

# Impact of school inspections on teaching and learning

## Technical report ISI-TL project year 1-3 data

### Ireland

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July 2014

#### **Introduction**

##### *Description of primary and secondary schools*

In Ireland there are just over 3200 primary schools. These schools provide education for children aged from four years to about 12 or 13. The classes are made up of Junior Infants, Senior Infants and years 1 to 6. At the end of year six pupils transfer to a secondary school. In theory there are three types of secondary school voluntary secondary, vocational and community/comprehensive. In fact these schools in terms of curriculum are very similar and pupils follow basically the same programme regardless of which school they attend. The first three years in secondary education lead to a national examination known as the Junior Certificate. This is followed by a one year program of interdisciplinary studies known as the Transition Year. The final two years leads to a second national examination known as the Leaving Certificate. This is a vital examination in that the results are used to decide entry to Higher Education. Other than the two certificates examinations mentioned above there is no national testing in the school system in Ireland, although primary schools tend to use, for their own purposes, various literacy and numeracy tests.

##### *Description of principals/head teachers in primary and secondary schools*

In the Irish system the principal of each school together with the board of management manage the day-to-day operation and the policy and planning of the school. The role of the principal and the board of management is set out in the Education Act of 1998. The Act appears to confer great power on the principal and board of management but in fact the Irish system is very centralised and the Department of Education and Skills in fact controls most of the key decisions in relation to the operation of schools. For example pay and staffing rates are set at national level, the curriculum is laid down by the DES and the body known as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. In other areas the power of individual schools is also limited by legislation, for example schools must develop their policies in areas such as entry, expulsion, discipline and so on with national legislation such as the Equality Acts. Since the bulk of budgets are predetermined centrally for such matters as pay, new building and so on schools in practice have very limited budgets over which control is exercised. In practice schools, particularly primary schools must raise significant sums of money from the parent body to subsidise the purchase of books and equipment and other extras. In recent years there is a clear policy direction of decentralising more power to school principals and boards of management but in fact the system remains very centralised and there is little sign of key areas such as pay budgets being handed over to the control of the local individual schools.

Since boards of management are in most cases made up of volunteer parents and other community representatives most day-to-day decision-making falls to the school principal. Vastly increased bureaucracy in recent years has made this role more and more difficult and it is now problematic to fill principalships particularly in the smaller primary schools where the principal will also have to teach a class. Major cutbacks in recent times have also resulted in severe reductions in middle management roles in secondary schools again greatly increasing the work load carried by principals and deputy principals.

### *Inspection visits to primary and secondary schools*

By the mid-1990s School inspection in Ireland had become largely irrelevant. Since then a major effort has been made to make school inspections more relevant and more regular. By 2008 a new system of inspection known as whole school evaluation had become well-established. The majority of the nearly 4000 primary and secondary schools in the country had received a substantial inspection under this new system. Secondary schools were also subject to regular subject inspections so that again by 2008 most secondary schools had received an inspection for the majority of the subjects taught in that school. Since 2008 and the economic crash the resources available for inspection have been significantly reduced. As a result a slimmed down version of whole school inspection known as 'management leadership and learning' (WSE-MLL) has been introduced. These new inspections are shorter, usually two days in duration, and more targeted than the previous system. Another significant change has been that the more recent inspection approaches are no longer pre-notified and schools do not know that an inspection is imminent. Finally since 2012 a greatly enhanced role for self evaluation has been built-in to inspection procedures.

Until recently school inspection in Ireland remained largely subjective in nature. The inspectors formed opinions about management and teaching in schools based on a variety of indicators but primarily on observation and opinion. Objective measurements in the form of test or examination results were not used in any systematic way to reach judgments, nor is there any system of sanctions or rewards for schools which fail to meet particular criteria. However it is now becoming clear that in the new era of greatly reduced inspection resources the inspectorate is in fact using thresholds to decide upon which schools should receive inspections. This is not fully acknowledged and schools have not been specifically told about the targets and thresholds which may trigger further inspection treatments. Moreover standardized testing, surveys of student and parental opinion and inspector, principal and peer appraisal of teaching are now being used to generate the evidence on which inspection judgments are based.

