

Evaluation Support and Research Unit

A Guide to Short Evaluation of Schools at High Support Units, Special Care Units and Child Detention Centres



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S
INSPECTORATE

1. Introduction

This guide describes short inspections carried out in the schools attached to high support units, special care units and child detention centres. Given the particular circumstances of the children who attend these schools, including the fact that all are in the residential care of the state, the Inspectorate is committed to a programme of annual inspections of the schools in order to quality assure the education provided for the children, and to provide advice and support to the teachers, principals and the managements of schools. These short inspections are not announced in advance to the schools.

From time to time, the Inspectorate may use other models of inspection to evaluate and report on the work of the schools at the high support units, special care units and child detention centres. These models include incidental (unannounced) inspections, whole-school evaluations, subject inspection and thematic evaluations as used in the inspection of mainstream primary and post-primary schools. Separate guides are available about each of these inspection models.

1.1 What is involved in the short evaluation model for schools at high support units, special care units and child detention centres?

The areas of enquiry for the short evaluation of schools at high support units, special care units and child detention centres are:

- teaching, learning and student attainment
- literacy, numeracy and life skills
- the quality of educational assessment and individualised planning
- attendance, retention and educational progression
- child protection
- relationship and collaboration with residential and social services
- the general management and operation of the school
- the school's capacity for improvement and development.

This short evaluation model builds on five key questions relating to the quality of education provision in the school. These questions are:

- a) How good are the learning experiences and achievements of students?
- b) How good is the teaching?
- c) How well are students cared for and supported?
- d) How effective are leadership and management?
- e) How effective is school self-evaluation and how well is it being used to improve engagement and outcomes for students, teaching, leadership and management?

These evaluations of the schools at high support units, special care units and child detention centres result in written reports on the quality of teaching, learning, organisation, management and planning in the school. A draft report is sent to the school for the purposes of factual verification, and the school is given the opportunity to provide a response for publication with the report. The report is then issued to the school, and is published on the Department's web site in accordance with the procedures set out in Section 3 of this Guide.

1.2 What are the main purposes and features of the short evaluations of schools at high support units, special care units and child detention centres?

The main purposes and features of these short evaluations are

- to monitor the quality and effectiveness of learning and teaching in the schools
- to affirm good practice in teaching, learning and support for students
- to support the development of self-reflective professional practice by school management and teachers; and
- to provide advice to teachers and school managements about the quality of the education provided in the school.

1.3 Short evaluations of schools at high support units, special care units and child detention centres as part of the Inspectorate's work

The short evaluations of schools at high support units, special care units and child detention centres are carried out in line with the general principles regarding evaluation and reporting outlined in the *Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate*.

Inspectors carry out inspections in fulfilment of their role under section 13 of the Education Act, 1998. Section 13(3)(a)(i) of the act provides for visits to recognised schools and centres for education "on the initiative of the Inspectorate" while section 13(7) places an obligation on the board of management and staff of a school to accord inspectors every reasonable facility and co-operation in the performance of their duties.

2. What happens typically during a short evaluation of schools at high support units, special care units and child detention centres?

These short evaluations take place typically over two days. Additional time may be dedicated where the school is located in more than one setting. Inspection activities involve evaluation of teaching and learning, examination of documents and interviews. The evaluation is not announced to the school in advance.

2.1 Initial meeting with the principal

Generally, the inspector arrives at the school at the beginning of the school day. On arrival at the school, the inspector introduces herself/himself to the principal and/or deputy principal (or other teacher in charge) and explains the nature and purpose of the visit. Typically, the inspector uses this opportunity to become familiar with the school context, and to explain the format of the evaluation. The principal is asked to provide a list of staff members. The inspector discusses with the principal any timetabling or calendar issues which may influence the classes that are to be visited. The inspector indicates the classes to be visited on the first day, and initial arrangements are made for the review of documents and for meetings with management and staff.

Normally inspectors do not request changes to the initial inspection plan, but if the need for alterations to the plan emerge later, the inspector indicates this to the principal during the course of the evaluation.

The inspector asks the principal to provide documentary evidence of compliance with the requirements of *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills 2011).

The inspector gives a school information form to the principal, and requests the principal to complete the form during the course of the two days of the evaluation. If this is not possible, the inspector provides the principal with an email and/or postal address, and requests him/her to complete and return the form within three days.

2.2 Classroom visits

Inspectors evaluate learning and teaching in a number of lessons over the two days. The schedule of lessons to be observed is provided to the principal at the beginning of each day. The principal can then inform the teachers. Lessons are selected from across the curriculum that is offered in the school. Teachers are generally not requested to change their timetables or alter their normal plans of work.

