

# **GUIDELINES FOR THE PUBLICATION OF SCHOOL INSPECTION REPORTS**

## **SEPTEMBER 2015**



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OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION  
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

**INSPECTORATE**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The purpose of school inspection

School inspection and evaluation make an important contribution to promoting quality in the educational experiences provided for pupils/students in primary and post-primary education. External evaluation by inspectors complements the continuing efforts of schools and centres for education<sup>1</sup> to review and improve their own work. During evaluations, the inspectors seek to

- identify, acknowledge and affirm good practice in schools
- promote continuing improvement in the quality of education offered by schools
- promote self-evaluation and continuous development by schools and their staffs
- provide an assurance of quality in the education system as a whole, based on the collection of objective, dependable, high-quality data.

The reports that arise from the Inspectorate's evaluations play an important role in this process and provide valuable information about schools and centres for education. Inspection reports take cognisance of the context in which schools are operating and contain carefully balanced accounts of the strengths and areas of development identified by the inspectors.

These guidelines set out the general principles and procedures in accordance with which the Inspectorate publishes school inspection reports.

## 1.2 Why publish school inspection reports?

Inspectors have a duty under the Education Act, 1998, to report the outcome of their evaluations of schools and centres for education to teachers<sup>2</sup>, parents, boards of management, school patrons and the Minister for Education and Skills. The publication of school inspection reports makes the findings and recommendations of inspections available to all members of the school community and to the wider public. The reports provide one important source of information about the work of schools and making them publicly available makes a real contribution to the quality of schools and educational provision.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 13 of the Education Act, 1998, provides that the Inspectorate carries out its evaluative, advisory and other functions in both schools and centres for education. In all instances in these guidelines the word "school" refers to both schools and centres for education.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this document, the word 'teacher' is intended to include principals, deputy principals and teachers.

Through publishing school inspection reports the Inspectorate seeks to

- acknowledge and affirm good practice in schools
- provide an assurance of quality in the education system
- identify areas for development and contribute to real improvement in schools
- encourage school self-review and development
- ensure a wider dissemination of good practice in and among schools
- provide authoritative and balanced information on the effectiveness of schools
- provide valuable information to parents, prospective parents, and pupils/students
- promote greater accountability and transparency.

### **1.3 What reports are published?**

The Inspectorate operates a general inspection programme for schools and centres for education. These evaluations are undertaken in accordance with the *Code of Practice for the Inspectorate* (2015) and in accordance with arrangements described in published guidelines for each type of inspection.

Inspection reports arising from this general inspection programme for schools and centres for education are published in accordance with the principles and procedures described in these guidelines and in line with regulations made by the Minister for Education and Skills.<sup>3</sup> The publication process strikes a balance between respecting the right of individuals to privacy on the one hand, and the right of parents and the wider public to information concerning the operation and effectiveness of publicly funded schools and centres for education.

The reports issued following these inspections take a number of forms, including:

- reports arising from whole-school type inspections and whole-centre type inspections, for example, Whole-School Evaluation - Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL)
- reports arising from inspections of curriculum provision, subject provision and programme provision in schools and centres for education, for example reports on the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

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<sup>3</sup> The regulations are entitled: *The Education Act 1998 (Publication of Inspection Reports on Schools and Centres for Education) Regulations 2015*.

- reports arising from thematic inspections in schools and centres for education, for example *Looking at Social Personal and Health Education in Post-primary Schools* (2013)
- reports arising from inspections to monitor the implementation of recommendations in previous inspection reports
- reports arising from inspections of special schools attached to High Support Units, Special Care Units and Children Detention Centres.

These inspections evaluate, as appropriate, the work of the school as a whole or the work of the school in the provision of an area of the curriculum. The Inspectorate's evaluation is based not solely on an examination of the work of an individual teacher or teachers but on the quality of the educational experience provided by the teacher or teachers and the board of management, and the quality of pupils'/students' learning. The reports describe such aspects as the quality of school management, planning and self-review, as well as the quality of supports available to pupils/students. The findings of the evaluation presented in the report take cognisance of the context in which the school or the subject team or subject teacher or teachers in the school are operating.

All reports of the types listed above are published in their entirety. However, individual teachers, members of boards of management and inspectors are not named in the reports.

#### **1.4 What reports are not published?**

The procedures for publication of reports described in these guidelines do not apply to inspection reports that fall outside the general inspection programme for schools and centres for education. This means, for example, that the guidelines do not apply to reports arising from:

- inspections carried out for the purpose of research and the development and trial of new inspection practices in schools and centres for education
- inspections carried out for the purpose of assessing the performance of an individual teacher of his or her duties
- a grievance of a pupil/student, or a grievance of his or her parents, relating to the pupil's/student's school
- work conducted for the purpose of assessing the extent of school provision or anticipated demand for school provision in an area, or work in connection with a school's application for recognition by the Department
- inspections where the Chief Inspector is satisfied that the publication of the inspection report could reasonably be expected to prejudice the effectiveness of tests, examinations, investigations, inquiries or audits conducted by or on behalf of

the Minister or other public body

- circumstances where the report would be exempt from production in proceedings in a court on the ground of legal professional privilege or its publication would constitute contempt of court.