While it was suggested as far back as 2005 (*Towards 2016 Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006–2015* (Government of Ireland 2005) that schools should be required to evaluate teaching and learning as a dimension of overall performance<sup>1</sup> it is only since 2012 that schools were instructed that 'over a four-year period from 2012, all post-primary schools should engage in school self-evaluation and produce three-year improvement plans for numeracy, literacy and one aspect of teaching and learning across all subjects and programmes' (DES 2012, p.2). It is a dramatic change that, within the WSE-MLL process, inspectors are now gathering statistical data on the quality of education from parents and students through the use of parental and student questionnaires. The WSE-MLL guidelines state that 'the Inspectorate greatly values the views of teachers, parents and students as key stakeholders in the school community' (DESROI 2011, p.10). However, the preceding sentence states that 'as part of the WSE-MLL, questionnaires are administered to a representative sample of parents and students in order to get their views on the operation of the school' (DES 2011, p10).

In terms of this project it needs to be stressed that these major changes in inspection policy and practice came largely in 2012 and were implemented, in particular in relation to self-evaluation in 2013. In consequence the principal responses to Inspection captured in this research refer to a very different inspection landscape.

## Data Collection

### *Target sample in primary and secondary education*

For a number of reasons it was decided for this research to target a full sample of all primary and post primary schools in Ireland. There are 3210 primary schools and 729 secondary schools. This decision was taken for a number of reasons. Firstly the inspectorate were unable or unwilling to say which schools would be targeted for inspection in the coming year. The dates on which schools had been expected up to now could be ascertained from the inspection reports posted on the Department of Education and Skills website but it was impossible to predict which of the remaining schools which have not yet received a full inspection would do so in the coming year or two. It was felt that a complete picture of the type and frequency of inspection which schools were receiving in Ireland could best be built up by obtaining in the first year of the research response based on a complete sample.

### *Response rates primary and secondary schools*

In the first year a total 182 schools were received which were usable for the longitudinal study. A number of year 1 schools did not provide an identifier code so could not be used in subsequent years. Of these usable responses 129 are from primary schools and 53 from secondary schools.

#### Response rates primary schools

Target population	Target sample	Schools in year 1 data collection	Schools in year 2 data collection	Schools in year 3 data collection	All 3 years
3210	3210 (Yr. 1) 129 (Yrs. 2 and 3)	129 (4.0%)	70* (54.3%)	71* (54.4%)	47

#### Response rates secondary schools

Target population	Target sample	Schools in year 1 data collection	Schools in year 2 data collection	Schools in year 3 data collection	All 3 years
729	729 53 (Yrs. 2 and 3)	53 (7.3%)	26* (49.03%)	24* (45.3%)	15

\*For years 2 and 3 of the survey the 182 schools who responded in Year 1 were use as the target sample.

*Breakdown of Sample. (Year 1)*

Number of schools:	182
Percentage of principals with 0-2 years' experience	16.0%
Percentage of principals with 3-6 years' experience	29.4%
Percentage of principals with >7 years' experience	54.6%
Percentage of time spend on administrative tasks	37%
Percentage of time spend on teaching	28%
Percentage of time spend on discussing education with teachers	13%
Percentage of time spend on observing lessons	4%
Percentage of time spend on managing student behavior	14%
Percentage of time spend on quality assurance/self-evaluation	9%
Percentage of time spend on other tasks	10%
Percentage of schools in area with <3000 inhabitants:	36.8%
Percentage of schools in area with 3000-15.000 inhabitants:	19.6%
Percentage of schools in area with 15.001-50.000 inhabitants:	22.1%
Percentage of schools in area with 50.001-100.000 inhabitants:	3.1%
Percentage of schools in area with 100.001-500.000 inhabitants:	5.5%
Percentage of schools in area with >500.000 inhabitants:	12.9%
Percentage of schools in urban area	43.2%
Percentage of schools in suburban area	22.8%
Percentage of suburban schools in metropolitan area	34.0%
Percentage of schools in rural area	0%
Average number of students in the schools	317
Average number of fulltime teachers in the schools	19
Percentage of schools with majority of students (>50%) from low income groups	41.1%
Percentage of schools with majority of students (>50%) from high income groups	41.6%
Percentage of schools where majority of students (>50%) do not speak national language as first language	3.1%

