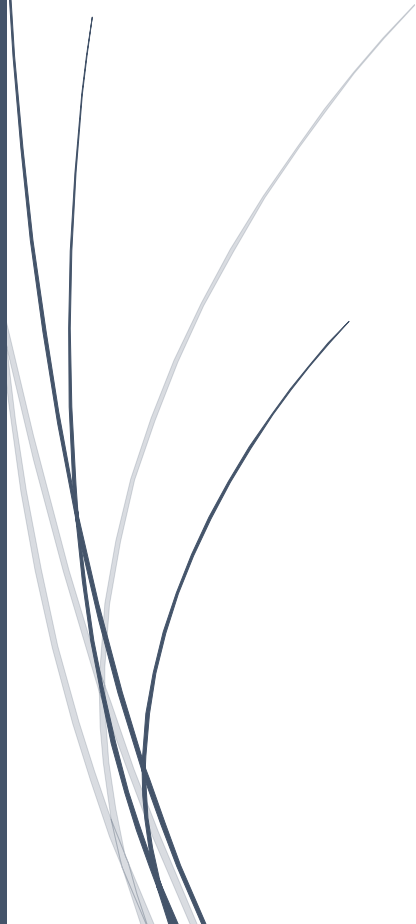




# Submission - Evaluation of Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTAL) Inspection Model



## **Introduction**

The Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission with regard to proposed Evaluation of Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTAL) inspection model.

## **Overview**

CPSMA is the management body for over 2,800 primary and special schools. In the last school year, over 12,000 calls were received from chairpersons and principals of boards of management on a range of issues relating to the operation of member schools. CPSMA has had a notable increase in schools contacting our office with regard to school inspections, most notably and recently Child Protection Inspections and Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling inspections.

CPSMA recognises that systems of accountability, including school inspections, are required as part of the process to ensure that a quality education is provided for pupils (Eurydice 2004). We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the collaborative and co-professional approach which has underpinned Inspectorate engagement with member schools and with CPSMA directly, in line with the *Code of Practice for the Inspectorate* (DES 2015).

The most recent *Department of Education Chief Inspector's Report January 2013-July 2016* (DES 2017) stated that the overall quality of teaching and learning was considered good or very good in 93% of approximately 800 Whole School Evaluations and in 88% of over 1500 Incidental Inspections and that the vast majority of parents were happy with their child's school. While correlation does not necessarily equal causation, these figures could reasonably be considered an endorsement of teaching, learning and school leadership structures in CPSMA member schools, given that they make up approximately 90% of the primary and special school system.

The Irish model of school evaluation has become more focussed and intense since 2010 (O'Brien, McNamara, and O'Hara 2014), with the introduction of Whole School Evaluations. Since that time, a further wide range of inspection models have been introduced in the Irish education system, including Incidental Inspections, Curriculum Evaluations, Evaluations for Provision of Pupils with Special Educational Needs, Evaluation of DEIS Action Plans, Follow-through Inspections, a modified Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning Inspection (DES 2016) and more recently, Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections (DES 2017a) and Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling Inspections (DE 2021).

During this time, the practices of boards and school staff have radically changed, in part as a result of the accountability measures and procedures required by these inspection models. Volunteer boards of management and school staff are deeply committed to their roles in supporting pupil learning but, as outlined by Stynes, McNamara and O'Hara (2018), the Department of Education and the Inspectorate must be careful about the ever increasing demands and burdens placed upon such schools. Accountability systems bring with them unintended consequences (Merton 1936), including an increased administrative burden on school management (Jones et al. 2017) at the expense of their core purpose of leading teaching and learning. The need to strike the balance between appraisal and support in schools has never been more pertinent, especially in the current context of providing an education for pupils during a global pandemic.

### **The ERTAL Evaluation Framework**

CPSMA recommends that:-

- The implementation of the ERTAL model should be paused until all schools have been properly supported by the Department of Education with the provision of high speed school broadband, adequate hardware and software and digital training for staff. Study results from the period of remote teaching and learning have highlighted a clear digital divide (hardware, software, & technological skills) that is present across schools in Ireland, reinforcing the social inequalities of our society (Burke and Dempsey 2020).
- Further Department of Education guidance be provided to schools on resources and supports for the provision of remote teaching and learning. Gaps were clearly identified during the period of Covid-19 related school building closures, most notably, in the areas of Special Education Needs (SEN), English as an Additional Language (EAL) and pupils in special classes and special schools (Burke and Dempsey 2020).
- The Inspectorate review its evaluation framework with regard to its sampling size and volunteer bias concerns. 26 primary schools were involved in the initial research, co-construction, pilot phase one and two of the ERTAL model, representing approx. 0.81% of all primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. In addition to this, participants were invited to take part. Volunteer bias is a challenge to the external validity of any research project (Salkind 2010) and CPSMA is concerned that the small subset of respondents may not be representative of the views of the general school population.

- The proposed implementation of any formal ERTAL model would include the implementation of a clear and timely communication plan with all schools, outlining the rationale and assessment structure of the inspection model.

### **The Procedures Before, During and After the Evaluation**

CPSMA recommends that:-

- Consideration be given to the publication of questionnaires for all stakeholders in advance of the implementation of the ERTAL inspection model. This would provide an open and transparent environment for all stakeholders as to the expectations required as part of the inspection process.
- Further engagement takes place to ensure clarity on the specific requirements for individual teacher timetables as part of the model
- Given that partial and full school closures will be in the context of emergency situations in schools, that, as with incidental school inspections, the mode of feedback on findings and recommendations on the provision of ERTAL be in verbal form only.

### **How ERTAL Approaches Can be Integrated into Current Models**

CPSMA recommends that:-

- The ERTAL model is implemented only for the purpose for which it is designed, in the event of a partial or full closure of schools arising from Public Health advice (Circular 0074/2020). Any attempt to utilise the proposed model for an undefined further reason has no current basis in education policy and could be considered as an opportunity to use the Covid-19 pandemic to implement additional oversight measures on schools.

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