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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

A Report by the  
**Education and Training Inspectorate**

# Inspection, Self-Evaluation and Improvement in Primary and Post-Primary Schools

2003-2004

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## FOREWORD

Following the publication in 1999 of the Northern Ireland Audit Office Report 'School Inspection in Northern Ireland', the Permanent and Deputy Secretaries at the Department of Education (DE), along with myself as Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate), appeared before the Northern Ireland Public Accounts Committee (NIPAC) in 2001.

I was asked by the Committee about the role of self-evaluation by schools in the inspection process. In my response I indicated that it was my intention that more schools would become involved in evaluating their own performance as a complement to rather than a replacement of external inspection. The NIPAC welcomed the attention being paid to self-evaluation by the Inspectorate and, to ensure its importance as a tool for improvement, recommended that inspections should include assessment of the contribution that self-evaluation is making to standards of achievement.

The Inspectorate is currently reviewing its models of inspection across the education, youth and training sectors, a process which the Inspectorate engages in routinely in order to ensure that its inspection models are fit-for-purpose. The review will ensure that self-evaluation becomes an integral part of all inspection activity, and, in due course, inspection reports will include an evaluation of the capacity of organisations to self evaluate and to effect self-improvement.

The Department's written response to the outcomes of the aforementioned hearing before the NIPAC indicated that the Inspectorate would, during the 2003-2004 academic year, undertake a survey to help gauge the extent of the contribution of self evaluation to raising standards of achievement in NI schools.

The report which follows 'Inspection, Self-Evaluation and Improvement' sets out the main findings from that survey. The findings are most encouraging in terms of identifying the link between inspection and self-evaluation, and the improvement in the quality of the pupils'

experiences and the standards which they achieve. It is a survey which, resources permitting, I should like my colleagues to repeat at some stage over the next three years as organisations, and the Inspectorate, become more adept at quantifying the link between inspection and self-evaluation, and the improved standards which the learners achieve.

*Marion J Matchett.*

**MARION J MATCHETT**  
**Chief Inspector**

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Over the past several years, the Inspectorate has published a range of materials to help encourage and support schools to become more self-evaluative. These materials include: 'Evaluating Schools', 'Evaluating Subjects', 'Evaluating Pastoral Care', 'Improving Subjects', and, most recently, 'Together Towards Improvement', and the primary and post-primary interactive digital versatile disks (DVDs). In addition, some forms of inspection have been designed to include an element of self-evaluation as an integral part of the inspection process, for example the Quality Assurance Inspection (QAI), the two-part focused inspection and the self-evaluative follow-up inspection (SEFUI).
- 1.2 In response to the commitment given to the NIPAC, and as part of its own commitment to continuous improvement, the Inspectorate undertook a survey of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the materials, and of the inspection approaches mentioned in paragraph 1.1, in helping to foster a culture of self-evaluation in schools leading to self-improvement. The survey was guided by the following assertions:
- (i.) the inclusion of aspects of self-evaluation in the inspection process encourages schools to look more closely at their own provision;
  - (ii.) the inclusion of self-evaluation within inspection encourages schools to use, subsequent to inspection, the processes of self-evaluation employed as part of the inspection;
  - (iii.) self-evaluation by schools has brought about improvements in the experiences of the pupils and in the standards they attain; and

(iv.) the materials published by the Inspectorate, and the inclusion of an aspect of self-evaluation in inspection, have encouraged and helped schools to become more self-evaluative.

1.3 In order to gather evidence for the survey, the Inspectorate invited the involvement of 12 schools (two primary and ten post-primary) which had, during the last three years, taken part in either a QAI, a two-part focused inspection or a SEFUI. The 12 schools visited as part of the survey are listed in the Appendix.