The inspector asks to see teacher planning documents and records, including individual education plans for students.

Lesson observations focus primarily on evaluating the quality of learning and teaching. As lessons vary in duration, nature and style, inspection methods also vary in order to obtain evidence upon which to base judgments about learning and teaching. During the lesson visit, the inspector's activities may include:

- brief introduction and discussion with the teacher
- appropriate introduction by the inspector of himself/herself to the students
- observation of learning and teaching
- interaction with students
- review of students' work
- recording observations
- concluding discussion with the teacher.

At an agreed time the inspector provides brief oral feedback to the teacher. This may be immediately after the lesson or at another time during the school day. The purpose of this feedback is

- to discuss the lessons that were inspected, and any issues related to the quality of learning and teaching observed
- to identify, acknowledge and affirm good practice
- to provide supportive and constructive feedback to the teacher
- to make recommendations (where appropriate).

The focus of advice and recommendations is on aspects for development that will improve the quality of the students' learning.

2.3 Documentation review

Relevant school documents are reviewed to gather information on the quality of education provision in the classrooms and in the school as a whole. At the initial meeting with the principal, the inspector indicates the documents that should be made available for review. These are documents that are normally available in the school, and include

- the school timetable
- the school register and roll books
- records of educational assessment and individual education plans for students, including records of progress achieved during period in the school
- the minutes of the last three board of management meetings
- the minutes of the last three staff meetings
- the school's child protection policy
- the admission, enrolment and attendance policies
- the code of behaviour and discipline and the school's incident book
- school self-evaluation reports and
- copies of reports written on children who have transferred from the school, including assessment information regarding progress achieved in the school and the recommended next steps in the child's programme of learning.

The inspector may also request to see sections of the school plan related to school curriculum, organisation, assessment, and student progression.

2.3 Interview with the principal

During the course of the two in-school evaluation days, the inspector conducts an interview with the principal or the deputy principal in the absence of the principal. The purpose of this interview is:

- to discuss matters related to the management and operation of the school, the strengths and challenges facing the school, the quality of links with the residential centre and agencies supporting the children, and the agenda for school development and improvement
- to provide an opportunity for the principal to discuss matters relating to teaching and learning with the inspector

- to provide feedback on the implementation of recommendations made in previous inspections
- to provide advice and recommendations in respect of any priority whole-school issues identified during the evaluation that require action by the school
- to answer any queries the principal may have about the school information form and to arrange for the return of the form to the inspector
- to give brief feedback on the evaluation findings, focussing on the positive aspects of the work observed and, where appropriate, on aspects that require improvement.

2.4. Other meetings

Because of limitations in the time available during this evaluation, it is possible only to hold short meetings with others. However, on the first day of the evaluation the inspector endeavours to arrange for short meetings with the chairperson of the board of management, and the director of the centre. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss matters such as the management and general operation of the school, the provision that is made for the students, the strengths and challenges for the school, the quality of links with the residential centre and agencies supporting the children, and the agenda for school development and improvement. These meetings will take place generally on the first or second day of the evaluation, or in exceptional circumstances on another day.

Depending on the stage of the evaluation the inspector may provide at these meetings some initial evaluation findings, and recommendations for school development and improvement.

3. The Report

Following the in-school inspection and receipt of the school information form from the principal, a draft report is drawn up by the inspector. The framework for the evaluation forms the core of the structure of the report, as shown in the Appendix. The report sets out concisely and unambiguously the findings in respect of each of the five key questions of quality and it indicates clearly the school's strengths and areas requiring improvement. It also includes comment on the school's capacity to improve. The report is written largely in bulleted sentences. The report is typically two to three pages in length.

The report is processed through the normal quality assurance procedures of the Inspectorate. The report is issued to the school for factual verification, and later for school response as prescribed in *Publication of School Inspection Reports: Guidelines* (DES, 2006). When the report is sent back to the school for school response a copy should be made available by the school management to anyone affected by the report's contents, even a teacher who has recently left the school.

The final report and the school's response, where appropriate, are published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

4. What is the evaluation framework for short evaluation of schools at high support units, special care units and child detention centres?

The framework for short evaluations of schools at high support units, special care units and child detention centres forms the core of the report template which is shown in the Appendix. The inspector(s) evaluate and report on the quality of education provision in these schools under the following headings –

- Teaching, Learning and Support for Students
- School Organisation and Management
- School Planning and School Self-Evaluation

The quality of the provision is evaluated in accordance with the quality continuum that is set

out in the table below. Descriptive language and statements about the quality of aspects of provision in reports reflect the terminology of the quality continuum.

