



Inspection Newsletter No. 7

April 2016

Revision to section 48 Inspections in the Summer Term 2016

In addition to the changes notified in Inspection Newsletter No. 6 about the reduction of notice to two weeks, there are four further changes two of which bring s48 inspections into line with Ofsted procedure, and one which adjusts reporting in the light of the focus of risk assessments. Two of these changes are unlikely to affect most schools, a third will only affect them if the guidance here is ignored.

1. Inspectors will revert to writing reports in the conventional Ofsted way; that is, they will make judgements about each aspect of the Inspection Schedule and report those judgements as their own. Reports will not be divided into sections on Self Evaluation and Overall Effectiveness any longer, but will follow an adjusted structure of the Schedule. Inspectors will continue to make judgements about the quality of schools' monitoring and evaluation, but as one part of the whole process. It will still be significant for the final judgement about the school. The difference to the Inspection Framework will be that where it currently reads:

"Inspectors should review the school's evaluation of:..."

it will now be taken as reading:

"Inspectors should evaluate:..."

Why are we making this change which appears to be a backward step? Now that we have risk assessments in place we are able to return to a form of report that all know and understand well, schools as well as inspectors. The strong focus on self evaluation will be sustained through the three yearly risk assessments which will continue to guide schools on how to best represent their self review. The quality of school self evaluation will still be reported as part of judgements about school leadership and schools will still be expected to have formal processes in place for monitoring and evaluating Catholic life, collective worship, and religious education. So this change mainly affects inspectors, but will enable greater clarity of reporting overall. No separate letter to parents will be produced.

2. Inspectors will explore the extent to which a school is identifying its own weaknesses and areas for development as well as its strengths and is able to explain what action it is taking to bring about improvement. They will look for these to be identified in the school self evaluation document in the first instance on the principle that self evaluation is essentially concerned with informing the school about what it needs to do to improve. In his recent speech to ACSL in Birmingham Sir Michael Wilshaw said:

"The focus of inspection is very much on whether the culture of the school is supporting good teaching and learning and whether the leadership has a real handle on the strengths and weaknesses of the school. And, most importantly, that the leadership has a clear plan to put things right.

Inspectors take a pragmatic view of any isolated pockets of weakness as long as the school is heading in the right direction and leaders have identified what needs to be done.



This is designed to encourage honest dialogue between the HMI and senior leaders. We want you to be equally open about what is working well and about what needs to improve. In other words, don't obfuscate or try to cover up weaknesses that will almost inevitably become apparent during the course of the inspection."

This is as true of s48 inspection as of s5/8. This is not the same as introducing something new into the school: we will be looking for how the school identifies issues, plans and takes action to improve what self evaluation has revealed. Effective self evaluation is as open about the areas for development (AfD) or weaknesses as about the strengths of the school and the logical place to identify them first is in the self evaluation document. If weaknesses and AfD are not identified in the self evaluation document, the inspector will pursue this in the interviews with leaders and governors during the inspection.

If an inspector is not convinced that the school knows its weaknesses as well as its strengths, it cannot be judged to be good in respect of its Catholic life and RE.

3. **Feedback:** As from this term inspectors will not give a definite judgement about their findings at feedback, but will say that any judgements given will be interim and may be subject to change in the light of their full thoughts about the evidence they have gathered and during monitoring of the draft report. This is in accord with the practice of Ofsted and arises from the need to ensure that there is consistency between inspectors. It is also unrealistic to expect inspectors to give a firm and well considered judgement at the end of a two day inspection, and even more especially after one day, when they have had little time to draw together their thoughts based on interviews with staff, pupils, governors, parish priest/chaplain, and sometimes parents, observations of lessons and collective worship, work scrutiny, and looking at further documentation. So feedback will be tentative, but will most often be confirmed in their written reports following monitoring.
4. **Outstanding Schools:** As we appear to be the only diocese in England which fully applied the agreement with the DfE to have a reduced inspection both in terms of time and focus, we are reviewing our approach to short inspections. There are advantages both for the DES and for schools in maintaining things as they are, but there are also disadvantages, especially for inspectors. A one day inspection is less of a burden for schools and gives a small saving in travel costs for the DES while making it a little easier for inspectors who are serving headteachers to give their time. However, it is extraordinarily pressured for inspectors to complete everything in the one day while producing accurate judgements. To date only a single school previously judged to have outstanding Catholic life and RE has been judged to be good in the one day inspection. Schools, of course, may well see this as an advantage, but it is unrealistic given that schools do change with pupils, staff, governors, and, not least, headteachers.

For the moment, where an inspector judges it to be necessary, a monitoring inspection can be extended to a second day to allow more time for the inspection.

The focus on school self evaluation in monitoring inspections will remain in place for the present. If schools have views on this or on the possible extension of the time for inspection, I should be glad to receive them.

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