## **1.5 Is pupil/student assessment data included in the reports?**

Inspectors draw upon a wide range of evidence when evaluating the work of schools, including such information as pupils'/students' results in standardised tests, results in the state examinations, and pupil/student retention rates. Section 53 of the Education Act permits the Minister for Education and Skills to refuse to publish data that would make possible the compilation of comparative tables with respect to the academic performance of pupils/students enrolled in schools. The Minister has confirmed that she is opposed to the publication of "league tables" based on examination or test data. The publication of school inspection reports respects Ministerial decisions in this regard.

## **1.6 Developing and reviewing these Guidelines**

The publication of inspection reports is underpinned by provisions contained in regulations made by the Minister for Education and Skills entitled the Education Act 1998 (Publication of Inspection Reports on Schools and Centres for Education) Regulations 2015. Under these regulations, reports arising from inspections begun on or after 6 February 2006 are published in accordance with these guidelines.

The regulations and the guidelines have been developed following detailed consultation with the education partners as required under Section 13(8) and Section 33 of the Education Act, 1998, including representatives of school management bodies, teachers, parents and pupils/students, and a range of other bodies with whom we work and co-operate.

This edition of the guidelines replaces an earlier version of the guidelines published in 2006 which is withdrawn and is operative for all inspections commencing on or after 01 September 2015. The Inspectorate is committed to reviewing these guidelines from time to time following consultation with the relevant stakeholders and in the light of changes that may occur to legislation and/or developing best practice in public services.

## 2. General principles

### 2.1 Code of Practice for the Inspectorate

The general principles that guide inspectors as they engage in evaluation and reporting are set out in the *Code of Practice for the Inspectorate* (2015). The code provides guidance on maintaining professional relationships with the school community and on the standards that apply to the Inspectorate's evaluation procedures and reporting. Copies of the code are available on the web site of the Department of Education and Skills ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)).

### 2.2 The inspection process

When carrying out inspections, the Inspectorate aims to ensure that

- the inspection process and outcomes are clear and open to scrutiny and accountability
- oral feedback and inspection reports are clear and unambiguous and provide the appropriate level of detail for decision-making by boards of management, teachers, learners, parents' associations and others
- reports are written in the main language of the school (Irish or English) and translations are published to ensure maximum accessibility to the reports<sup>4</sup>
- reports are accurate and provide fair and balanced information that enables the users to make appropriate use of the information with confidence.

The way in which each type of inspection (such as whole-school evaluations, subject inspections, etc.) is carried out is described in separate guidelines or regulations which are available on the website of the Department of Education and Skills or from the Inspectorate.

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<sup>4</sup> Normally, where the main medium of instruction in schools is Irish, all sections of the inspection reports, other than sections or reports on the teaching of English, are written in Irish; similarly, where the main medium of instruction is English, all sections or reports, other than those on the teaching of Irish, are written in English. To ensure maximum accessibility to reports, an English translation is published for all reports and sections of reports written in Irish. Similarly, an Irish translation is published for all reports and sections of reports written in English for Irish-medium schools. In addition, a board of management may request that a translation of a report to either language may be made available to it.

## **2.3 The publication process**

When publishing inspection reports, the Inspectorate is committed to ensuring that

- boards of management, teachers, chief executives of Education and Training Boards (where relevant) and parents' associations are informed, in advance of the inspection process, of the intention to publish the final report
- the board of management of the school has a right to respond in writing to the inspection report in advance of publication within the agreed guidelines and time limits
- normally, the response of the school, if furnished by the board of management, will be published with the original report.

## **2.4 The published reports**

The Inspectorate seeks to ensure that published reports are

- accessible: The reports will be disseminated in a way that achieves the highest degree of access by the public. Reports will be published on the Department's web site.
- complete: The full report will be published in order to maintain balance and accuracy and to encourage the reading of the report in its entirety
- timely: The published report will be available in accordance with agreed time schedules.

## 3. The publication process

### 3.1 Preparation of the inspection report

The inspection report is prepared following completion of the in-school evaluation work. Normally, the in-school evaluation work concludes with oral feedback on the findings and recommendations arising from the inspection. This feedback may be provided to staff in the school, and/or to the principal, and/or to the board and representatives of the parents' association depending on the type of inspection that is carried out.

