Chief Inspector's Report

2010-2012

PROMOTING THE QUALITY OF LEARNING

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AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SKILLS

INSPECTORATE

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FOREWORD

I am delighted to present this Chief Inspector's Report from the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills covering the years 2010-2012. The period has been one of very great challenge and change for everyone involved in Irish education and in the delivery of all public services. Perhaps more than at any other time, Irish people are acutely conscious of the importance that effective learning at school has for the life chances, well-being and happiness of the young people who will be the adult citizens of tomorrow. Our work in schools and centres for education, therefore, and this report, focus on the quality of the learning that happens in schools and centres for education. It describes the key findings that we have made in the period 2010-2012 about the quality of teaching, learning, leadership and management in schools and centres for education.

In many cases, we have been delighted to be able to report very positive findings about many aspects of the work of teachers and other staff in schools and centres for education. In other cases, we have identified instances where the quality of provision for children and young people needs significant improvement. I am glad to have this opportunity to pay tribute to all those in school communities with whom we have engaged during the course of 2010-2012 for their cooperation and, more importantly, for the evident dedication that the vast majority demonstrate to the education of young people.

Of course, there are general lessons to be learned that apply not only to individual schools but also to the designers of curricula, to teacher educators and professional support services, to those involved in management organisations, to parents' councils at local and national level, to administrators and to policy makers. I hope that the summary analysis contained in this national report will be useful to schools and to all these individuals and organisations as they work to improve learning in schools and centres for education.

Harold Hislop
Chief Inspector

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report

This report covers the work undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in the years 2010, 2011 and 2012. It presents an account of many of the major aspects of our work over the three-year period and some key findings about standards in schools attended by primary and post-primary students. Its focus is on the quality of provision in different parts of the education system. Other aspects of the Inspectorate's work in supporting the policy development work of the Department are not treated in detail.

How the report is organised

Chapter 1 reviews some key aspects of the educational context that impacted on the work of teachers and schools and on the work of inspectors in the period covered by the report. The period has been one of rapid change and of considerable challenge. Understanding this context is important when drawing conclusions about the work of schools and the performance of the education system.

Chapter 2 provides information on the role, staffing, organisation, structure and management of the Inspectorate but is concerned mainly with the very significant range of reforms to the work of the Inspectorate undertaken from 2010 to 2012 to improve the quality assurance of Irish schools. It also provides statistical data on the number of inspections and other evaluative activities conducted by inspectors in the same period.

Chapter 3, which focuses on primary schools, and Chapter 4, which focuses on post-primary schools, provide an analysis of the major trends emerging from the findings of inspections in schools and from other evaluation work carried out by the Inspectorate over the three years.

Making sure that improvement happens in schools has been a consistent theme in our work and Chapter 5 provides information on follow-up measures and other work related to this topic.

Interspersed between these chapters, we have included a number of "spotlights". These are short summaries on specific areas of provision in the education system: DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) schools, Gaeltacht schools, SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education) provision at primary and second level, special educational needs provision at second level and provision in centres for education (Youthreach centres).

Taken together, the chapters and spotlights in the report are intended to provide summary evaluative information about the effectiveness of some important elements of our education system.

Inspection for improvement

On many measures, Irish schools and other centres for education provide a good or very good service for learners and their parents. Inspectors have a unique level of access to schools, teachers and learners and, happily, they are able to see and affirm much good practice in Irish schools. Inspection reports on individual schools and this national report demonstrate that inspectors have found good practice in a majority of schools and classrooms across the school system and, overall, very high levels of parental satisfaction with children's learning in schools.

Of course, one of the key objectives of the Inspectorate is to encourage improvement because, for some learners, the education system does not enable them to acquire the level of knowledge and skills that all young people and adults require. In addition, the needs of today's learners and tomorrow's citizens are constantly evolving and we need to challenge ourselves frequently about the standards we expect for young people in the education system. Good schools and other centres for education, like all effective organisations, ask themselves regularly how well they are doing and how they can improve. From time to time, it is also important that an external view is taken of the quality of provision, and that is the unique role that the Inspectorate fulfils. We find some schools where the school community is not well led and some classrooms where teachers' practice needs improvement. Occasionally, we find instances of schools where we have very serious concerns about the quality of young people's learning.

So, in addition to affirming the very extensive good practice in schools and the school system, this report (and individual reports on schools) contains recommendations for improvement. We hope that the evaluations we conduct in individual schools, as well as our reporting of national trends in reports such as this, will enable all of us in the education system to build on what is good in our system and to address the weaknesses in educational provision for our young people. They deserve nothing less.

Chapter 1

**THE CONTEXT IN WHICH WE WORK:
THE IRISH SCHOOL SYSTEM 2010-2012**

1.1 Understanding the context

Inspection of schools or any other service has to have regard to the context in which the schools or services operate. Indeed, it is a core commitment of the Inspectorate that we take account of the realities in which teachers and schools operate while, at the same time, setting quality standards to which all schools should aspire. The findings that we present in this report arise from inspection and evaluation work that took place in the Irish school system in the period 2010-2012, so this opening chapter reviews some aspects of the educational context that impacted on the work of teachers and schools and on the work of inspectors.

The period 2010 to 2012 was one of change and challenge for those involved in providing, leading and quality assuring education in schools and centres for education. These changes and challenges arose from the growth of student numbers, from the financial crisis in which Ireland found itself in the period and from the need to address a number of concerns about the quality of the education provided in Irish schools. All of these factors affected the environment in which the work of schools and the Inspectorate took place.

1.2 The number of students in schools and centres for education grew while teacher numbers remained more or less the same

During the period 2010-2012, the number of learners in schools and other centres for education grew at a faster rate than had been anticipated. The available statistics show that pupil numbers grew in primary schools by over 27,500 (5.5%) in the four school years to 2012/13 to reach over 526,000. Just over 21,500 additional students were enrolled in post-primary schools in the same period bringing the total numbers to over 362,000 (Table 1.1). On the basis of the available census information and recent analysis by the Department's Statistics Section, it is clear that the growth in student numbers will continue to increase for many years ahead.[1]

Table 1.1

Number of Students Enrolled (Full Time) in Department-aided schools

Year	Primary	Post-Primary
2009/2010	498,914	341,312
2010/2011	509,652	356,107
2011/2012	516,460	359,047
2012/2013	526,422	362,847

Table 1.2

Number of Teachers (Whole-Time Equivalents) in Department-aided schools

Year	Primary	Post-Primary
2009/2010 (June 2010)	31,709	25,801
2010/2011 (June 2011)	32,489	26,185
2011/2012 (June 2012)	31,928	25,808
2012/2013 (June 2013)	32,175	25,374

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1   Department of Education and Skills Statistics Section, *Projections of Full Time Enrolment – Primary and Second Level, 2013-2031* (Dublin, DES, 2013).

As Table 1.2 illustrates, in the same period, the number of whole-time equivalent teachers in primary, special and post-primary schools rose only slightly from 57,510 to 57,549. This overall slight increase occurred in a context in which there were reductions in the number of teachers serving students learning English as an additional language and an increase in the number of students required to appoint a teacher at post-primary level. The number of special needs assistants (SNAs) employed in the schools reached 10,543 in 2010, fell to 10,117 in 2011 and grew slightly in 2012 to 10,390 (see Table 1.3). A cap on SNA appointments was introduced in the 2012 budget.

Table 1.3

Number of Special Needs Assistants (Whole-Time Equivalents) in Department-aided schools

Year	Primary	Post-Primary
2009/2010 (June 2010)	8,401	2,142
2010/2011 (June 2011)	8,165	1,952
2011/2012 (June 2012)	8,361	2,029

Table 1.4

Pupil-teacher ratio in primary and post-primary schools (excluding Post-Leaving Certificate enrolments)

Year	Primary	Post-Primary
2009/10	16.0	13.6
2010/11	15.7	13.6
2011/12	16.2	13.9
2012/13	16.4	14.3

The growth in enrolments in primary and post-primary schools (Table 1.1) combined with budgetary measures that resulted in an overall slight increase in the number of teachers at primary level and an overall slight decrease in teachers at post-primary level (Table 1.2) impacted on the pupil-teacher ratio at both levels. As Table 1.4 shows, the pupil-teacher ratio (the number of pupils divided by the number of classroom teachers and support teachers) grew in primary schools from 15.7 in 2010/11 to 16.4 in 2012/13 and in post-primary schools from 13.6 in 2010/11 to 14.3 in 2012/13.[2]

The impact of growing enrolments and relatively static teacher numbers was also reflected in the *average class size* in primary schools which increased from 24.3 in 2010/2011 to 24.8 in 2012/13. (A figure for average class sizes in post-primary schools is not readily calculable as the number of students varies considerably from subject lesson to subject lesson depending on the number of students opting for each subject and each syllabus level.)

1.3 Spending on education rose slightly in the period and expenditure per student on early childhood, primary and post-primary education was above the OECD average in 2010

Inevitably, the work of schools and centres for education and the work of the Inspectorate during the period 2010 to 2012 was affected by the need for Government to constrain public expenditure in the light of the severe financial crisis facing the country.

2   The pupil-teacher ratio at primary level is calculated by dividing the total enrolment in all primary schools as of 30 September in a given year by the number of teaching posts (classroom teachers and support teachers) in June of the following year. At post-primary level, the pupil-teacher ratio is calculated by dividing the full-time enrolment in all second-level schools as of 30 September in a given academic year by the number of full-time equivalent teachers (classroom teachers and support teachers) in the same year.

Schools, and the education system generally, certainly experienced severe financial pressures in the period 2010-2012, yet current expenditure on education at primary and second level actually rose slightly during this time as shown in Table 1.5. This modest growth occurred in a context where very severe reductions took place in many other aspects of Government expenditure. However, the growth in education spending has to be seen against a backdrop of rapidly rising student numbers and increasing demands for resources to address special educational needs provision. In fact, considerable savings were realised in the education sector through reductions in the salaries of teachers and others working in the education system, and the non-replacement of post of responsibility allowances.

Table 1.5
Gross current expenditure on education, 2010-2012

Year	Primary level	Post-Primary level
2010	€3.218b	€3.070b
2011	€3.259b	€3.137b
2012	€3.263b	€3.147b

It should also be noted that during the period prior to 2010, education spending grew rapidly. Comparative figures published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) show that between 2005 and 2010, total public and private spending on education in Ireland increased by 44% for all levels of education below Higher Education (compared with a 13% increase on average across OECD countries).[3] These increases addressed a historic position where Ireland's spending on education as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had been below the average for OECD countries. For example, Ireland's expenditure on education was 5.6% of GDP in 2008 but had risen to 6.4% of GDP in 2010, compared to the OECD average of 6.3% of GDP.

This growth in spending meant that by 2010, annual public expenditure per student in Ireland on early childhood, primary and post-primary education was above the OECD average as shown in Table 1.6.

Table 1.6
Annual public expenditure on public educational institutions per student (2010)
Expressed in equivalent US$ converted using purchasing power parities for GDP

	Pre-primary education	Primary education	Post-primary, non-tertiary education
Ireland	6,121	8,384	11,380
OECD average	5,643	7,974	9,014
Ranking in OECD	10th of 29	8th of 33	8th of 33

Source: OECD, Education at a Glance, 2013

1.4 Despite financial pressures, measures were taken to protect teaching and learning in schools

Although the Government introduced severe curtailments in public expenditure, measures were taken to protect the delivery of teaching and learning in schools. Teacher vacancies were excluded from the moratorium on public service recruitment which was introduced by Government in March 2009. This meant that teacher vacancies and vacancies for principals and deputy principals at primary and post-

3   See: Department of Education and Skills Statistics Section, *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators – A Country Profile for Ireland* (Dublin, DES, 2013).

primary level continued to be filled when they arose in schools in accordance with specified enrolment thresholds (staffing schedules). Expenditure on the Department's action plan for educational inclusion (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools – DEIS) was also maintained.

1.5 Financial and staffing measures impacted on schools and centres for education

Of course, schools were not immune from the effect of the curtailment of public expenditure. The capitation grants paid to schools to fund day-to-day running costs (such as heating, lighting, maintenance, insurance, purchase of teaching materials) was reduced by 5% in primary and post-primary schools in 2011 and by a further 2% in primary and post-primary schools in 2012.

At primary level, the enrolment thresholds for teacher appointments (the staffing schedules) were increased by one point (pupil) in the 2009/10 school year and the more favourable staffing schedule that had applied to gaelscoileanna was ended. Subsequent to this change, the general staffing schedule for most primary schools was unchanged in the period 2010-12. However, the advantage enjoyed by smaller schools (through the lower pupil numbers required for the appointment of teachers in schools of four teachers and fewer) was lessened somewhat: from September 2012, a three-year phased increase in the number of pupils required for the appointment of teachers in small schools began to be introduced. At post-primary level, the enrolment threshold for teacher appointments was changed from 18:1 to 19:1 in schools in the free education scheme from September 2009. From September 2012, guidance counsellors, who had been allocated to post-primary schools on an ex-quota basis (i.e. in addition to the normal allocation of staff to the school) were now included within the allocated teachers for the school. These changes meant that post-primary schools had to operate within a tighter allocation of staff and there was some evidence that the range of subjects that schools were able to offer to students was narrowed.

Of even greater impact on the running of schools was the effect that the public service moratorium had on promoted posts such as assistant principal and special duties teacher posts. When teachers holding such posts retired, the resulting vacancies were not filled. The effect of this on schools varied greatly. In some schools the middle management team was considerably depleted; in others, few vacancies arose and the middle management team was largely unaffected. Because post-primary schools are generally much larger than primary schools, the loss of middle management posts was more severely felt at this level. In December 2010, the Department of Education and Skills sanctioned the appointment of 97 promoted posts in 76 schools that had been disproportionately affected by the loss of middle management teachers. An additional 75 posts were sanctioned in 50 schools in December 2011.

1.6 Funding and supports for DEIS schools continued and were evaluated

The Department's action plan for educational inclusion, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, continued to be implemented in the period covered by this report. Schools included in the action plan continued to receive additional funding, teaching resources, and access to a number of initiatives and strategies such as the School Completion Programme, Home-School-Community Liaison scheme, *Reading Recovery, First Steps, Maths Recovery,* and *Ready, Set, Go Maths*. The impact of the DEIS action plan was assessed in two separate evaluations: one undertaken by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) in primary schools, the other by the Inspectorate in both primary and post-primary schools. The outcomes of these evaluations were published during the period 2010-2012. The Inspectorate's and the ERC's findings demonstrated considerable positive effects of the DEIS planning process at primary level. The Inspectorate's findings at second level were less encouraging (see Spotlight on DEIS). The DEIS programme now has a renewed focus on linking inputs with outcomes and on improved school planning. Further evaluation reports will be published as they become available.

1.7 Spending on additional resources to support students with special educational needs represented about 15% of all education spending

Many schools continue to meet the needs of their community by including students with a wide range of special educational needs. By 2012 this had been reflected in a significant increase in the demand for additional supports. Data from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) shows that the total number of students with low incidence special educational needs in mainstream schools rose from approximately 24,000 in 2010 to approximately 29,000 in 2012. Over the same period, the number of special classes attached to mainstream schools rose from 516 in 2010 to 628 in 2012. The provision of supports for students with special educational needs increased from €1.2 billion in 2010 to €1.3 billion in 2012 representing a spending increase from 14% to 15% of the total Department budget.

In 2012, the General Allocation Model (GAM)[4] was adjusted to allow the combination of GAM and language support into a single and simplified allocation system. A single allocation process was also introduced for post-primary schools to facilitate the merging of learning support and language support. To support these changes, schools with high concentrations of Traveller pupils or pupils requiring language support were able to apply for additional support. Traveller pupils previously supported by Resource Teacher for Traveller (RTT) posts are now included in the pupil population for GAM allocation purposes, and are provided for under the GAM. Schools which had large numbers of Traveller pupils previously supported by RTT posts also received additional alleviation posts, while alleviation posts were also provided in respect of schools which had large numbers of pupils previously supported by language support posts.

In 2012, approximately 7,094 students of primary and post-primary age were enrolled in Ireland's 119 special schools for students with special educational needs and 1,177 teachers were employed in those schools.

1.8 Significant changes occurred in the leadership and staffing of schools

Considerable change took place in the staff employed in schools over the period 2010-2012. A large number of experienced teachers and principals retired from schools in February 2012 or in June 2012 under a retirement scheme implemented across the public service. The loss of a higher than normal proportion of experienced staff meant that between January and December 2012, 6% of all retirements in the voluntary secondary and community and comprehensive sector were at principal level, while 28% of all retirements in the primary sector were at principal level. This turnover of school leaders increased the need for targeted professional development for newly appointed principals and deputy principals. This need was met partially by the work of the Misneach and Tánaiste courses run by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and by the work of the Department-aided professional networks for school leaders, the Irish Primary Principals Network at primary level and, at second-level, the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals.

The retirement of experienced staff also created many vacancies for newly qualified teachers. This was evident, for example, in the high numbers of newly qualified teachers at primary level whose work was evaluated by the Inspectorate as part of the Teaching Council's process for the registration of probationary teachers. In order to reduce salary costs, all teachers appointed for the first time from January 2011 were placed on a salary scale that was 10% lower than that for teachers hired prior to that date. In addition, with effect from February 2012, teachers appointed for the first time to primary and second-level schools were not paid qualification allowances.

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4   The General Allocation Model provides support for pupils with high incidence needs without the need for primary schools to apply for individual teaching supports

1.9 The Department continued to fund a range of support services to schools though the spending on these services was curtailed

The Department of Education and Skills continued to fund a range of support services that provided professional development courses and other professional supports for school leaders and teachers. However, the need for the Department to maintain expenditure within the resources available to it meant that the extent of support available was less than that provided in earlier years.

In the period 2010-2012, the work of these support services included initiatives targeted at improving practice and standards in literacy, numeracy, teaching and learning in DEIS schools, and special education provision including specialised support for teachers in a number of centres for children with autism that were undergoing a process to become recognised primary schools. The services also provided supports for teachers and schools in implementing new syllabuses such as Project Maths and technology subjects at second level and in priority areas such as schools' child protection measures, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). Some training was also provided for members of boards of management and for principals and deputy principals of schools. The support services also provided targeted advice to a small number of schools where serious weaknesses in teaching, learning or management were identified during inspections.

1.10 Substantial investment was made in expanding and improving school infrastructure

Continuing substantial investment was made over the 2010 to 2012 period in expanding and improving school infrastructure at both primary and post-primary levels. Total capital investment in school infrastructure over the period amounted to €1.327 billion. A total of 133 large scale school building projects were completed over the period. In addition, a total of 807 devolved projects providing permanent school accommodation were completed and a total of 3,960 devolved minor works projects were undertaken, including emergency and summer works. As well as meeting the demands of demographic growth, the Department's building programme was focused on ensuring quality learning environments. There was an emphasis on continual quality improvement through design standards, continuing development of technical guidance documents, design research, post-occupancy evaluations and innovations in building energy efficiencies.

1.11 An ambitious programme of reform in education was initiated in the 2011–2012 period

The work of schools and the Inspectorate was influenced by a far-reaching and ambitious programme of reform initiated in 2011 that affected many aspects of the education system. Several of the significant elements in that programme of reform were outlined in *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020* launched by the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, TD, in July 2011. This strategy was developed through an extensive consultation process with the education partners, business interests, community groups and others. It was informed by evidence from the 2009 report of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2009) and findings from Inspectorate reports and other sources that suggested that the teaching of literacy and numeracy needed to be strengthened.

The OECD's PISA 2009 study, published in December 2010, presented stark findings that achievement levels in literacy and numeracy among 15-year-olds in Ireland had declined substantially in the period 2000-2009. Independent research into the PISA findings, commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills from Statistics Canada and the Educational Research Centre, Drumcondra, identified a range of factors that may have caused the apparent declines in student performance. These included greater involvement of students with special educational needs and students learning English as an additional language in mainstream schools and classes over the 2000-09 period, the success of the school system in reducing early school leaving (and hence the retention of greater numbers of lower-performing students at school) and a lack of student engagement with the PISA test materials in 2009. This independent research also suggested that while a decline may have occurred in student performance, the extent of that decline was most likely exaggerated to a considerable extent by the methodology employed in the construction of OECD trend data in reading.[5]

Earlier in 2010, the Inspectorate published *Incidental Inspection Findings 2010: A Report on the Teaching and Learning of English and Mathematics in Primary Schools.*[6] This report showed that in the twelve-month period from October 2009 to October 2010, inspectors had found good practice in the teaching of English and Mathematics in almost 85% of lessons but that over 14% of such lessons had been rated as less than satisfactory.

Given the concerns regarding literacy and numeracy, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy launched by the Minister for Education and Skills initiated wide-ranging and integrated reforms in teacher education, curriculum content, assessment and reporting of student progress, and evaluation and assessment policies. These reforms began to be implemented from summer 2011 onwards, mid-way in the period to which this Chief Inspector's Report refers. The most immediate changes, such as an increase in the time devoted to literacy and numeracy in schools began to be implemented almost immediately as did the roll-out of an extensive programme of professional development for school leaders and teachers in literacy and numeracy. Assessment and reporting practices at primary level changed in 2012, when the use of standardised tests in literacy and numeracy and the reporting of results to parents, boards of management and the Department became mandatory in schools.

Work on other developments signalled in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, such as changes to the English, Irish and mathematics curricula at primary level and the fundamental reform of Junior Cycle began at the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment but were not introduced to the school system generally in the period 2010-2012. The exception to this was the continued roll-out of Project Maths – an eight-year programme to change the teaching and learning of Mathematics at post-primary level which had begun in 2008.

The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy resonated with the reforms already underway in the Inspectorate, including work on the development of arrangements and materials for school self-evaluation. While the content of teacher education programmes began to be revised and extended, the impact of these changes was yet to be seen in schools by the end of the period to which this report refers.

In summary, therefore, the findings regarding the work of schools presented in the later chapters of this report arise from a period in which significant changes in schools had begun to be developed and implemented. However, the period covered by the report ends before one might expect to see the significant improvements in student outcomes that could be expected from the implementation of the planned changes.

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5   See: Rachel Perkins, Jude Cosgrove, Grainne Moran and Gerry Shiel, *PISA 2009: Results for Ireland and Changes Since 2000* (Dublin, Educational Research Centre, 2012).

6   Inspectorate, *Incidental Inspection Findings 2010: A Report on the Teaching and Learning of English and Mathematics in Primary Schools* (Dublin, Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

Chapter 2

REFORMING HOW WE WORK

2.1 The role of the Inspectorate

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) works to improve the quality of learning for children and young people in Irish schools and centres for education. We also support the development of the Irish education system through providing high quality evaluation and advice.

