
- 1 All discussion groups had concerns about how representative parents from any group were. It was suggested that particularly vocal or politically active parents get themselves elected to board of management positions, raising issues such as who speaks for the general body of parents and the possible exclusion of some parents as only a representative group is met by the inspectors.
- 1 The question was raised, as to whether parents' groups not affiliated to the National Parents' Council were recognised for the WSE consultation process. The National Parents' Council (NPC) were included in the Education Act because of their legal standing.
- 1 Another group noted that in Northern Ireland a group of parents were selected at random to rate teachers and delegates were warned against introducing this practice in the South.
- 1 While no difficulty had been reported to date, some concern was expressed regarding the lack of teacher representation at meetings with parents though in some schools the HSCL teacher was present. There was a suggestion that an independent observer should attend.

#### SAFEGUARDING OF TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

- 1 It was felt that there should be strict guidelines laid down for any meetings with parents and that there should be no mention of any individual teacher at such meetings.
- 1 Teachers in several groups raised the issue of questionnaires to parents. It was

pointed out in one group by a CEC representative that the CEC had opposed the issuing of questionnaires. In a number of groups, teachers felt that, if a questionnaire format was used, it should not be anonymous. It was suggested that schools devise their own questionnaire, analyse the results and present the findings to the inspector themselves.

- 1 It was pointed out that, in the Education Committee survey, no concern was expressed by teachers regarding parental contribution and it should be remembered that a large majority of parents were happy with their child's schooling. In many cases principal teachers sat in on the meetings or parents reported immediately afterwards to the principal.

In reply to concerns regarding parents, a CEC representative stated that the inspectors were obliged to report parents' views back to principal teachers. When there were particular problems with some inspectors on the ground, he indicated that the Department was willing to take this on board and very often issues were resolved once the situation was addressed. Furthermore, it was important that the board of management would support the school.

### **Individual Feedback**

- 1 There was general agreement in the three groups that discussed this theme, that there was a need for informal oral feedback. Teachers would like affirmation but not necessarily in writing. One group was divided on whether there should be any individual feedback at all. Some teachers suggested that an optional individual written report be available for possible use as reference. However, it was argued that the strength of WSE was that reports were not individual but referred to schools as a whole.
- 1 Affirmation was considered a big bonus since teachers were rarely told they were doing a good job.
- 1 Teachers felt that advice was lacking from the Department of Education and Science, especially in the area of special needs.
- 1 Some teachers also expressed a desire to give feedback on the quality of inspections and inspectors.

### **Paperwork**

This topic was addressed by five groups. There was agreement from all groups that there was an unduly high level of expected paperwork. Many teachers felt that it should be unnecessary to regurgitate what already exists in curricula, syllabi and texts.

- 1 Teachers expressed a fear that Ireland was following the UK practice of demanding huge amounts of paperwork, to the detriment of teaching and learning. Many

teaching principals with much to offer had resigned their posts because of the overload of paperwork.

- 1 Demands on young teachers were considered excessive with many spending every hour of their free time writing notes and plans. The DES inspector assured the group that the Inspectorate were actively working to alleviate this situation.
- 1 Inspectors should not need reams of notes to ascertain if effective teaching was taking place. This should be evident from the children and from the classroom.
- 1 Some felt that teachers put a lot of pressure on themselves and there was general agreement that there was some truth in this.
- 1 Plans should be working documents that inform and support teacher practice, not bound volumes sitting on a shelf.
- 1 The question was raised as to whether there should be a lesser expectation from small schools regarding paperwork given the smaller group of people available to work on these documents and the less complex nature of such schools. This was discussed but there was no general agreement.
- 1 The central issue was the lack of uniformity among the Inspectorate in this area and, while the DES has made an effort to address this, it was not filtering down to individual inspectors on the ground.
- 1 It was noted in one group that IEPs were only required for low-incidence pupils and not for all special needs pupils. There was a lot of unnecessary paperwork in general which became more excessive during WSE.
- 1 Some concerns were also expressed that inspectors were removing documents up to one month before the start date of a school's evaluation.

## **Consistency**

All groups felt there was a lack of consistency in the approach of the inspectors to WSE and to probationary teachers. Areas of concern included:

- 1 some inspectors demanded copious notes, particularly from newly qualified teachers, while others were more realistic and even stated that teachers wrote too many notes;
- 1 in some areas meetings were held after school and in others meetings took place during school hours;
- 1 a lack of understanding for schools forced to employ substitutes or untrained teachers, in reports;
- 1 a lack of consistency between oral and written reports;
- 1 lack of consistency in interpretation of curriculum between inspectors on the same teams;
- 1 some discrepancies between notification and actual timetable.