The Inspectorate then completes the draft inspection report. The draft report is subjected to the Inspectorate's normal quality assurance mechanisms.

### 3.2 Draft inspection report issued for factual verification

The Inspectorate Secretariat sends a copy of the draft report, accompanied by a factual verification form (see appendix 1) to the school principal, the chairperson of the school's board of management and the chief executive<sup>5</sup> in the case of schools under the management of an Education and Training Board.

The principal and the chairperson are invited to draw the attention of the Inspectorate to any errors of fact in the inspection report, using the factual verification form. The form (or forms) are returned to the Inspectorate Secretariat by the principal<sup>6</sup> and/or the chairperson of the board of management<sup>7</sup> within **five school days** of the date of issue of the report.

The school is also asked to list the patron/trustees of the school and to provide email addresses for each. This is to facilitate the issue of the draft report for School Response.

The factual verification form (or forms), when returned to the Inspectorate Secretariat by the principal or chairperson, is referred to the reporting inspector and the appropriate assistant chief inspector. If any errors of fact are drawn to the attention of the Inspectorate, the report may be amended, as necessary, normally within five working days.

If no response is received in respect of factual verification within five school days of the issue of the report, it is assumed that the school is satisfied that the report is accurate. The report is then prepared for issue to the school for school response.

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<sup>5</sup> The chief executive of the ETB may nominate another officer of the ETB to undertake his or her duties as described in sections 3.1 to 3.9 inclusive of these guidelines.

<sup>6</sup> In the absence of the principal, his or her duties, as described in sections 3.1 to 3.7 inclusive and 3.9 of these guidelines, may be undertaken by the deputy principal or acting principal.

<sup>7</sup> In the absence of the chairperson of the board of management, his or her duties, as described in sections 3.1 to 3.7 inclusive and 3.9 of these guidelines, may be undertaken by an acting chairperson.

### 3.3 Finalised inspection report issued to the school

The Inspectorate Secretariat sends a copy of the finalised report, via email, to the school principal, the chairperson of the school's board of management, and the patron/trustees of the school including the chief executive in the case of schools under the management of an Education and Training Board.

On receiving the inspection report, the chairperson of the board of management, or a person authorised by him or her, must provide a copy of the report to each of the following:

- each teacher affected by the inspection. For example, a copy of a WSE report will normally be supplied to each member of the teaching staff (including teachers shared with other schools); a copy of a subject inspection report will be supplied to each teacher of the subject and to the principal and deputy principal
- each member of the board of management
- the school's patron or trustees.

It will be open to the chairperson to supply a copy of the report to other members of the staff; for example, in special schools this may include members of multi-disciplinary teams working in the school.

### 3.4 School response: Options available to the board of management and teachers

Any of the following actions may be taken when the finalised report is issued to the principal and the chairperson of the board of management for school response:

#### OPTION A

The board of management of the school may accept the report without comment and record this intention by returning the pro-forma *inspection report response form* to the Inspectorate **within ten school days** of the date of issue of the inspection report.

#### OPTION B

The board of management may respond formally to the findings and recommendations of the report by using the pro-forma *inspection report response form* (see section 3.5 and appendix 2). This must be done **within ten school days** of the date of issue of the inspection report. Normally, if the board exercises this option, the school response is included as an appendix to the published report.

#### OPTION C

The board of management or any individual teacher affected by the inspection may request a

formal review of the inspection under the *Procedure for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13 (9) of the Education Act, 1998*.

### **3.5 Purpose and contents of the school response**

The purpose of the school response is

- to allow the board of management of the school to respond to, and make observations on, the contents of the inspection report
- to allow the board of management to set out how it will use the report in the context of the school's ongoing programme of self-evaluation, planning, and improvement. The school is enabled to demonstrate how it is engaged in self-improvement and development in response to the school inspection report.

Where a board of management chooses to furnish a school response to the Inspectorate, the response is completed by using the pro-forma *inspection report response form* (see appendix 2).

- As a suggested guide, the total length of the school response is approximately 500 words.
- Restrictions governing the content of the inspection report will also apply to the school response. For example, such individuals as teachers, members of the board of management and inspectors may not be named in the school response. The school response is an opportunity for the school to comment on the contents of the report and to highlight the follow-up actions which it proposes to take (or has already taken) following the inspection. Comments on the inspection process may not be included in the school response. (If the board of management [or a teacher] has concerns about the way in which the inspection was conducted, they should use the *Procedure for Review*, to bring their concern to the attention of the Inspectorate).
- The school response must be submitted to the Inspectorate by the chairperson of the board of management.
- Other than in exceptional circumstances, the school response will be published in its entirety, with the exception of the signature of the chairperson, at the same time and in the same format as the school inspection report. If, for any exceptional reason, the Department decides not to publish the school response, the Inspectorate will inform the board of management of this decision and the reason or reasons for it.