Most of the Inspectorate's evaluation work takes place within recognised primary, second-level and special schools and within centres for education serving students of primary-school or post-primary school age. We are responsible for the inspection of over 3,100 primary schools, 723 post-primary schools, 141 special schools, and 105 centres for education. The evaluations provide an external perspective on the work of schools. They identify and acknowledge good educational practice and provide clear, practical advice as to how the quality of education provision can be improved. Their focus is on the education experiences and education outcomes of learners.

Inspectors provide advice to school leaders, teachers, boards of management and others in school communities about effective teaching and learning, and about good practice in the management and leadership of schools. Inspectors also advise policy makers and the Minister for Education and Skills on a range of educational issues.

2.2 The staffing and organisation of the Inspectorate, 2010–2012

The number of inspectors employed in the Inspectorate fell considerably in the period 2010-2012, as illustrated in Table 2.1. Owing to the effect of the public service recruitment moratorium and the incentives offered to public servants to retire early, the staffing of the Inspectorate declined from 154 inspectors at the beginning of 2009 to 116 inspectors in June 2012 – a fall of 25%.

In view of the disproportionate impact of the moratorium on the staffing levels in the Inspectorate, sanction was received from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) to recruit new inspectors and to make limited promotions within the management of the service. Two inspectors were recruited in 2011 and ten inspectors were recruited in 2012. By the end of 2012, the number of serving inspectors stood at 124.

The administrative work of the Inspectorate is supported by a secretariat, the staffing of which is also outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Number of inspectors and secretariat staff in service, 2007-2012

	31/12/07	31/12/08	31/12/09	31/12/10	31/12/2011	31/12/2012
Inspectors	166	154	133	132	127	124
Secretariat	10	12	13	11	10	10

During 2010, the staff of the Inspectorate was reorganised into eight business units as illustrated in Appendix 1. The units are arranged to facilitate the delivery of the Inspectorate's evaluation and advisory work in schools, the provision of specialised advice to the Department and the development of the Inspectorate's strategic objectives.

2.3 Major reforms to the work of the Inspectorate, 2010–2012

The period 2010-2012 was a period of significant reform in the work of the Inspectorate. We implemented substantial changes to enable us to deliver a more effective quality assurance system for Irish schools, while at the same time using the resources available to us more effectively. We set out our programme of reform in *Our Purpose, Our Plan 2011-2013*. This programme was drawn up following an intensive internal review of the work of the Inspectorate in 2010 and detailed consideration of best international practice. The reforms were implemented in a context where the overall staffing of the Inspectorate had fallen very considerably and quickly in 2009 and in the following years as discussed above.

2.4 The reform plan: *Our Purpose, Our Plan 2011-2013*

Our Purpose, Our Plan seeks to improve the work and impact of the Inspectorate over the period 2011-2013 by combining effective inspection of schools by inspectors with good self-evaluation practices led by principals and teachers within schools.

The main elements of the reforms include:

- Improving the frequency and effectiveness of the ways in which external inspections of schools and centres for education are carried out. This includes a number of commitments:

    o to improve the frequency with which inspectors visit and evaluate teaching and learning in schools

    o to ensure that our inspections are focused primarily on the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms and other learning settings and also on how the learning experience can be improved for students

    o to acknowledge that our inspection work should be suited to the circumstances and needs of the school and its learners. This means that some inspections may be relatively short and focused exclusively on classroom practice, while at other times it may be appropriate to spend a longer time in the school to examine additional aspects of the work of the school, including its leadership, management and links with the community

    o to listen to the voices of a large sample of students and parents when we conduct more intensive inspections of schools

    o to improve significantly our follow-up activities to ensure that schools act on recommendations made during previous inspections

- Improving the ways in which we promote best practice and improvement in schools, especially through:

    o promoting effective school self-evaluation

o   providing advice about best practice to teachers, school leaders and those involved in the management of schools

o   encouraging better use of different forms of assessment in schools and more effective analysis and use of assessment information at school level and on a national level

- Strengthening our work to promote the use of Irish within the Inspectorate and the education system to ensure the provision of an effective evaluation and advisory service to Irish-medium schools

- Ensuring that we provide relevant evidence-based policy advice to officials in the Department of Education and Skills and the education system generally on key strategic issues

- Improving the management and development of our own staff and other resources so that we can realise our purpose and objectives.

2.5 What has been achieved so far in reforming the work of the Inspectorate?

During the period 2010-2012, the Inspectorate placed most emphasis on reforming how we inspected and reported on the work of schools and teachers. This was most evident in the wide-ranging changes made to the inspection models we use in schools and in the way we have increased the frequency of inspections in schools. At the same time, we undertook development work on how best to support school self-evaluation and this was introduced to the school system in the second half of 2012.

We have increased the frequency of inspection in schools

Much of the energy of the Inspectorate in the period 2010-2012 was focused on improving the frequency of inspectors' visits to schools. We developed and began to introduce a range of new or revised inspection approaches in both primary and post-primary schools and in centres for education. These models included:

- the introduction and development of widespread unannounced (incidental) inspections in all schools and centres for education

- the use of a new form of Whole-School Evaluation (entitled Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning or WSE-MLL) at post-primary level

- the development and trial use of a revised model of Whole-School Evaluation at primary level

- focused evaluations of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) schools

- shortened notice periods for announced inspections at primary level

- the development and trial of evaluations of education provision in the schools attached to high support units, special care units and children detention schools.

All of these changes were introduced following consultation with the education partners as required by the Education Act 1998.

In parallel with these changes, the Inspectorate has improved the ways in which it plans and tracks inspections so as to provide better data for inspectors and to deploy inspectors in the most efficient way possible. As a result, the number of inspections conducted in schools grew over the three-year period as shown in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2: Summary of inspections and evaluations, 2010-2012

Summary of inspections			
	2010	**2011**	**2012**
Inspections in primary schools (including inspections of the work of teachers on probation)	2,470	2,972	3,115
Inspections in post-primary schools and centres for education	706	769	903
Other inspections of provision for students and young people	46	73	96
Total inspections in schools and centres for education	**3,222**	**3,814**	**4,114**
Total school self-evaluation advisory visits	**-**	**-**	**514**
Total number of schools in which the Inspectorate administered or quality assured national or international achievement tests	**120**	**118**	**181**

Primary schools

- In the period 2010-12, inspectors conducted 2,133 inspections in primary schools, excluding inspections of the work of individual teachers on probation. This represented inspection visits of some type to over half of all primary schools in the country
- In 2012, we made a deliberate decision to reduce the number of whole-school evaluations to accommodate the introduction of advisory visits to school staffs to support the roll-out of school self-evaluation and to allow us to conduct a number of formal follow-through inspections in schools
- 354 visits to support school self-evaluation were conducted in primary schools in November and December 2012
- Inspectors conducted a growing number of inspections of the work of probationary teachers in primary schools on behalf of the Teaching Council. The work of 6,424 newly qualified teachers was inspected in the school years 2009/10, 2010/11, and 2011/12.

Table 2.3: Inspections and evaluations in primary schools, 2010-2012

Primary			
Inspection/evaluation activity	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
WSE: Primary	259	291	262
Incidental inspections	459	404	326
DEIS evaluations	18	16	
Follow-Through inspections			98
Total of school inspection visits	**736**	**711**	**686**
Inspections of newly qualified primary teachers: probation of teachers (primary) for the school years 2009/10, 2010/11 & 2011/12	**1,734**	**2,261**	**2,429**
School self-evaluation advisory visits to schools			**354**

Post-primary schools and centres for education

- The total number of inspections in post-primary schools and centres for education grew from 706 in 2010 to 903 in 2012

- The introduction of unannounced (incidental) one-day inspections in 2011 and their expansion in 2012 has enabled us to conduct inspections in greater numbers of schools

- Between 2011 and 2012 inspections of some type occurred in 93% of second-level schools

- The introduction of Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) allowed us to reduce the time spent on the examination of school documentation and to increase the time spent on the observation of teaching and learning. Because the WSE-MLL activity is more focused, it is possible for us to conduct more of these inspections than would be possible with the original WSE model of inspection

- As at primary level, we decided to decrease the number of whole-school evaluations conducted in 2012 to accommodate advisory visits to post-primary schools to support the roll-out of school self-evaluation and to allow us to conduct formal follow-through inspections

- Advisory visits to support school self-evaluation took place in 160 post-primary schools in November and December 2012 while formal follow-up inspections occurred in 79 post-primary schools during 2012.

Table 2.4: Inspections and evaluations in post-primary schools and centres for education, 2010-2012

Post-primary			
Inspection/evaluation activity	2010	2011	2012
WSE: Post-primary	35	8	4
WSE-MLL: Post-primary	24	92	80
Subject Inspections	583	528	389
Programme Inspections	39	23	0
Incidental inspections in post-primary schools	N/A	92	342
Evaluation of Centres for Education (Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Centres)	7	10	9
DEIS evaluations	18	16	-
Follow-Through inspections			79
Total inspection visits	**706**	**769**	**903**
School self-evaluation advisory visits to post-primary schools			**160**

Other inspection and evaluation activities

Inspectors also conducted a wide range of other inspection and evaluation activities in the period 2010-2012 as set out in Tables 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7.

Table 2.5: Other inspection activities

Other inspections/evaluations of provision for students and young people			
Inspection/evaluation activity	2010	2011	2012
Evaluation reports on Irish Gaeltacht (Summer/Easter) colleges (Coláistí Gaeilge)	40	36	38
Dissolving Boundaries Evaluations (joint evaluation with ETI [Education and Training Inspectorate], Northern Ireland)		16	
Evaluation of schools for recognition purposes / assessment of education in places other than recognised schools	6		1
Evaluations of Early Childhood Care and Education settings			15
Evaluation of special schools for Autistic Spectrum Disorder			13
Evaluation of special schools attached to High Support Units, Special Care Units, and Children Detention Schools		8	10
Inspections of literacy summer camps for children		8	10
Inspections of campaí samhraidh for children		5	9
Total other evaluation activity[7]	46	73	96

Table 2.6 Administration of national and international tests

National and international achievement tests			
Evaluation activity	2010	2011	2012
Administration and quality assurance of National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics in Gaeltacht primary schools	120		
Administration and quality assurance of TIMSS and PIRLS in primary schools		118	
Administration and quality assurance of OECD PISA tests in post-primary schools			181
Total	120	118	181

Table 2.7 Inspections of continuing professional development courses for teachers

Inspections of continuing professional development courses for primary teachers			
Evaluation activity	2010	2011	2012
Inspection of continuing professional development courses (summer in-service courses) for primary teachers	46	69	71

We have sought to tailor inspection to the needs and circumstances of schools and the school system

We have developed and implemented a range of inspection models to provide greater flexibility in our evaluation work. We can now use different forms of inspection depending on the circumstances of the school and other factors. For example:

• Short unannounced (incidental) inspections allow us to have much greater coverage of the school system and they enable us to see the authentic learning experience for students. This sort of inspection means we can scan the school system and identify where risks may exist for students' learning.

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7   Excluding visits conducted by the Inspectorate under Section 24 of the Education Act 1998.

- Subject inspections in post-primary schools examine the teaching of an individual subject and the workings of a subject department in a school. They are more intensive than incidental inspections but shorter than whole-school evaluations. They provide valuable information on the quality of teaching and learning in individual subjects, and they also look at the effectiveness of the school's leadership in supporting the teaching of the subject. They provide an opportunity for specialist teachers to receive advice and guidance from subject specialist inspectors.

- In 2010 and 2011, we developed and used a specialised inspection model to evaluate the target setting and planning for improvement required in schools supported by the Department's DEIS action plan[8]. We intend to use this model in future years.

- Whole-school evaluations examine teaching and learning in the school as well as the quality of leadership and management. These inspections include engagement with school boards of management and with parents' associations and the use of questionnaires to survey parents and students.

- During 2012, we published proposals for a specialised model of inspection to evaluate the work of the small special schools attached to High Support Units, Special Care Units and Children Detention Schools (where some students who are in the residential care of the State are educated). The model is intended to take into account the very particular circumstances of the schools serving this vulnerable group of learners.

Having a range of inspection models available has allowed us to target a proportion of our inspection activity where the risk to students' learning is greatest. For example, information acquired during short, unannounced inspections can now be used to highlight where further, more intensive inspections are needed. This is enabling us to target a proportion of our resources on the inspection of schools and centres for education where there is some evidence that teaching, learning or leadership are in need of improvement.

We have focused our inspections on key factors that influence the quality of the learning experience

While many aspects of the work of a school can be examined during an inspection, we have chosen to place the focus of our inspection work on a relatively small number of key features of schools that have most impact on the quality of the learning experience.

- Almost all of our inspections are focused primarily on teaching and learning. This means we have chosen to spend most time observing teachers and students in classrooms and other learning settings. The provision of prompt feedback to teachers on the quality of the work in classrooms is an important feature of our inspections, including whole-school evaluations.

- The quality of the leadership in the school, particularly the leadership of the principal and deputy principal, and the quality of the work of the board of management are further critical success factors in schools. Whole-school evaluations seek to examine these factors in detail.

- Some important school records are examined in inspections but we now seek to collect much of our data on aspects of the school (such as attendance and enrolment information, capital spending and the results of State examinations) from sources within the Department of Education and Skills and

8 See spotlight on DEIS

its agencies in advance of the inspection. This means that we have been able to reduce the burden on schools to provide documentation and it allows the inspection team to focus on teaching, learning and engagement with staff, students and others during inspections.

- Since the revision of *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* in 2011, we have improved our monitoring of child protection procedures in schools. All whole-school evaluations include an assessment by the Inspectorate of compliance with aspects of the Department's *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (See Appendix 2).

We listen to the voices of students and parents during inspections

We believe that learners and their parents are key stakeholders in the school community. Getting their views on the work of schools is an important step in arriving at sound evaluative judgements regarding the quality of the education provided and we have sought to give parents and students a greater voice in the evaluation process.

In many cases, too, the support of parents and students will be important when the school seeks to implement the recommendations that we make during inspections.

- Inspectors interact with students during inspections, and in whole-school evaluations they meet with the officers of the parents' association if it is affiliated to the National Parents' Council or, where the association is not affiliated, with the elected parents on the board of management in the school.

- To strengthen the voice of students and parents in evaluations, we introduced confidential learner and parental questionnaires as part of whole-school evaluations in primary and post-primary schools in 2010. These questionnaires collect information on the views of parents and students about the work of the school and their experiences at the school.

- Since September 2010, over 47,600 parent and almost 36,000 learner questionnaires have been administered by the Inspectorate in primary schools and over 20,000 parent and 29,000 learner questionnaires have been administered in post-primary schools.

- The learner and parent questionnaires are confidential. They are processed in the Evaluation Support and Research Unit (ESRU) of the Inspectorate and a copy of the analysed statistical data from the questionnaires is made available to the inspectors conducting the evaluation and to the school. The data is used as an important source of evidence by the inspection team.

- A copy of the statistical analysis is shared with the school and we encourage the school to use it in reflecting on its own progress and in the setting of school targets through school self-evaluation.

- The support of parents can be important to the school when it seeks to implement the recommendations that we make during inspections. We now ensure that chairpersons of parents' associations are invited to the post-inspection feedback meetings during WSE inspections at primary level and WSE-MLL inspections at post-primary level.

We have introduced systematic follow-up procedures

The primary responsibility for improving the work of any school and for implementing recommendations in inspection reports lies with the board of management, staff and patron of each school. However, we recognise that inspection and other follow-up processes can help to ensure that school leaders, teachers, board members and patrons take action to address weaknesses in the work of schools.

- We have prioritised follow-up actions in schools with the most serious weaknesses. Since 2008, inspectors have collaborated with officials from the School Governance section of the Department of Education and Skills on the Department's School Improvement Group. This group seeks to coordinate the Department's engagement with schools where very serious weaknesses are identified. The approaches used vary depending on the nature of the issues in the school, but they often involve officials and inspectors engaging with the board of the school or the school's patron body, the provision of support from school support services or from the patron of the school. Follow-up visits to such schools often take place.

- In 2012, we began to extend follow-up visits (called Follow-Through inspections) in a sample of all schools in which inspections had taken place. These inspection visits seek to establish how well the school community has responded to the recommendations made in the previous inspection. We conducted 98 Follow-Through inspections in primary schools and 79 of these inspections in post-primary schools in 2012.

- The Follow-Through inspections that took place in 2012 were conducted on a pilot basis. We will continue with these inspections in 2013 and, following consultation with the education partners, we will publish a guide to these inspections. We will also publish the Follow-Through inspection reports that we complete in the future.

- The new model of Whole-School Evaluation at post-primary level (WSE-MLL) includes consideration of any recent inspections that may have taken place in the school (particularly recent subject inspections) and an assessment of the extent to which recommendations have been implemented.

We have supported the formal introduction of school self-evaluation

External inspection needs to be complemented by a commitment among teachers and managers in schools to keep the standards and work of the school under constant review. When teachers and school leaders review their own practice in a critical but constructive way, they can identify how they can improve teaching and learning for students.

Several schools already review their own work regularly and make changes to improve teaching and learning. In the period 2010-2012, we have worked to support the formal introduction of school self-evaluation in the school system. School self-evaluation is intended to complement external inspections.

- We commenced intensive development work on guidelines and other materials to support schools as they undertook school self-evaluation.

- During the 2011/12 school year, we worked with twelve pilot schools to test the materials and learn how best to support schools in beginning this type of work.

- We published *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Primary Schools* and *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools* in November 2012 following extensive consultation with the education partners. These guidelines make clear that the primary purpose of self-evaluation is to enable the school community to drive improvement in the school, rather than to create a bureaucratic accountability process.

- The Minister for Education and Skills announced that school self-evaluation would become mandatory from the school year 2012/13. To allow schools to become familiar with the process, the Minister announced that schools would be required to focus self-evaluation activities on just three aspects of teaching and learning: literacy, numeracy and one other area of the school's choosing in the period 2012/13 to 2015/16.

- During November and December 2012, the Inspectorate began a programme of advisory visits to schools to support the introduction of school self-evaluation. The visits include a presentation/ workshop session with all teachers. By the end of 2012, these visits had taken place in 354 primary schools and in 160 post-primary schools.

We have collaborated closely with stakeholders

We have collaborated closely with stakeholders in the school system and beyond in the development of our inspection processes. This has helped us to evolve robust yet well-accepted evaluation models and to communicate that the primary focus of school inspection is on improving learning and teaching.

- Each of the significant changes to inspection and the introduction of school self-evaluation have been the subject of detailed written consultation with national student groups, teachers' organisations, school leaders, school management organisations and patron bodies. Frequently, we have met representatives from these groups in face-to-face consultations and working groups.

- We have also extended consultation about the development of inspection and self-evaluation to groups outside the education sector. These have included the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and the Equality Authority.

- We have presented workshops and engaged in dialogue and question and answer sessions about inspection and quality assurance at national and regional meetings of organisations such as the national conferences of parents' councils (National Parents' Council-Primary [NPC-P], National Parents' Council Post-Primary [NPC-PP]), national associations of school principals (Irish Primary Principals' Network [IPPN], National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals [NAPD]) and management bodies of schools (such as the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association [CPSMA], the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools [ACCS], the Joint Managerial Body [JMB], the Irish Vocational Educational Authority [IVEA], Educate Together, the Church of Ireland Board of Education, An Foras Patrúnacha and the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education).

- We have cooperated with other relevant inspection bodies and agencies involved in quality assurance and research. We have worked with the Health Service Executive Early Years Pre-school Inspection Service on the development of an inspection framework and pilot evaluations of early childhood education and we have put in place a memorandum of understanding regarding cooperation and exchange of information with the Heath Information and Quality Authority (HIQA).

We have also cooperated in joint inspection work with the Education and Training Inspectorate of the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. All of this cooperation and joint work has helped to inform our inspection practice.

• We have worked closely with officers from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the State Examinations Commission in the development of curriculum and assessment policies and practices. We also have a close working relationship with the staff of the Educational Research Centre, Drumcondra, which carries out several national and international research studies on standards in schools on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills.

We have worked to maintain and improve the quality of our own work

The Inspectorate is very conscious of the need to maintain and improve the quality of our own work. During 2010-2012, our determination to improve the inspection service that we provide was particularly evident in the extensive internal review of inspection that we conducted, in changes that we made to inspection models, in improvements to our reporting on inspections, and in our ongoing commitment to the professional development and training of inspectors. Our work was evaluated during the external examination of the Department of Education and Skills published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in the Third Report of the Organisational Review Programme in January 2012.

All teachers and boards of management affected by an inspection have the right to seek a review of the inspection. The Procedures for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13(9) of the Education Act 1998 provide an informal and formal review process. The formal review process involves both internal and external independent reviewers examining the complaint from the school board or teacher. In the period 2010-2012 when over 11,000 inspections were completed, a total of four requests for formal review were processed. In two of these four cases, the reviewers upheld or partially upheld the complaint from the teacher or board of management concerned, in one case the complaint of the teacher or board was not upheld and in one case the complaint was withdrawn.

Chapter 3

3.1 The basis of the findings

This summary of findings from inspections in primary schools in the period 2010-2012 is based on an analysis of information from:

• Almost 800 whole-school evaluations
• Over 1,100 incidental inspections
• Thematic inspections of planning and target setting in 34 DEIS schools
• Almost 36,000 confidential pupil questionnaires administered to pupils in fourth and sixth class in larger schools and to pupils in third, fourth, fifth and sixth classes in smaller schools during the course of whole-school evaluations
• More than 47,600 confidential parental questionnaires administered to parents of a selected sample of pupils in larger schools and to all parents in small schools during the course of whole-school evaluations.

Whole-school evaluation (WSE) is the most comprehensive type of school inspection at primary level. During WSE, the inspectors examine and report on four key areas:

• The quality of school management
• The quality of school planning and school self-evaluation
• The quality of teaching, learning and pupil achievement
• The quality of support for pupils.

Whole-school evaluations (WSEs) are announced inspections as notice must be provided to enable meetings to be scheduled with members of the board of management, the parents' association, the principal, groups of teachers such as those with dedicated responsibility for special educational needs, and, at times, with focus groups of pupils.

Teaching and learning activities across a range of subjects are evaluated during a whole-school evaluation. As a minimum, inspectors examine teaching and learning in English, Irish, Mathematics and one other subject selected by the Inspectorate. Planning of inspections ensures that all subjects on the curriculum are evaluated regularly across the country. For the purposes of brevity, detailed information in this report is confined to findings about Irish, English and Mathematics. Information on other subjects/curriculum areas will be published by the Inspectorate from time to time.

