



***SICI Conference – Greenwich, London, June 07 and 08 2012***

***'Raising Standards through Innovative Inspection'***

- Learning outcomes:***
- ***Putting children and young people at the centre of the inspection***
  - ***Sharing international best practice – hearing from inspectors, schools and universities***
  - ***How can we 'squeeze out mediocrity'***
  - ***How we inspect teaching and early literacy***
  - ***Networking and building expertise for SICI***

Ofsted welcomed over 70 delegates from 30 different countries to London in June 2012. The intention was to build on previous workshops looking at innovative practice in inspection to continue the theme of innovation whilst also trying to measure the impact on the schools themselves following changes to the various inspection systems. This included seeking the views of two headteachers.

Prior to the conference was a day for the meeting of the Executive Committee and a further meeting of the working party on evaluating social outcomes.

**Day 1 – June 7th**

Following an introduction by John Goldup, Her Majesty's Deputy Chief Inspector, the first session was led by Richard Brooks, Director, Strategy and focussed on recent changes to Ofsted's inspection frameworks.

This was at a time when, following the introduction of a new framework in January 2012, Ofsted was also consulting on significant revisions to be made from September 2012. Richard presented findings that showed that educational outcomes

had improved in the last 10 years in England but had plateaued since 2011 as schools became more familiar with the inspection system. For this reason a new framework was being introduced more quickly than is usual to raise the level of challenge, for all schools but especially for schools that had previously been judged as satisfactory. This included shorter notice periods, greater focus on teaching and classroom practice and a closer look at performance management of teaching. This would then lead to sharper recommendations for future action in the school. Discussion focussed on the new criteria for the evaluation of teaching.

**The second session was led by Mrs Vic van den Broek d'Obrenan, Netherlands coordinating inspector on the theme of innovation within the Dutch system.**

There has been a strong focus on weak and failing schools in the Dutch education system, set against a context of reducing capacity and the introduction of risk based inspection in 2007. Changes have been made to the inspectorate's intervention strategy with weak and failing schools. This has included more direct contact with the relevant school board (governing body), early warnings where results are declining, and better tailored intervention according to the needs of the school. Consequently there has been a reduction in the number of 'new' weak or failing schools and the rate of improvement for those schools previously identified has accelerated. The inspectorate is beginning to shift its focus to improving those schools that are in the middle band of performance in order to raise expectation cross the whole system. These changes dovetail significantly with those being implemented in the English system.

**The third session was entitled University led research – 'is it better to fail than to succeed?' and led by Dr Rebecca Allen, Institute of Education, Department of Quantitative Economics)**

This was a technical session intended to introduce the concept of validated fully independent measures of school improvement following an inspection. The focus was specifically on schools that either achieves a satisfactory judgement compared to those that get a notice to improve (inadequate but the closest to a satisfactory judgement thus these schools have comparable performance data).

Quantitative methods were used to analyse the performance of schools following a judgement of notice to improve (inadequate) when compared to 'just' satisfactory. It was found that schools that are seen to have 'just' failed their Ofsted inspection subsequently do better than those who 'just' achieve a grade of satisfactory over a four year period. It is difficult to quantify the extent of improvement and statistically some improvements are modest. However, it can make one grade difference in one or two subjects when measured against attainment benchmarks. The impact can also be seen to some extent in English and mathematics. Higher ability pupils tend to benefit most from the changes that follow a judgement of Notice to Improve.

The reasons for improvement and the implication for policy were considered briefly by delegates, including the challenges posed by risk based inspection and frequent changes to inspection methodology alongside the need to provide proportionate support to schools within the constraint of limited resources.

**Some notes on the formative role of inspections** (Helder Guerreiro, Portugal) – This session was a reflective view of the benefits and potential misconceptions around school self-evaluation.

Inspectorates are required to look both to the past and to the future. Inspectorates have a summative role – closely linked to accountability. They also have a formative role – linked to school improvement. The formative role is facilitated through an inspectorate's influence and reputation, the quality of its interactions and professional dialogue with schools and through the written reports it produces. Self-evaluation and surveying the views of schools are important tools that enable inspectorates to assess whether they are having a formative impact. There are inherent challenges in pushing for change.