### **3.6 Publication**

If the board of management has exercised option A or option B as described above, the Inspectorate publishes the inspection report unless option C has been availed of by a teacher in the school. Usually, publication takes place within ten school days of the receipt of the completed response form from the school. Normally, the school response is also published by the Inspectorate (if a response has been supplied).

If the board of management or a teacher in the school has sought a review of the inspection or the inspection report (or both), the Inspectorate adheres to the *Procedure for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13 (9) of the Education Act, 1998*. The inspection report is not be published until the review has been completed and, if appropriate, any recommendations arising from the review have been addressed. On the completion of this process the publication of the final school inspection report proceeds in accordance with option A or B above.

On publication, a copy of the inspection report and the school response are issued by email to the school patron or trustees, the chairperson of the board of management, the principal, the chief executive (in the case of schools under the management of an Education and Training Board), the parents' association and the student council in the school (post-primary). The Inspectorate publishes the inspection report and the school response (if relevant) on the web site of the Department of Education and Skills ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)).

### **3.7 No response**

If no response is received from the board of management of the school, and if option C has not been availed of by a teacher within the time limit (ten school days from the date of issue of the report to the school), a null response is assumed, and the report is published by the Inspectorate within a further five school days.

### **3.8 Schools under the auspices of an Education and Training Board**

In the case of schools operating under the authority of an Education and Training Board (ETB), the duties of the chairperson and the board of management (as described in sections 3.1 to 3.7 inclusive of these guidelines) should be undertaken in consultation with the chief executive of the ETB. For example, the factual verification form is completed by the chairperson in consultation with the chief executive of the ETB. Similarly, the school response should be formulated by the board of management in consultation with the chief executive of the ETB.

### **3.9 Requests for an extension of time**

Section 3 of this *Guidelines for the Publication of School Inspection Reports* outlines the publication process, which is intended to facilitate finalisation of the report without unnecessary delays. However, it is possible that a chief executive of an ETB or chairperson may

seek an extension of time from the Chief Inspector. The Chief Inspector will consider such requests following consultation with the relevant regional Assistant Chief Inspector.

# Appendix 1

## Inspection Report Factual Verification Form

### School inspection

<b>School name:</b>	
<b>School address:</b>	
<b>School roll number:</b>	
<b>Type of inspection</b>	<i>For example: whole-school evaluation, subject inspection, incidental inspection, follow-through inspection, etc.</i>
<b>Date of issue of inspection report</b>	

### Factual inaccuracies in the report

Please use the space below to draw the attention of the Inspectorate to any factual inaccuracy that you believe is included in the draft inspection report issued to your school. Alternatively, please supply details on an attached sheet

<b>Page</b>	<b>Inaccuracies</b>

### Signature

<b>Principal</b>	<i>Print name:</i>
	<i>Signature:</i>
	<i>Date:</i>

<b>Chairperson, Board of Management</b>	<i>Print name:</i>
	<i>Signature:</i>
	<i>Date:</i>

This form must be signed by either the principal or the chairperson of the board of management of the school. In the case of a school operating under the auspices of an Education and Training Board, the form must be completed by the principal or the chairperson of the board of management in consultation with the Chief Executive (or nominated officer) of the Education and Training Board. The form must be returned to the Inspectorate Secretariat within five schools days of the date of issue of the draft report.

# Appendix 2

## Inspection Report School Response Form

### School inspection

School name:	
School address:	
School roll number:	
Type of inspection	<i>For example: whole-school evaluation, subject inspection, incidental inspection, follow-through inspection, etc.</i>
Date of issue of final inspection report	

Please choose option A, or B, or C

<b>OPTION A</b>	The board accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and does not wish to respond formally to the report	
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<b>OPTION B</b>	The board accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and wishes to respond formally to the report. The board's response is submitted below.	
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<b>OPTION C</b>	The board does not accept the report as the final inspection report and is making a request for a review of the inspection under the <i>Procedure for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13(9) of the Education Act, 1998</i> . The board will submit/has submitted a written request for a review to the Office of the Chief Inspector.	
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### School response: Part A

Please comment on the content of the inspection report (approximately 100-150 words)

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### School response: Part B

Please indicate the actions that the school has taken or plans to take to address each of the recommendations in the report (approximately 350 -400 words)

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### Signature

<b>Chairperson, Board of Management</b>	<i>Print name:</i>
	<i>Signature:</i>
	<i>Date:</i>

This form must be signed by the chairperson of the board of management of the school. In the case of a school operating under the auspices of an Education and Training Board, the form must be completed by the chairperson of the board of management in consultation with the Chief Executive (or nominated officer) of the Education and Training Board. The form must be returned to the Inspectorate Secretariat within ten schools days of the date of issue of the final report.