The lack of consistency in approach to probationary teachers by the Inspectorate extended to principals. There was general consensus that newly qualified teachers were not well supported by the system. Newly qualified teachers required support from principal teachers and consistency of approach by the Inspectorate.

## **Stress**

- 1 All groups agreed that WSE was very stressful for schools and staff. It was acknowledged that teachers' reactions and fear of failure contributed to stress levels in addition to inspectors' attitudes.
- 1 It was pointed out that day-to-day problems can upset a teaching situation and that more attention needs to be given to exceptional situations arising on inspection days. It was also stated that business models should not apply to schools as they were not a business.

## **Thematic Evaluations**

- 1 One group reported that thematic evaluations were much more stressful, more concentrated and more invasive than WSE. They involved all aspects of planning, planning days and the various partners. The thematic evaluations experienced by teachers concentrated on English, Irish and maths and there was a concern that if thematic evaluations became the norm, the Revised Curriculum would be undermined.
- 1 There was a view that stress occurred because teachers were not used to having to perform in front of another adult. There was a suggestion that teachers could practice in front of a critical friend but this presupposed strong collegiality in the school. It was stated that the framework and timing would need to be strictly adhered to with flexibility in approach to take account of type of school, setting and multi-grade classes.

## **School Development Planning (SDP)**

- 1 In relation to self-evaluation by the school, it was pointed out that SDP would help schools to self-evaluate by providing advice, support and templates. Others felt this was only more paperwork. One teacher commented that the SDP person was what the inspector should be – an advisor. They should work in unison but some felt the Inspectorate were almost suspicious of SDP personnel.
- 1 It was stated that there was no evaluation of parental input, no evaluation of resources and no evaluation of boards of management and that this was unfair.
- 1 In relation to newly qualified teachers (NQT), it was recommended that the

mentoring process should be extended. Even where some induction process was in place, teachers felt the inspectors would not listen to other opinions in relation to the NQT. There was a call for young teachers and students in Colleges of Education to be in a position to observe different classes.

- 1 In response to a question as to whether teachers were obliged to teach in front of an inspector, it was pointed out that under the 1998 Education Act, they were.
- 1 There was criticism of inspectors who appeared to be ‘ticking boxes’ at the end of a room, with little or no interaction with the teacher or pupils, as this was found by teachers to be intimidating.

### **General Comments**

- 1 The WSE was seen as a good idea if the inspectors also looked at facilities, storage space and the physical resources available as part of the education process and made recommendations so that the appropriate investment could be made to address deficiencies.
- 1 There was a recommendation that training in WSE be available for all – parents, teachers, board members and principal teachers.
- 1 The delegates questioned the usefulness of evaluation which focused on ‘performance’ during WSE. There was also a strong view voiced that teachers should be more pro-active in standing up for their profession.
- 1 It was suggested that everyone should know what would be in the final report before it was published.
- 1 Clarity, in advance, as to the focus of the inspection was thought to be important, so that schools could prepare themselves, eg, if policy statements were required then the schools should know in advance which ones.
- 1 Teachers who had experienced WSE advised others to stay true to themselves, to be professional in their approach and to let the inspector see the positive atmosphere in the classroom.



# Appendices

## APPENDIX I

### Questionnaire on Teachers' Attitudes to School Evaluation

#### RESPONDENT'S DETAILS

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

School Address \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Class Taught \_\_\_\_\_

Years teaching \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate your agreement/disagreement with the statements below by ticking one of the boxes after the statement.

#### GENERAL

1. Teachers should be accountable for their work in schools.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

2. There are better ways of evaluating the work of teachers than current arrangements.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

3. Teachers are already accountable for their work.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

4. Teachers with over 10 years teaching experience should not be expected to teach in front of inspector.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

PRE-INSPECTION

5. When initially informed that WSE was to take place in the school I was concerned.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

6. Pre-inspection literature from the DES clarified all issues relating to WSE.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

7. The pre-inspection meeting with the inspector(s) clarified the process of WSE.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

8. There was ample opportunity at the pre-meeting to discuss the format/details of WSE.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

9. The pre-inspection meeting set a positive context for the subsequent process.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

INSPECTION OF CLASSROOM WORK

10. The inspector's visit to the classroom was thorough.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

11. The inspector was courteous.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

12. The inspector carried out her/his duties in relation to WSE in a professional manner.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

13. The inspection process was overly concerned with written preparation.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

14. The inspection process was overly concerned with children's written work.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

15. The inspection process involved a fair examination of interactions in the classroom.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

16. The inspector's evaluation was fair.  
Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
17. The inspector's evaluation was objective.  
Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
18. The inspector demonstrated a good understanding of the curriculum.  
Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
19. Teaching in the presence of an inspector is a stressful activity.  
Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
20. The oral feedback given by the inspector at the end of the classroom visit was useful.  
Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
21. The inspector adhered to the format/details as outlined in pre-inspection meeting.  
Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

