



Inspection Newsletter

December 2012

Link between s5 and s48 broken

From the start of the statutory inspection process in 1993, diocesan inspection of schools has been triggered by Ofsted inspection. Currently s48 inspection takes place in the half term or term following s5. No diocesan inspection follows s8 monitoring inspections. As from September 2012 the link between Ofsted and diocesan inspections has been broken. In future schools which have been judged to be good or better by the diocese, irrespective of s5 judgements, must be inspected under s48 within 5 years from the end of the school year within which they were last inspected. Those where the s48 judgement was less than good must be inspected within 3-5 years from the end of the school year within which they were last inspected. Those schools notified of their inspections in the autumn term 2012 are still being inspected in the subsequent half term or term. The reason for this is that the notice of the change was published by DFE on 31st July (typically during the summer vacation) and only reached us at the DES in October. By then plans were laid and inspectors allocated.

What happens if a school's Catholic life or RE becomes a major concern within the five years?

The diocese will be able to approach DFE to request funding for an inspection. If this is not forthcoming, the diocese could initiate a Canon Law inspection which would, in all appearances, be the same as a s48. In the case of secondary schools some risk assessment is possible via GCSE/A Level results and a significant change could trigger an early inspection.

Will schools judged by Ofsted or the Diocese to be outstanding be exempt from further inspection?

We are clear that no school will be exempt from s48 inspection and this has been agreed with DFE and all other dioceses. Exemption from s5 is constantly under review through Ofsted risk assessments based on school data. Dioceses do not have this data nor can there be any data about Catholic life or collective worship.

Will academies be inspected any differently?

Inspection will continue to operate in accordance with statutory requirements and canon law in the same way as for voluntary aided Catholic schools. The same time intervals will apply, though it might prove possible to bring inspections of schools within a MAC closer together.



How will s48 inspections be set up and what notice will be given to schools that an inspection is to take place?

A database is being established listing all schools with their last inspection dates for s5 and s48 and the outcome of those inspections (in the case of s48 inspections since February 2012 this will be the judgement in the school self-evaluation where it has been validated by inspection). A plan based on the time intervals described above will then be laid for the next five years. If no concerns are raised in that time about any of the schools, the plan will be effected. If it becomes evident that a school is experiencing difficulties where previously it was securely good or better, the inspection will be brought forward. Because s48 inspection currently seeks to validate school self-evaluation rather than make judgements directly about the school, a half term's notice is given with a view to school's providing a self-evaluation document in good time for the inspectors. This is likely to remain the same, but views of headteachers and governors on this notice would be welcome.

Should the focus of inspection or the framework change over the next five years, the period of notice might be reviewed. Since 2000, no framework based on nationally agreed s48 guidelines has lasted more than three years, though changes were previously always linked to s5 changes. Since no other diocese appears to have put the new guidelines in place as yet, most doing so from January or Easter 2013, it is unlikely that there will be any significant alterations for some years ahead. But then the management of inspection will change in the diocese within 5 years from now and that might signal change.

Inspecting school self evaluation

The purpose of this form of inspection is to enable schools to become more effective in self evaluation. Inspection can require change and can point in the right direction, but school self-evaluation when properly directed with secure systems and procedures and careful integration with development planning is at the heart of school improvement. The current diocesan approach to inspection is intended to help schools to improve their self-evaluation especially of Catholic life and collective worship, the areas of perceived greatest need. The inspections will be supplemented by additional guidance on how to carry it out.

At one headteachers' meeting in summer 2012, it was said that no changes in inspection had been noticed. Perhaps the character of inspection based on school self-evaluation needs to be re-visited here. Inspection prior to February 2012 required inspectors to make judgements about the standards and progress of pupils in RE, the extent to which they benefited from and contributed to the Catholic life of the school, their participation in and leadership of collective worship, the quality of leadership of the school's Catholic life and RE, and the provision for RE and collective worship.

Since then, schools make those judgements and inspectors seek the evidence to validate them. The Framework for Inspection is very similar to those which preceded it; what the inspectors do in school is superficially very similar to earlier practice. They observe lessons; they undertake a work scrutiny; they interview headteacher, governor(s), parish priest/chaplain, pupils, subject leader and others as appropriate.

What is different is that they are asking the questions: "Is the school's view of itself reliable? Are there effective self-evaluation processes in place?" They are not starting from the old question: "How good are this school's Catholic life and RE?" What they are doing is looking for evidence which supports the school's judgements, but sometimes the evidence may challenge those judgements. That could be because the evidence is insufficiently strong or is incomplete, because it is misinterpreted (for example, schools have judged some areas to be good when they might have said they were better), because processes - especially for monitoring Catholic life - are not secure.