### Breakdown of Overall Sample by School Type

School Type	Secondary			Primary			Total		
	Mean	N	Std. Dev	Mean	N	Std. Dev	Mean	N	Std. Dev
Administrative tasks	44.6%	42	15.3	34.8%	121	19.7	37.3%	163	19.1
Teaching	2.3%	42	4.2	25.7%	121	31.2	19.7%	163	28.8
Discussions with teachers on education matters	14.4%	42	7.2	12.9%	121	7.5	13.3%	163	7.4
Observing lessons	1.9%	42	2.6	2.3%	121	2.8	2.2%	163	2.7
Managing student behaviour / general communication with students	20.7%	42	14.0	11.7%	121	9.0	14.0%	163	11.2
Self-evaluation / quality assurance of school	8.4%	42	5.2	8.1%	121	6.7	8.2%	163	6.3
Other duties	7.7%	42	9.3	4.6%	121	6.3	5.4%	163	7.3

How many years' experience do you have working as a principal (in this and in other schools)?			
	School Type		Total
	Secondary	Primary	
0-1 year	3 7.3%	4 3.3%	7 4.3%
1-2 years	9 22.0%	10 8.2%	19 11.7%
3-4 years	8 19.5%	15 12.3%	23 14.1%
5-6 years	6 14.6%	19 15.6%	25 15.3%
7+ years	15 36.6%	74 60.7%	89 54.6%
	41	122	163

How would you characterize the area in which your school is located?			
	School Type		Total
	Secondary	Primary	
Urban	24	46	70
	60.0%	37.7%	43.2%
Suburban	9	28	37
	22.5%	23.0%	22.8%
Suburban in a metropolitan area	7	48	55
	17.5%	39.3%	34.0%
	40	122	162

How many people live in the city, town or area in which your school is located?			
	School Type		Total
	Secondary	Primary	
Fewer than 3,000	5	55	60
	11.9%	45.5%	36.8%
3,001 to 15,000	6	26	32
	14.3%	21.5%	19.6%
15,001 to 50,000	16	20	36
	38.1%	16.5%	22.1%
50,001 to 100,000	4	1	5
	9.5%	0.8%	3.1%
100,001 to 500,000	6	3	9
	14.3%	2.5%	5.5%
Over 500,000	5	16	21
	11.9%	13.2%	12.9%
	42	121	163

Approximately what percentage of students in your school come from economically disadvantaged homes?			
	School Type		Total
	Secondary	Primary	
0-10%	14 35.0%	37 30.1%	51 31.3%
11-25%	14 35.0%	31 25.2%	45 27.6%
26-50%	8 20.0%	14 11.4%	22 13.5%
Over 50%	4 10.0%	41 33.3%	45 27.6%
	40	123	163

Approximately what percentage of students in your school come from economically affluent homes?			
	School Type		Total
	Secondary	Primary	
0-10%	12 30.8%	47 40.9%	59 38.3%
11-25%	9 23.1%	22 19.1%	31 20.1%
26-50%	6 15.4%	18 15.7%	24 15.6%
Over 50%	12 30.8%	28 24.3%	40 26.0%
	39	115	154

Approximately what percentage of students in your school do not speak “English” as their first language?			
	School Type		Total
	Secondary	Primary	
0-10%	38 90.5%	86 71.1%	124 76.1%
11-25%	4 9.5%	18 14.9%	22 13.5%
26-50%	0 0.0%	12 9.9%	12 7.4%
Over 50%	0 0.0%	5 4.1%	5 3.1%
	42	121	163

As is clear from the above response rates to the year one survey were poor, due it seems largely to the very negative atmosphere in schools at the time as a result of the massive cut backs in resources caused by the economic crisis. However a good number of those who responded in year one did also in years two and three allowing the researches to compare a reasonable number of schools across the three years.

**Differences in Scale Averages for Years 1 to 3 – Ireland (Inspected vs Non-Inspected)**

The following table presents the mean scores for each scale for each of the three years. Sample size restrictions made it feasible to run a latent growth model to look at the effect of inspection on the key variables in the study. Here are the descriptives for the key measurements in the study over the three years broken. We also ran a number of independent sample t-test to compare differences between schools inspected that year and those who were not inspected.