#### PARENTS/BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

22. Parents have a right to be informed about all information contained in a WSE Report.  
Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
23. I am opposed to inspectors meeting with members of the Board of Management.  
Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
24. I am opposed to parental consultation as part of the WSE process.  
Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
25. A questionnaire to all parents would be a fair way of assessing parent opinion.  
Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
26. Primary school reports should be available, on request, to any parent who asks.  
Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

27. Primary school reports should be published on the internet.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

28. Primary school reports should be available, on request, to the media.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS ON WSE

29. WSE is an improvement over 'Tuirisc Scoile.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

30. WSE can be improved.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

31. The WSE will contribute to school improvement.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

32. The inspection as carried out was a positive experience.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

33. WSE led to a sense of partnership and collaboration.

Strongly Agree  Agree  No Opinion  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

Additional Comments

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Some General Comments from Teachers on Whole School Evaluation**

I would have welcomed some constructive/oral feedback at the end of classroom visit.

Seemed like the old fashioned inspection!

Report would need to be explained and clarified for parents or anyone else or else it could be misinterpreted.

Positive experience for the school.

Involvement of Board of Management and the Parents' Association is a good thing.

More time needed at school wide events such as playtime, school assembly, morning assembly, school council – whatever the school community feels are important aspects of school life.

While I think that the WSE was a satisfactory experience, I feel that with a few modifications it could be significantly improved. These all revolve around making the process more of a genuine partnership without compromising the Inspectorate's responsibilities.

Inspectors should sit down with staff members after each classroom visit and listen to what the teachers/SNA want to tell them about their work in the school. There was little or no oral feedback at the end of the visits.

At the post-evaluation meetings the inspectors should discuss their suggestions for future development with the staff and principal in a genuine way and not present it as a 'fait accompli'. This could ensure that the school buys into the recommendations and would avoid the situation where some of the recommendations are based on inspectors simply getting it wrong due to lack of understanding and over reliance on written documentation.

WSE was in general positive but felt that large parts of report were based on the Cuntas Míosiúl provided in advance, and many comments in the report based on information in the monthly report or not as was the case with oral language development.

It would be nice to have individual feedback with the inspector at the end of session in your classroom.

School should be asked if there is anything they feel inspectors should be made aware of. Inspectors could spend some time in the yard observing pupils at play.

Our inspectors were courteous, professional and more than willing to share in the teaching.

Pupils and teachers were left with very positive feelings as a result of the WSE process.

Sitting in on WSE meetings with the BOM and inspectors is not a 'comfortable' experience for the school principal!!

I didn't think the WSE was a worthwhile exercise.

Two inspectors came into the school for a few days, delivered a verbal report some time later and left 10 minutes for discussion. The same report with one or two additions was read to the BOM a half hour later.

The format I feel is ridiculous.

Too much emphasis on notes.

No opportunity to discuss the report.

A copy should be given beforehand, not 'read' to the staff.

I feel that WSE places a lot of stress on teachers and increases their workload.

Teachers should be more involved in evaluating the school and the writing of the report.

I did not feel that the WSE was a fair evaluation of the work I usually do in the classroom.

Parental involvement in WSE may lead to a small minority of parents nit-picking over running of school when principals and teachers are working flat out to provide an excellent quality of education.

WSE process was very time consuming – a heavy reliance on written presentation of work emulating from Department of Education and Science.

WSE a positive experience in general.

I didn't feel that we could have input into the format/detail – merely informed of the process.

I felt that the inspectors were overly concerned with assessment even in areas that we have not yet received training, ie, PE, music, drama. All these were mentioned continuously in the written report which I felt was unfair. Little attention given to things we were doing currently.

I felt that if we had a better idea what they were looking for we could have been better prepared.

Emphasis on paper work and assessment for subjects will clog up the classroom, inhibit, misdirect and take an inordinate amount of teaching and preparation time. Once over it is too easy to just forget it. Without the follow up help it is just an exercise and a stressful one.

WSE was spread out over three or four weeks. Would have preferred if it was confined to two weeks.

Inspectors were very pleasant, helpful and friendly.

Took too long in school – spread over a number of weeks.

The time leading up to the WSE was most stressful time for all staff.

If both inspectors can't be present for feedback meeting it should be postponed or cancelled.

Inspectors were kind and courteous at all time.

Parents are not qualified to give a fair opinion on school/curriculum matters. They also tend to transfer their own feelings/experiences of school to their children... and therefore cannot be objective judges.

WSE should be completed within a set period of time.

Both inspectors should attend post-inspection meeting. This was not the case in our school.

WSE is Tuairisc Scoile under a different name.

Very stressful experience. No need for evaluation to be carried out for such a long period of time.