A breakdown of the available Inspectorate data illustrates the number of Whole School Evaluations in which the individual subjects/curriculum areas were inspected during 2010-2012 (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Inspection of individual subjects/curriculum areas: WSE

Subject/curriculum area area	No. of WSEs
Gaeilge	753
English	778
Mathematics	778
History	142
Geography	98
Science	139
Visual Arts	107
Music	116
Drama	143
P.E.	103
SPHE	128

Incidental or unannounced inspections in primary schools focus on the teaching and learning taking place at the time of the inspection. Lessons are generally observed in a sample of up to three classrooms during the course of a full school day. The inspections generate information about the subjects or areas of the curriculum that are being taught at the time of the visits and do not directly examine, from a whole-school perspective, issues such as school management or leadership. Incidental inspections provide information on:

- The quality of teachers' planning
- The quality of assessment
- The quality of teaching
- The quality of pupils' learning.

Lessons across all areas of the curriculum are observed in incidental inspections. As the areas of English, Irish and Mathematics take up the highest proportion of classroom timetables, inevitably, these lessons are more frequently observed, as shown in Table 3.2. For the purposes of this report, a focus has been placed on reporting trends from the lessons in English, Irish and Mathematics.

Table 3.2 shows the number of lessons inspected in each subject/curriculum area during the incidental inspection process.

Table 3.2 Inspection of individual subjects/curriculum areas: Incidental Inspection[9]

Subjects/curriculum areas	No. of lessons inspected	Percentage of total no. of lessons inspected
Gaeilge	984	16.3%
English	2,077	34.5%
Mathematics	1,303	21.6%
History	247	4.1%
Geography	272	4.5%
Science	234	3.9%
Visual Arts	149	2.5%
Music	297	4.9%
Drama	94	1.6%
P.E.	127	2.1%
SPHE	164	2.7%
Other	80	1.3%
Total	6028	100%

Thematic inspections focus on selected aspects of the work of a school in relation to particular programmes or initiatives such as DEIS.

Inspectors' judgements about the quality of pupils' learning and the quality of teachers' practice have been analysed using the quality continuum illustrated in Table 3.3.

9   These figures are based on available data

Table 3.3: The quality continuum

Categories used in this report	Performance level	Examples of descriptive terms
Satisfactory/Appropriate	Significant strengths	Excellent; of a very high quality; very effective; highly commendable; very good; very successful; few areas for improvement
	Strengths outweigh weaknesses/More strengths than weaknesses	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; fully appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Less than satisfactory/Not appropriate	Weaknesses outweigh strengths/More weaknesses than strengths	Fair in certain areas but with evident weaknesses that are impacting significantly on pupils' learning; scope for development; experiencing difficulty
	Significant weaknesses	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties

The parental questionnaires used during whole-school evaluations carry a number of positive statements about different aspects of children's learning, the work of the school and the linkages between the school and parents. Parents are asked to "Strongly agree", "Agree", "Disagree" or "Strongly disagree" with the statements or state that they "Don't know". This data is used in this report as shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Analysis and reporting of parental responses in primary schools

Categories used in this report	Possible parental responses
Agree	Strongly agree
	Agree
Disagree	Disagree
	Strongly disagree
Don't know	Don't know

Pupil questionnaires also carry a number of positive statements about different aspects of the work of the school and the child's own learning. Primary school pupils are asked to select "Yes", "No" or "Don't know" as responses. Table 3.5 shows how the data is used in this report.

Table 3.5: Analysis and reporting of pupil responses in primary schools

| Categories used in this report	Possible pupil responses
Agree	Yes
Disagree	No
Don't know	Don't know

3.2 The quality of management in primary schools

Boards of management

Irish primary schools are managed by boards of management made up of representatives of the patron of the school, two elected parents, the principal, one elected teacher and two people from the local community. The board is appointed by the patron to serve for a fixed period and all members of the board serve in a voluntary capacity (with the exception of the principal who, during the period to which this report applies, could be paid an allowance to act as secretary of the board).

Inspectors reported on the work of the boards of management in schools where whole-school evaluations were conducted. Over the period 2010-2012, they judged that in 88% of cases, the overall work of boards was satisfactory or better. In 12% of schools, the overall work of the boards was judged to be less than satisfactory.

Board of management: inspectors' evaluation (WSE)[10]

Satisfactory   Less than satisfactory
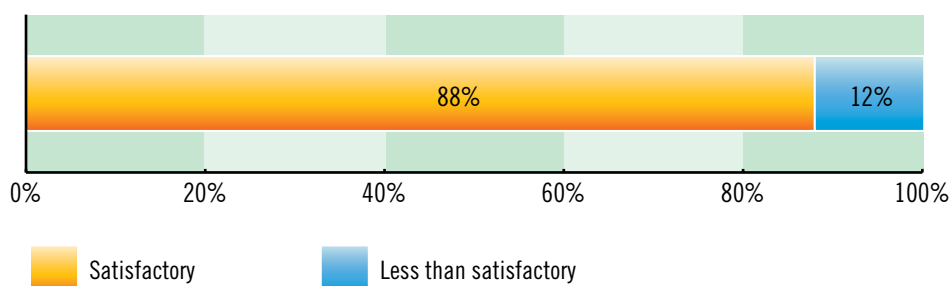
In the more effective schools, boards were committed to school development and improvement and the educational welfare of pupils. They consulted with parents in decision-making, ensured the availability of resources to support the work of the school, and worked effectively with the principal and staff.

Where scope for developing organisational or administrative aspects of the work of boards was identified by inspectors during WSEs, the inspectors advised and made recommendations on a range of matters including Department regulations governing retention of pupils in the same grade (Circular 32/03), the length and structure of the school day (Circular 11/95), the maintenance of rolls and registers, and on statutory requirements regarding the auditing or certification of financial accounts.

In-school management

In-school management refers to the quality of the internal professional leadership in the school, usually provided by the principal and deputy principal. It also encompasses the work of other promoted teachers who carry responsibilities for curriculum leadership or other aspects of the work of the school.

While the posts of principal and deputy principal continue to be filled, vacancies for other promoted posts as assistant principal or special duties teacher have not generally been filled since the introduction of the public service moratorium in March 2009. This has eroded the number of such promoted post-holders in schools.

10 Due to rounding of numbers, the percentages of the proportions in some charts total 99% or 101%.

A majority (82%) of whole-school evaluations reported that principals, deputy principals and other members of the in-school management team provided satisfactory or better leadership to their schools. Reports frequently referred to the principal's cultivation of a collegial work environment, consultative decision making and/or strong curriculum and instructional leadership. The more effective in-school management teams (including assistant principals and special duties teachers) had clearly defined responsibilities that included responsibility for curriculum leadership and for overseeing the implementation of whole-school teaching strategies and initiatives to improve learning.

Inspectors found that there was scope for development of the work of in-school management in a significant minority (18%) of schools. The main challenge identified in such schools was that of ensuring that the duties assigned to and undertaken by in-school management personnel were responsive to, and addressed more directly, evolving school needs and priorities.

In-school management: inspectors' evaluation (WSE)
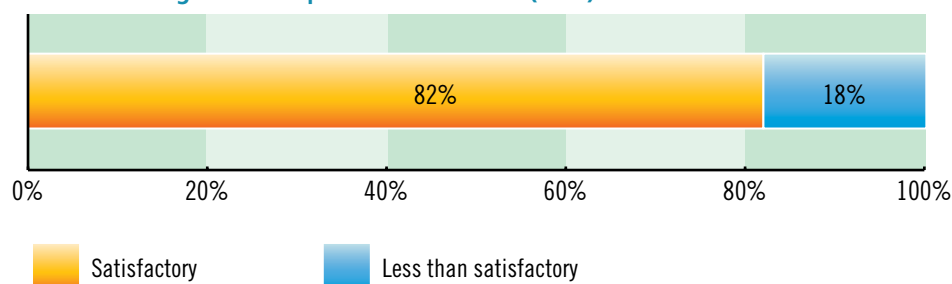
Management of pupils

Some very positive findings were reported about the management of pupils in primary schools in the period 2010-2012. During notified WSEs, 96% of schools were found to be managing their pupils effectively by, for example, fostering respectful pupil-teacher interactions, by cultivating an inclusive, child-centred ethos and by using positive strategies to promote good behaviour. Incidental inspections similarly found that the management of pupils was effective in practically all (96%) of the classrooms visited.

Management of pupils: inspectors' evaluation (WSE)

Management of pupils: inspectors' evaluation (incidental inspection)

96%				4%

Satisfactory   Less than satisfactory
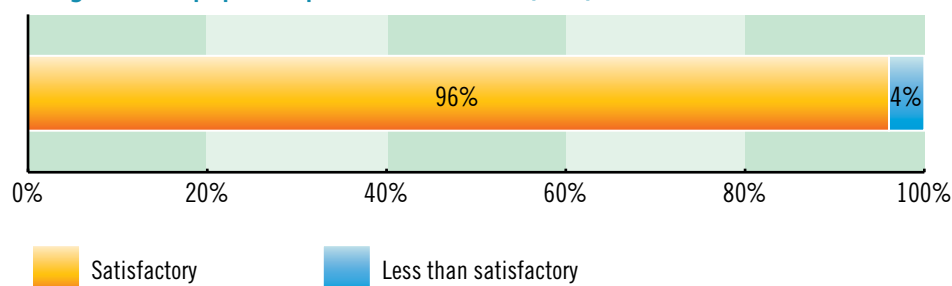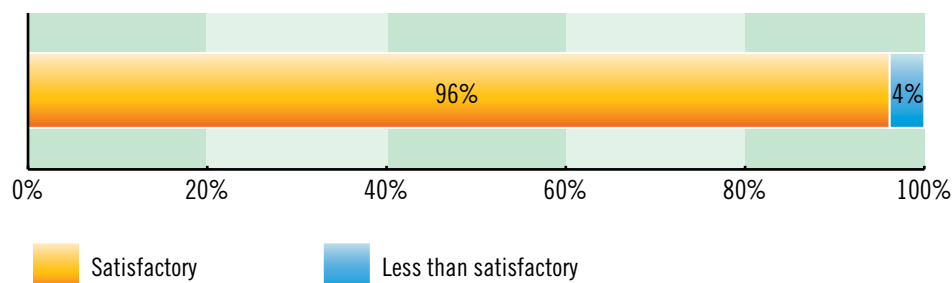
Parents similarly expressed very positive opinions about the management of pupils in schools. Very high percentages of parents surveyed during the WSE process in the period 2010-2012 indicated their satisfaction with matters such as school discipline and the safety of the school environment. However, satisfaction with how the school dealt with bullying was less positive and a large proportion of parents (24%) indicated that they did not know if their child's school dealt well with bullying. This may have arisen, at least partly, because parent respondents and their children may not have encountered bullying and may not have felt able to judge the effectiveness of the school in this area. However, given that awareness of the school's anti-bullying measures is a key tool in countering bullying, this statistic should serve to remind schools to redouble efforts to ensure that all of the school community is kept aware of policies and practices in this area.

Discipline is good in the school: parental response

95%				2% 4%

Strongly agree/agree   Disagree/strongly disagree   Don't know
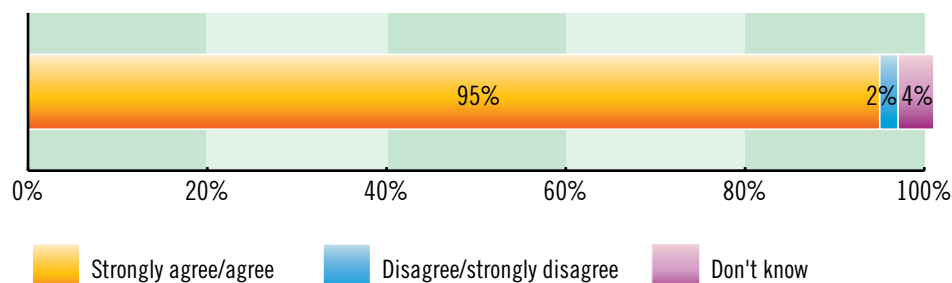
The school deals well with bullying: parental response

70%		6%	24%

Strongly agree/agree   Disagree/strongly disagree   Don't know
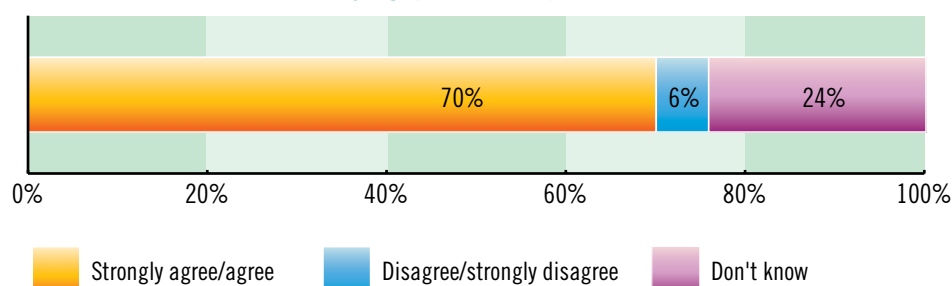
Pupils, too, expressed very positive views regarding the way in which they were managed in schools. Over the three-year period 2010-2012, practically all of the pupils surveyed indicated that they felt safe in their school and class and that they could talk to their teacher if they were upset about something in school. Further, 89% of the pupils indicated that the issue of bullying was something that their teacher discussed with their class.

I can talk to a teacher if I feel upset about something in school: pupil response

87%	4%	8%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Don't know
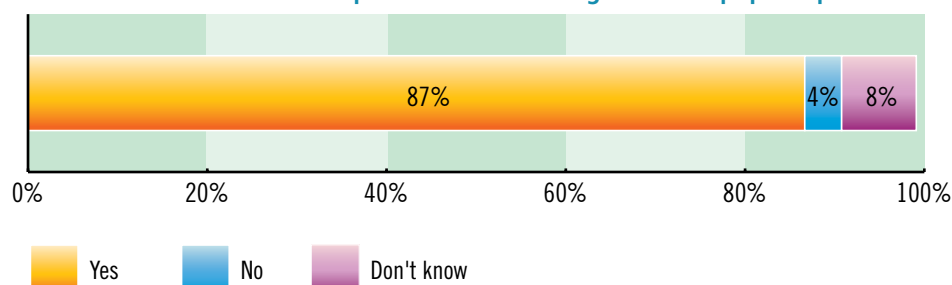
I feel safe in my class and in the playground: pupil response

94%	2%	4%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Don't know
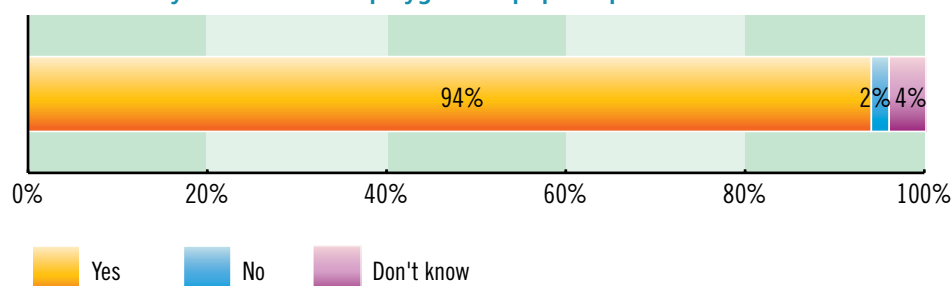
Teachers talk to us about dealing with bullying/ The teachers talk to us about what to do if someone is being bullied: pupil response

89%	4%	6%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Don't know
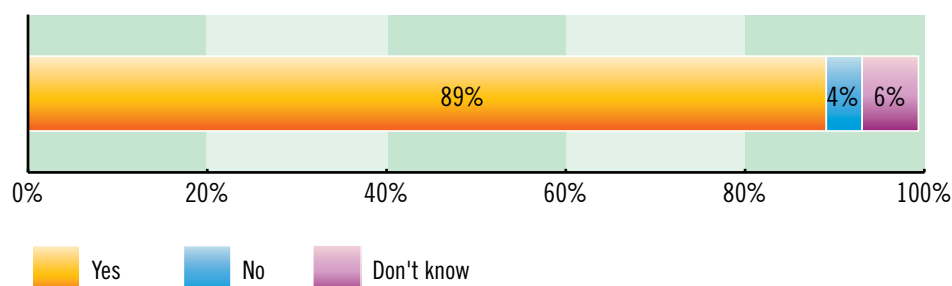
However, in a significant proportion of whole-school evaluations, pupil questionnaires showed that there is scope for greater account to be taken of pupil opinion in school life through increased learner involvement in decision making. 22% of pupils surveyed in 2010 and 2011 disagreed with the statement, "Children have a say in how things are done in the school".

Children have a say in how things are done in the school: pupil response[11]

47%	22%	31%

🟧 Yes   🟦 No   🟪 Don't know
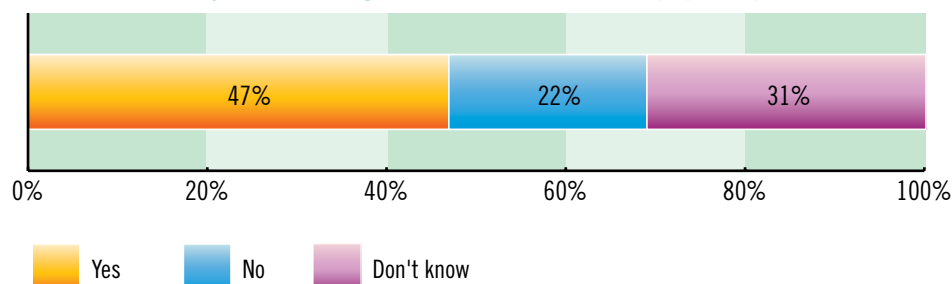
Communications with parents

Inspectors, in the course of whole-school evaluations, enquire into the quality of a school's communication with parents, including how parents are kept informed of the work of the school, school policies, and the progress of their children. Inspectors hold meetings with representatives of the parents' association[12], the board of management and the school principal during which such matters are explored. In addition, the questionnaires administered to parents during whole-school evaluations provide a very rich set of information on how parents feel about their own connection with schools.

Whole-school evaluations indicate that the overall quality of most schools' communications with parents is good. High proportions (95%) of the parents surveyed as part of the WSE process during 2010-2012 agree that schools are welcoming of them. Inspection reports frequently note a range of other strengths in parent-school communications such as regular parent-teacher contact, school newsletters to parents and up-to-date informative school websites. The vast majority (94%) of parents viewed positively the schools' arrangements for parent-teacher meetings even though, as the international studies TIMMS (Trends in International Maths and Science Study, 2011) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, 2011) show, parent-teacher meetings occurred less frequently in Ireland than in many other countries. Most (92%) of parents surveyed during the 2010-2012 WSEs agreed that school reports gave them a good picture of how their child was doing in school.

The school welcomes/is welcoming of parents: parental response

95%	3%	2%

🟧 Strongly agree/agree   🟦 Disagree/strongly disagree   🟪 Don't know
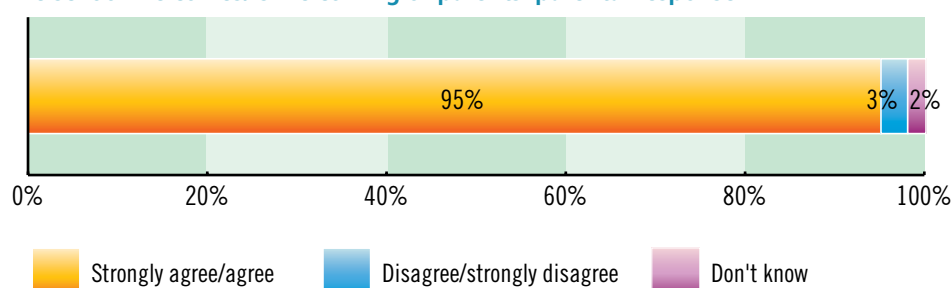
11 This question was asked in 2010 and 2011 only.
12 Where the parents' association is affiliated to the *National Parents' Council- Primary*

School reports give me a good picture of how my child is doing: parental response

92%				4% 5%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Strongly agree/agree ■ Disagree/strongly disagree ■ Don't know
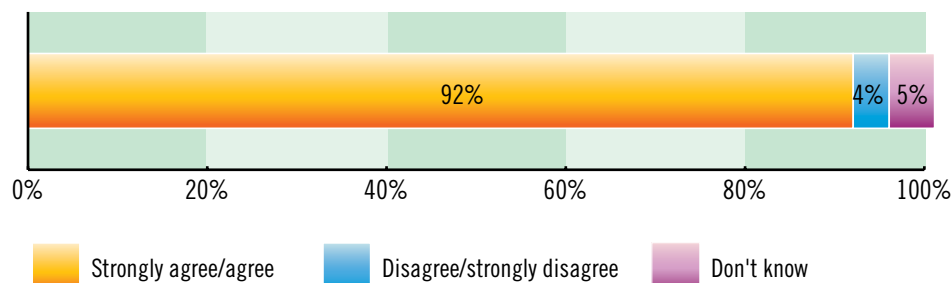
Schools' communications with parents in relation to other school matters including school policies were not as positive as other aspects of their communications. For example, as noted above, a sizeable proportion (24%) of parents surveyed during WSEs appears to be unaware of school policies and practices in relation to the issue of bullying. Further, just over two-thirds (67%) indicated that parents are invited to contribute views about school policies while 70% agreed that the school regularly seeks the views of parents on school matters. Just under two-thirds (65%) of parents agreed that they know about the work the board does for their child's school. Such findings point to the need for every board to ask itself whether transparency and communication with parents is as strong as it could and should be. These are questions that also need to be faced by parents' associations. Only 77% of parents surveyed during WSEs agreed that the parents' association in their child's school keeps them informed about its work.