	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>
Capacity Building	4.29	4.31	4.30
Improvement in Capacity Building	3.60	3.74	3.50
Improvement in Teacher Participation in Decision Making	3.61	3.80	3.52
Improvement in Teacher Co-operation	3.79	3.88	3.61
Improvement in Transformational Leadership	3.36	3.48	3.37
School Effectiveness	4.31	4.38	4.34
Improvement in School Effectiveness	3.46	3.55	3.42
Improvement in Opportunity to Learn	3.39	3.49	3.32
Improvement in Assessment of Students	3.63	3.81	3.72
Improvement in Assessment of School	3.32	3.41	3.33
Improvement in Clear and Structured Learning	3.47	3.54	3.40
Accepting Feedback		4.11	4.03
Setting expectations		3.78	3.80
Shareholders sensitive to reports	3.88	3.90	3.86
Promoting Self-Evaluations	3.46	3.95	3.94
Unintended Responses	2.07	3.19	3.02
Feedback on capacity building		1.52	1.54
Feedback on effective school and teaching conditions		1.94	1.94

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Capacity Building	4.33	4.27	4.29
Capacity Building (Year 2)*	4.53	4.27	4.31
Capacity Building (Year 3)	4.26	4.30	4.30

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Improvement in Capacity Building	3.61	3.59	3.60
Improvement in Capacity Building (Year 2)	3.83	3.73	3.74
Improvement in Capacity Building (Year 3)	3.50	3.50	3.50

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Improvement in Teacher Participation in Decision Making	3.51	3.67	3.61
Improvement in Teacher Participation in Decision Making (Year 2)	3.81	3.80	3.80
Improvement in Teacher Participation in Decision Making (Year 3)	3.54	3.52	3.52

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Improvement in Teacher Co-operation	3.93	3.72	3.79
Improvement in Teacher Co-operation (Year 2)	4.12	3.85	3.88
Improvement in Teacher Co-operation (Year 3)	3.63	3.60	3.61

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Improvement in Transformational Leadership	3.40	3.34	3.36
Improvement in Transformational Leadership (Year 2)	3.62	3.46	3.48
Improvement in Transformational Leadership (Year 3)	3.29	3.38	3.37

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
School Effectiveness	4.36	4.29	4.31
School Effectiveness (Year 2)	4.55	4.35	4.38
School Effectiveness (Year 3)	4.33	4.34	4.34

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Improvement in Assessment of Students	3.64	3.63	3.63
Improvement in Assessment of Students (Year 2)	3.81	3.81	3.81
Improvement in Assessment of Students (Year 3)	3.67	3.73	3.72

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Improvement in School Effectiveness	3.45	3.47	3.46
Improvement in School Effectiveness (Year 2)	3.64	3.54	3.55
Improvement in School Effectiveness (Year 3)	3.45	3.42	3.42

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Improvement in Clear and Structured Learning	3.44	3.48	3.47
Improvement in Clear and Structured Learning (Year 2)	3.72	3.51	3.54
Improvement in Clear and Structured Learning (Year 3)	3.42	3.40	3.40

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Improvement in Assessment of School	3.38	3.30	3.32
Improvement in Assessment of School (Year 2)	3.38	3.42	3.41
Improvement in Assessment of School (Year 3)	3.42	3.31	3.33

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Improvement in Opportunity to Learn	3.34	3.41	3.39
Improvement in Opportunity to Learn (Year 2)	3.62	3.47	3.49
Improvement in Opportunity to Learn (Year 3)	3.36	3.31	3.32

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Shareholders sensitive to reports	4.03	3.79	3.88
Shareholders sensitive to reports (Year 2)	4.28	3.77	3.90
Shareholders sensitive to reports (Year 3)	3.94	3.83	3.86

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Promoting Self-Evaluations	3.43	3.47	3.46
Promoting Self-Evaluations (Year 2)	4.13	3.92	3.95
Promoting Self-Evaluations (Year 3)	3.94	3.93	3.94

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Unintended Responses	2.09	2.06	2.07
Unintended Responses (Year 2)*	2.87	3.30	3.19
Unintended Responses (Year 3)	2.82	3.12	3.02

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Accepting Feedback (Year 2)*	4.58	3.94	4.11
Accepting Feedback (Year 3)	4.16	3.97	4.03

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Setting expectations (Year 2)*	4.15	3.64	3.78
Setting expectations (Year 3)	3.83	3.79	3.80

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Feedback on capacity building (Year 2)	1.52	1.51	1.52
Feedback on capacity building (Year 3)	1.52	1.55	1.54

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Feedback on effective school and teaching conditions (Yr 2)	2.02	1.91	1.94
Feedback on effective school and teaching conditions (Yr 3)	1.87	1.97	1.94

There were no significant differences between schools inspected and not inspected in the first year and third years of the study.