**How can transparency drive improvement?** (Richard Brooks, Ofsted Director of Strategy):

Transparency is a major agenda in the United Kingdom – one which is unlikely to go away. This can be seen within a context of sharpening accountability and driving public sector improvement. Ofsted makes its work transparent through a wide range of approaches: its annual report, its surveys of subjects and aspects of school work and the good practice case studies it produces. Around a million unique users a month access its website, in particular the inspection reports. This information is picked up and used by third parties (for example property websites offer links to the reports for schools in a particular area). In partnership with the DfE, Ofsted ensures that detailed information about pupil achievement (RAISEonline) is available to inspectors, schools and local authorities so that they have access to the same information that is used to help form judgements about school performance. Ofsted now published quarterly reports on inspection outcomes that are available publicly and include provider level data. This can be used to support detailed and complex external analysis. Parent View was introduced in October 2010. Whilst in its early days this online survey enables parents to express their views about a school and see the views of other parents.

Comments were made by delegates from Malta, The Netherlands and Germany. Richard Brooks responded to questions/comments about systems for ensuring the reliability and validity of judgements, the complaints process, the links to external research and evaluation of Ofsted's work, and the 'unintended consequences' of too great a level of transparency.

**Are International comparisons useful or simply interesting?** (Linda Sturman, NFER)

Full presentation notes were circulated to delegates.

The aim of international comparisons is to share knowledge and ideas that promote improvement of educational systems and outcomes for learners. There are a number of well-known international studies, of which PISA is perhaps the most high profile.

There are advantages and limitations to large and small scale studies, particularly in terms of their breadth or depth. There is a need to ensure that information from these comparisons is interpreted and evaluated sensitively – rankings and trends can exaggerate difference and/or hide internal variations. We should avoid 'policy tourism' – that is adopting policies that are not well matched to a particular country's context as this can prove a costly mistake.

Comments were made by delegates from Malta, the Czech Republic and Finland. Linda Sturman responded to questions/comments about the relative influence of different studies at a political level, the merits of different sampling methods, the need for case study material to support where systems are successful and the need for more in depth research into the wider findings.

**Inspecting for successful early reading** (Gill Jones HMI, Ofsted, England):  
Full presentation notes were circulated to delegates.

Ofsted has focused strongly over time on the need to narrow the gaps in performance between different groups of pupils in school. Literacy, and in particular reading, is seen to be critical in a child's wider educational development and subsequent academic performance and life chances. A child from a higher socio-economic background is likely to have a vocabulary that is twice as large as a child from a lower socio-economic background by 36 months. In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) inspectors pay close attention to the communication, language and literacy development of children and the extent to which a provider meets the needs of those children who are weak in this area. The Ofsted survey publication 'Reading by Six' identified how schools in disadvantaged areas were successful in teaching children to read: by using phonics from an early age, using it systematically and based on a scheme which is then linked to the children's wider reading experience. The new inspection framework emphasises the importance of pupils learning to read so that they can read to learn. Inspectors look closely at how well teachers systematically teach synthetic phonics. From June 2012 the government will introduce a national phonics screening check for 6 year olds. Inspectors will evaluate how well teachers have used this information to identify children who are struggling and the effectiveness of any interventions that are put in place.

**Thematic inspection of Dutch language education** (Herman Franssen, inspector of primary education, The Netherlands):

Full presentation notes were circulated to delegates.

Over several years the Dutch inspectorate has used thematic inspections to identify good practice in the teaching of Dutch language as a means to share successful practice and promote school improvement. The key message to schools from all of these thematic inspections is that 'teachers make a difference'. The findings of these surveys have been disseminated through high quality publications and videos. They have been well-received by schools. A thematic survey that looked at the teaching of language skills in primary schools found a clear link between the quality of teaching

and the pupils' performance. In the best schools teachers had better instructional skills and subject knowledge skills. In these schools, the curriculum was better adapted to the characteristics of the pupils. A good practice survey identified innovative practice in language education. A common feature in these schools was the high quality training and professional development opportunities for teachers linked to renewing their curriculum. A survey looking at writing found that this (alongside oral communication) was much less likely to be a school improvement focus than reading. It found that in some schools that rarely worked in partnership with other schools there were a limited range of approaches. Dutch universities have now taken up this issue as an area needing further research.

The evening was the conference dinner and a presentation about the history of Greenwich as a Royal Borough.