Occasionally, schools have tried too hard to present the best possible picture of themselves and neglected to identify areas they know to be weaknesses or areas for development. Part of what the inspector wants to know is whether the school is aware of any weaknesses or development needs, how it knows about them, what it is doing about them, and what progress is being made. If this is made clear the first section of the report where the key judgement is made will be positive and supportive of the school even if the school's overall judgement of itself is that it is satisfactory. It is perfectly possible in that circumstance that the inspector's judgement could be that "the school has very strong and effective processes of self-evaluation in place. School leaders know where development must take place and have instituted effective measures to achieve it." Equally a school which has high achievement, and outstanding collective worship and Catholic ethos, could be criticised for having ineffective monitoring and evaluation processes. They could, through complacency, be taking their eye off the ball with the result that what is now outstanding will not remain so.

So what are inspectors are looking for?

1. Self-evaluation that is reliable, accurate, realistic for Catholic life, collective worship, and RE
2. Systematic processes focussing on impact and outcomes
3. The outcome of the processes: a basis for action to improve
4. Close relationship of monitoring, evaluation and improvement planning
5. Clear priorities with success criteria and review intervals
6. Involvement in evaluation of all who are appropriate: headteacher/senior team (responsible for Catholic life); governors; subject leader; staff; pupils; parents through questionnaires and surveys
7. Identification of any inhibiting factors
8. Capacity for further improvement.

The extent to which these characteristics are met within the school determines both the key judgement of the inspection and how the second section of the report – Overall Effectiveness of the School – is written. The first half should record the inspector's judgements and any relevant observations; the second half should only record the school's judgements of itself if they have been validated. The inspector should not intrude in the second half unless the school has not been reliable in the self-evaluation.

Can the inspectors do this effectively?

Inspecting in this way is harder especially as everyone has for years known that inspection is about making judgements about how good a school is. While reports have sometimes strayed into judging aspects of the school or have struggled with writing about self-evaluation, by and large inspectors have met expectations. Undoubtedly, the standard of reports will improve with more experience. If one looks back to the reports produced either by Ofsted or the diocese in the first decade of inspection, one can see practice improving over time.



Inspector recruitment

While we have some serving headteachers as inspectors and a few deputies, assistant heads and subject leaders, the majority of inspectors are retired from schools. It would be good to bring in more serving heads and deputies for primary schools in particular where we have the greatest need for inspectors. Training will be offered at regular intervals in the hope that more will become involved.

The difficulty with secondary schools is that there aren't that many inspected each year, so more people have been trained than it has been possible to use so far. At the same time, only two serving heads or deputies from secondary schools have led an inspection. The shortage is of lead inspectors.

There is a difficulty, too, for headteachers and other senior staff living in the north of the diocese. Recently a head living in Stoke was doing an inspection in a primary school to the north of Birmingham and took two hours to get to the school. Driving back north is not that much easier.

All serving heads and others who have joined inspections have recognised that it provides them with good inset experience. It is also a great privilege to be able to visit schools and see how they work. As almost all of our diocesan schools are good or better in their Catholic life and RE, they provide a wealth of good practice for other senior leaders to draw upon. There is scarcely a better way than to spend a couple of days in an inspection analysing how others achieve success.

Inspection Surveys

As inspectors visit schools they are gathering evidence in a little more detail of things that work well – or occasionally which don't work so well – in relation to themes or aspects of RE and Catholic life. This evidence is at present simply lodged with the DES in the same way that the old inspection of subjects or aspects by Ofsted was gathered to be reported later. The example of this underpinning what the diocesan inspections are doing is the Ofsted document "Transforming Religious Education" (Ofsted, February 2010). That was a three year undertaking across community schools. Similarly the gathering of information by diocesan inspectors is a longer term undertaking which will result in the publication of a report when sufficient evidence has been garnered. So far we have some evidence about collective worship; spiritual, moral and vocational development across the curriculum; assessment for learning; sixth form teaching; teaching in primary schools; subject leadership; self-evaluation; teaching about Catholic practices in other countries; governors' ethos committee. More is needed on these and other themes before we are in a position to publish a useful report on Catholic life and RE across the diocese. However, we have only been gathering information for 6 months.

