



# Inspection Newsletter No. 6

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## Ofsted Inspection, Religious Education and Collective Worship

It has come to our notice from time to time that s5/S8 inspectors are visiting and commenting upon RE and/or collective worship in feedback to schools or, more rarely, in reports. It is important that all headteachers should know exactly what Ofsted inspectors can and cannot do under the law.

The relationship between s5/8 and s48 inspections is set out in a protocol agreed between Ofsted and the faith communities. The protocol sets out the legal background of inspection:

If a maintained school has a religious character, as designated by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills under section 69(3) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, denominational religious education and the content of collective worship are inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Accordingly, the *School Inspection Handbook section 5 from September 2015*, states:

In schools with a religious character, section 5 inspectors **must not comment on the content of religious worship or on denominational religious education (RE)**. Inspectors may visit lessons and assemblies in order to help them evaluate how those contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their personal development, behaviour and welfare. (Annex p.71)

This is sometimes read as saying that inspectors must not comment on the content of denominational RE, but a strict interpretation of the language would mean that Ofsted inspectors cannot comment on any aspect of RE other than SMSC and personal development, behaviour and welfare. However, since the protocol was agreed the British values agenda has required Ofsted to report on "mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs" and diversity (Handbook, Paras 135, 136). While this is a whole school requirement and in essence belongs to the whole curriculum, schools will want to make clear the extent to which they teach about other faiths within the RE curriculum. This will not extend to s5 inspectors' rights to see pupils' books in RE nor to comment on any teaching which they observe in RE lessons.

It has been evident over a long period that many s5/s8 inspectors, including HMI, are not conversant with the protocol or even aware that one exists. It is essential, therefore, both senior leaders and subject leaders understand the rules governing inspection, RE and collective worship. **Any breach of the protocol and failure of s5/8 inspectors to operate according to the School Inspection Handbook should be challenged and must be reported to the Senior Officer for Inspection and School Improvement at the DES.** The matter would then be reported to the Catholic Education Service which would ask Ofsted to investigate.

**These rules apply equally to Local Authority representatives who also have no right to view and comment upon religious education in our schools.**



## Risk Assessment

I want to thank all of the schools which have co-operated so well with the risk assessments. So far as the DES is concerned it is proving to be a valuable exercise in filling the gap left by the change from a three to a five year interval between diocesan inspections of good or better schools. In general the procedure is confirming that schools are monitoring and evaluating RE very effectively, that most governors are carrying out their responsibilities in relation to Catholic life and RE properly, and that primary schools are making very good progress in gathering and beginning to analyse data about RE. It is evident that many are still finding difficulty in monitoring and evaluating Catholic life and worship formally and that we, at the DES, need to provide further guidance on how to engage in evidenced reflection on Catholicity.

Some schools have failed to recognise that risk assessment is a requirement under Canon Law and is, therefore, to be treated by schools in the same way as s48/diocesan inspection. As a timetable for the assessments has to be established and it does not allow for any leeway without causing bottlenecks in our work, schools need to observe the times stated for their assessment. Most have done this and have submitted their documentation as requested and to the time specified, for which we are grateful. In this context, please see the section below about notice for future assessments and inspections.

Risk assessment, in common with s48/diocesan inspections, has confirmed that there are weaknesses in schools' summative evaluation documents, in some measure arising from an unsatisfactory template for the SEF which I have stuck with for too long. That has demanded too much description from schools and insufficient focus on the process of monitoring and evaluation, the impact of provision, and the implications for school improvement. Each notification of risk assessment and inspection is now being accompanied by another document which indicates the key questions that schools should answer in a summative evaluation and these should be supported in school by an evidence base which can be accessed by inspectors when they evaluate the work of the school. The document, which will also be uploaded to the BDES website, is for guidance and does not establish a required format for self evaluation.

A few schools have submitted evaluation documents that are barely changed from those presented for the inspection in 2012, sometimes using evidence from even earlier years. This implies that no monitoring or evaluation of Catholic life, worship and RE has taken place, though I am fairly confident that in most cases that is not true. It would be better to submit a very short document summarising recent monitoring than to repeat old material which tells us nothing of where the school is now. The whole purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to keep the school moving forward effectively and to inform future planning. This is as necessary for Catholic life and RE as it is for Maths and English in a diocesan school: they are a key reason for the existence and maintenance of the school.

## Reduced notice for inspection/risk assessment

As all schools should now know broadly when their next inspection and risk assessment will take place, I am reducing the time for notification of inspection to two weeks and risk assessment to a minimum of four weeks. So that everyone is sure when these will occur the arrangements are as follows:

**Any school which is judged to be good or better in relation to Catholic life and RE must be inspected within 5 years from the end of the year in which the last inspection took place.** In general terms I have been seeking to re-inspect a school in the same term as that in which it was



inspected on the last occasion. So, for example, a school inspected in Spring 2013 would normally be re-inspected in Spring 2018, though not necessarily in the same part of the term. This cannot be absolutely guaranteed as the date of Easter varies, but in most cases across the year schools will be able to predict within a term when the inspection will take place and will, consequently, be able to be prepared without long notice.

**Schools previously judged to be requiring improvement to be good or lower must be re-inspected within three to five years following the previous inspection.** We normally do this after three years and before the end of that fourth year.

Risk assessments only apply to schools judged to be good or better. The pattern is that **risk assessments will take normally place three years and a term after the last inspection.** However, the number arising from the earlier cycle when the interval was three years, has led to some stretching of the time. So schools should expect the assessment to take place after three years and a term, but it may in practice be three years and two terms for some schools.

### **Future Developments in Inspection in the Diocese**

At present we are considering whether the next phase of diocesan inspection should return to the more conventional approach of the inspector(s) making judgements about the school rather than about the quality of the school's self evaluation. This will obviously be for my successor and the senior leaders at the DES to determine, but I should like to leave with a firm recommendation which schools have had the opportunity to comment upon. You may have a view on this that you would wish to share.

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