Level	Performance Level	Example of descriptive terms
4	Significant strengths	Excellent; of a very high quality; very effective; highly commendable; very good; very successful; few areas for improvement
3	Strengths outweigh weaknesses	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; fully appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; adequate
2	Weaknesses outweigh strengths	Fair; scope for development; experiencing difficulty; evident weaknesses that are impacting significantly on student/pupil learning
1	Significant weaknesses	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties

4.1 Teaching, Learning and Support for Students

Teaching, Learning and Attainment

The focus in these short evaluations is placed on teaching and learning and on the progress made by students. The inspector(s) evaluates the quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed as an indicator of the overall quality of teaching and learning in the school. The inspector(s) examines aspects of teachers' practice such as preparation for teaching, the teaching approaches and methodologies in use, the engagement of students in learning, the resources used to support learning, and the ways in which learning outcomes are monitored and assessed. The inspector(s) also examine samples of students' work and the school's record of their progress.

Literacy and Numeracy

Information is sought about the support strategies in place in the school to meet the needs of all students in relation to literacy and numeracy skills, including supports for students with specific educational needs, for example, special education needs.

Life Skills

The inspector(s) will enquire into the provision in the school for the development of students' life skills. The care structures in the school are also considered.

Educational Progression

The quality of the individual learning plans prepared for students, the matching of learning programmes to student abilities and needs, and the support provided for student progression following placement in this school are examined. During the evaluation, the inspector(s) consider the general level of support and guidance available to students in the school. The inspector also considers the quality of the links between the schools attached to the high support unit/special care unit/child detention centre and those schools to which students transfer, including copies of written student reports.

4.2 School Organisation and Management

The inspection framework also includes the quality of management and general operation of the school, the links with the residential centre and agencies supporting the children, student attendance, and student safety and welfare.

General management and operation of the school

The inspector(s) examines the composition, role and operation of the board of management, including the development of policies and procedures to guide the operation of the school. During the evaluation, the inspector(s) looks at the physical resources and facilities available in the school to support learning and teaching in a safe and stimulating environment.

The quality of in-school management is also assessed, including the role of the principal in leading teaching and learning in the school. The inspector(s) looks at communication structures in the school and the level of co-operation and collaboration among the school community. The relationship between the school and the residential setting is also examined.

Attendance and Retention

The inspector(s) examines the school's procedures for monitoring attendance, transitions, student management and retention. Strategies in place to celebrate students' achievements and to affirm their engagement with the programme available in the school are also examined.

Child Protection

Schools are required to provide documentary evidence of compliance with *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills 2011).

4.3 School Planning and School Self-Evaluation

The quality of planning at whole-school and classrooms levels, the strengths and challenges for the school, and the agenda for school development and improvement are addressed.

The inspector(s) assesses how effective the school's self-evaluation processes are and how well they are being used to improve engagement and outcomes for students, teaching, leadership and management.

Based on the development of the school in recent years and on how plans for improvement have been identified and implemented, the inspector(s) comments on the school's capacity to implement the recommendations arising from the inspection within an appropriate timeframe.

5. Review of inspections

A teacher or a board of management affected by an inspection may seek a review of the inspection using the procedures outlined in *Procedures for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13(9) of the Education Act (1998) (Revised 2006)*.

6. Publication and revision of this Guide

This Guide has been prepared following consultation with the education partners as required under Section 13(8) of the *Education Act, 1998*.

The Inspectorate is committed to improving the ways in which it carries out its evaluation and advisory work in schools and the provisions of this Guide will be reviewed periodically.

Appendix – Report template

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Evaluation of Schools at High Support Units, Special Care Units, and Child Detention Centres

REPORT

**Name of School
Address**

Date of evaluation:



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

Introduction

An evaluation of [Name of School] was undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in [month, 2012]. The evaluation involved [insert inspection activities here].

Please write 1-3 sentences to give the context of this particular school

Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Further Development

(Please present each main strength and main recommendation using complete sentences)

The following are the **key findings of the evaluation**:

-
-
-

The following **main recommendations** are made:

-
-
-
-

1. Teaching, learning and support for students

- 1.1 Teaching, Learning and Attainment**
- 1.2 Literacy and Numeracy**
- 1.3 Life skills**
- 1.4 Educational Progression**

2. School Organisation and Management

- 2.1 General management and operation of the school**
- 2.2 Attendance and retention**
- 2.3 Child protection**

3. School planning and school self-evaluation

- 3.1 The school's capacity for self-evaluation and improvement**