Teachers shouldn't be expected to teach most areas of curriculum in front of inspectors – maybe could be more emphasis on interaction with children and looking at children's work.

Inspection doesn't give realistic view of day to day goings on in a school or classroom.

Stress levels amongst the staff were very high throughout duration of WSE inspection.

The time delay from moment of notification to actual inspection made stress levels more pronounced. It would have been easier on staff members if they had only one session of inspection as opposed to a return visit on a second date.

I feel normal timetable for subjects should be followed closely, eg, teaching of Irish, English and maths in the afternoon in junior classes is unreasonable and puts added stress on teacher and pupils.

The overall time taken from beginning to end of WSE should be shortened. Prolonging the process by staggering the days etc... causes more stress on the teaching staff.

Time frame (number of days/weeks etc) that WSE is carried out in within a school should be definite. Teachers should know what day/time they will be seen.

Overall the experience was positive. However, I felt greater detail was needed as regards notes needed for WSE.

It was stressful to be teaching in front of inspectors!

Needless overburdening of paperwork.

Very stressful experience. Doubtful benefits to the children's learning. Very strong emphasis on observation of teacher instructing groups or class. Had negative impact

---

on atmosphere in school, not conducive to collegiality and in the end more could be lost than gained.

Inspection process – a huge amount of written preparation – whether necessary or not.

Too much focus on written preparation.

Pre-meeting with inspectors and staff much too late in year – work already started. What happened in our school was called a WSE but in fact it was exactly the same as a Tuairisc Scoile. Yes, the inspectors met with parents and board of management but it was to talk to them about the process. Our school made a great effort to implement the new curriculum but, as far as we could see, the inspectors would have been happier to see a return to the pre-1970 curriculum. Also, the buck still stops with the class teacher – there was no examination of how management operates in the school.

Created a negative atmosphere in school.

Too much emphasis was placed on ‘teacher performance’.

Class teachers did not have an opportunity to discuss classroom matters at any great length.

Overburdening of paper work.

The process should be more clearly defined with a timetable of sequence of events agreed beforehand.

First year teaching so I wasn't that daunted by inspectors' visit.

It was a stressful time. It extended over three weeks from the time the cigirí began assessing the classes and teachers until they left the school.

There were instances of double checking which was unprofessional in my opinion – re school times and policies.

As inspectors are present in the school for a week more flexibility in topics taught should be allowed. In my case, I had to wait until Friday morning and was then asked to teach Irish, English and maths. I thought this was unreasonable.

I think parents need only be part of the WSE process where there are open difficulties. The staff of a school should be able to furnish details and evidence of co-operation with parents.

More time or a sample questionnaire should have been given to teachers, to prepare fully and more comprehensively for individual meeting with the inspection re the teaching of English.

Inspector meeting parents before WSE leaves teachers exposed to false allegations.

Inspector held a 45 minute one to one session with each teacher, the questions were not presented to teacher beforehand.

The whole experience was very stressful on the teacher and class pupils.

Some of the meetings were held outside of school time.

At the time of the WSE in our school the inspector was also carrying out a survey on language/English. He 'interviewed' two teachers including myself – it was intensive and the questions difficult to answer fully on the spot, as they were presented. Answers were recorded, we could have been prepared if we had a list of questions prior to the interview.

WSE put me under undue stress.

Inspectors could have given more feedback after watching the teacher in the classroom. I felt in maths the inspector ignored all the hard work I and the class had done on number and focussed on what was yet to be covered.

Too much written details of planning / weekly schemes required from experienced teachers.

A very stressful time. Written notes and plan – too much emphasis based on this.

Our brain is a far superior piece of equipment to computer. What a pity it is being put in second place in all walks of life. This has led to vast quantities of documentation seen in teachers' work and inspectors' work. All this detracts from our work with children and inspectors' work with us teachers. The mountainous amount of paper work takes us away from the people we want to serve and makes us less effective as teachers and inspectors less effective at their job.

There seems to be an over emphasis on paper work (notes, schemes, form filling etc) almost to the point where they appear to take precedence over the student.

I haven't seen the written report as yet, so I'm answering above questions without all the information. When meeting inspectors after WSE we were told we would get time to comment. This didn't happen because they spoke for 55 minutes themselves.

At the post WSE meeting with staff the inspectors gave themselves too much time and gave staff little or no time to give their opinions. We didn't see the written report yet. Secondly, I felt teachers were not given adequate time to respond to the report when presented by inspectors.

I felt that the WSE was a positive experience but I also feel that it is too concerned with written work, form filling etc. The advice which inspectors give is far more beneficial to children and teachers alike.

Very efficient and comprehensive. However 'an Curaclam Nua 1999' is still only in the primary stages of being implemented and the books don't yet directly correspond with the contents. I think that inspectors should be more understanding of this.