1.4 During each visit the Inspectorate discussed with the principal, and some members of staff nominated by the school, the conduct and outcomes of the inspection in which they had been involved. The discussions explored the following areas:

- the strengths and weaknesses associated with the type of inspection undertaken;
- the publications used to support self-evaluation; (both those published by the Inspectorate and those available from other sources);
- the outcomes for the school in taking forward self-evaluation;
- the ongoing use of self-evaluation in the school;
- the improvements in provision and standards brought about by the process of self-evaluation;
- the benefits (or otherwise) associated with the involvement of the Inspectorate as part of the school's work on self-evaluation;
- the effects of the process of self-evaluation on the staff;

- the extent of self-evaluation before the inspection as compared to the extent at present;
- the advantages and disadvantages of self-evaluation as a process which contributes to school improvement.

1.5 The schools visited during the survey had used a variety of methods to undertake the process of self-evaluation. In some schools, the process was led by the principal and senior members of staff, while in others the self-evaluation was undertaken by a small group of staff, for example, those within a subject department. The areas of focus which the schools self evaluated were wide and varied; they included whole school issues such as the quality of pastoral care, trends in external examination results, or the outcomes of a SETAQ evaluation. Other more specific areas of focus included the teaching of reading, the value of the homework set for a particular year group, or the teaching of science at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) levels. In most instances, the schools identified their own area for self evaluation.

1.6 The quantitative terms used throughout the report are described as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	More than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very small/a small number	-	Less than 10%

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<sup>1</sup> SETAQ - Self Evaluation Through Attitude Questionnaires - a software tool which provides a school with baseline data from attitude questionnaires completed by parents, teachers and pupils.

## 2 THE MAIN FINDINGS

- 2.1 **The inclusion of self-evaluation in inspection encourages schools to look more closely at their own provision.**
- 2.1.1 All of the schools involved in the survey agreed that one of the most important outcomes of the inclusion of an aspect of self-evaluation in the inspection process, was that it helped the staff to be more involved in the inspection process, and to share a sense of ownership of the inspection findings. Almost all of the schools reported that the staff worked effectively together to promote improvement: thereby they contributed to important decisions, and became involved actively in the process of change.
- 2.1.2 Through the self-evaluation process, the majority of schools reported that the staff became more aware of the attainments of individual pupils and, even though the process increased accountability, it also improved individual confidence, and helped staff to contribute in a positive way to the school development plan. The majority of teachers appreciated the acknowledgement and celebration of the strengths within a school, and were more willing, therefore, to take on board the areas identified for improvement.
- 2.1.3 In a small number of the schools, the reluctance of a few teachers to become involved in the self-evaluation process had reduced the quality of the outcomes. Most principals reported, however, that other members of staff often took on extra work to ensure that the process was successful. Almost all of the schools reported that most of the reluctant teachers contributed eventually to the process.
- 2.1.4 For individual teachers, the self-evaluation process increased their professionalism and enabled them to reflect and to question the effectiveness of their own practice. Due to the teachers' willingness to consider the quality of their own



practice, other developments which contributed to professional debate and improvement occurred within the majority of the schools. These developments included:

- classroom observation by management and peers, which helped the staff to reach agreed criteria for effective teaching and learning; and
- the analysis and review of quantitative data, such as external examination results, including end of key stage results, to ensure that achievement was as good as it might be, and to inform the planning for future learning.

2.1.5 In addition, the process of self-evaluation:

- empowered members of staff to take on leadership roles at various levels;
- provided opportunities for them to develop their own understanding of, and expertise in, self-evaluation;
- endorsed the consequent identification of areas of priority for inclusion in the school development plan; and
- allowed those in the middle management tier to promote and facilitate improvement at departmental level.

2.1.6 The role of the Inspectorate was considered by almost all of the schools to be a crucial, enabling factor, especially when the school was undertaking the process for the first time. The majority of the schools expressed their appreciation of the professional debate, and of the time taken by the Inspectorate to discuss the planning for self-evaluation. Most of the schools felt that through the professional debate, the important questions posed by the Inspectorate helped the school to determine and understand the nature and extent of the evidence required to support the school's evaluation of its own work. This understanding helped the schools to focus sharply on the improvements required in learning and teaching, and

hence the experiences of the pupils and the standards which they attain.