Parents are invited to contribute views about school policies: parental response
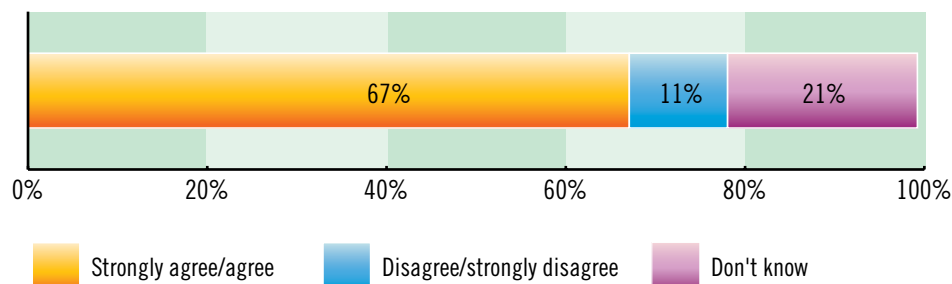
67%	11%	21%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Strongly agree/agree ■ Disagree/strongly disagree ■ Don't know

The school regularly seeks the views of parents on school matters: parental response

70%	15%	15%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Strongly agree/agree ■ Disagree/strongly disagree ■ Don't know
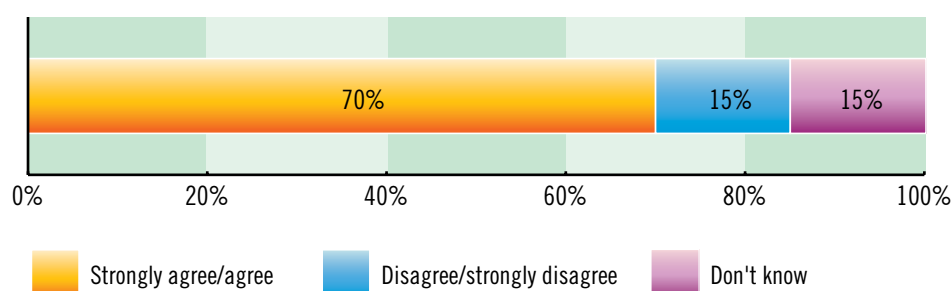
I know about the work the board of management is doing for the school: parental response
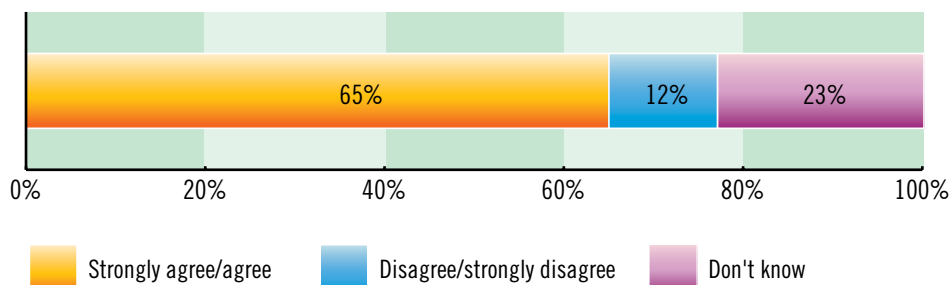
Strongly agree/agree	Disagree/strongly disagree	Don't know
65%	12%	23%

The parents' association keeps me informed about its work: parental response

Strongly agree/agree	Disagree/strongly disagree	Don't know
77%	11%	13%
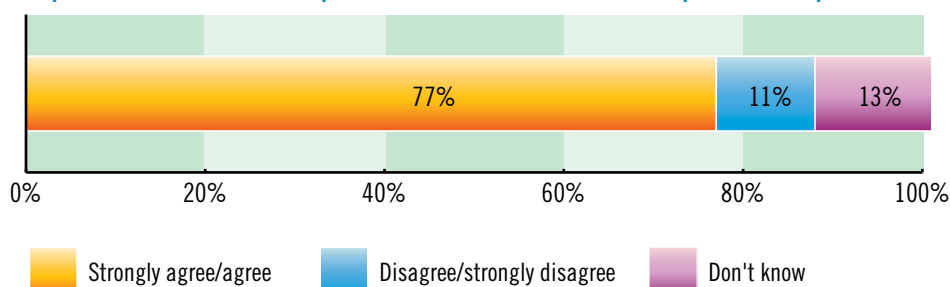
Management: Learning from inspections

While the inspection findings about the management of primary schools during 2010-2012 are in many ways positive, they also highlight some important issues where improvement can and should be made:

- **Effective school management and leadership:** It is heartening that most boards of management, which are comprised of voluntary members, provide good leadership to their schools. Further, the critical role played by effective school leaders – principals and deputy principals in particular – is also evident in inspection reports. Their cultivation of a collegial work environment, consultative decision-making and their provision of strong curriculum and instructional leadership underpin school effectiveness. However, the provision of strategic leadership by boards of management and effective leadership by principals and deputy principals needs to be improved in a minority of schools.

- **Real roles for in-school management:** One of the most common features of successful in-school management teams observed during inspections was their fulfilment of clearly-defined curriculum leadership responsibilities and their overseeing of the implementation of whole-school teaching strategies and initiatives to improve learning. Such features depend, of course, on the willingness of staff to take on leadership roles, both within the structure of promoted posts and outside of the post structure. The replacement of promoted posts to meet more directly identified school developmental needs while ensuring distributed leadership and real management opportunities for staff would be beneficial.

- **Improving communication:** It is clear that there is scope for strengthening communication and dialogue between schools and parents particularly in relation to key school policies and practices. There is a need to give parents both information and a real say in how the policies and practices of the school are determined. The role of the board in this regard is crucial. Further, school leaders and staff need to review regularly how well they seek the views and opinions of the pupils in their schools. The fundamental challenge is that of ensuring that pupils are given a real opportunity to give their views in relation to decisions that affect them and that those views are taken into account in school decision-making processes. Finally, the school self-evaluation guidelines published in November 2012 underline the importance of accessing both parent and pupil perspectives on the work of the school in the context of evaluating the effectiveness of that work and planning for improvement.

- **Bullying:** Inspections show that high proportions of parents believe that the school provides a safe environment for their children. However, lower percentages are confident that their school handles bullying well and almost a quarter of parents indicated that they did not know if their school was effective at dealing with bullying. At the very least this points to the need for schools to regularly raise awareness of the anti-bullying measures that they have in place. In some cases, schools should revise their codes of behaviour and anti-bullying policies and ensure that these are well-known and implemented by all staff.

3.3 The quality of school planning and school self-evaluation in primary schools

During whole-school evaluations and the thematic evaluations of planning and target setting undertaken in 2010-2012, inspectors examined how well schools planned to ensure that their pupils experienced a high quality and broadly balanced education. They referenced their evaluations largely to the school development planning framework familiar to schools and within which the majority of schools worked. Recognising that the more impact-focused, school improvement-focused approach of school self-evaluation was one with which many schools were not yet familiar, inspectors did not generally apply school self-evaluation expectations to the planning processes of schools during the WSEs they undertook. They took account of the fact that while school development planning has been a feature of schools for some time, more rigorous school self-evaluation practices are only being introduced to primary schools.

Inspectors considered the relevance of school planning to the quality of pupils' learning and the overall work of the school. They took account of the roles and responsibilities of members of staff within the planning processes, the level of planning for the teaching of individual curriculum areas and subjects and how the plans were implemented. They found that, within a school development planning framework, satisfactory school planning processes were evident in 74% of the schools. In schools where informal self-evaluation or more formal action planning processes were underway these were acknowledged, evaluated and reported (as in the case of the evaluations undertaken in DEIS schools)[13].

In schools where school planning was most effective, principals gave strong leadership to the planning process and ensured that it was a genuinely collaborative process involving the staff, the board and the parents' association. Clear target setting, focused on teaching and learning as well as on schools' organisation and resources, were also a feature of good practice. Effective schools also analysed standardised and observational assessment data thoroughly to establish improvement targets and to

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13 See *Spotlight on DEIS*

guide implementation strategies. This enabled them to set school targets that were really useful in guiding classroom planning, teaching methods and approaches to differentiation.

Effective whole-school planning and self-evaluation do not require extensive volumes of paperwork but they do have a discernable impact on teaching and learning and the school climate. In schools with the most effective planning and review practices, teachers had clear, objective-based, long-term and short-term plans that were linked to the school plan. These teacher plans also included relevant and realistic approaches to differentiating the curriculum for pupils of different abilities in classrooms.

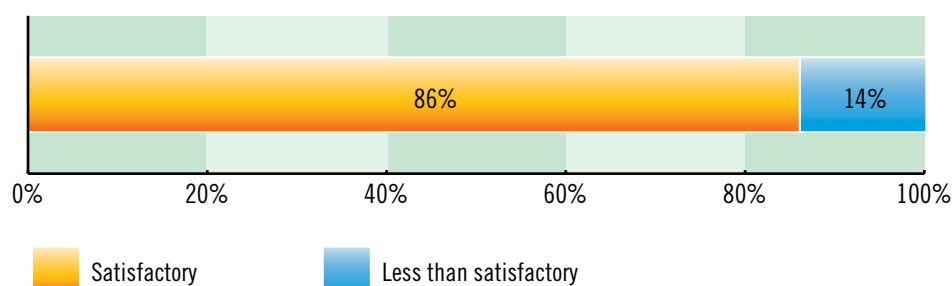## School planning and school self-evaluation: Learning from inspections

The outcomes from inspections in the period 2010-2012 highlight a number of issues that need to be addressed in order to develop and improve existing school planning processes so that school self-evaluation can be solidly established in schools.

- **Using whole-school planning and self-evaluation to drive improvement:** It is clear from inspection findings that where school principals provide effective leadership, where staff are committed to reflecting on their work in a critical but constructive way, and where assessment and other data are effectively used, schools can identify the changes that are necessary to bring about improvements in pupils' learning. The findings strongly suggest that there is a need for schools generally to further develop their capacity to set targets and, in so doing, to make more effective use of assessment information.

- **Evidence from pupil assessments and from parents and pupils should be used to inform self-evaluation and planning:** The experience of schools involved in piloting the guidelines for school self-evaluation has shown the value to be gained from using evidence from a wide range of sources, including asking pupils and parents about their views of the work of the school. It has also demonstrated that reviewing and carefully analysing assessment information and other data is vital in assisting schools to reach conclusions about their practice. The pilot has highlighted the importance of setting specific and measurable targets based on the analysis of all evidence gathered, and focused on improving teaching and learning.

- **Whole-school planning within a school self-evaluation framework needs to be embedded in primary schools:** The development of robust school self-evaluation processes in line with the *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Primary Schools* is necessary. The implementing and monitoring of the six steps of the self-evaluation process and the maintaining of an emphasis on improving teaching and learning will be crucial in the years ahead.

- **Individual teachers' preparedness to teach needs to be improved:** The outcomes of incidental inspections for the period 2010-2012 show that teachers are inadequately prepared to teach in 18% of lessons. This is significantly better than the findings from incidental inspections of English and mathematics lessons in the period October 2009-October 2010, when teacher preparation in one third of lessons was found to be unsatisfactory. This preparation does not refer solely to written plans, but to all of the work that teachers do to organise lessons effectively. School leaders have an important role in encouraging adequate preparation of lessons and, more generally, in fostering regular collaborative reflection on the quality of the teaching that occurs in individual classrooms.

3.4 The quality of teaching and learning in English, Mathematics and Irish in primary schools

Most primary schools are, in overall terms, working satisfactorily with regard to the quality of the teaching they provide and the progress of their learners. Unannounced (incidental) inspections during the period 2010-2012 found that the quality of teaching overall was satisfactory or better in 86% of schools while the quality of learning overall was satisfactory or better in 87% of schools. Among parents surveyed as part of the WSE process, very high percentages agreed that teaching was good in their child's school and that their child was doing well in school. These are very positive findings.

Teaching overall: inspectors' evaluation (incidental inspections)

	86%		14%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Satisfactory   ■ Less than satisfactory

Learning overall: inspectors' evaluation (incidental inspections)

	87%		13%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Satisfactory   ■ Less than satisfactory

Teaching is good in the school: parental response

	97%	1%	2%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Strongly agree/agree   ■ Disagree/strongly disagree   ■ Don't know
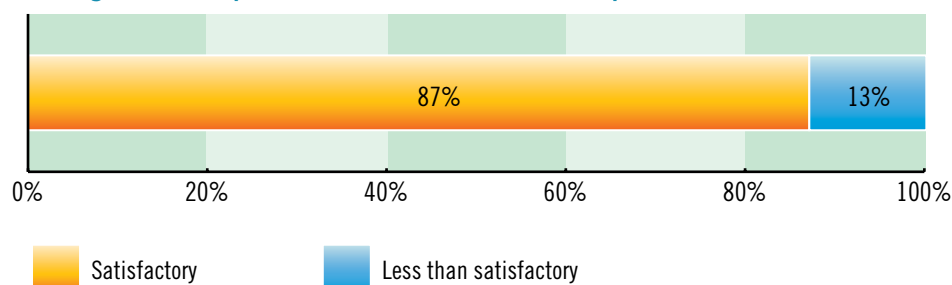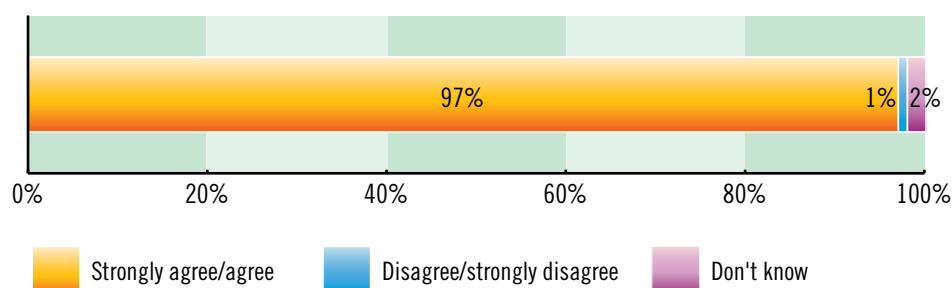
My child is doing well in school: parental response
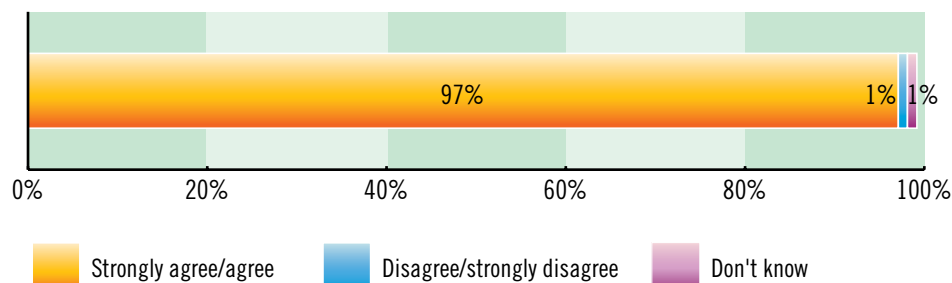
However, when examined more closely by curriculum area, inspectors reported considerable variation in the effectiveness of teaching and in the quality of pupils' learning as discussed in the sections that follow.

How good is the teaching and learning of English in primary schools?

Inspectors' overall findings about teaching and learning in English in primary schools were positive in the period 2010-2012 and this was corroborated by the views of parents and by evidence from international studies.

Incidental inspections showed that the learning outcomes for pupils were satisfactory in 87% of the English lessons inspected and that the teaching approaches used in the lessons were appropriate in 86% of cases. Inspectors frequently noted and praised the correction of pupils' work, the effective management of pupils, the quality of pupils' engagement during English lessons, and the attention given by the teacher to the reinforcement of learning through revision, effective questioning of pupils and ongoing checking of pupils' understanding. The findings in notified whole-school evaluations were similarly positive about children's learning: the overall quality of pupils' learning outcomes in English was judged to be satisfactory or better in large numbers (89%) of the schools inspected.

English learning outcomes: inspectors' evaluation (incidental inspections)
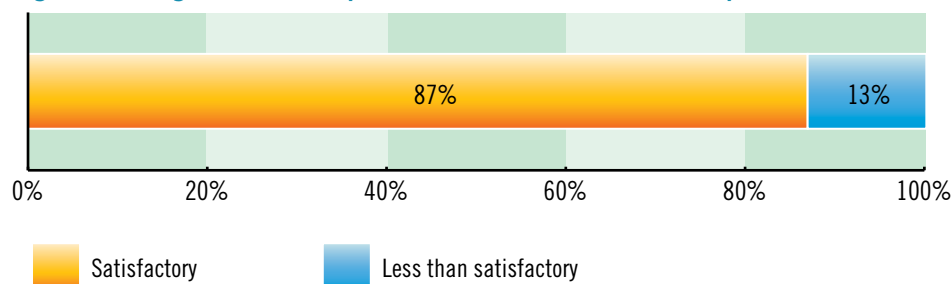
English learning outcomes: inspectors' evaluation (WSE)
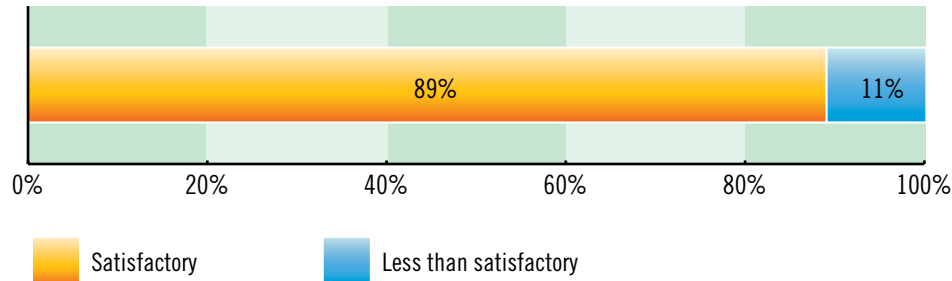
89%	11%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Satisfactory   ■ Less than satisfactory

English teaching approaches: inspectors' evaluation (incidental inspections)

86%	14%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Satisfactory   ■ Less than satisfactory
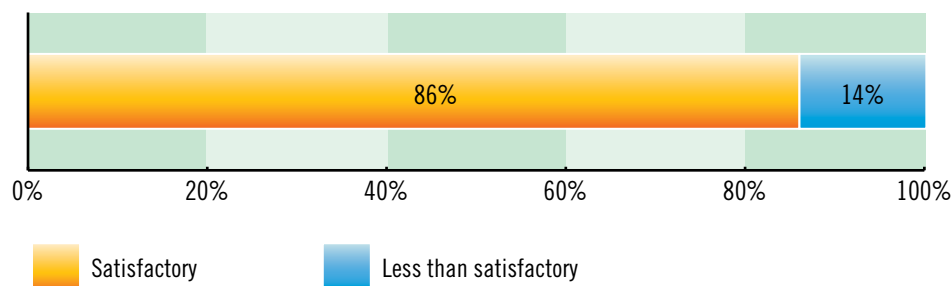
Parents were very satisfied with their child's experience of learning to read. Almost all (96%) of the parents surveyed during the WSE process agreed with the statement, *The school is helping my child to progress with reading*. Pupil perspectives on reading progress were not quite as positive with 83% of the pupils surveyed indicating that they thought they were doing well at reading.

The school is helping my child to progress with reading: parental response

96%	2%	2%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Strongly agree/agree   ■ Disagree/strongly disagree   ■ Don't know
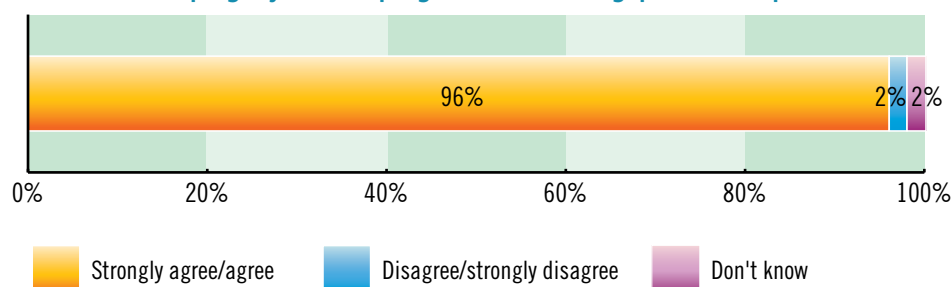
I think I am doing well at reading: pupil response

83%	4%	13%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Don't know
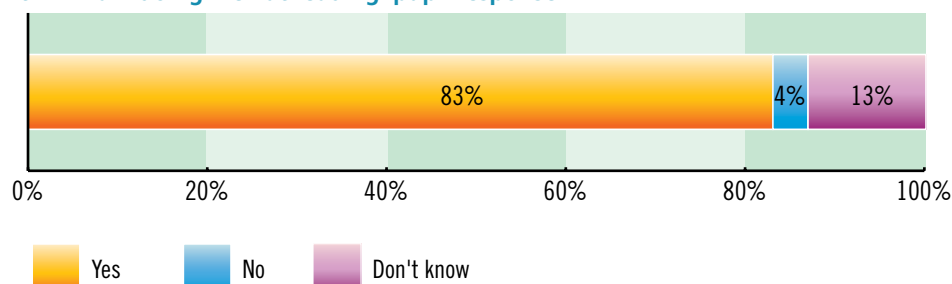
These largely positive views from inspectors and parents are in line with the very good outcomes achieved by Irish pupils in the international reading literacy test, PIRLS. This study compared the reading skills of pupils in the equivalent of fourth class across 45 countries in 2011 and found that Irish pupils scored significantly above the international average and Ireland was among the top-performing countries.

While the findings for English are broadly positive, both the WSE and incidental inspection data also suggest that there are still significant numbers of pupils for whom the learning experiences and attainments in English could be better. For example, the 2010-2012 incidental inspection findings show that in 13% of the English lessons inspected the quality of the pupils' learning was not satisfactory. Similarly, inspectors judged that the overall teaching of English and the overall learning of pupils in English was not satisfactory in 11% of the schools in which notified whole-school evaluations took place.

English: Learning from inspections

The outcomes from inspections regarding English in the period 2010-2012 highlight a number of issues that need to be addressed in a significant minority of primary schools:

- **Preparation:** Poor preparation by teachers for English lessons is a cause of concern. Teachers were found to be inadequately prepared to teach 18% of the English lessons inspected incidentally in the period 2010-2012 and, in the case of approximately one in five (22%) of the lessons, the teacher did not have any long-term or short-term written plans for the subject.

- **Assessment:** Inspectors noted a significant improvement in the use of assessment practices in English lessons in incidental inspections over the period 2010-2012. Satisfactory assessment practices were reported in just 67% of lessons in 2010 but in 77% of lessons in 2012. This improvement may reflect the emphasis on assessment in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. However, there were significant shortcomings in assessment practices in almost one quarter (23%) of the English lessons observed during the 2012 incidental inspections. It is very important that teachers are able to assess how well pupils are learning and to recognise how and why pupils are not progressing. This formative use of assessment enables the teacher to take the most effective next steps with the pupil. While it is good to record improvement in this aspect of schools' work, it is also clear that further support for the enhancement of teachers' skills is needed in this area.

- **Approaches:** During the WSEs in schools that were found to be underperforming with regard to English, inspectors advised on matters such as:
  o *Oral language:* The need for explicit teaching of a structured oral language programme
  o *Writing:* The importance of establishing a whole-school, developmental and systematic approach to the teaching of writing, ensuring that pupils have frequent opportunities to write, and experience of writing in a variety of genres
  o *Comprehension:* The need to implement a whole-school approach to the development of comprehension skills
  o *Reading:* The need to ensure that there is cohesive and explicit teaching of reading skills as pupils progress through the school as well as ready availability of differentiated reading materials to sustain interest in and ensure progress in reading.

How good is the teaching and learning of Mathematics in primary schools?

