



Proportionate inspection

A consultation document

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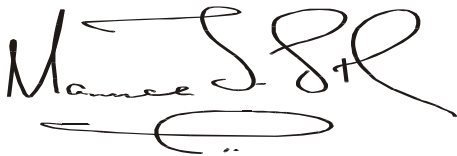
Foreword

The fundamental review of our approach to school inspection, which was outlined in our strategic plan 2004 to 2007, resulted in the radical changes to the inspection framework that were implemented in September 2005.

Building on the achievements of the new style of inspections, we are continuing to review our inspection arrangements, ensuring they are in line with the *New Relationship with Schools* and that they promote higher standards for all children and young people by concentrating resources where they can have the most impact.

This consultation paper deals with many of the recommendations noted by the National Audit Office in their recent publication *Improving poorly performing schools in England*. It sets out our proposals for reducing further the burden of inspection on schools that are achieving very well and for increased monitoring of schools where there is underachievement.

I would encourage anyone with an interest in the development of the inspection system to consider these proposals and the impact they will have on raising standards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maurice Smith', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Maurice Smith
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools

Executive summary

From September 2006, Ofsted intends to develop an inspection system for maintained schools that is more proportionate to risk. This responds directly to the government's agenda for further reductions in inspection and builds on the successful introduction of the current arrangements since September 2005. It reduces the burden of inspection on schools that are achieving very well in order to continue Ofsted's focus on achieving better value for money by focusing resources on schools where there is underachievement.

Under the current arrangements, set out in the Education Act 2005, maintained schools are inspected under section 5 of the Act to a published framework for inspection. Schools are inspected every three years, with very short notice, to a grading scale of 1 to 4 (outstanding to inadequate). They receive a two-day inspection by one or more inspectors, depending on the size of the school. School self-evaluation is at the heart of the inspections: although there is some variation in the quality of self-evaluation across schools, the self-evaluation form has proved very successful in identifying the strengths and weaknesses within the school and the action the school is taking to improve the strengths and remedy the weaknesses, which helps the inspector decide how to focus the inspection.

HMI will continue to have a management role in all section 5 inspections and monitoring visits to schools causing concern. They will continue to lead a significant proportion of secondary school inspections and monitoring visits, for example to schools in particular categories, along with a smaller proportion of primary and special school inspections.

Feedback from schools and inspectors indicates that the new section 5 arrangements have been very effective. Therefore, we do not intend to change them for the majority of schools. However, there is a proportion of schools that have yet to be inspected under section 5 where achievement is high, self-evaluation is good and there is a good track record from the schools' previous inspections. We believe these schools need little inspection and we are proposing to reduce the tariff of inspector days.

Monitoring schools in special measures has been a success story: visits by inspectors undertaken at regular intervals have proved valuable in ensuring that the quality of education pupils receive improves. Where a school has been given a notice to improve then an inspection takes place one year later. Ofsted plans to trial monitoring visits in schools given a notice to improve to see whether this will help schools in this situation make sufficient progress to be judged at least satisfactory when they receive a further inspection a year later.

There are a number of schools which, while satisfactory overall, still have pockets of underachievement. Ofsted is trialling approaches to monitoring these schools over the next few months.

Proposals in detail

Ofsted is trialling changes to inspection over the next few months and proposes to implement changes based on the results of these trials and on the outcome of this consultation in September 2006. First, higher-achieving schools, appropriately identified, will receive a short, focused inspection involving the minimum number of inspector days; second, schools with a notice to improve will be monitored prior to being reinspected one year after being placed in the category; and third, schools judged to be 'satisfactory', but where there are pockets of underachievement, will be monitored to evaluate whether they are making sufficient progress in those areas where weaknesses have been identified.

Higher-achieving schools

Evidence from inspections conducted since September 2005 demonstrates that, in the best schools, inspectors have been able to use the school's self-evaluation, data about pupils' attainment and progress, and selective on-site investigation to reach, efficiently and economically, an accurate and rigorous view of the school's effectiveness.

1. Do you agree in principle that there is scope to reduce further the weight of inspection for higher-achieving schools?

2. What, in principle, is the minimum acceptable level of inspection, within current legislation, for higher-achieving schools?

Ofsted plans to undertake short, focused inspections in some, but not all, higher-achieving schools which are due for inspection. We are already trialling and evaluating this type of inspection with schools in a small number of local authorities. In many respects, the process of inspection will remain very similar to that of section 5 inspections. However, we are going to take an even sharper look at the quality of the school's self-evaluation and tailor the inspection accordingly.

3. On a shorter inspection of a higher-achieving school, which inspection activities would you consider to be indispensable?

The inspection will result in a report sent to the school and published on Ofsted's website. The report will focus on the main aspects of the school's effectiveness, and will contain the same headings as a 'normal' section 5 report. Considerable use will be made of a school's own evaluation of its progress. The letter to the pupils, which has generally been welcomed in the current inspection reports, will remain.

4. For a shorter inspection of a higher-achieving school, within current legislation, what should the report contain?

The outcome of an inspection is never predetermined. Inspectors will report what they find.