2.1.7 Involvement in the process of self-evaluation during inspection had also encouraged schools to look more closely at how their own evaluation was conducted in the past. The majority of schools reported that they now made more informed decisions about the size of the team to undertake the work, were more aware of the importance of effective communication so that all the staff were aware of the process and outcomes, and had learned new strategies to involve staff who remained anxious or did not wish to be involved in the process of self-evaluation.

2.1.8 The involvement of all the staff was considered as crucial by the majority of the schools. On the very few occasions when the exercise was restricted to a small group, without effective communication with the rest of the staff, the principals reported that the process had been less successful.

2.1.9 Some quotes from the discussions:

*'the process provided a road map for getting into key areas of school provision'*

*'more professional way of working with a very strong pupil-centred approach to the activity'*

*'provided good opportunities to celebrate the good work being done'*

*'the staff had control of the process and were able to determine and demonstrate improvement'.*

2.2 **The inclusion of self-evaluation within inspection encourages schools to use, subsequent to inspection, the processes of self-evaluation employed as part of the inspection.**

2.2.1 A minority of the schools reported that, at the time of the inspection, there had been a reluctance of staff to become

involved, but once the process was outlined and agreed, a 'culture of self-evaluation' developed, which prompted the staff to continue, on an ongoing basis, with the process of self-evaluation, after the inspection had been completed. The reluctance to become involved occurred for several reasons including:

- an unwillingness to open the school up to external verification of its work;
- having to become involved because of being in a particular group of schools, such those in the School Support Programme (SSP) or Group 1 initiative;
- the need to adopt new practices, such as classroom observation or issuing questionnaires to parents;
- anxiety that the weaknesses of individual teachers would be highlighted in front of other members of staff or 'outsiders';
- the perceived level of additional work involved in the process; and
- concerns about having departmental examination results scrutinised and compared to other departments within the school.

2.2.2 In spite of the initial reluctance, almost all of the schools reported that the process of self-evaluation had continued after the inspection. This willingness to continue had been brought about for a number of reasons, including:

- the obvious improvements which had occurred in the provision in one department or subject area, which others wanted to replicate;
- the view that "we should do it ourselves before we have it done to us";

- the acknowledgement by the Inspectorate of the good practice within the school;
- staff feeling valued and having ownership of the self-evaluation process;
- the expectation that it would bring about improvement in the classroom; and
- the development of a 'no blame' culture within the school.

2.2.3 A majority of the schools now use the process on a regular and frequent basis to identify priorities for inclusion in the school development plan. In one school, for example, where all of the staff were involved in the self-evaluation element of the inspection, each department then undertook its own evaluation and made suggestions for subsequent inclusion in the school development plan. In a majority of the schools the Board of Governors had also been made aware of the self-evaluation initiative, and were very supportive of the process.

2.2.4 In other schools, the process of self-evaluation was developing subsequent to inspection by addressing whole-school issues, or those particular to departments or subject areas. As the process developed, the majority of the schools reported that self-evaluation had become a natural strategy used by the school, rather than one simply adopted because of inspection.

2.2.5 In a small number of the schools, where the process of self-evaluation had not continued after the inspection, there was a desire on the part of the staff to re-introduce self-evaluation approaches, but other circumstances within the school had prevented this. These circumstances included changes in key personnel such as principals or other members of the senior or middle management teams. None of the schools visited had rejected the process as an effective way of working in the future; and almost all of the schools reported that the process of self-evaluation had become more refined and less

cumbersome as they became more familiar with the approach. One school reported that the process had become more about changing the teachers' thinking, than about producing written policies and other documents. The schools also reported the development of a greater sense of collegiality within the staff as well as a recognition and understanding amongst the teachers of why change was necessary.

2.2.6 Those responsible for carrying out the self-evaluation also reported some of the challenges they had to overcome, including:

- the need to learn new skills;
- the extra time needed outside normal duties to carry out the self-evaluation effectively;
- the reluctance of some staff to become involved; and
- the gathering of evidence to support the school's findings.