Several positive findings arise from the inspectors' reports on the teaching of Mathematics in the period 2010-2012 and parental views are also generally positive. International research from this period also provides positive evidence about the achievement of pupils in Mathematics at primary level. However, both inspections and international evidence suggest a number of areas requiring improvement.

During 2010-2012, inspectors reported that teaching approaches in mathematics lessons were satisfactory or better in 83% of the lessons evaluated during unannounced (incidental) inspections. They judged that pupils' learning was appropriately consolidated in most (86%) of the lessons. The strengths in practice identified by inspectors were similar to those identified in many English lessons: the correction of the pupils' work, the management of pupils during mathematics lessons and the quality of their engagement in their mathematics learning.

Mathematics teaching approaches: inspectors' evaluation (incidental inspections)

| Satisfactory | Less than satisfactory |
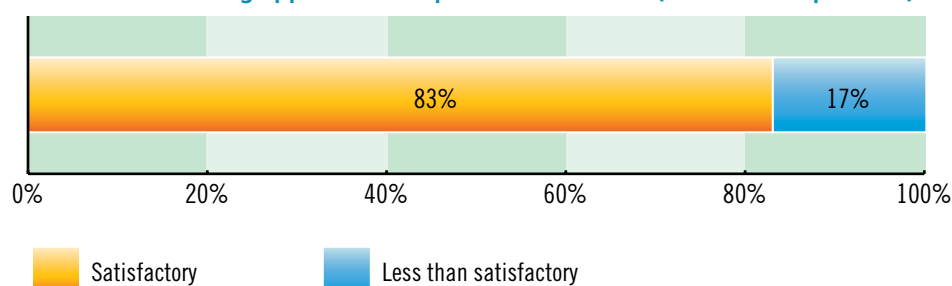
Consolidation of mathematics learning: inspectors' evaluation (incidental inspections)

| Satisfactory | Less than satisfactory |
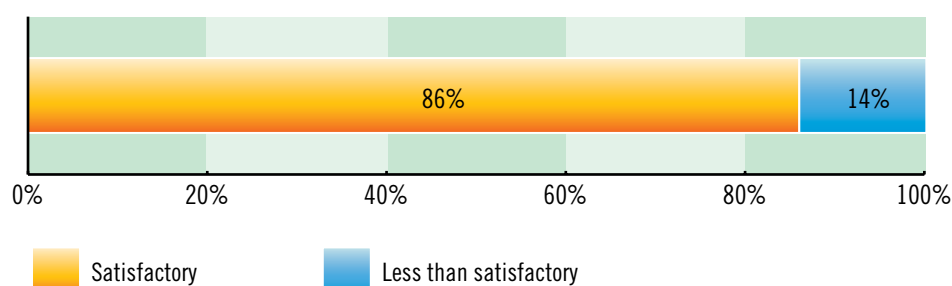
Mathematics learning outcomes: inspectors' evaluation (incidental inspections)

| Satisfactory | Less than satisfactory |
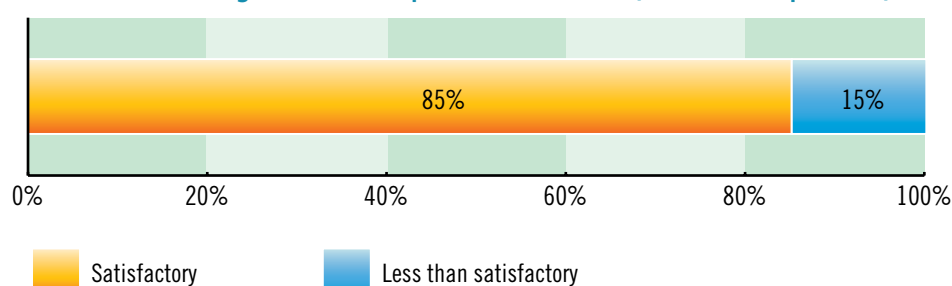
Inspectors also reported that pupils' learning during mathematics lessons was satisfactory or better in 85% of the lessons that they inspected during unannounced inspections. WSEs found that the overall quality of teaching and learning in Mathematics was satisfactory or better in 92% of the schools inspected.

Mathematics teaching and learning overall: inspectors' evaluation (WSE)
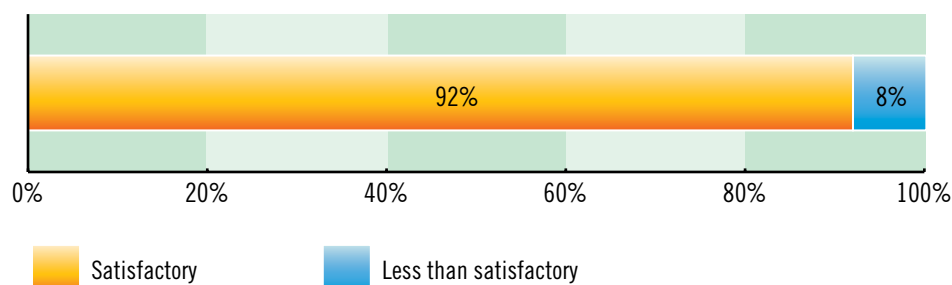
Almost all (94%) of the parents surveyed during the WSE process over the three years indicated that they agreed that their child's school was helping their child to progress in Mathematics. Pupils, however, were not as positive in relation to how they viewed their progress in Mathematics with lower percentages (78%) agreeing that they were doing well in Mathematics.

The school is helping my child to progress in maths: parental response
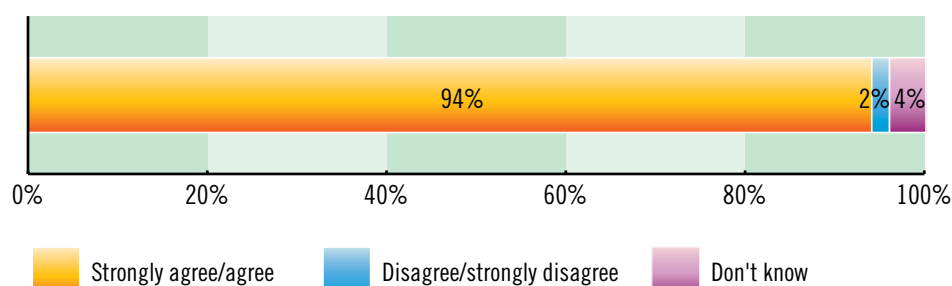
Information from the international test, TIMSS 2011 also shows that Irish primary school pupils are doing reasonably well in Mathematics. The Irish pupils in fourth class performed significantly above the average of pupils in the 50 countries that took part in the study, though not among the top performing countries in Mathematics.

Inspectors raised concerns about pupils' learning and progress in mathematics lessons in 15% of the lessons they observed in incidental inspections in the period 2010-2012.

Mathematics: Learning from inspections

Closer examination of the information from incidental inspections in the period 2010-2012 highlights a number of key challenges in the delivery of the mathematics curriculum in significant numbers of classrooms and schools.

- **Preparation:** Of concern, in the first instance, is the number of mathematics lessons for which teachers had prepared inadequately. Overall, inspectors noted that teachers' preparations were not satisfactory in 19% of the mathematics lessons they visited during incidental inspections. This compares to 25% of these lessons in the period 2009-2010.[14] While this improvement is encouraging, it remains a concern that almost one in five mathematics lessons was still not adequately prepared. This is particularly so when considered alongside the fact that, for one in five (20%) of the mathematics lessons inspected during 2010-2012, the inspector noted that the teacher did not have written plans.

- **Assessment:** Evidence from inspections strongly suggests that there are ongoing improvements with regard to the quality and effectiveness of how schools and teachers assess and use assessment information in teaching. However, inspectors report that the use of assessment is not satisfactory in 28% of mathematics lessons.

  WSE reports indicate that where schools have shortcomings with regard to assessment in Mathematics, these tend to be in the area of formative assessment (often referred to as assessment for learning). In these cases, inspectors advise on the need to ensure that the outcomes of mathematics assessment are used effectively to inform the programmes of learning and, specifically, to ensure that those programmes are appropriately differentiated in terms of their content and delivery according to the mathematical needs and abilities of different learners.

- **Resources:** Incidental inspection findings for the years 2010-2012 show that there is considerable scope for development with regard to how learning materials and resources are used during mathematics lessons. Serious deficiencies in this regard were noted in 20% of the lessons inspected.

  A related concern, which was identified regularly in WSE reports on schools where the teaching of Mathematics was judged to be less than satisfactory was an over-reliance on textbooks and/ or workbooks or worksheets. Inspectors noted that pupils in these schools had insufficient opportunities to handle learning materials and manipulatives and to engage in active learning tasks during mathematics lessons.

  Although there were evident shortcomings with regard to how some schools used resources to support mathematics learning and teaching, it should be noted that, when the incidental inspection findings for 2010-2012 are compared to those of 2009-2010, it is clear that there is increasing use of information and communication technology (ICT) during mathematics lessons. ICT was used in 30% of the mathematics lessons evaluated in 2009-2010 compared with 46% of the mathematics lessons evaluated in 2010-2012.

- **Collaboration; talk and discussion:** The extent to which pupils are enabled to work collaboratively in mathematics lessons is disappointing. Inspectors noted that pupils were given opportunities to work collaboratively on mathematics tasks in just over half (53%) of the mathematics lessons evaluated during incidental inspections. Further, inspectors reported satisfactory use of talk and discussion in only 81% of the lessons. These findings are of concern in light of the significance of problem-solving as a component in pupils' overall mathematical competence, as shown by the international TIMSS test.

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14 *Incidental Inspections 2010: A Report on the Teaching and Learning of English and Mathematics in Primary Schools*

How good is the teaching and learning of Irish in primary schools?

Inspectors' findings with regard to Irish are significantly less positive than those for English or Mathematics. During the years 2010-2012, inspectors reported that the quality of Irish teaching was problematic in one fifth of the lessons inspected during incidental inspections and the quality of pupils' learning of the language was problematic in approximately one quarter (24%) of those lessons.

While many inspectors in whole-school evaluations commended the commitment and efforts of teachers to teach Irish, they also found that learning outcomes were disappointing. Inspectors judged that the teaching of Irish was satisfactory or better in 80% of lessons observed during incidental inspections. They also reported that the quality of pupils' learning outcomes was satisfactory in 76% of the lessons evaluated.

Irish teaching approaches: inspectors' evaluation (incidental inspections)
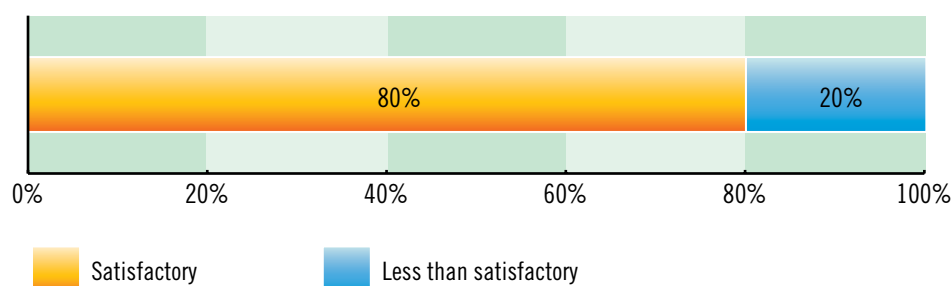
Satisfactory — 80%
Less than satisfactory — 20%

Irish learning outcomes: inspectors' evaluation (incidental inspections)

Satisfactory — 76%
Less than satisfactory — 24%
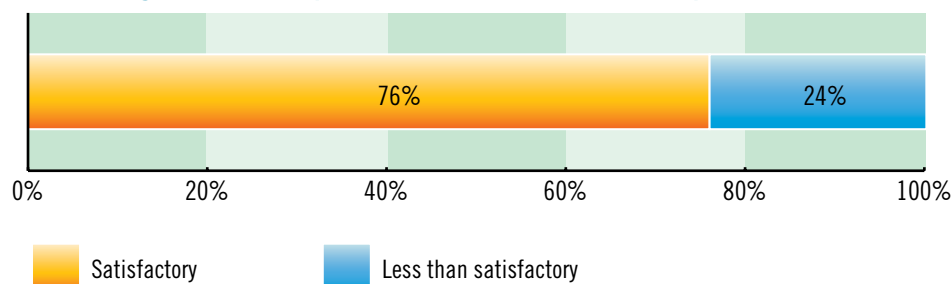
In schools where inspectors found teaching and learning in Irish to be effective, there was evidence that teachers had adopted a well-planned, whole-school approach to fostering learning in Irish. They had also created an environment that encouraged regular informal use of Irish throughout the school.

The richness of the language inputs provided to pupils was, not surprisingly, an important factor in successful learning. The accuracy and fluency of teachers' own Irish language competence and hence of the language exemplars presented to pupils were critical factors in supporting effective learning. Clearly, where teachers' competence and confidence in using Irish were weak, the learning opportunities provided to pupils were less effective.

The successful implementation of a communicative approach to the teaching of the language across the school was a further factor noted where Irish was taught most successfully. This meant that successful lessons in these situations were well structured, they included well-planned listening opportunities, and strategies such as drama, pair work and games that helped to develop pupils' communicative abilities. The teaching of reading was integrated effectively with writing, oral and listening skills work, and a broad range of reading material in Irish was used in these schools. Teachers had also planned sufficient opportunities to enable their pupils to consolidate their language learning. Finally, teachers used a range of assessment methods such as teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and collections of pupils' work to assess the main language skills.

Irish: Learning from inspections

The inspection data from 2010-2012 illustrate starkly the challenges for considerable numbers of schools and teachers with regard to Irish.

- **Approaches:** It is clear from both incidental inspection findings and WSE reports that a sizeable proportion of primary schools need to change their approach to the teaching of the Irish language. In 22% of the Irish lessons evaluated during incidental inspections from 2010-2012, pupils were not provided with opportunities to learn through talk and discussion, one of the fundamental requirements of language learning. The need for schools to adopt a communicative approach to the teaching of Irish is also one of the recurring themes in the WSE reports on schools in which there were significant weaknesses with regard to Irish teaching and learning. Related to this, both WSE reports and incidental inspections over the three-year period highlight the need for greater opportunities to be provided to pupils to work collaboratively during Irish lessons, and for the language learning to be consolidated.

- **Preparation:** The use of a communicative approach in Irish lessons demands careful preparation. Teachers need to be clear about the intended language learning objective, they need to plan lesson content and the relevant language learning activities carefully, and they need to source suitable learning materials and resources. The findings from incidental inspections suggest that a significant minority (22%) of teachers are not preparing adequately for their teaching of Irish. This means that there are considerable numbers of learners in primary schools that are not being provided with properly planned Irish language experiences or a properly planned, progressive Irish language learning programme.

- **Teaching resources:** Inspectors found, in a considerable proportion (20%) of the Irish lessons evaluated by incidental inspection, that there were shortcomings with regard to the use of resources to support Irish language teaching and learning in classrooms. The Inspectorate, in its 2007 report, *Irish in the Primary School,* recommended that a graded teaching programme similar to Séideán Sí (currently in use in Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools) be prepared for each class in the primary school to support the systematic implementation of the communicative approach. Such a programme is not yet available at a national level. The 2010-2012 incidental inspection findings underline the real need for such a programme to be developed for and used by English-medium schools in the teaching of Irish. It is hoped that the current work of the NCCA in developing an integrated Irish language curriculum with clear and specific learning outcomes and support materials for teachers as well as the ongoing work of COGG (An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta) in supporting Irish in Gaeltacht and all-Irish schools will improve considerably the overall quality of Irish language teaching and learning in our primary schools.

- **Assessment:** The issue of assessment in Irish is one that appears to be particularly challenging for many schools and teachers. Inspectors noted that assessment practices were not satisfactory in more than one third (35%) of the Irish lessons evaluated in the years 2010-2012. This finding points to the need for critical numbers of primary schools to make planned, systematic provision for assessing pupils' learning of the main language skills in Irish. Schools then need to use the information from this assessment to inform whole-school and individual teachers' planning of the language learning objectives, content, and activities of Irish lessons and the necessary resources required. There is evidence that teachers need considerable professional development support to enable them to undertake this sort of teaching. The availability, from the Educational Research Centre, of standardised tests in Irish for primary schools is a further support to improve assessment practice. The use of these standardised tests in Irish has been a requirement in Irish medium schools since 2012.

3.5 The quality of support for pupils in primary schools

Provision for pupils with special educational needs

In evaluating the quality of the support provided for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) inspectors consider matters such as school policy in relation to the enrolment of pupils with SEN, their inclusion and participation in the life of the school, and the quality of the teaching supports provided for them in both classroom and particular support contexts.

Inspectors' overall findings from 2010-2012 in relation to how schools provide for pupils with special educational needs are varied. Good or better provision in this regard was noted in 81% of the notified WSEs. Among the strengths in practice recorded by inspectors in such schools were effective implementation of a staged approach to addressing pupils' needs, good use of assessment information including information from diagnostic tests in devising individual education plans and programmes of work for pupils, clarity and cohesion between the roles and responsibilities of both class and support teachers in the delivery of supports to individual pupils, and well-structured, well-resourced delivery of supports.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs: inspectors' evaluation (WSE)

Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
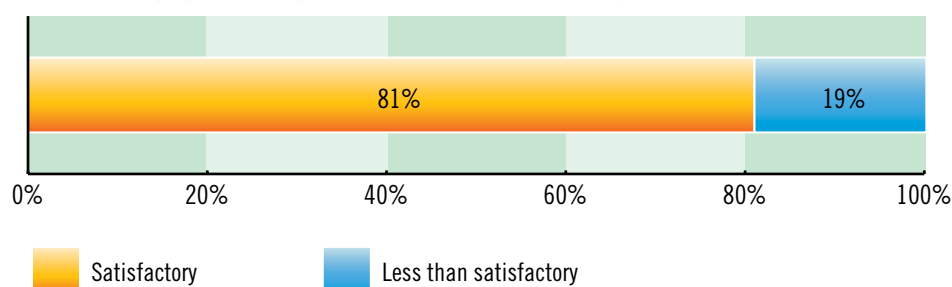
Care for pupils in need of additional supports

The WSE process allows inspectors to consider the functioning and effectiveness of a school in terms of how it enables pupils from disadvantaged circumstances to achieve their full educational potential. The evaluation process facilitates enquiry into how, at a practical level, a school meets the needs of

such pupils through its admissions and enrolment policy, the allocation of resources to support pupil learning and participation in school life, and school collaboration with community agencies in meeting the pupils' needs. In the WSE process inspectors also explore how pupils from minority groups are supported in the school through, for example, additional English language supports and through policies that promote their inclusion in all aspects of school life. As part of evaluating the care provided by a school for pupils in need of additional supports for their learning and participation in school, the quality of home-school partnership is also examined.

Inspectors found that the majority (89%) of the schools inspected through WSE were performing effectively with regard to how they supported pupils from disadvantaged circumstances and how they supported pupils from minority groups. Overall positive findings in relation to how schools communicated and cooperated with parents and other agencies to support pupils are also apparent. Inspectors frequently noted the commitment of schools to ensuring that the particular language learning needs of pupils for whom English is not a first language are met. They also commented on the positive actions of schools and home-school-community services in supporting pupils' attendance at school (including before-school and after-school activities) and in facilitating their transition from primary to post-primary school.

Support for pupils: Learning from inspection

Whole-school evaluations highlight a number of issues that need to be addressed in a significant minority of schools in order that pupils are adequately supported in achieving their full educational potential:

• **Coordination and planning:** In almost one fifth of the WSEs conducted in 2010-2012, inspectors found less than satisfactory practice in relation to how the schools planned for or delivered supports to pupils with special educational needs. In their reports on such schools, inspectors advised on a range of matters including the importance of making adequate use of diagnostic tools and professional reports to identify, inform and review targets in education plans, and of ensuring that suitable resources were available and used to support teaching and learning.

• **Inclusion, integration and communication:** In a number of instances, inspectors advised schools to explore models of in-class support instead of relying exclusively on a model of support that involved withdrawing pupils from the mainstream classroom. Inspectors also highlighted the importance of ensuring that there was effective, regular communication with parents in relation to their child's learning targets and individual programmes of work.

SPOTLIGHT ON PLANNING PROCESSES IN DEIS PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

What is this Spotlight about?

This Spotlight summarises key inspection findings about the effectiveness of the Department's action plan to support the needs of learners from disadvantaged communities.

What is DEIS?

- *DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools)* is an action plan for educational inclusion. Its aim is to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities are met. At its core is an integrated School Support Programme (SSP) to bring together and build on interventions for schools such as:
  o Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme
  o School Completion Programme (SCP)
  o Support Teachers Project
  o Giving Children an Even Break
  o Breaking the Cycle
  o Disadvantaged Area Scheme
  o Literacy and numeracy schemes

DEIS schools

- DEIS schools receive additional staffing and additional resources. In return, the schools undertake to develop and implement three-year cyclical action plans in order to bring about improvements in their schools with regard to the following DEIS themes:
  o Attendance
  o Retention
  o Progression[15]
  o Examination attainment (post-primary only)
  o Literacy
  o Numeracy
  o Partnership with parents and others

The evaluation

- The evaluation was undertaken by the Inspectorate at the request of the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of Education and Skills. It was carried out in 2010 in 18 primary and 18 post-primary schools. Its purpose was to evaluate and report on the progress being made by DEIS schools with regard to the DEIS action plan for educational inclusion. The focus of the evaluation was on the planning processes used by the schools in pursuance of the objectives of DEIS. Specifically, inspectors enquired into the nature and effectiveness of the schools' planning processes with regard to each of the DEIS themes.

- The evaluation findings are reported in full in the following publications:
  o *An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Primary Schools, Inspectorate Evaluation Studies,* Department of Education and Skills, 2011
  o *An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Post-Primary Schools, Inspectorate Evaluation Studies*, Department of Education and Skills, 2011

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15 Progression at primary level refers to pupil progression to post-primary school. Progression at post-primary level refers to student progression from junior cycle to senior cycle and from senior cycle to third level or further education.