\* In year 2 Inspected schools scored significantly higher on Capacity Building, Accepting Feedback and Setting Expectations and lower on unintended responses.

However the power of these tests will be affected by the small sample sizes.

### Attitude to inspection

The following section looks at the attitude of school principals to inspections. Responses to inspection questions over the three years were combined to increase sample size.

<b>The feedback provided to the school during the last inspection visit was insightful</b>		
Strongly Disagree	5	3.4%
Disagree	8	5.4%
Neutral	20	13.4%
Agree	82	55.0%
Strongly Agree	34	22.8%
TOTAL	149	

<b>Overall the school was happy with the feedback it received</b>		
Strongly Disagree	3	2.0%
Disagree	12	8.2%
Neutral	6	4.1%
Agree	73	49.7%
Strongly Agree	53	36.1%
TOTAL	147	

<b>The feedback received from the school inspectors was useful</b>		
Strongly Disagree	4	2.7%
Disagree	5	3.4%
Neutral	14	9.5%
Agree	84	57.1%
Strongly Agree	40	27.2%
TOTAL	147	

<b>The school in the main will act on the feedback received from the inspectors</b>		
Strongly Disagree	2	1.4%
Disagree	2	1.4%
Neutral	11	7.5%
Agree	79	53.7%
Strongly Agree	53	36.1%
TOTAL	147	

<b>We use the inspection rubric to set new priorities for the future</b>		
Strongly Disagree	3	2.0%
Disagree	15	9.8%
Neutral	22	14.4%
Agree	90	58.8%
Strongly Agree	23	15.0%
TOTAL	153	

<b>I discourage teachers to experiment with new teaching methods that do not fit the scoring rubric of the Inspectorate</b>		
Strongly Disagree	67	44.4%
Disagree	52	34.4%
Neutral	22	14.6%
Agree	8	5.3%
Strongly Agree	2	1.3%
TOTAL	151	

<b>School inspections have resulted in narrowing curriculum and instructional strategies in my school</b>		
Strongly Disagree	51	34.2%
Disagree	50	33.6%
Neutral	31	20.8%
Agree	11	7.4%
Strongly Agree	6	4.0%
TOTAL	149	

<b>School inspections have resulted in refocusing curriculum and teaching and learning strategies in my school</b>		
Strongly Disagree	15	10.1%
Disagree	24	16.1%
Neutral	43	28.9%
Agree	56	37.6%
Strongly Agree	11	7.4%
TOTAL	149	

<b>The latest documents/facts and figures we sent to the Inspectorate present a more positive picture of the quality of our school then how we are really doing</b>		
Strongly Disagree	12	8.0%
Disagree	20	13.3%
Neutral	42	28.0%
Agree	59	39.3%
Strongly Agree	17	11.3%
TOTAL	150	

<b>Preparation for school inspection is mainly about putting protocols and procedures in writing that are in place in the school and gathering documents and data.</b>		
Strongly Disagree	15	9.9%
Disagree	39	25.7%
Neutral	38	25.0%
Agree	38	25.0%
Strongly Agree	22	14.5%
TOTAL	152	

\* As mentioned earlier our response rate was quite poor and in particular the number of schools who answered the school inspection questions was low due to the fact that some principals had never been or had not recently been inspected.

To look at descriptive statistics for the inspection items we combined the data for all three years to allow us look at the overall view of school principals on inspection. Each school is represented only once in the file. Where there was more than 1 response to the question, an average was taken.

***Comparing inspected and uninspected schools attitudes to inspection***

We divided the sample into those schools in the study who were inspected at least once over the three year period and those who were not inspected to compare the attitudes of both groups to inspection. This was used to examine if school principals who had been inspected more recently than those who had not been inspected for a longer period.