2.2.7 The majority of these challenges were overcome when the senior management at the school took actions to facilitate the process of self-evaluation, including:

- the setting up of teams where staff supported one another and shared the work;
- the provision of appropriate in-service training through, for example, the Education and Library Boards (ELBs);
- the inclusion of reluctant teachers in the self-evaluation teams, (in one case the school reported that the most sceptical teacher eventually became the strongest advocate of the self-evaluation approach); and
- the provision of time away from class teaching responsibilities to gather and scrutinise evidence, observe classes and discuss outcomes.

### 2.2.8 Some quotes from the discussions:

*'there is a bottom up approach where current practice engenders improvement and change'*

*'this is a changed school where ownership, reflection, honesty and positive experiences for all are embraced'*

*'more professional way of working - very strong pupil-centred approach to the activity'*

*'there is a culture of ongoing review'*

*'there is an increased momentum to get better'*

*'self-evaluation is now part of the planning cycle'.*

### 2.3 **Self-evaluation by schools has brought about improvements in the experiences of the pupils and in the standards they attain.**

2.3.1 All of the schools visited cited improvements which they reported had occurred because of self-evaluation undertaken during inspection, or subsequent to it; the improvements cited were both qualitative and quantitative and included:

- the pupils taking pride in and talking much more about their work;
- the enhanced morale of the teachers through the acknowledgement and celebration of good practice;
- the improved behaviour of the pupils, attributed to changes in teaching styles used;
- the pupils having more interest in books, and in reading for enjoyment;
- the significant reduction in the percentage of pupils 'dropping out' of GCSE;

- the development of more effective teaching styles for boys in the middle ability range of pupils, leading to more consistent attendance and participation in class;
- the appointment of a school librarian which has led to increased use of the school library;
- the recognition of the need to set individual, rather than generic, targets for pupils;
- the marked improvement in GCSE results in the area under focus for self-evaluation;
- the increased number of pupils receiving an A to C grade at GCE level;
- the less able pupils setting, and having ownership of, their own targets to improve, which resulted in significant improvement in the quality and number of GCSEs they obtained;
- a significant increase of pupils achieving Level 5 in English at the end of KS3.

2.3.2 As a consequence of self-evaluation, a few schools discovered issues in relation to the existing provision, of which management had not previously been aware. For example, one school discovered that in 25% of classes there was no differentiation in learning and teaching, with all pupils expected to complete work of the same level and at the same pace. Another school realised that the technology available to analyse examinations data was underused and, consequently, staff within the subject departments did not have the necessary baselines against which to judge their performance.

**2.4 The materials published by the Inspectorate, and the inclusion of an aspect self-evaluation in inspection, have encouraged and helped schools to become more self-evaluative.**

2.4.1 All of the schools had used some documents and materials published by the Inspectorate to help them with undertake self-evaluation. The documents used included:

- Evaluating Schools;
- Evaluating Subjects;
- Improving Subjects;
- Evaluating Pastoral Care;
- Children and their Learning: Primary Inspections 1992-1998;
- Guidance on the conduct of QAIs;
- QAI reports on other schools;
- An Evaluation of School Development Planning in Primary and Post-Primary Schools: 1999-2000;
- The Chief Inspector's Report: 1999-2002.

2.4.2 Other publications from DE also provided background guidance. These documents included:

- Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection (1999).
- Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour (2001).



- 2.4.3 The majority of schools also reported that they valued the insights they had gained from other materials published outside of Northern Ireland. These materials included:
- National Standards for English; and
  - How Good is Our School (Her Majesty's Inspectorate, Scotland).
- 2.4.4 Other sources which encouraged schools to become involved in self-evaluation work included:
- a series of conferences hosted by the Inspectorate, which considered good practice in post-primary education;
  - the support provided by the ELBs through the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS);
  - Regional Training Unit (RTU) materials and management courses; and
  - personal development undertaken by members of staff, for example, the identification and utilisation of preferred learning styles.
- 2.4.5 The schools which have continued the self-evaluation approach since the time of the inspections, highlight the use which they have made of the materials 'Together Towards Improvement' published by the Inspectorate in October 2002, and also that they are beginning to make use of the phase-related, good practice DVDs published in September 2003, and mentioned in paragraph 1.1.
- 2.4.6 Almost all of the schools emphasised the importance of having the Inspectorate involved in the self-evaluation process in order to quality assure and affirm the school's findings and recommendations, and to highlight, as necessary, other areas for improvement which the school had 'missed' during their

self-evaluation, but which in the view of the Inspectorate they needed to consider.