DEIS Theme	DEIS Planning Processes: Summary Findings	
	Primary Findings	**Post-Primary Findings**
Overall	The quality of the primary schools' DEIS planning process varied according to the DEIS themes. Overall, there were many strengths in planning for attendance and retention. Findings in relation to planning processes for literacy, numeracy and partnership were not as positive.	Overall, post-primary schools were at a very early stage in the DEIS planning process, despite receiving considerable support and resources to implement DEIS action plans.
Attendance	The theme of attendance was the one most effectively addressed by primary schools in their DEIS planning processes. Significant, measurable improvements in attendance were achieved by practically all of the schools.	Fewer than half had effective target-setting practices in the area of attendance. 7 of the 18 schools reported improvements in attendance. Overall, there was a need for the schools to be more focused on planning for improvements in attendance.
Retention	This theme did not feature in a specific way in the planning processes of the primary schools.	The retention of students in school was addressed effectively by the majority of the schools in their DEIS planning processes.
Progression	The overall findings regarding planning for progression were positive. The majority of the schools reported 100% progression of their pupils to post-primary schools.	The overall findings regarding planning for progression to the next level of education were mixed. The majority of the schools had effective strategies to support progression. Half reported improvements in progression.
Examination attainment (post-primary only)	This theme was not relevant to the planning processes of the primary schools.	Overall findings regarding planning to improve examination attainment were disappointing. The schools generally did not analyse or use available relevant data in the planning process. Only 4 of the 18 schools had set suitable targets. Half had effective strategies to support improvement in examination attainment. 5 of the 18 schools had made progress in this area.
Literacy	The overall findings regarding the schools' planning for literacy were mixed. Good or very good improvement in literacy levels was achieved in 11 of the 18 schools. Almost all schools had effective interventions in place to improve literacy levels. There was scope for the development of target-setting for literacy in the majority of the schools.	Overall, there was little evidence of the use of whole-school approaches to literacy. Only 7 schools had good or very good target-setting and strategies to improve literacy levels. Only 6 schools measured progress in literacy.
Numeracy	The overall findings regarding the schools' planning for numeracy were mixed. 8 of the 18 schools succeeded in improving significantly the numeracy levels of their pupils. All had effective improvement strategies. More than half had weaknesses in how they set targets for numeracy.	Overall, there was a low level of engagement in planning processes to improve numeracy attainment. Only 4 of the 18 schools had strengths in their target setting for numeracy. Only 3 had effective strategies and were measuring progress.
Partnership with parents and others	The objectives for promoting partnership with parents and others tended to be broad and lacking specificity and, as a result, it was very difficult for the schools to establish the progress made.	Overall, the schools engaged positively in target-setting and in implementing interventions to improve partnership with parents and the community.

SPOTLIGHT ON GAELTACHT PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS 2010-2012

What is this Spotlight about?

This Spotlight summarises key inspection findings on the quality of teaching and learning in primary and post-primary Gaeltacht schools.

Gaeltacht Schools

- There are 132 primary schools and 26 post-primary schools in Gaeltacht areas in Ireland. Many of these schools are small with an average enrolment of 71 pupils in primary schools and an average enrolment of 144 students in post-primary schools.

- There is much variation in the use of Irish as the daily language of communication between and within Gaeltacht communities and in the linguistic profile of students attending Gaeltacht schools for a number of reasons. Irish speakers in Gaeltacht communities are often sparsely distributed and this is coupled with inward migration of non-Irish speakers into Gaeltacht areas. There has also been a considerable drop in enrolment patterns in Gaeltacht schools due to Irish speakers moving from Gaeltacht areas for economic reasons.

Inspectorate Evaluations

During the period 2010-2012, the Inspectorate carried out a total of 68 evaluations in Gaeltacht schools. This included 41 inspections at primary level and 27 at post-primary level. A variety of inspection approaches was used ranging from WSEs and incidental inspections at primary level to WSE-MLLs, incidental inspections and subject inspections at post-primary level.

Gaeltacht Primary and Post-Primary Schools: Summary Findings

Overall	Inspections conducted in Gaeltacht schools indicate many features of effective practice. A number of areas were also identified where sustained improvement and further development were required to maximise the potential of education provision in these schools. The need for improvement was due, in some measure, to demographic factors, the significant challenges in enrolment, curriculum provision, the complex socio-linguistic contexts, and the different language profiles of the students.	
	Successes	**Scope for Development**
Management and Leadership	In general, the overall quality of management and leadership in Gaeltacht schools was found to be good. Gaeltacht schools were reported to be well equipped with a very good range of teaching and learning resources, particularly at primary level, although the range and variety of classroom library reading material in Irish was limited in some cases.	The boards of management of most Gaeltacht schools need to develop strategic plans for Irish which set targets with regard to the promotion of and support for the Irish language at school and board levels. Some post-primary schools need to review posts of responsibility and to maintain minutes of subject department meetings. It was reported that, contrary to the characteristic spirit required of a Gaeltacht school, boards of management in a small number of Gaeltacht primary schools conducted meetings through the medium of English.
School Planning and Development	The overall quality of school planning documentation in most Gaeltacht schools was found to be good. ICT and Moodle were utilised successfully in a small number of post-primary Gaeltacht schools to enable teachers to use the virtual learning environment to share whole-school plans, teaching resources and materials.	In the majority of Gaeltacht schools, there was a need for more meaningful and frequent use of ICT to mediate students' learning and to strengthen linkages between whole-school and individual teacher's planning. In general, it was found that teachers' planning and differentiated practices among teachers needed to be strengthened to ensure that students were sufficiently challenged.
Teaching, Learning, and Student Achievement	The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the Gaeltacht schools where evaluations were carried out. The small number of Gaeltacht schools where there was very good student attainment in Irish language competency were found to be characterised by: *strong leadership from the principal and board of management* *shared staff commitment and a high level of Irish language proficiency among teachers* *active parents' associations, good communication channels, and strong links with the community* *strong pastoral care and mentoring systems* *purposeful use of small group work in classrooms* *effective use of information and communication technology (ICT)* *involvement in a range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities.*	A key challenge identified in the majority of Gaeltacht primary schools related to the use of English as the language of communication outside the Irish lesson by the majority of students. The need to systematically teach the vocabulary required in Irish across a range of curriculum areas in Gaeltacht schools was highlighted frequently by inspectors. Less than half of all Gaeltacht schools used differentiated active learning methodologies and formative and developmental assessment approaches. In a small number of Gaeltacht primary schools, inspectors raised concerns about the standards of language proficiency and student attainment. In these cases, it was reported that there was a need to extend students' communicative contact with the Irish language in the school yard and in the teaching of other curriculum areas through Irish. Inspectors recommended greater usage of the structured integrated language programme Séideán Sí in many Gaeltacht primary schools to support the development of pupils' linguistic skills in Irish.

Literacy (Irish/English)	In all Gaeltacht schools, literacy standards in Irish and English ranged from good to very good. Pupil attainment was reported to be very good in a considerable number of Gaeltacht primary schools when an integrated whole-language approach was implemented with a strong emphasis on pre-reading skills, phonics and access to frequent reading and writing experiences. Very good learning was reported in almost all practical lessons in post-primary schools where students worked in project-based teams.	In a considerable number of Gaeltacht schools, it was reported that Irish lessons were often taught bilingually with English as the dominant language of communication among students. This limited students' capacity to challenge themselves cognitively in thinking through the target language. The quality of reading and writing in a small number of Gaeltacht primary schools was reported as weak. In these instances, students had limited opportunity to engage in oral language and free writing activities. The study of poetry and the implementation of whole-school oral language programmes required development in primary schools. Writing was frequently mentioned as an area requiring development and extension in both primary and post-primary schools.
Numeracy	Inspection findings show that the quality of teaching of mathematics in Gaeltacht primary schools was generally good and was very good in some schools.	Students' mastery of estimation and problem-solving skills using real-life contexts required improvement in the majority of Gaeltacht primary schools. The language of Mathematics and of other subjects taught through Irish was identified as a considerable challenge in the majority of Gaeltacht schools. Overall, it was reported that there was a need for greater linkage and integration of literacy and numeracy skills in Irish across subject areas.
Educational Progression	The majority of Gaeltacht schools were showing some progress in analysing test results to inform teaching and learning.	Overall, it was found that the range of assessment approaches used needed to be extended to include the involvement of students in reviewing their own learning. In the majority of Gaeltacht schools, there was a need to review, monitor and analyse student progression and standards of achievement more systematically.
Partnership with Parents and Others	Overall, parents of students attending Gaeltacht schools had positive views about the quality of teaching and learning provided. Strong links and good communication channels with the community, and parents' association, were evident in the majority of schools. Parent/teacher meetings were a regular feature of the Gaeltacht schools evaluated.	In a small number of Gaeltacht primary schools, there was a need for a more active role by boards of management to support the establishment of parents' associations. Many Gaeltacht schools need to extend parental involvement in school self-evaluation processes. In a small number of Gaeltacht primary schools it was recommended that annual reports (including relevant information on language proficiency) be provided to parents.
Support for Students	The overall findings regarding support for students were positive. The quality of care for students in almost all Gaeltacht schools was found to be very good. There were positive findings in relation to students' behaviour High motivation levels among students were evident, especially where students were provided with the opportunity to enage in initiatives, such as, 'Scríobh Leabhar', drama events, the Green Flag, healthy eating	Overall, there was a need to ensure a greater balance between in-class and out of class support It was noted that there was a need for greater coordination and linkage between the work of Cuntóirí Teanga funded by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the work of class teachers.
School Self-Evaluation and Capacity for Improvement	Overall, it was reported that boards of management and staffs were committed to the continuing development of the school.	School self-evaluation was at a very early stage of development in most Gaeltacht schools. There was limited evidence of the regular review of whole-school curriculum and administrative policies and also of the setting of improvement goals.

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Chapter 4

WHAT DOES INSPECTION TELLS US ABOUT POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS?

4.1 The basis of the findings

This summary of findings from inspections in post-primary schools in the period 2010-2012 is based on an analysis of information from:

- Almost 190 whole-school evaluations – management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLLs)
- Over 1,400 subject inspections
- Over 430 incidental inspections
- 62 programme evaluations
- Thematic inspections of planning and target-setting in 34 DEIS schools
- Over 29,000 confidential student questionnaires administered to students in second year and fifth year during the course of WSE-MLLs
- Over 20,000 confidential parental questionnaires administered to parents of students in second year and fifth year during the course of WSE-MLLs.

Whole-School Evaluation-Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) is the most commonly used form of whole-school inspection at post-primary level. It was introduced to the school system in 2010. WSE-MLLs are announced inspections as notice must be provided to enable meetings to be scheduled with members of the board of management, the parents' association, focus groups of students, the principal and deputy principal, and groups of teachers such as those with dedicated responsibility for special educational needs. During WSE-MLLs, the inspectors examine and report on four key areas:

- The quality of school management and leadership
- The quality of learning and teaching
- The implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
- The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for improvement.

Subject inspections evaluate teaching and learning and the whole-school provision for a specific subject in post-primary schools. This report draws in particular on the outcomes of inspections in the subjects of English, Irish and Mathematics. Subject inspections report on:

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- Planning and preparation for the subject
- The overall quality of provision and whole-school support for the subject.

Incidental inspections at post-primary level focus on the quality of teaching and learning in up to five learning settings in a school. They differ from subject inspections in that they are unannounced and are not confined to particular subjects but are focused on the quality of teaching and learning in the lessons evaluated. These lessons may range over a number of subject areas. Incidental inspections provide information on:

- The quality of teachers' planning
- The quality of teaching
- The quality of assessment
- The quality of students' learning.

Programme Evaluations evaluate the effectiveness of specific curriculum programmes at post-primary level, such as the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The inspections report on:

- The quality of programme organisation

- The quality of programme planning and coordination
- The quality of learning and teaching.

Inspectors' judgements about the quality of students' learning and the quality of teachers' practice have been analysed using the quality continuum illustrated in Table 4.1. This quality continuum is the same as that used by the Inspectorate at primary level.

Table 4.1: The quality continuum

Categories used in this report	Performance level	Examples of descriptive terms
Satisfactory/Appropriate	Significant strengths	Excellent; of a very high quality; very effective; highly commendable; very good; very successful; few areas for improvement
	Strengths outweigh weaknesses/More strengths than weaknesses	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; fully appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Less than satisfactory/Not appropriate	Weaknesses outweigh strengths/More weaknesses than strengths	Fair in certain areas but with evident weaknesses that are impacting significantly on pupils' learning; scope for development; experiencing difficulty
	Significant weaknesses	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties

The parental questionnaires used during WSE-MLLs carry a number of positive statements about different aspects of students' learning, the work of the school and the linkages between the school and parents. Student questionnaires also carry a number of positive statements about different aspects of the work of the school and the student's own learning. Both parents and students are asked to "Strongly agree", "Agree", "Disagree" or "Strongly disagree" with the statements or state that they "Don't know". This data is used in this report as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Analysis and reporting of parental and student responses in post-primary schools

Categories used in this report	Possible parental/student responses
Agree	Strongly agree
	Agree
Disagree	Disagree
	Strongly disagree
Don't know	Don't know

4.2 The quality of management and leadership in post-primary schools

Overall quality of management

During their evaluations of the quality of management and leadership in post-primary schools inspectors examine the work of the board of management, the work of the senior management team (the principal and deputy principal) in leading staff and students, as well as issues such as the general management of the school's resources and the school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement. During WSE-MLL inspections of post-primary schools in 2010-2012, inspectors judged that the overall quality of leadership and management was satisfactory or better in 89% of schools.

Quality of leadership and management: inspectors' evaluation (WSE-MLL)

89%   11%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Satisfactory   ■ Less than satisfactory
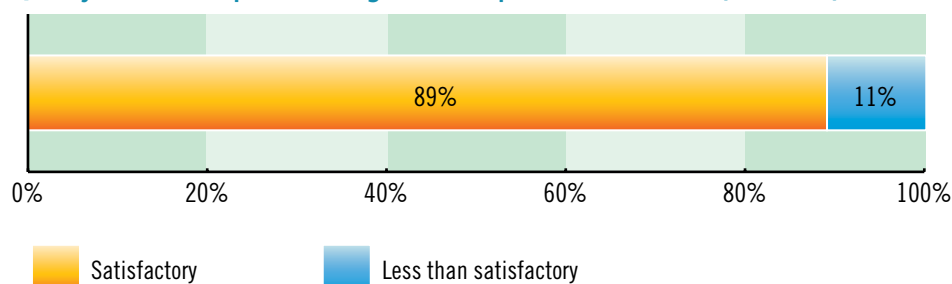
The school is well run: parental response

91%   5% 5%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Strongly agree/agree   ■ Disagree/strongly disagree   ■ Don't know
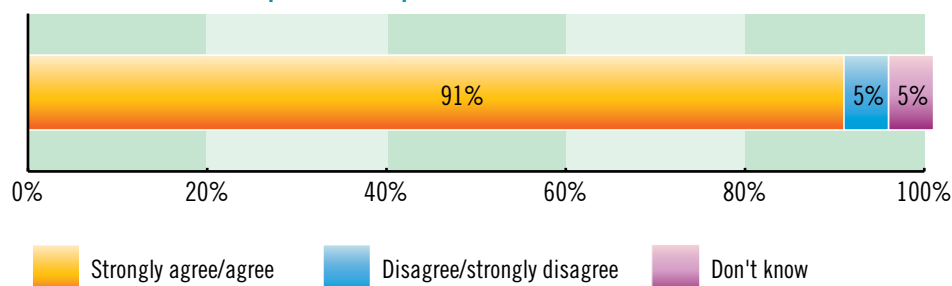
Parents were also well satisfied with the management of post-primary schools. 91% of parents surveyed as part of WSE-MLL agreed or strongly agreed that their child's school was well-run. Parents also had positive views about issues such as discipline and the work of the school to provide a safe and caring environment for students, but they had less positive views about how schools dealt with bullying.

Two areas for attention highlighted through parental and student responses to questions concerning the management of schools were communication between schools and parents and the opportunities given to students to have a voice in how their school was run.

Boards of management

In the more effective schools, inspectors noted that the boards of management engaged in a collaborative and communicative manner with key stakeholders in the school including staff, the parents' association and the student council. Most of these boards were also described as having a well-chosen focus on the development of teaching and learning in the school including, in some cases, strongly endorsing and supporting professional development opportunities for staff. These boards of management also had a clear vision for the school with established priorities for development.

Where inspectors reported that the work of boards required improvement, they frequently found that the boards did not have a strategic vision for the school. Most of the inspection reports in these cases also commented on unsystematic policy development, including lack of review of policies, lack of updating of policies and, in a small number of schools, on the fact that some of the key policies required by law were missing or out of date. Many inspection reports which commented on weaknesses in boards of management noted little evidence of educational leadership by the board and little attention to teaching and learning in board minutes. Less effective boards often communicated poorly with other stakeholders in the school such as the staff, parents' body or trustee body.

In-school management and leadership of staff

In-school management refers to the quality of the internal professional leadership in the school, usually provided by the principal and deputy principal. It also encompasses the work of other promoted teachers who carry responsibilities for many aspects of the work of the school.

While the posts of principal and deputy principal continue to be filled, vacancies for other promoted posts as assistant principal or special duties teacher have not generally been filled since the introduction of the public service moratorium in March 2009. This has eroded the number of such promoted post-holders in schools.

Inspectors reported that in many schools the leadership of staff provided by the principal and deputy principal was satisfactory or better. The senior management teams in these schools, made up of the principal and deputy principal, had a clear vision for their school that was shared with the whole school community. These effective senior management teams had a visible presence in the school. There were good communication structures with the staff and school community, and effective systems were in place to ensure the smooth running of the school. Good senior management teams were leaders of learning and supported the staff in their work. They focused on high standards in all areas of school life.

An important feature of effective senior management teams was their ability to build capacity among staff by promoting distributed leadership opportunities. Inspectors frequently commented on how, in the more effective schools, leadership roles were clearly defined and mutually agreed among all staff, and leadership positions were devolved in line with the skills and interests of the staff. There was also explicit reference by many inspectors to regular monitoring and review of positions of responsibility in such schools.

In contrast, where inspectors identified weaknesses in the leadership of staff, they frequently commented on poor communication between, for example, the senior management and staff or between the principal and deputy principal or between senior management and the parents'

association. In the more extreme situations where poor communication between staff and management was noted, there was a lack of collaborative decision making and a resultant effect on staff morale.

In other schools where leadership of staff and students required improvement, inspectors found issues such as inequitable distribution of work among post-holders, no regular formal review of posts of responsibility or limited opportunities for post-holders to build their leadership capacity.

Leadership of and care for students

Student and parent questionnaires and inspectors' observations show that the majority of post-primary schools care well for their students.

Most of the WSE-MLL inspection reports show that post-primary schools had structures and strategies in place to support students and address their specific needs. Frequently, these included care teams and class tutor and year head structures. In the more effective schools, inspectors noted good strategies for monitoring students' attendance, punctuality and behaviour and they reported that the schools' code of behaviour promoted positive behaviour and mutual respect. In inspection reports where significant strengths were identified, inspectors described the school environment as secure, friendly and inclusive, and they stated that the students' welfare and educational needs were central to the ethos of the school. In these schools, student achievement was promoted and celebrated and high standards were set for students in accordance with their ability, so that they were encouraged to reach their full potential.

During the lessons observed in incidental inspections, inspectors reported that classroom management was good or better in 96% of lessons.

91% of parents surveyed during the WSE-MLL process in the period 2010-2012 agreed that their child felt safe and well looked after in the school. 89% of parents also agreed that discipline was good in their child's school. Students' reactions to similar questions were also positive, but less strongly so than the responses of parents. 82% of students in 2010-2012 agreed that they felt safe and cared for in the school although just 63% agreed that the behaviour of students was good in their school. A strikingly high proportion of students (24%) responded that they did not know when asked to respond to the statement, *The behaviour of students is good in my school*.

My child feels safe and well looked after in the school: parental response

| Strongly agree/agree | Disagree/strongly disagree | Don't know |
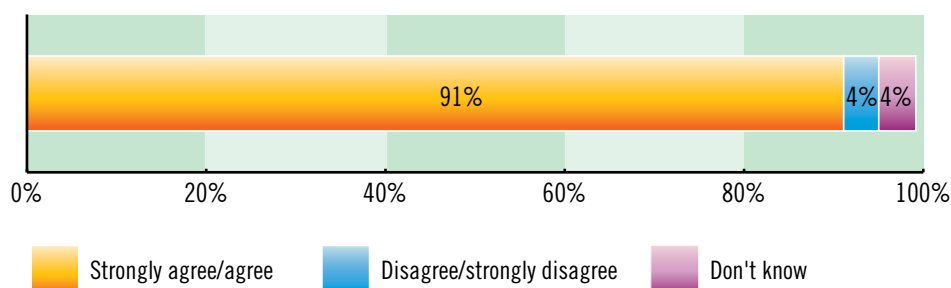
Discipline is good in my child's school: parental response

89%	6%	6%

Legend: Strongly agree/agree ・ Disagree/strongly disagree ・ Don't know
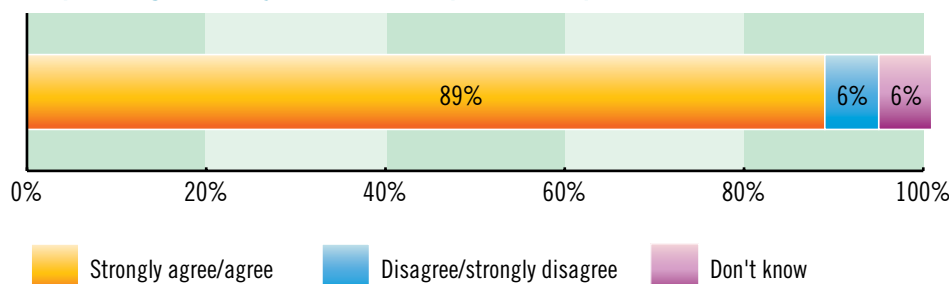
I feel safe and cared for in the school: student response

82%	6%	12%

Legend: Strongly agree/agree ・ Disagree/strongly disagree ・ Don't know
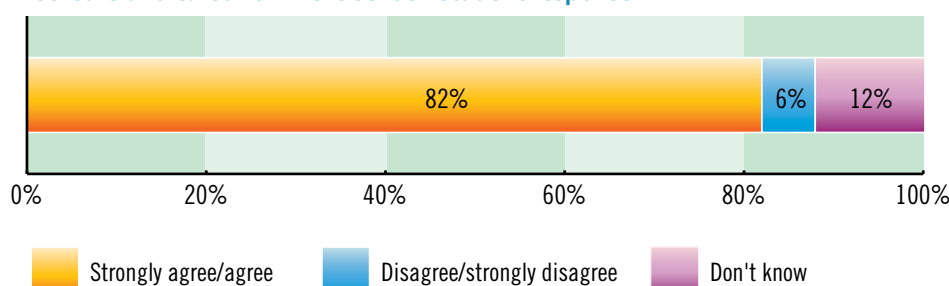
The behaviour of students is good in my school: student response

63%	13%	24%

Legend: Strongly agree/agree ・ Disagree/strongly disagree ・ Don't know
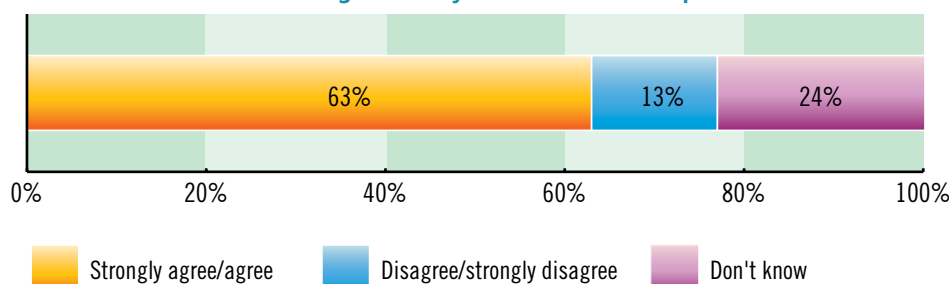
While it is evident that parents and students are, overall, satisfied with many aspects of the care for and leadership of students in school, a striking finding emerges in relation to their views on how schools deal with bullying. During the WSE-MLLs conducted in 2010-2012, almost one quarter of parents and almost one fifth of students indicated that they did not know how well their school dealt with bullying. This high number of "Don't knows" may have arisen because individual parents and students had no direct experience of bullying in their schools. However, given that an awareness of the school's anti-bullying policy and procedures, and confidence in their use are essential if bullying is to be reduced, this finding points to the need for schools to be proactive in their efforts to counteract and deal with bullying.