At the post WSE meeting, teachers were not given time to clarify certain statements being made by the inspectors. We were not given time to comment on their suggestions.

We had three inspectors on our WSE and a visit each from two inspectors. One I found fair. The other had his mind made up about certain curricular areas and was only looking for evidence to support that claim. Both visits were in the latter part of two consecutive school days which was not altogether fair as both children and teachers can be tired.

The one positive aspect was knowing the exact date the inspectors were to call and exactly which subjects they would examine. In a large school, the old system of one inspector coming and going for weeks on end was ridiculous. One never knew until 9am on the appointed day if the inspector was coming to you or not. At the very least, I hope we never revert to that situation.

The whole WSE scenario is too stressful. Why can't we have a limit to the number of subjects that can be examined in any one year. Excellence in every subject is too demanding.

Time given in classroom was not sufficient to gain an insight into all work being done.

Too much emphasis on Cuntas Míosúil, Notái seachtaine, organisational plans, policies and legal documents.

WSE has the potential to be a very positive experience for a school and with some effort could contribute well to school improvement. From my experience of WSE schools and teachers have nothing to fear from it.

## APPENDIX 3

### FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION

#### Court Cases

Under the terms of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, *The Irish Times* in 2001 requested access to reports of inspections of certain primary schools carried out by the Department in the Dublin area. The Department refused access to the reports on the grounds that access to the information was prohibited by Section 53 of the Education Act 1998. Section 53 of that Act provides that access may be refused to any information which would enable the compilation of information in relation to the academic achievement of students. The Department also refused access on the grounds that the staff of the schools provided information in confidence to the Inspectors during the course of their inspections, that disclosure could prejudice the effectiveness of future inspections and also that its functions relating to its management of schools could be adversely affected.

On 5 March 2003 the then Information Commissioner, Mr Kevin Murphy, ruled that in relation to the contents of the reports he did not accept that access to them could have the harm envisaged by the Department. The Commissioner commented that while the reports gave an overall impression of the schools they did not contain any specific references to the academic achievements of students in each school. The Commissioner went on to find that the comments in the reports were of such a general nature that no meaningful comparison could be drawn between the schools. He did not accept that the information in the reports could be described as information given in confidence to the inspectors as the reports were the inspectors' own opinions and observations formed during the course of visits to the schools. Although not required to, the Commissioner also commented briefly on the public interest.

In the decision of this case (Case 000238) Mr Murphy reviewed the Department's decision and its submissions of 18 April 2002 and 22 August 2002. He also examined the school reports in question, the relevant Department circulars and the provisions of the Education Act 1998 ('the Education Act').

The original request by *The Irish Times* was for all school reports which the Department's Primary Inspectorate prepared in accordance with Circulars 31/82 and 12/83. The Department refused to grant the request on a number of grounds including section 10(1)(c) of the Freedom of Information Act, 1997 which provides that a request may be refused if the retrieval and examination of the records sought would "...cause a substantial and unreasonable interference with or disruption of the other

work of the public body concerned”.

During the course of this review *The Irish Times* agreed to confine its request for access to reports of five Primary schools located in the Dublin inner city area. This effectively removed the basis for the Department's refusal under section 10(1)(c). The five reports, selected by the Department, were for the following primary schools in Dublin : St Catherine's – North Circular Road; Scoil Naomh Bríd – The Coombe; Scoil Choilm – Crumlin; St Laurence O'Toole NS – Seville Place and the Central Model School – Marlborough Street.

*The Irish Times* also indicated that the newspaper was not seeking access to any references to individual teachers or staff in the reports. Four of the reports contained a brief comment in relation to the principal of each school, while two of the reports contained a brief reference to other staff.

Accordingly, Mr Murphy's review was concerned solely with the question of whether the Department's decision to refuse access to these five school reports, with the exception of the references to the principal and individual staff members as listed in the attached schedule, was justified.

The Department of Education and Science had refused access to the reports under Section 53 of the Education Act, and Sections 21(1) (a), 21(1) (b), 26(1)(a) and 28(1) of the FOI Act. He examined the Department's claim for exemption under each of these Sections in turn. He also pointed out that Section 34(12) (b) of the FOI Act provides that a decision to refuse to grant a request shall be presumed not to have been justified unless the head shows to my satisfaction that the decision was justified.

### **Section 53 of the Education Act 1998**

Section 32(1)(A) of the FOI Act provides that access to a record shall be refused if the disclosure of the record is prohibited by any enactment. The Department claims that access to the reports is prohibited by Section 53 of the Education Act. Section 53 of the Act provides that :

*“... the Minister may –*

- (a) refuse access to any information which would enable the compilation of information... in relation to the comparative performance of schools in respect of the academic achievement of students enrolled therein...”*

The Department argued that disclosure of these five reports and other reports which may be released in response to subsequent requests under the FOI Act, would enable comparisons to be made between the various schools and thus would enable school league tables to be produced. It argued that the purpose of Section 53 of the Education Act was to prevent the compilation of such tables. In submissions the

Department described the adverse impact the compilation of such league tables would have on the school system and the Department's ability to manage those schools.