Schools given a notice to improve

At present, schools which have been identified as needing significant improvement and have been given a notice to improve are reinspected after one year. Ofsted does not monitor their progress in the interim. In the summer term of 2006, Ofsted will trial ways of checking the progress of these schools between inspections. The monitoring will take place at short notice, approximately six months from the date of publication of the original report. A range of approaches will be used, such as telephone discussions with the headteacher and local authority, followed, in some cases, by a short visit to the school. When a visit is made, the outcome will be a short letter to the school and the local authority, which will be published on the Ofsted website.

5. Do you agree in principle that a monitoring visit could promote the progress of a school given a notice to improve?

5a. If you agree, how should the visit be organised to promote the school's progress most effectively?

Satisfactory (grade 3) schools

We have looked closely at schools which have been judged satisfactory (grade 3) in their section 5 inspection and think that many of the schools where there are pockets of underachievement could be doing better. We don't think 'satisfactory' is good enough for the pupils involved. In addition, we are concerned that some of these schools deteriorate between inspections and are in danger of falling into a category of concern when they are reinspected after three years.

Starting next term, Ofsted is trialling how it can monitor schools judged satisfactory to help promote their improvement. Using the latest data, and information from the inspection report and from local authorities, we will identify schools that could benefit most from this approach. In the trial, inspectors will make short-notice visits to explore with the school what progress is being made in the areas identified for improvement in the last inspection. The outcome will be a letter to the school and local authority, which will be published on the Ofsted website.

6. Do you agree that a monitoring visit could promote the progress of a grade 3 school with pockets of underachievement?

6a. At what stage after a section 5 inspection would a monitoring visit be most useful for this purpose?

In undertaking these monitoring visits we intend to liaise with local authorities and representatives of the national strategies to ensure that a coherent approach is taken in monitoring, challenging and supporting the development of these schools.

6b. Do you agree in principle that Ofsted should work with local authorities in planning for and undertaking the monitoring visits proposed above?

Conclusion

In conclusion, Ofsted is proposing changes to school inspections that will continue our drive to provide better education and care for children and young people. Higher-achieving schools will receive short inspections that focus on the quality of schools' self-evaluation. Lower-achieving schools will be targeted for monitoring. All this will be done alongside the important work of local authorities and school improvement partners. Ofsted is keen to play its part in shaping the *New Relationship with Schools*.

Consultation questions

1. Do you agree in principle that there is scope to reduce further the weight of inspection for higher-achieving schools?

2. What, in principle, is the minimum acceptable level of inspection, within current legislation, for higher-achieving schools?

3. On a shorter inspection of a higher-achieving school, which inspection activities would you consider to be indispensable?

4. For a shorter inspection of a higher-achieving school, within current legislation, what should the report contain?

5. Do you agree in principle that a monitoring visit could promote the progress of a school given a notice to improve?

5a. If you agree, how should the visit be organised to promote the school's progress most effectively?

6. Do you agree that a monitoring visit could promote the progress of a grade 3 school with pockets of underachievement?

6a. At what stage after a section 5 inspection would a monitoring visit be most useful for this purpose?

6b. Do you agree in principle that Ofsted should work with local authorities in planning and undertaking the monitoring visits proposed above?

Annex

Consultation criteria

This consultation has been conducted in accordance with the six consultation criteria that are summarised in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on consultation, which can be found on the Cabinet Office website:

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/code/.

The six criteria are set out in the numbered points below, with some comments specific to this consultation on the introduction of proportionate inspection in schools, noted in italics after each point.

1. Wide consultation with a minimum of eight weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.

This consultation commences 16 March 2006 and will close eight weeks later, on 11 May 2006. It was preceded by informal consultation with selected local authorities and schools, which began on 25 January 2006.

2. Clear proposals about who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.

The consultation document makes clear that state maintained schools are directly affected. Headteachers, governors and teachers working in these schools will have a strong interest.

Parents and the wider public with an interest in improvements to the education system and best value for money in the public sector, and organisations representing these interests, may also wish to comment.

3. Consultation document is clear, concise and widely accessible.

We hope that the document is clear and concise. It is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/pipquestionnaire

4. Feed back the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.

Responses received will be evaluated alongside feedback from the inspection trials during the 2006 spring and summer terms. We will publish a summary of the key themes and how they have influenced the inspection framework at the start of the autumn term.

5. Monitor the department's effectiveness at consultation.

Our Strategic Communications Divisional Manager, currently Emma Boggis, maintains an overview of the effectiveness of consultations.

6. Ensuring that the consultation follows better regulation best practice.

Contact for comments/complaints

Angela Jackson (PIP team administrator)

Contact details: ajackson1@ofsted.gov.uk.

List of stakeholders consulted

Headteachers and local authority personnel in a selected group of local authorities where trial inspections have taken place will be asked to give their views on proportionate inspection following the trials.

Around 17,000 schools which subscribe to our online newsletter *Ofsted Direct* will be emailed a news bulletin at the start of the consultation.

Other schools will receive a postal update with a prompt to subscribe to it, as this is our key channel for communicating with schools about news on the inspection front.

We are consulting teachers' organisations through HMCI's Standing Group of Teacher Associations. We will be keeping our Regional Inspection Service Providers informed and will be alerting the wider public to the proposed changes through our press strategies.