The school deals well with bullying: student response

71%	10%	19%

Strongly agree/agree   Disagree/strongly disagree   Don't know
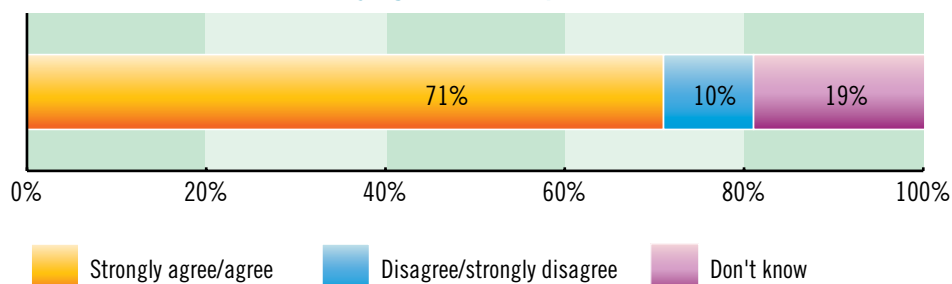
I am satisfied with the way bullying is dealt with by the school: parental response

68%	8%	24%

Strongly agree/agree   Disagree/strongly disagree   Don't know
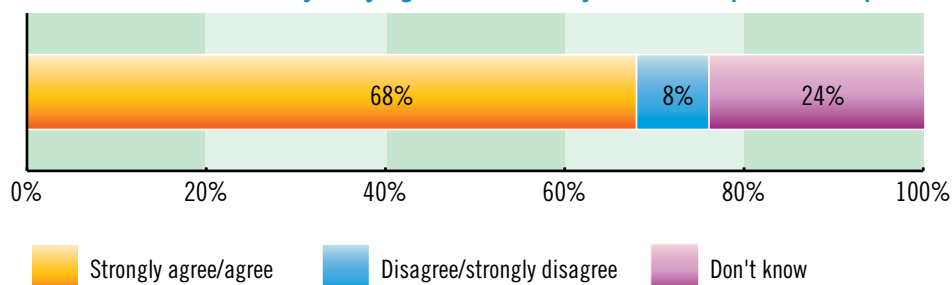
One of the weakest areas in schools in regard to the leadership of students, as identified through student responses, concerned the opportunities for involving students in the running of the school. Students' responses to questionnaires indicated that just 40% of students felt that they had a say in how to make their school a better place.

I have a say in how to make my school a better place: student response

40%	37%	23%

Strongly agree/agree   Disagree/strongly disagree   Don't know
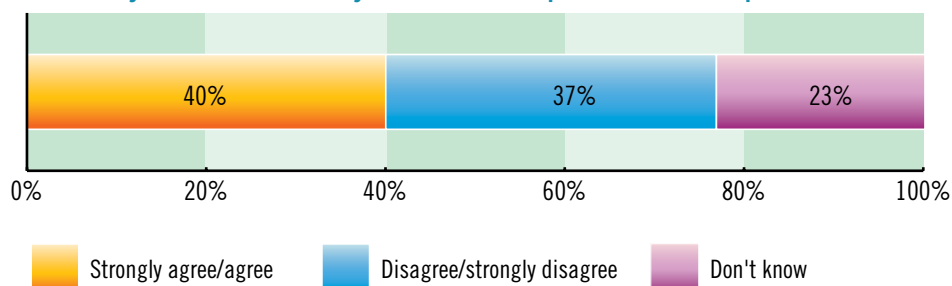
In schools where inspectors found very effective leadership of students, they often noted that the schools had well organised, active and effective student councils. However, some schools did not have a student council or the student council had limited responsibility or its role was unclear.

Communications with parents

Inspectors, in the course of WSE-MLLs, enquire into the quality of a school's communication with parents, including how parents are kept informed of the work of the school, school policies, and the progress of their children. Inspectors hold meetings with representatives of the parents' association[16], the board of management, and the school principal and deputy principal during which such matters are explored. In addition, the questionnaires administered to parents during WSE-MLLs provide a rich set of information on how parents feel about their own connection with schools.

Communication with parents emerged as a weak area across many post-primary schools during inspections and this was also reflected in the responses to parents' questionnaires. While 86% of parents surveyed in WSE-MLL inspections agreed that there was good contact between the school and home, a number of significant aspects of this relationship were noticeably less successful.

Surveys of parents completed in schools during WSE-MLL inspections in 2010-2012 showed that schools were generally successful in informing parents about codes of behaviour. 96% of parents agreed that they had been informed about the school's code of behaviour. 92% of parents also agreed that school reports gave them a good picture of how their child was doing at school and 85% of parents agreed that arrangements for parent/teacher meetings were good in their child's school.

There is good contact between the school and home: parental response

86%   10%   4%

| 0% | 20% | 40% | 60% | 80% | 100% |

■ Strongly agree/agree   ■ Disagree/strongly disagree   ■ Don't know
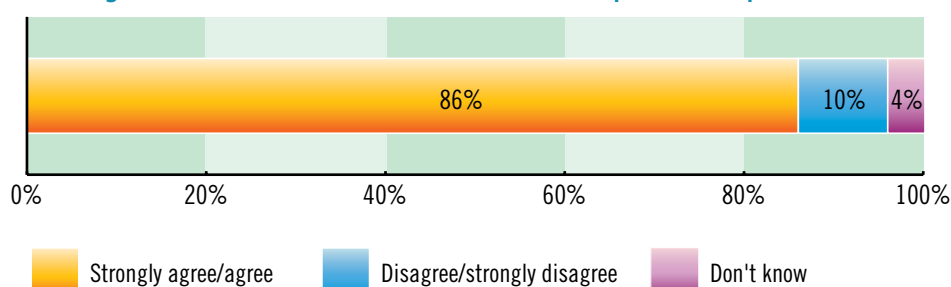
I have been informed of the school's code of behaviour/ school rules: parental response

96%   2% 2%

| 0% | 20% | 40% | 60% | 80% | 100% |

■ Strongly agree/agree   ■ Disagree/strongly disagree   ■ Don't know

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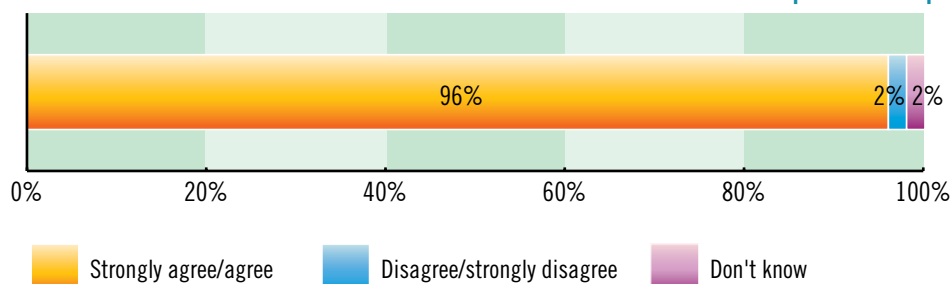
16 Where the parents' association is affiliated to the National Parents' Council-Post-Primary

School reports give me a good picture of how my child is doing: parental response

Strongly agree/agree	Disagree/strongly disagree	Don't know
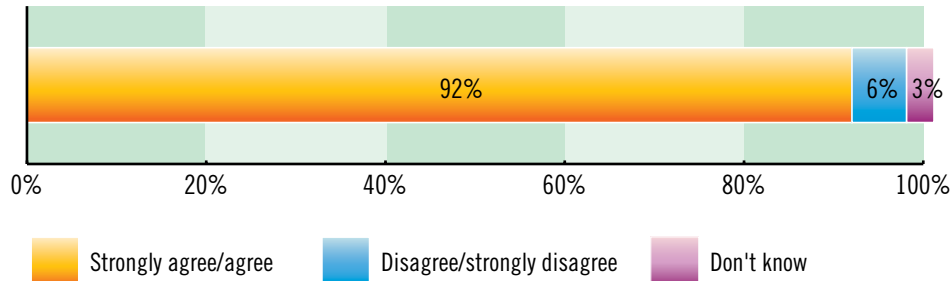
There are good arrangements for parent-teacher meetings: parental response

Strongly agree/agree	Disagree/strongly disagree	Don't know
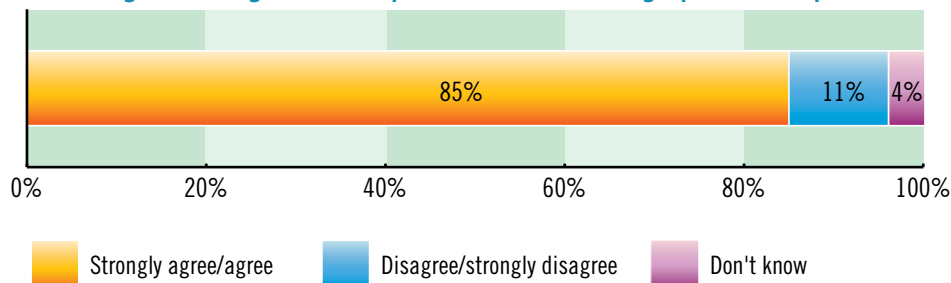
Questionnaire findings highlight the need for schools to improve the information that they give to parents in relation to subject and curriculum choice at key transition points for their child. Just 61% of parents in 2010-2012 agreed that they received helpful advice from the school when their child was choosing subjects.

I received helpful advice from the school when my child was choosing subjects: parental response

Strongly agree/agree	Disagree/strongly disagree	Don't know
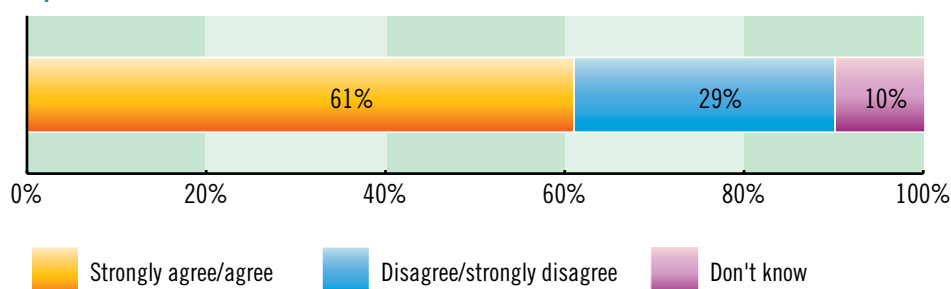
Inspections also revealed that schools could do more to make parents aware of the work of the school and to consider the perspectives of parents when making decisions about the school's policies. Over half the parents (56%) surveyed during WSE-MLL inspections in 2012 indicated that the board of management reported annually to them on the work of the school. Further, just 44% of parents surveyed during WSE-MLL in the 2010-2012 period agreed that the school regularly sought parents' views on school matters.

The board of management reports annually to the parents on the work of the school: parental response
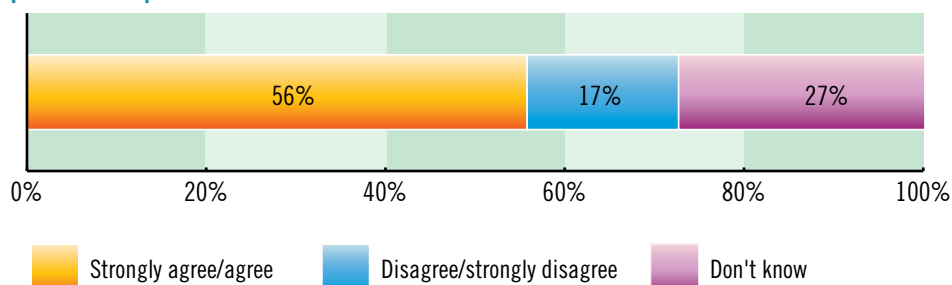
Strongly agree/agree: 56%	Disagree/strongly disagree: 17%	Don't know: 27%

The school regularly seeks the views of parents on school matters: parental response

Strongly agree/agree: 44%	Disagree/strongly disagree: 32%	Don't know: 24%
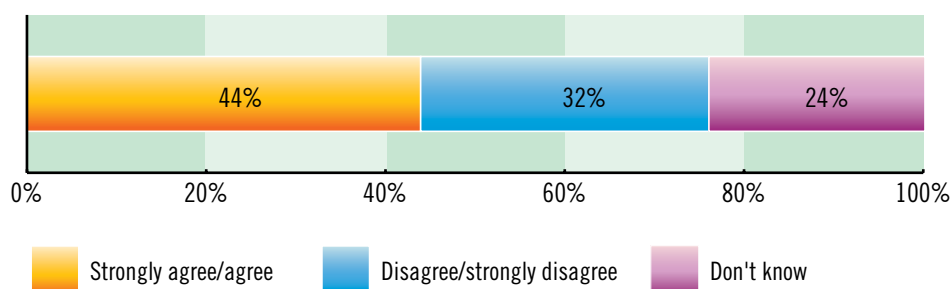
Inspections found that parents' associations also needed to improve how they communicated with parents. Responses to parents' questionnaires showed that just 51% of parents in 2012 agreed that the schools' parents' association kept them informed about its work.

The school's parents' association keeps me informed about its work : parental response

Strongly agree/agree: 51%	Disagree/strongly disagree: 28%	Don't know: 20%
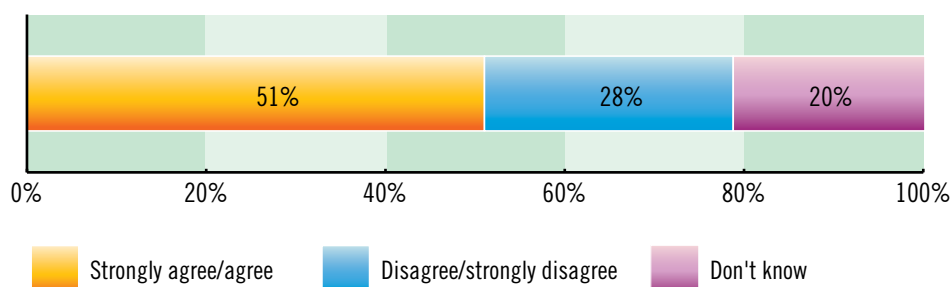
Managing subject and curriculum provision

The evidence from subject inspections indicates that school provision of and support for individual subjects was satisfactory or better in 89% of schools. Organisation of particular programmes was found in programme evaluations to be satisfactory or better in 87% of schools.

Subject provision and whole school support: inspectors' evaluation (subject inspections)

89%		11%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Satisfactory   Less than satisfactory
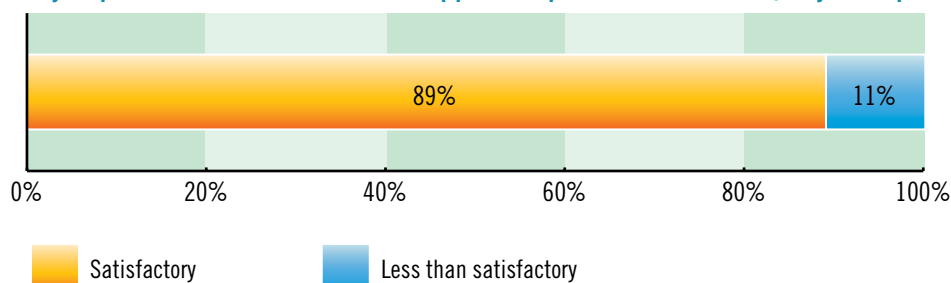
Programme organisation: inspectors' evaluation (programme evaluations)

87%		13%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

Satisfactory   Less than satisfactory
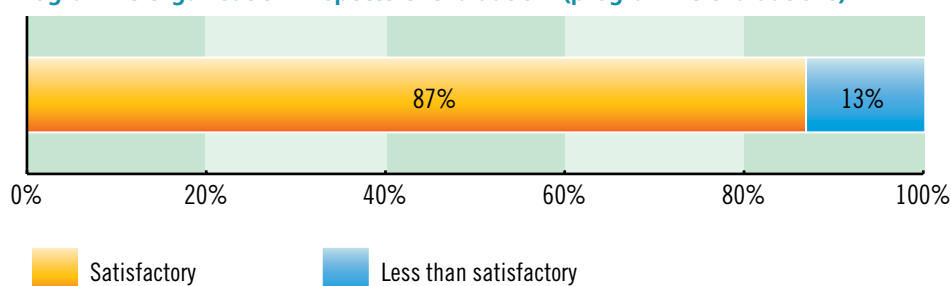
In schools where the best practice was evident, the school's senior management team allocated appropriate time for the subject for each year group and concurrent timetabling was provided where appropriate.[17] These schools also ensured that, as far as possible, teachers held appropriate teaching qualifications, were graduates of the subject being taught and were provided with regular opportunities to teach all levels (higher level, ordinary level, foundation level) and all programmes. Subject teachers were facilitated and encouraged to attend relevant professional development events. There was also very good whole-school support for the subject in terms of provision of information and communication technology (ICT) and other resources for teaching and learning.

Another feature of the majority of effective schools was that the school's senior management and staff were ambitious for their students: these schools sought to delay student choice of level in State examinations for as long as was possible and appropriate in order to encourage all students to take the subject at the highest possible and achievable level. Students were also provided with opportunities for co-curricular activities in the subject. However, despite the relatively good practice across schools, there is evidence to suggest that schools need to improve the advice that they give to students about the choice of subjects. Just 58% of students indicated that they got helpful advice and information from teachers about subject choices at key transition points during their time in school.

17 Concurrent timetabling enables the subject to be timetabled at the same time for each class group within a year. This facilitates movement of students who wish to change levels and also facilitates cooperative or team teaching where appropriate

I got helpful advice and information from teachers when choosing subjects: student response

58%	25%	17%

0% — 20% — 40% — 60% — 80% — 100%

- Strongly agree/agree
- Disagree/strongly disagree
- Don't know
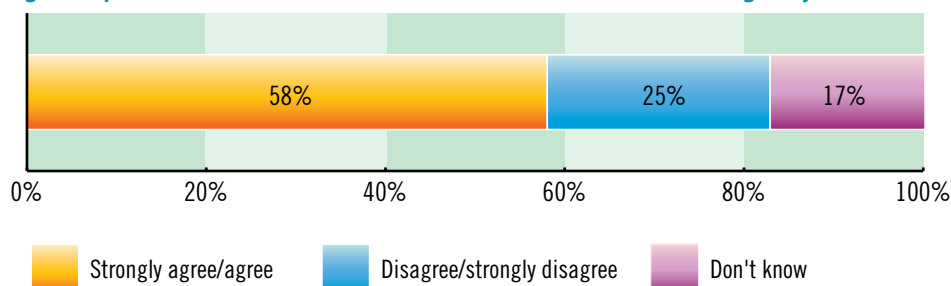
Inspectors identified deficiencies in timetabling in a number of schools. Examples of such deficiencies included inequitable allocation of time for subjects, uneven distribution of lessons in subjects across the week, responsibility for the teaching of the subject to an individual class group being shared between teachers, and limited access for students to Physical Education and SPHE.

Inspectors found that there was room for improvement in the quality of planning and preparation at subject department and programme level. Just 81% of subject departments and 85% of programmes inspected had satisfactory or better planning arrangements in place. Effective planning at subject department level relies to a large extent on the support of school management for the planning process. Good planning is also part of effective school self-evaluation (SSE). It was evident from WSE-MLL reports and other forms of evaluation that a number of schools have begun to engage with the SSE process.

Quality of planning and preparation in subject departments: inspectors' evaluation (subject inspections)

81%	19%

0% — 20% — 40% — 60% — 80% — 100%

- Satisfactory
- Less than satisfactory
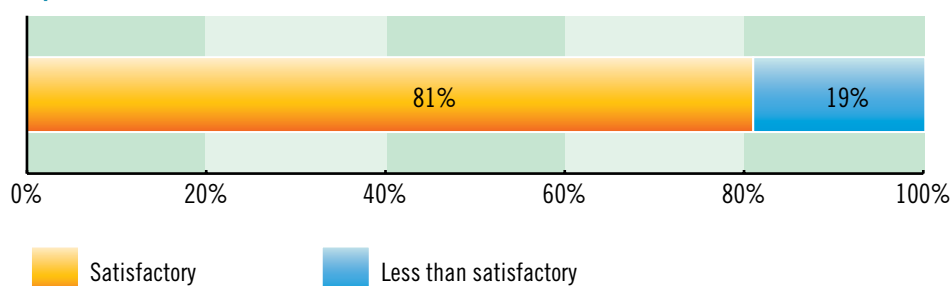
Quality of programme coordination and planning: inspectors' evaluation (programme evaluations)

85%	15%

0% — 20% — 40% — 60% — 80% — 100%

- Satisfactory
- Less than satisfactory

71
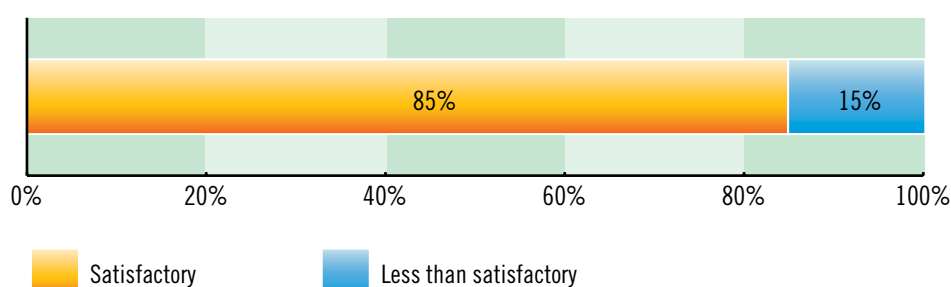
The most effective subject and programme departments discussed both organisational and pedagogical approaches at their subject department meetings, collaboratively developed subject specific plans for each year group, ensured there was clear progression in students' learning from year to year and used common assessments where appropriate. Where there was a coordinator for the subject or programme with a clearly defined role this resulted in better organisation within the department. Other features of good practice commented on by inspectors in reports included liaison between the subject department and the team supporting students with additional educational needs and annual reviews of plans by subject departments with clear identification of improvement targets. Such practices are in keeping with good school self-evaluation processes.