	<b>Inspected</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>P-value</b>
The feedback provided to the school during the last inspection visit was insightful*	Yes	84	3.75	0.94	sig < .1
	No	65	4.01	0.90	
Overall the school was happy with the feedback it received	Yes	83	3.99	0.93	NS
	No	64	4.11	0.97	
The feedback received from the school inspectors was useful	Yes	83	3.92	0.82	NS
	No	64	4.07	0.86	
The school in the main will act on the feedback received from the inspectors	Yes	83	4.06	0.72	NS
	No	64	4.26	0.72	
We use the inspection rubric to set new priorities for the future	Yes	88	3.63	0.89	NS
	No	65	3.82	0.92	
I discourage teachers to experiment with new teaching methods that do not fit the scoring rubric of the Inspectorate*	Yes	86	1.94	1.12	sig < .05
	No	65	1.63	0.61	
School inspections have resulted in narrowing curriculum and instructional strategies in my school	Yes	85	2.09	1.12	NS
	No	64	2.05	1.03	
School inspections have resulted in refocusing curriculum and teaching and learning strategies in my school	Yes	84	2.99	1.10	Ns
	No	65	3.18	1.04	
The latest documents/facts and figures we sent to the Inspectorate present a more positive picture of the quality of our school then how we are really doing*	Yes	85	3.41	1.07	Sig < .05
	No	65	3.07	1.09	
Preparation for school inspection is mainly about putting protocols and procedures in writing that are in place in the school and gathering documents and data.	Yes	88	3.03	1.19	NS
	No	64	3.02	1.22	

\* There were significant differences between schools inspected in the last three years.

## **Findings**

Firstly it is quite clear from these findings that inspection in Ireland has become well-established and respected. This is no mean achievement in the context of the history of inspection and indeed the collapse in available resources in the Irish education system in recent times. The attitude of principals to inspection as indicated by this research is very positive. As can be seen in the data above, on virtually every variable, principals report strong support for inspection and are clearly influenced by inspection reports. There appears to be a very good relationship between schools and the Inspectorate.

The majority of principals are of the view that the recommendations outlined by the inspectorate in reports are fair and reasonable based on the present availability of school resources. Furthermore, principals are very positive about external recommendations clearly believing that they result in a faster pace of educational change.

Since this research began the Inspectorate have changed their schedule of inspection visits to a system where inspection visits should be proportionate and based on the change capacity of the school and the required improvement action needed. The vision for the future of evaluation policy and practice now relates to the deployment of resources to schools that need help and support the most. From a policy point of view internal evaluation has become the main focus, while external evaluation is seen as informing policy and enabling resources to be properly distributed so that a perhaps a more equitable system intervention can be created.

The majority of principals in the surveys seem convinced that inspection results in better management, teaching and learning and that inspection has had an impact on the quality of teaching, learning and management in their schools, in particular where adherence to management and teaching standards is required. In addition, as a result of inspection, principals were also of the view that there was an accelerated rate of change in certain elements of practice.

## **Conclusion**

It seems clear that educational evaluation is no longer merely considered an external monitoring process or top-down externally devised system of examining, sanctioning or rewarding. Rather, educational evaluation is widely viewed as an allogamy of external evaluation carried out by the inspectorate in parallel with internal evaluation carried out by a school, the dual purpose of which is to serve both the accountability agenda on the one hand and the school improvement agenda on the other. It seems broadly accepted that

when inspection and self-evaluation are treated as interconnected units and used in partnership, both systems of evaluation have the potential to counteract the flaws that are inherent in each system, Moreover it would reasonable to suggest that inspection of post-primary schools has been received as being a significant catalyst for school improvement.

In this regard, the Irish Inspectorate could be commended for the manner in which inspection was re-introduced, particularly since, prior to its re-introduction in 2006 school inspection was an unfamiliar concept to the majority of post-primary school principals and teachers. Moreover, one could also say that schools in Ireland must also be commended for the widespread acceptance of inspection rather than what could have been abjection and rejection).

However, this picture as previously mentioned in effect to a very different time. Since 2012 all primary and post-primary schools in the Ireland have been provided with procedures and guidelines for the self-evaluation of teaching and learning (DES 2012). Indeed, as stated by the DES 'Over time the guidelines will be further developed to support schools as they evaluate other key dimensions of school provision' (DES 2012, p.8), with these key dimensions being that of leadership and management and support. This move to a type of inspection with a much stronger data base for decision making not only significantly increases the workload on schools but more importantly will provide the type of evidence on which robust judgements of both school and teacher performance can be based going forward. Inspection may thus become a more judgemental and invasive process and the very positive attitudes and relationships revealed in this research may be tested.

## **References**

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