In its submission the Department of Education and Science drew attention to the comments of the Minister for Education when he introduced Section 53 of the Education Act as a report stage amendment in Dáil Éireann. The Minister stated:

*“The amendment allows the withholding of information in relation to issues such as whole school evaluation and retention rates. The release of such information would represent another form of league tables to which I am strongly opposed.”*

In acknowledging the Minister's statement Mr Murphy had regard to the wording of the Education Act itself. Section 53(a) clearly states that access may be refused to:

*“any information which would enable the compilation of information... in relation to the comparative performance of schools in respect of the academic achievement of students enrolled therein, including, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing:*

- (i) the overall results in any year of students in a particular school in an examination, or*
- (ii) the comparative overall results in any year of students in different schools in an examination.”*

The Information Commissioner stated that the views of the Minister notwithstanding, it was clear that this section of the Act was concerned with academic achievement. He agreed that if anything in these reports revealed matter directly related to Section 53(a) of the Education Act and the Minister had refused access to it then its release could be refused under Section 32(1)(a) of the FOI Act. He stated that he had examined the contents of the school reports and had no reason to believe that they were significantly different from other reports produced by the Department in accordance with Circular 12/83. The reports did not contain any specific references to the academic achievements of students in each school. There were no rankings or scorings given either for the school or the students involved. He was also not aware of, and the Department had not pointed to, any criteria used for assessing the schools under each of the headings listed above.

The Information Commissioner formed the view that the comments contained in the reports were of such a general and subjective nature that any direct comparison of academic achievement between the schools could not be drawn. In addition, he noted that Section 6 of Circular 12/83 provides that the school report is not:

*“... the report of a general inspection and, therefore, it is not necessary to assess all aspects of the curriculum in all classes except to the extent that general inspections on teachers on probation or other general inspections in accordance with the Rules for National Schools contribute to the overall view of the school contained in the School Report”.*

He argued that from this provision the reports are not concerned with the curriculum but rather with an overall view of the school which is compiled under a limited number of headings.

He did acknowledge that an analysis of the reports in question could give rise to comparisons being drawn between overall views of the schools. However, such comparisons would be highly subjective and, therefore, he did not believe that any empirical league table of schools, even one based on overall impressions, could be compiled. In any event, he argued that in his opinion such information would not breach the provisions of section 53 of the Education Act. “Having examined the contents of the reports and having regard to the provisions of section 34(12) of the FOI Act, I am not satisfied that access to the reports would breach the provisions of section 53 of the Education Act. Therefore I find that access to the reports is not exempt under section 32(1)(a) of the FOI Act.”

### **Section 21(1)(a) and 21(1)(b)**

Section 21(1) of the FOI Act provides that access to a record may be refused if access could reasonably be expected to:

*“(a) prejudice the effectiveness of tests, examinations, investigations, inquiries or audits conducted by or on behalf of the public body concerned or the procedures or methods employed for the conduct thereof...”, or,*

*“(b) have a significant, adverse effect on the performance by the body of any of its functions relating to management (including industrial relations and management of its staff)...”*

In arriving at a decision to claim a Section 21 exemption, a decision maker must, firstly, identify the potential harm to the functions covered by the exemption that might arise from disclosure and, having identified that harm, consider the reasonableness of any expectation that the harm will occur. The test of whether the expectation is reasonable is not concerned with the question of probabilities or possibilities. It is concerned simply with whether or not the decision maker’s expectation is reasonable. In the case of a claim under Section 21(1)(b), the establishment of “significant, adverse effect” requires stronger evidence of damage than the “prejudice” standard of Section 21(1)(a). When invoking Section 21(1)(b), the public body must make an assessment of

the degree of importance or significance attaching to the adverse effects claimed. Not only must the harm be reasonably expected but it must also be expected that the harm will be of a more significant nature than that required under Section 21(1)(a).

The Department of Education and Science claimed that the effectiveness of future inspections of schools could be prejudiced as the release of the reports would lead directly to the compilation of league tables which is prohibited under the Education Act. The Department elaborated on this argument in its submissions. It also contended that the compilation of such league tables could have a significant adverse effect on one of its management functions i.e. its duty to report on schools in accordance with the provisions of Circular 12/83. The Information Commissioner accepted that the compilation, from the contents of the reports, of such school league tables could have an adverse effect on the effectiveness of the reports in question. However, Mr Murphy argued in line with his comments in relation to section 53 of the Education Act that he did not accept that disclosure of the contents of the reports could result in the compilation of any meaningful league tables as feared by the Department.