- 2.4.7 The schools reported that having the Inspectorate involved, brought rigour to the process, and provided opportunities for professional discussion and debate, as well as providing a set time frame in which to focus on, and to define, targets for improvement. The following quote illustrates the point:

*'Inspectorate involvement encouraged greater rigour. The benefits were huge in terms of support and encouragement as well as challenge. It provided opportunities to articulate particular strategies and approaches'.*

## 3 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The outcomes of the survey indicate that the main strengths of incorporating an aspect of self-evaluation within inspection are that this approach:

- helps promote a culture of self-evaluation which remains after the inspection;
- provides a clear focus on improving pupils' attainments;
- concentrates improvement into a specific purpose or focus;
- gives the staff of the school a degree of ownership of the inspection process;
- indicates how the quality of learning and teaching might be improved for the benefit of the pupils;

- increases the confidence and ability of the staff to evaluate their own practice;
- promotes a climate of openness amongst the staff to classroom observation by peers;
- gives individual teachers the confidence to talk about their practice, to develop professionally and to contribute to improvement within the content of the whole school;
- promotes openness within the school and staff, and a willingness to share outcomes with the Inspectorate and with CASS;
- boosts morale by celebrating good practice, and using this as a basis for building future improvements;
- encourages and supports the professional development of the staff;
- opens minds to new initiatives and strategies;
- involves other members of the school community in school improvement including parents, pupils and governors;
- concentrates the staff on actual improvement in the school provision and the pupils' attainments, rather than merely producing a paper 'audit' exercise;
- enhances rather than disrupts school life i.e. inspection becomes part of a process of continuous improvement rather than being an event to be overcome;
- provides opportunities for the school to demonstrate self improvement;
- contributes to improved experiences, standards and attainments for the pupils.

3.2 The disadvantages of incorporating an aspect of self-evaluation within inspection as seen by schools, include the need to:

- provide and manage additional time in order to facilitate the necessary depth of evaluation;
- identify what evidence is necessary and important;
- set priorities and to not become over-burdened with procedures and unrelated evidence;
- include all of the staff at a relevant level;
- budget for the evaluation in the school development plan;
- communicate effectively the outcomes to all the staff and other relevant members of the school community.

3.3 In all of the schools visited, the staff involved in the process of self-evaluation saw this way of working as beneficial to the pupils of the school. At the time of their original inspection, the majority of the schools were in the early stages of the development of self-evaluation; they felt that the inclusion of self-evaluation within inspection had helped deepen their understanding of, and improved their skills in, the process of self-evaluation. Almost all of the schools had continued to use the self-evaluation process to varying degrees and levels of success after the inspection had taken place. The majority of schools had now made self-evaluation part of the culture of the school, and had extended its use to include the work of departments, and individual teachers. A very small number of schools, because of exceptional circumstances, had not yet been able to move the self-evaluation process further forward, but planning was in place to do this as soon as circumstances changed.

- 3.4 The outcomes of the survey indicate that schools find this way of working very beneficial. It enables the staff to have greater ownership of the inspection process, to work together on agreed priorities, to establish a culture of self-evaluation, and to raise the quality of the experiences of the pupils and the standards which they attain.



### THE SCHOOLS VISITED AS PART OF THE SURVEY

#### Post-Primary

242-0072	Convent Grammar School, Strabane
441-0085	Down High School, Downpatrick
242-0064	Christian Brothers Grammar School, Omagh
423-0161	St Colman's High School, Ballynahinch
523-0293	St Patrick's College, Dungannon
121-0258	Castle High School, Belfast
321-0172	Bangor Grammar School
526-0286	Integrated College, Dungannon
342-0011	Ballymena Academy
242-0054	St Columb's College, Londonderry

#### Primary

401-0788	Dunmurry Primary School
503-6622	St John's Primary School, Middletown

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