

REPORT TO: EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 6 DECEMBER 2010

REPORT ON: OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION ON THE HMIE SCHOOL INSPECTION FRAMEWORK

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

REPORT NO: 709-2010

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report is a response to the current consultation on the future development of the HMIE School Inspection Framework. The consultation seeks views on a range of alternative inspection approaches and the ways in which future inspection functions should be undertaken.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Education Committee is recommended to:

- i. note the contents of this report;
- ii. approve the Council's response to the consultation (appendix); and
- iii. instruct the Director of Education to submit the response on behalf of Dundee City Council.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 None

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) is currently an Executive Agency of the Scottish Government which inspects all aspects of education and children's services and provide reports on the quality of service. HMIE and Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) will be brought together into a new executive agency - the Scottish Education Quality and Improvement Agency. Further and more detailed work will be carried out between now and the end of the year to define the scope, functions, structure and leadership of the new agency. The agency will be operational from 1 July 2011. Its role will be to:

- lead and drive forward the Curriculum for Excellence;
- encourage and support effective innovation;
- inspire practitioners and managers to meet new challenges and to be comfortable about doing so;
- ensure that quality, standards and outcomes for learners are continually driven upwards to deliver educational excellence; and
- provide the necessary assurance to parents and others that Scottish education really is playing the key role it needs to in facing the challenges of the 21st century.

4.2 The purpose of the consultation on the future development of the inspection framework is to gather the views of as many stakeholders as possible about proposals for future inspections. The rationale for the review is the need to revisit and review the inspection

process regularly to ensure that it remains relevant. The two methods of consultation include an online questionnaire by individuals and the option for the submission of a report by Councils (appendix).

- 4.3 HMle have recently completed a cycle of inspections where every local authority school in Scotland was inspected over a fixed period of time (six years in the case of secondary schools, seven in the case of primary schools). This was not regarded as proportionate given that all schools experienced the same inspection model whether they were performing highly or less well. To address this issue, there is a proposal that HMle should move towards inspections that vary in size relative to the needs of the school and pre-school settings, while remaining independent, transparent and clearly focused on the needs of learners and their families.
- 4.4 HMle want inspection to be seen as a positive, partnership experience. To achieve this will require a greater level of involvement in the inspection process by staff, pupils, parents and carers and the extended school community. The proposal by HMle is to build on current inspection models so that they focus even more on how schools evaluate themselves (school self-evaluation) and how they are improving.
- 4.5 The proposals for consultation are designed to ensure that HMle staff are well prepared to meet the challenges which all public bodies are facing of improving education whilst using fewer resources. This will require alternative inspection models that focus inspections on key issues to ensure that HMle staff can concentrate their efforts in the places which will have the greatest benefit for learners. In addition, a reduced number of inspection models will reduce the carbon footprint and environmental impact of HMle given the extent to which staff currently travel across the country.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report has been screened for any implications in respect of sustainability, strategic environment assessment, anti-poverty, equality impact assessment and risk management. There are no major issues.

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 6.1 This report has been subject to consultation with the Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), the Director of Finance, teacher trade unions and Head Teachers.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 None

Jim Collins
Director of Education

16th November 2010

JC/MW/MM

Dundee City Council

Response to proposals for changing the HMIE school inspection framework

Inspect where it really matters.

Dundee City Council welcomes the external scrutiny provided by HMIE during the course of inspections. This provides an additional element of endorsement to our own evaluation activities as well as identifying strengths and areas for improvement. However, the current models are inflexible with the result that all establishments experience the same inspection model by sector regardless of their current level of performance. This provides a universal yardstick and could be considered useful in this regard but it is also time consuming and staff heavy at a time of reducing resources. Evaluation activities are carried out regularly at council and establishment level using a range of appropriate methods. The information is discussed and shared with staff, pupils, parents and elected members in a variety of ways. There are ongoing discussions with HMIE during meetings and through ongoing links with the HMIE District Inspector. We would therefore agree that there is scope for HMIE to revisit the current model of delivery in line with the following suggestions that:

- A smaller sample of schools should be inspected each year as long as the sample size and scope is valid and representative of all sectors of education across all areas of Scotland and is large enough to provide enough evidence for a national overview of the quality of school education.
- HMIE should continue to liaise closely with local councils to discuss and identify any additional schools that should be added to or removed from the inspection sample.
- The move towards 'risk-based' assessment sampling must be based on a clearly stated and agreed rationale. Where a school is clearly causing concern, the Education Department should be given the opportunity to support and challenge the school to make the necessary improvements. This would lessen one negative view of inspection by HMIE as a reaction to issues such as negative media publicity (often unfounded) and complaints which have not been made to the school or Education Department.
- When HMIE work more closely with local authorities to make better use of the information held about their schools, there should be the opportunity to identify highly performing schools as well as schools where improvement is required. A move to a 'deficit' model of inspection would undermine the role of inspection and make it very difficult for HMIE to identify and share good practice.

Inspect what really matters

To maximise increasingly fewer resources, HMIE will require to focus resources on what really matters to learners and on where improvements in the quality of delivery are required. This will necessitate a clear focus on each of the following areas:

- the impact of the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*
- the quality of learning and teaching
- the quality of learners' experience
- the extent to which the needs of all pupils are met through a broad and inclusive education

- the extent to which all staff are engaged in improving the skills and knowledge of all learners
- the quality of leadership at all levels within an establishment

Within Dundee City Council we would welcome the proposed move away from concentrating inspection activity on four subject departments in every secondary school inspection and on extending the observation of learning and teaching more widely across the school. This will involve a greater number of staff in the inspection process. However, we would caution strongly against the narrow proposal to focus on specific curriculum areas and subjects such as English, Mathematics and Health and Wellbeing to the exclusion or detriment of other subject areas.

Involve an increased number of stakeholders

While current inspection models focus largely on learners, there is scope to involve an increased number of stakeholders. This may require an alteration to the timing of inspection so that parents/carers and the wider school community who have work commitments can share their views outwith the confines of the traditional school day. This model has operated successfully during Ofsted inspections and is considered a valuable means of increasing parental involvement. Similarly, this approach would enable an increased number of additional stakeholders such as members of the local community and those with other links to participate at a time convenient to them.

Increase staff involvement in inspection

We would welcome the proposal to involve senior staff, and where appropriate education authority staff, to join HMle staff on class visits and take part in inspection team meetings. This would clearly increase the involvement of staff in inspections and let them share their views. It would also allow inspection teams to evaluate how well staff know the school's strengths and aspects for development. However, we would contend that this practice could operate both ways and that increased partnership could involve HMle working with Education Department staff during our engagement with establishments. This would maximise resources and would be a valuable means of providing HMle with a deeper knowledge of the quality assurance systems within a council.

Develop purposeful reports

We would argue that there is an inherent danger in the proposal for HMle to move to shorter reports on the basis that 'less is not always best'. Parents have an expectation that HMle reports will tell the story of the school from a pupil perspective. Any revised or shortened version would have to retain the core characteristics of providing:

- assurance to the user and learner on how the school is performing;
- information on strengths and areas of good practice;
- information on key areas for improvement; and
- evaluations for each quality indicator used during the inspection

Reduce the period of notice for inspection

We would agree that this is a useful and overdue step. A shorter period of notice for inspection will increase public confidence that inspectors observe the school as it normally works while reducing the anxiety experienced by staff in the school, which can build up over a longer period of notice. Establishments and Education Departments hold a wide range of information on schools and the views of key stakeholders. The only barrier to the complete removal of the period of notice would be when staff and pupils were not present during the inspection because of attendance at residential events or transition activities. It should be noted that any reduction in the notification period would require a reduction in the demand for advanced paperwork from an establishment.

Conclusion

Based on our experience in Dundee City Council, we would agree that there is a need for a proportionate, more focused, sustainable and effective programme of inspection. This will have the added value of maximising resources, extending partnership working and enabling HMle to carry out the core role of improving Scottish education. The annual programme of inspections should continue to provide evidence for monitoring progress in improvement across Scotland. The challenge is for Education Departments and staff to ensure that they become more adept in the area of critical self-evaluation so that the identified priorities in improvement plans reflect the needs of each individual establishment. This will promote a culture in which the external scrutiny role of HMle will be to endorse the work of each Education Department and establishment.

16th November, 2010