Mr Murphy pointed to Section 13 of the Education Act 1998 which states that :

*“(3) ... 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:*
  - (1) evaluate the organisation and operation of those schools and centres and the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools or centres...*
  - (V) report to the Minister, or the board, patron, parents of students and teachers as appropriate, and as prescribed , in these matters...*
  - (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 the school...”*

In addition Section 1 of Circular 12/83 provides that a school report *“is to be furnished to the Department at regular intervals...”* These provisions provide the Department with the authority to carry out such reports and provide for the co-operation of schools in this regard, according to Mr Murphy.

The Department’s second submission makes reference to difficulties with the partners that could arise should information which could give rise to the creation of league tables be released, thereby frustrating the aims of the Education Act. Mr Murphy took this as a claim for exemption under Section 21(1)(a) or 21(1)(b) of the FOI Act. As he had previously argued he did not believe that the information contained in the reports could give rise to the compilation of information envisaged in the

Education Act and as such he did not accept this argument.

He said that the powers of an inspector under Section 13(7) of the Education Act would appear to allay these concerns. Accordingly, he did not accept the Department's argument in relation to Section 21(1)(a) or (b) and he found that having regard to the provisions of Section 34(12) the Department had not justified its decision to refuse access under Section 21(1)(a) or (b).

## SECTION 26

The Department also refused access to the reports under section 26(1) of the FOI Act. It had argued that the information in the reports was given in confidence to the Inspectors, that the information would not have been given if the parties concerned believed the reports would be published and, that the reports would be of little value in the absence of the information supplied by the schools.

Section 26(1) of the FOI Act provides exemption for certain information given to a public body in confidence. Section 26(2) provides that this exemption does not apply to a record which is prepared by a head, a director or a member of the staff of the public body in the course of the performance of his or her functions. The one exception to this rule is where the disclosure of the information concerned would constitute a breach of a duty of confidence owed to a person other than a public body or head or director, or member of staff of a public body. It follows that the exemptions in section 26(1) are capable of applying, but only if disclosure of the information in the reports would constitute a breach of a duty of confidence owed by the Department to the staff, principal or board of management of the schools in question.

As no argument was made in relation to any specific agreement or enactment in relation to this matter the Information Commissioner therefore considered whether an equitable duty of confidence existed in this case. The correct tests, he argued, to apply in deciding whether there is a breach of an equitable duty of confidence are set out in the case of *Coco v. A. N. Clark (Engineers) Limited* F.S. R. 415 (which is accepted as reflecting the Irish law on the subject).

*“Three elements are normally required if, apart from contract, a case of breach of confidence is to succeed. First, the information itself... must have the necessary quality of confidence about it. Secondly, that information must have been imparted in circumstances imposing an obligation of confidence. Thirdly, there must be an unauthorised use of that information to the detriment of the party communicating it.”*

He adopted the following definition of ‘confidence’ taken from F. Gurry *Breach of Confidence in Essays in Equity*; P. Finn (Ed.); Law Book Company, 1985, (p.III):

*“A confidence is formed whenever one party (‘the confider’) imparts to another (‘the*

*confidant') private or secret matters on the express or implied understanding that the communication is for a restricted purpose."*

He argued that the school reports were prepared by inspectors who are members of staff of the Department. They were prepared in the course of the performance of their functions. They consist of 'the authors', ie, the Inspectors' own opinions and observations formed during the course of their visits to the schools. He stated that in his view such matters cannot be the subject of a duty of confidence, if for no other reason than these opinions and observations were not 'imparted' to them by anyone.

There is information in these reports which may have been provided to the inspectors. The first section of each report contains a factual profile of the school, details of accommodation and resources and this is information which may have been provided to the inspectors. Details about a school's size, accommodation, resources and catchment area (such as that contained in the first sections of the reports) is information that is readily available to any member of the public and much of which would be in the possession of the Department in any event. Such information does not consist of private or secret matters and he did not accept that it had the necessary quality of confidence required to create a duty of confidence.

The Department also argued that some of the opinions expressed by the Inspectors were formed as a result of discussions with the teachers and the management of the schools concerned. He accepted that it was conceivable, although rather unlikely – given the purpose of the reports and the circumstances of their creation – that some of these views could have been imparted to the Department in confidence. However, having examined the contents of the reports he stated that he was satisfied that they did not contain any information that could be said to have been imparted in circumstances imposing an obligation of confidence or have the necessary quality of confidence about it. He did not accept that release of any part of these reports would give rise to a breach of a duty of confidence. In the circumstances he found that by virtue of Section 26(2), the exemptions in Section 26(1) cannot apply.