## Day 2

### What use inspection for schools?

Kath Falconer – Sparkenhoe Primary School, Leicester and Lindsey Clarke – Park View Secondary School, Birmingham

This session was presented by 2 Headteachers from schools in England which had recently been inspected. One was from a primary school and the other a secondary school. Each served areas of high deprivation but each spoke about the way they used the inspection findings to improve provision and outcomes in their respective schools. They had each achieved outstanding grades in subsequent inspections but recognised inadequate when supporting other schools. They especially welcomed the way Ofsted used direct observation of teaching to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses which they then used to provide professional development. Other aspects they welcomed were the regular and frequent moderation of their own self-evaluation, a regular report which was used as a management tool to improve provision and inform governance and parents. They recognised the pressure associated with this but described ways in which it had been used positively. One example was the joining (by headteachers) of the inspection team meetings.

Questions followed about how they used teaching observation and a healthy discussion about what training was provided for teachers both pre inspection and post inspection. Other questions included ones about the notice period and methodology of inspection. Some asked about teachers who 'could not handle the observation' – the response was that this was rare and other evidence would then be sought.

## Day 2 – session 2

### Changes to the inspection system in England



This was a summary session which outlined the forthcoming changes (implemented September 2012) to the Ofsted inspection system. These are many but summarised as a desire to improve those middle performing schools which never improve above satisfactory – around 45% of all schools nationally. These schools will now be described as 'requires improvement' and require speedier and more frequent monitoring. Inspectors will help provide guidance and support – mainly through making contacts with stronger schools. The notice period will be shortened but the focus on direct lesson observations remains. The intention is that good will become the acceptable standard of schools rather than satisfactory. The same principles apply to teaching and leadership and management. A new handbook was published in September 2012 which is available on the Ofsted website.

### Day 2 – session 3

Improving teaching through inspection – a joint session by Wulf Homeier – Lower Saxony Inspectorate (NLQ) and Brian Currie, Managing Inspector for Primary Schools, Education and Training Inspectorate, Northern Ireland and Peter Geoghegan.

This session showcased the technical instruments and outcomes of the German method of evaluating teaching via direct observation and that of Northern Ireland.

The number and proportion of lesson observations varied but inspectors try to seek at least 50% of staff observations or a minimum of 20 lesson observations. The data generated was used by inspection teams to provide helpful guidance and recommendations for schools. Ireland have a six point grading scale and focus the judgement on the impact of teaching on outcomes of pupils. This included a focus on literacy and numeracy also. The example from Lower Saxony outlined the differential between the judgements of teaching and subsequent impact on student outcomes. The grading system has changed over time but less frequently than that of other direct observation countries thus maintaining comparisons and reliability.

Final discussion session was led by Pasi Reinikainen from Finland.

Finland has a very different view of teaching observations and contrasts this with the other inspectorates that do observe teaching. The main points raised by Finland were that they had no inspection system only evaluation, they had no external colleagues evaluating lessons (although parents have this right and do exercise it occasionally) – teachers receive 5 years training and work at masters levels (similar to others) – schools have greater autonomy and peer support systems are secure – teachers can add ingredients to the core national curriculum and a belief that the quality of education cannot exceed the quality of teachers. Self-evaluation is so embedded in the Finnish system that most schools buy into the tests even though only 10% are required to do so.

Questions that emerged from the floor during the discussions were:

1. Does inspection encourage game playing?
2. How can we challenge those schools that 'need' it most irrespective of performance?
3. What are the key inhibitors for inspectorates?
4. Can there be too much transparency? Is it pseudo helpful?
5. Is it necessary for some schools to 'fail' an inspection to ensure the process has validity?
6. Why publish reports?
7. Is it the inspectorates fault if schools do not improve?
8. What should be done after an inspection by the inspectorate?
9. Does changing frameworks make comparisons meaningless?
10. How can inspectorates develop self-evaluation skills?

### Closing remarks – Graham Donaldson – President SICI

Graham closed the conference by reiterating the importance of international gatherings. SICI now has 33 members and reflects the interest in evaluation and improvement. This shared experience is beneficial to all. It is now contributing to national and international decision making processes, including OECD and EU level.

He ended by thanking the workshop organisers and offering the proposal that there are no right answers, just challenges. He did agree that satisfactory should be challenged in national systems and that what matters is what happens in the classroom.

One debate issue was the tension between correction and prevention. Evaluation is essentially an internal dynamic tested by the nature and pace of change. SICI will be looking at the implications for the role of the teacher and the implications for external evaluation and inspections in future conferences and workshops.

The conference closed with a visit by the Olympic torch.



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