Guidance on using the diocesan self-evaluation document

Following concerns from schools and inspectors about the length of self-evaluation documents, further guidance has been placed on the diocesan website – www.bdes.org.uk – about how to use the blank SSE document. A major part of the problem for both schools and inspectors is that the forms as submitted have consistently included too much description and repeated information unnecessarily between sections. On the website there is a blank form with clear statements about what should be omitted from each section e.g. in the section on pupils' learning the guidance says: "Do not write about teaching here. Write about progress in learning as well as progress in attainment." Guidance about what might be included is given in the italics at the beginning of each section and in the outline guidance of the framework for inspection.



The principle should be, as with the Ofsted SEF, to state the judgements you have made and then point to the evidence. In addition, as the diocese is inspecting the school's self-evaluation, clear but brief reference should be made to the processes used. When inspectors visit schools they will want to see the evidence gathered over time.

If a school wishes to present the self-evaluation in their own way, this is acceptable. It is not required that schools use the SSE document provided, though obviously schools will wish to take account of the inspection framework.

Findings from two terms with the new framework and inspection process

- All schools but one have provided a self evaluation document (SSE), but a small number are providing them with insufficient time for the inspector to prepare thoroughly. The purpose in giving half a term's notice is to enable a school to be properly prepared in good time and to submit their SSEs at least a fortnight in advance of inspection.
- All SSEs have been found to make broadly reliable judgements about the school's work; the very large majority of schools are reliably judging themselves to be good or better in relation to Catholic life and RE .
- Most SSEs have been produced carefully, but some showing signs of haste – especially where there is a new head who has not been left any documentation.
- Best practice is collaboration between senior team and RE subject leader in producing SSE with involvement of governors: a few schools leave all to RE subject leader and HT does not take responsibility for Catholic life.
- Some governors are not familiar with the self-evaluation document.
- Schools are doing a lot of self-evaluation.
- Schools are not making sufficient distinction between Catholic life and RE.
- There is still uncertainty in a number of schools about how to monitor and evaluate Catholic life and collective worship formally.
- The relationship between evaluation and improvement planning is not always clear and sometimes there is no apparent link between them.

Limiting Factor

As a result of the findings of inspection a change will be introduced to the judgements made by inspectors. From the beginning of the Summer Term 2013, any school which does not have formal systems or processes in place for monitoring and evaluating Catholic life including collective worship cannot be judged to have better than satisfactory self evaluation. This will be the case even if the judgements the school makes about itself are accurate.

Inspecting Faith Schools (Ofsted, 2012)

It has come to our notice both here in Birmingham diocese and in dioceses across the country that s5 inspectors are routinely visiting RE lessons. They are not infrequently seeing all members of the RE department of secondary schools even though there are teachers of other subjects who are not being seen



at all. Their grounds for this are that they are not judging the content of RE lessons but making judgements about generic teaching and learning skills. A second reason is that they are looking for evidence of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

S5 inspectors were provided with a series of briefing documents with the new framework, one of which is called *Inspecting Faith Schools*. In this it claims the right for s5 inspectors to observe lessons in which RE is provided. "In such cases, the section 5 inspector will not inspect or report on matters which are the responsibility of the section 48 inspector – generally the denominational content provided." It does note that "The relationship between section 5 and section 48 inspections is governed by a protocol between Ofsted and signatory faith group inspectorates."

While the protocol is to be revised once more, the national s48 co-ordinators' view, supported by the Catholic Education Service, is that s5 practice currently and the information above from *Inspecting Faith Schools* is inconsistent with the protocol which has been signed between Ofsted and the CES. The protocol acknowledges that s5 inspectors may "observe lessons in which denominational RE is provided." It has not been agreed that they should report on teaching and learning. The protocol also states that inspectors should take steps to avoid over inspection of particular teachers. As RE is the only subject which is now inspected in schools, it is our contention that s5 inspectors are currently failing to take account of the fact that RE teachers will be inspected twice if they observe them as a matter of course. On two occasions headteachers have asked the DES or lead inspector if RE teachers would have to be observed in s48 inspection "as they have already been seen by OFSTED". Observing RE teaching and learning is central to s48: it is not so for s5. **Headteachers should remind s5 inspectors of the protocol and ensure that their RE staff are not liable to be over-inspected. In primary schools too, it is important that RE lessons should not be over-inspected and headteachers need to draw inspectors' attention to the protocol.**

It is recognised that headteachers are at times encouraging s5 to visit RE lessons where they judge their teachers to be outstanding. If this happens, heads cannot expect s48 inspectors to cut down on their observations. However, this is not the major concern. It is unacceptable for s5 to visit every teacher of RE including non-specialist teachers as has happened in several inspections in recent months. The issue is being taken up with HMI by the CES and the outcome will be communicated to schools when we know what the outcome is.