## **Public Interest**

Mr Murphy argued that if he were to find that Sections 21(1)(a) or 21(1)(b) applied, the Act provides that release might still be justified where the public interest would, on balance, be better served by granting than by refusing to grant the request. Although it was not necessary for him to do so he considered whether the public interest would require release in this case.

He argued that there was a significant public interest in information about schools being available to the public. Given the vast expenditure of public funds on the education system, it can hardly be argued that what goes on in a school is always the business only of the board of management, teachers, parents or pupils. The protection

of the right to privacy may require access to some records or parts of records relating to schools to be withheld. However, he stated that he found it difficult to see why records of the kind at issue in this review need to be withheld from the public. He stated his satisfaction that disclosure of the contents of these reports would not be in breach of the provisions of the Education Act or lead to any meaningful comparisons between schools. Therefore he argued that in the absence of any countervailing public interest and if he had to decide this case on whether the public interest would be better served by release, he would find in favour of release.

## Section 28

*The Irish Times* had already indicated that it was not seeking access to any parts of the reports which contain personal information. Those parts which could be described as containing personal information were identified and listed. Mr Murphy stated that he was satisfied that none of the remaining parts contain information “about an identifiable individual” as required to meet the definition of personal information in the FOI Act. Accordingly he stated that he was satisfied that access to the remaining parts of the reports would not involve the disclosure of personal information.

## Decision

The Information Commissioner annulled the decision of the Department of Education and Science and directed that access be granted to the five school reports with the exception of those parts of the reports which are not within the scope of this review and which were identified.

Speaking after this decision was handed down John Carr, General Secretary, said that the INTO was anxious that the implications of the ruling be clarified in the light of the provisions in Section 53 of the Education Act 1998 .

He cited experiences in England where the publication of league tables had a most damaging effect on the whole school system. He stated that it was his belief that the publication of reports in this manner would allow the comparison of schools in an unfair and biased manner.

*“Schools are complex organizations and comparisons on the basis of crude league tables could not do justice to the work of schools”.*

The Irish experience to date has been one of cooperation between the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science and primary teachers. Such co-operation has enhanced openness and transparency and allowed school inspection to be open and thorough.

The Inspectorate is an independent body accountable to the Minister for Education

and Science for the evaluation of the school system.

“This is not an attempt to run away from accountability. The INTO believes that teachers are accountable for their work in schools and have always cooperated fully with the school inspection process. It is a key way in which quality assurance is provided.”

## High Court Case

Following this a case was taken by Mr Barney Sheedy, Principal of Scoil Choilm in Dublin 12, appealing a decision of the (by that time, former) Information Commissioner Kevin Murphy.

The case was heard before Easter before Mr Justice Gilligan. In his judgement Justice Gilligan said that he was satisfied that the Oireachtas having put in place a system in relation to FOI that the court should be slow to set the decision aside. He said the intent of the FOI Act was to ensure the greatest possible access to information in the possession of public bodies consistent with the public interest and the right to privacy.

Section 53 of the Education Act prohibits the publication of information in relation to schools that would enable the compilation of information in relation to the comparative performance of schools in respect of academic performance.

He stated that he was satisfied with the contention of the Information Commissioner that the reports do not contain such specific references. There are no scorings, rankings or obvious criteria in the reports.

He accepted the view that it would be possible to draw overall comparisons but that these would be subjective and not empirical.

He ruled that Mr Sheedy failed to show that the Information Commissioner erred in law and that granting access to the reports would enable the compilation of information in relation to the comparative performance of schools.

He agreed with previous judgement (Minister for Agriculture V Information Commissioner 2000) that only in confidence cases should the public be deprived of access to information in the possession of public bodies.

Crucially he dismissed the argument that information given to inspectors as part of a Tuairisc Scoile was given in confidence. He said it was not a matter of choice but of statutory obligation and that the inspectors had sufficient powers to require co-operation.

He awarded costs for the Information Commissioner against Barney Sheedy but made no order in respect of *The Irish Times* costs.

This decision was then appealed to the Supreme Court. It was also emphasised that school evaluations cover a range of issues over and above the academic attainment of children, and that the ruling did not prevent parents having access to school information.

# Bibliography

Department of Education and Science Inspectorate (1996), *Whole School Inspection (WSI) Consultative Conference*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science Inspectorate (1999), *Whole School Evaluation – Report on the 1998/1999 Pilot Project*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science Inspectorate (2002), *Procedure for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13(9) of the Education Act, 1998*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science Inspectorate (2002), *Fifty School Reports: What Inspectors Say*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science Inspectorate (2002), *Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science Inspectorate (2003), *Looking at our School: An Aid to Self-Evaluation in Primary Schools*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Government of Ireland (1995), *White Paper on Education: Charting our Education Future*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

O’Connell, T.J. (1968), *100 Years of Progress: The Story of the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation*. Dublin: INTO.