Management and Leadership: Learning from inspections

While the inspection findings about the management and leadership of post-primary schools during 2010-2012 contain many positive elements, they also highlight a number of areas where improvement can and should be made:

- **Strategic leadership by boards of management:** It is heartening that most boards, which are comprised of voluntary members, provide good strategic leadership to their schools. The evidence also suggests that most boards have a long-term vision for their school and have identified priorities for development. Patron and trustee bodies have an important role in ensuring that all boards have the ability to carry out this strategic role for their school communities.

- **Effective school leadership:** The critical role played by effective school leaders – principals and deputy principals, in particular – is evident in inspection reports. As noted in the opening chapter of this report, there have been a high number of retirements from and new appointments to these roles in post-primary schools since 2010. The medium-term to long-term effect of this has yet to be seen in the school system but the high number of new appointments means that the provision of high quality professional development for school leaders is more necessary than ever.

- **Real roles for middle management in schools:** One of the most common features of successful senior management teams observed during inspections was their ability to distribute leadership across the school. This ability often, of course, depends on the willingness of staff to take on leadership roles, both within the structure of promoted posts and outside of the post structure. The replacement of promoted posts to meet more directly identified school developmental needs while ensuring distributed leadership and real management opportunities for staff would be beneficial.

- **Improving communication:** The evidence from inspection reports suggests that many schools could improve their communication structures and practices. Boards need to improve their communication structures and dialogue with parents, and school management teams need to improve their communication structures and dialogue with students and give students a greater voice in their schools. Inspections have also revealed that parents' associations need to improve their communication with their member parents. This communication is not simply about getting messages across to parents: it also means that schools need to consult with parents in a meaningful way concerning school policies. The school self-evaluation guidelines published in 2012 underline the importance of accessing both parent and student perspectives on the work of the school in the context of evaluating the effectiveness of that work and planning for improvement.

- **Bullying:** Inspections show that high proportions of parents and students believe that their school provides a safe and caring environment for students. However, lower percentages are confident that their school handles bullying effectively. Almost one quarter of parents and almost one fifth of students didn't know if the school was effective at dealing with bullying. At the very least this points to the need for schools to regularly raise awareness of the anti-bullying measures that they have in place. In some cases, schools should revise their codes of behaviour and anti-bullying policies and ensure that these are well-known and implemented by staff. The cooperation of students in drawing up such codes and policies is an important factor in gaining acceptance for their provisions.

- **Using effective planning to drive improvement:** There is a need for better planning processes at subject department level in a significant minority of schools. School leaders have an important role in encouraging adequate preparation for lessons and, more generally, in fostering regular collaborative reflection on the quality of teaching and learning that occurs in individual classrooms. Effective planning and review will drive improvement and lead to better outcomes for students. In schools where the principals provide effective leadership, where staff are committed to reflecting on their work and where assessment and other data are effectively used, schools can identify the changes that are necessary to bring about improvements in students' learning.

4.3 The quality of teaching and learning in post-primary schools

During their inspection work in schools, inspectors spend most of their time observing teaching and learning in classrooms and other settings. During the period 2010-2012, inspectors evaluated the quality of teaching and learning in over 4,300 lessons in the course of WSE-MLL inspections. In the period 2011-2012, they evaluated teaching and learning in over 1,900 lessons during the course of unannounced (incidental) inspections. Inspectors also evaluated the quality of teaching and learning in over 7,700 individual lessons during subject inspections and in over 380 individual lessons during programme evaluations.

Inspectors' overall findings about teaching and learning in post-primary schools were positive in the period 2010-2012 and this was corroborated by the views of parents and students.

The quality of teaching

Inspectors judged that the standard of teaching observed in WSE-MLLs was satisfactory or better in 87% of lessons, and problematic in 13% of lessons. The evidence from other inspections was similar. In subject inspections, teaching was found to be satisfactory or better in 85% of lessons and below the required standard in 15% of lessons. In programme evaluations, the quality of teaching was found to be satisfactory in 88% of lessons and below the required standard in 12% of lessons.

Parents' responses to questionnaires completed as part of the WSE-MLL inspections showed generally good levels of parental satisfaction with teaching and learning in their child's school. 87% of parents agreed that teaching was good in their child's school.

Teaching is good in the school: parental response

87%	7%	6%

0%　20%　40%　60%　80%　100%

■ Strongly agree/agree　■ Disagree/strongly disagree　■ Don't know
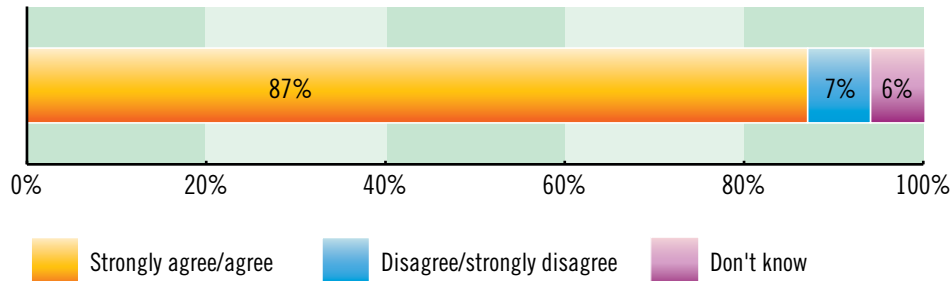
Students were also positive about the quality of teaching and learning in schools, though less strongly so than their parents. 70% of students surveyed during WSE-MLL inspections agreed that their classes were interesting and 74% felt that teachers explained things clearly to them. 87% of students agreed that their teachers encouraged them to work to the best of their ability and 77% indicated that teachers tell them how to improve their work.

My classes are interesting: student response

70%	16%	14%

0%　20%　40%　60%　80%　100%

■ Strongly agree/agree　■ Disagree/strongly disagree　■ Don't know
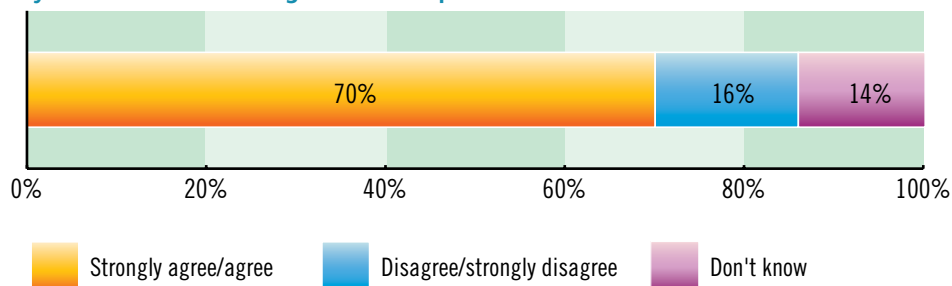
The teachers explain things clearly for me in my classes: student response

74%	12%	14%

0%　20%　40%　60%　80%　100%

■ Strongly agree/agree　■ Disagree/strongly disagree　■ Don't know
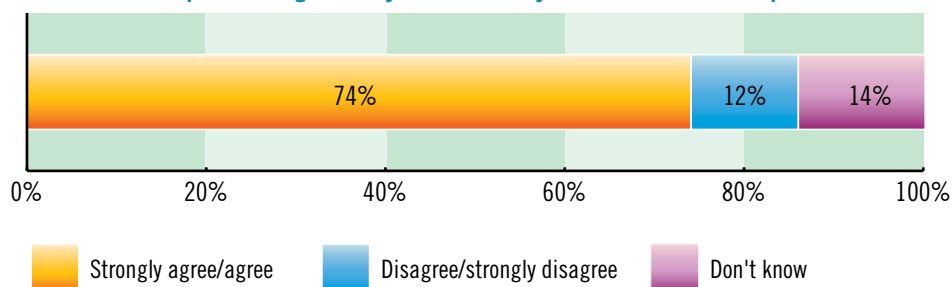
The teachers encourage me to work to the best of my ability: student response

87%	5%	8%

0%　20%　40%　60%　80%　100%

■ Strongly agree/agree　■ Disagree/strongly disagree　■ Don't know
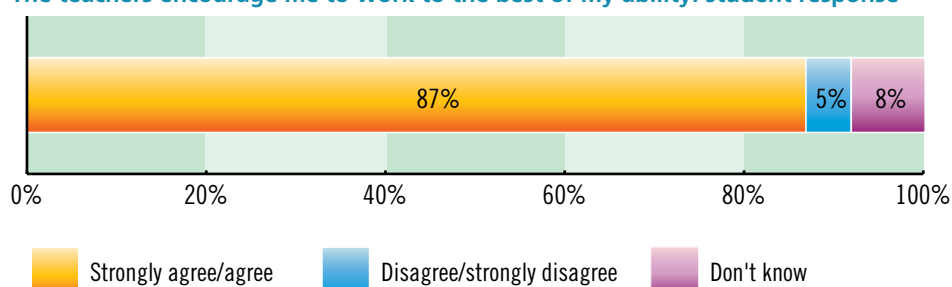
The teachers tell me how I can improve: student response

77%	11%	12%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

- Strongly agree/agree
- Disagree/strongly disagree
- Don't know
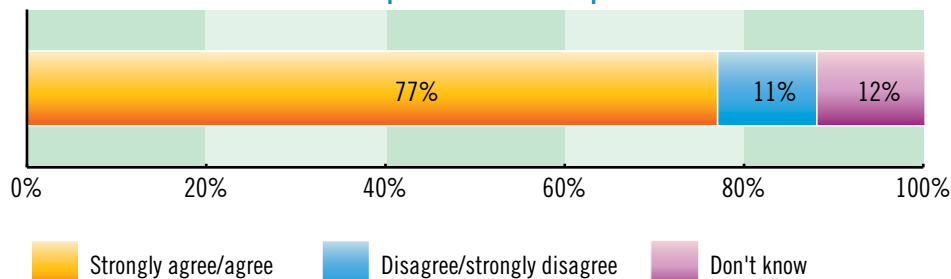
The quality of students' learning

Inspectors found the quality of student learning in the lessons observed during WSE-MLL inspections to be satisfactory or better in 84% of cases and less than satisfactory in 16% of cases. Similarly, in subject inspections, the quality of learning was judged to be satisfactory or better in 82% of lessons while deficiencies were noted in 18%. In programme evaluations, the quality of learning was satisfactory in 88% of the lessons observed and less than satisfactory in 12%.

Parents, too, were positive about their children's learning: 93% of parents surveyed during WSE-MLL inspections agreed that their child was doing well in school. 83% of students surveyed indicated that they were getting on well with their school work.

My child is doing well in school: parental response

93%	5%	2%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

- Strongly agree/agree
- Disagree/strongly disagree
- Don't know
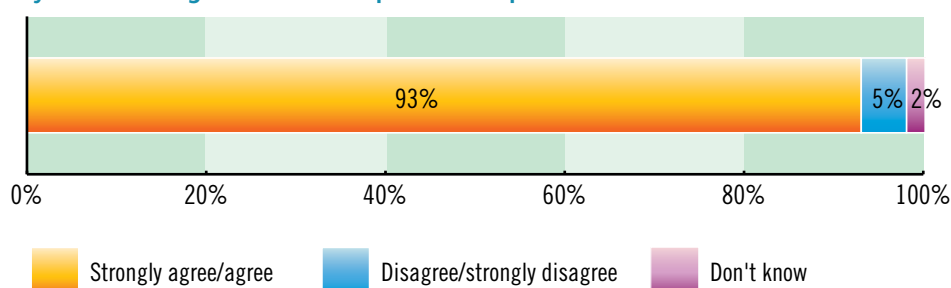
I am getting on well with my school work: student response

83%	7%	10%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

- Strongly agree/agree
- Disagree/strongly disagree
- Don't know
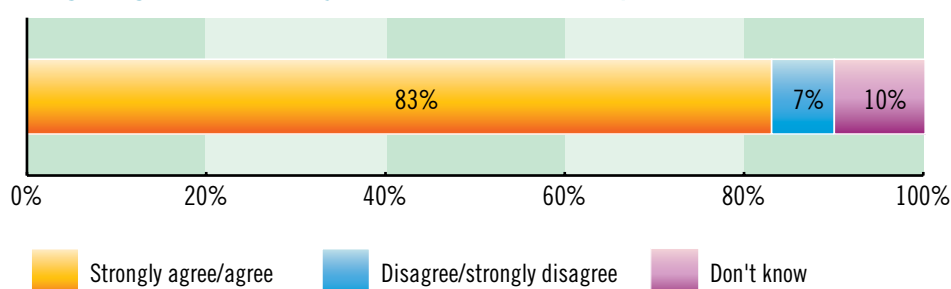
The quality of assessment

Inspectors frequently referred in WSE-MLL and subject inspection reports to the importance of assessment in aiding teaching and learning. Much of this comment focused on how assessment should be used to identify the next steps in the learning journey for students. Research in Ireland and other countries has shown that the effective use of assessment for this formative purpose (often referred to as assessment for learning) can make a very significant contribution to improving students' learning.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Learning from inspections

An analysis of the detailed information that is available from incidental inspections and the observations of inspectors in WSE-MLL reports and subject inspection reports provides useful information on the aspects of teaching that were most successful and the aspects where improvements could be made. Inspectors found during incidental inspections that students were engaged in the learning challenge posed by the lesson to a satisfactory or greater extent in 88% of lessons, students successfully completed the lesson task in 91% of cases and their understanding was evident from their contributions to the class in 92% of lessons. All of these are very positive findings.

- **Preparation:** In incidental inspections, inspectors judged that teachers' preparation for teaching was satisfactory or better in a high proportion of lessons. The learning intention was clear in 84% of cases, an efficient lesson sequence was evident in 90% of lessons and teachers selected appropriate resources to support teaching and learning in 85% of the lessons. This nonetheless leaves a significant minority of lessons where there were evident weaknesses in aspects of preparation.

- **Teaching approaches:** During the lessons observed in incidental inspections, teachers' ability to explain and communicate concepts and skills was judged to be satisfactory or better in 92% of cases. Good but less positive judgements were made about the use of teaching strategies and resources, both of which were found to be satisfactory or better in 83% of lessons.

  Overall, one of the weakest areas of teachers' practice was their use of assessment (which is discussed further below) and their efforts to differentiate the teaching and learning activities to suit varying learning needs and abilities of students. Appropriately differentiated provision, including differentiated teaching strategies and differentiated planning in the light of students' needs, was evident in less than two-thirds (64%) of lessons evaluated during incidental inspections.

  It was also clear that opportunities for students to work independently or collaboratively – both critical learning skills – were less evident in classrooms. Inspectors reported that the development of these skills was evident in only 77% of lessons observed during incidental inspections. This is similar to the finding from the student questionnaires where 79% of students reported that they had opportunities to work with other students in their classes.

  Inspectors found that learning was consolidated in 83% of the lessons during incidental inspections, suggesting that the learning intention was revisited at the end of the lesson. Inspectors praised lessons where links were made with prior learning and where instructions and explanations were clear and unambiguous.

- **Literacy and numeracy:** Findings from incidental inspections indicate that specific attention was paid to literacy and numeracy skills in just 76% of lessons. Similar patterns are evident in WSE-MLL reports and subject inspection reports. Further, inspectors found that most schools were focusing on the development of literacy as opposed to numeracy strategies.

- **Assessment practices:** Teachers maintained good records of students' attainment in the best lessons. Other good practice noted by inspectors included the assigning of frequent and purposeful work, ongoing monitoring of students' progress with constructive comments written by teachers on areas where students should improve, and the setting of common assessment tests where appropriate. In addition, the analysis of State examination results and school-based assessments was praised in many reports and frequently recommended where it did not occur. Inconsistent practice in assigning and monitoring homework was noted in some instances; linked with this was a lack of a whole-school homework and assessment policy.

  However, in a considerable number of schools, approaches to assessment needed significant improvement. Evidence available from subject inspections in 2010 and 2011 showed that assessment practices were less than satisfactory in 23% of schools. Inspectors also made reference in subject inspection and WSE-MLL reports to little evidence of assessment for learning strategies including limited evidence of written formative feedback on students' work in some cases.

  A not dissimilar picture emerges from incidental inspections in 2010-2012. In these inspections, inspectors found that teachers used opportunities to check students' understanding during lessons in 93% of cases but that students' work was monitored satisfactorily in only 79% of lessons. There is clearly a need for post-primary schools to make planned, systematic provision for assessing students' learning. Schools then need to use the information from assessment to inform their teaching approaches and programmes of work so that the learning needs of students of all abilities are properly addressed.

The remainder of this chapter explores in greater depth inspectors' specific findings with regard to English, Mathematics and Irish. Details of inspection findings in relation to other subject areas will be published from time to time.

How good is the teaching and learning of English in post-primary schools?

Inspectors' overall findings about the teaching and learning of English in post-primary schools were positive in the period 2010-2012.

The findings of 134 subject inspections of English that were conducted between 2010 and 2012 indicate that the overall quality of planning and preparation for English was satisfactory or better in 77% of schools.

The best practice in collaborative planning was evident in schools where there was an incremental approach to learning identified from first year through to sixth year. In these schools, appropriate learning outcomes and appropriate teaching materials including a range of novels, drama texts and poetry, were chosen, thus allowing students to enjoy a broad and balanced curriculum in each year of their studies.

In the 23% of schools where planning showed weaknesses, there was little collaboration among teachers in subject departments, a lack of focus on agreed learning outcomes and the skills to be developed, and some poor selection or preparation of teaching methods and/or teaching materials.

Regrettably, in many schools, the junior cycle curriculum on offer to students had a narrow focus with a limited number of texts being taught. Teachers in these schools did not seem to see junior cycle as an opportunity for students to experience a range of interesting texts and genres in each year of their course. Indeed in some schools, inspectors found that students were re-reading texts that they had already read in primary schools, or were encountering only one novel during the entire three-year junior cycle.

The importance of experiencing a wide range of fiction, drama texts and poetry has already been stressed in the Chief Examiner's Report on Junior Certificate English in 2006 and in the Chief Examiner's Report on Leaving Certificate English in 2008. In addition, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy places a considerable emphasis on the need for learners to have an opportunity to engage in a broad and balanced curriculum experience. The Strategy identifies issues such as the lack of connectivity between the learner's experiences of English in sixth class in primary school and first year, the focus on teaching to the examination, and the lack of opportunity to engage with rich and varied literary and non-literary texts and other texts in which boys tend to show interest, including digital media texts.

It is hoped that the specification for junior cycle English now in preparation at the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) will address many of the concerns raised in inspection reports, Chief Examiners' Reports and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. The draft specification provides teachers with an outcomes-based approach which stresses the importance of the development of the four key skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening among students.

Findings from English subject inspections indicate that the quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 87% of the English lessons that were inspected and the quality of learning was satisfactory or better in 84% of the English lessons inspected.

Quality of teaching in English: inspectors' evaluation (subject inspections)

87%	13%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

☐ Satisfactory   ☐ Less than satisfactory
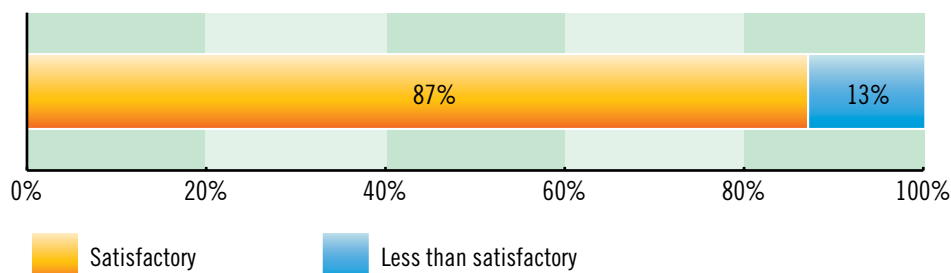
Quality of learning in English: inspectors' evaluation (subject inspections)

84%	16%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

☐ Satisfactory   ☐ Less than satisfactory
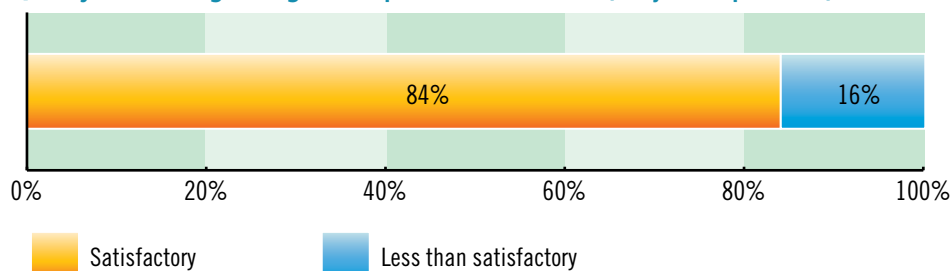
Notwithstanding these positive results, there is no room for complacency about the teaching of English in view of the importance of literacy for all students, including those who struggle to acquire basic literacy skills and in view of the decline in the performance of junior cycle post-primary students in international literacy tests. In 2006, Irish fifteen-year-old students performed at the "above average" level in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). However, in the 2009 round of the assessment, Irish students performed at the "average" level, ranking 17th out of 34 OECD countries. As noted in Chapter 1, subsequent analysis has thrown doubt on the extent of the decline in student performance in literacy in the PISA 2009 tests. However, it is clear that the PISA 2009 tests showed that a significant proportion of low-performing students in Ireland (17% of all Irish fifteen-year-olds and almost one in four teenage boys) were failing to master the literacy skills necessary to function effectively in today's society.

Where the quality of teaching and learning was particularly good, there was a strong focus in the lessons on the balanced development of the key skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teachers in these lessons provided students with frequent opportunities for reading and discussion that encouraged them to engage with character, situation and language in a way that facilitated analysis and empathy. Students also had opportunities to write in a variety of genres, and to display and/or publish their work. Teachers emphasised the development of students' personal responses in the teaching of texts. They also encouraged the accurate and imaginative use of language and commended students for good expression and for correct use of grammar, syntax and spelling.

A shortcoming identified by inspectors in some lessons was the lack of opportunity for students to actively engage in listening to language and in speaking the language in different ways. Students need to be provided with opportunities to engage in debates and drama and to discuss what they have heard or written. In addition, an over-technical approach to the teaching of poetry and drama in particular was noted in many lessons. In these lessons, students' personal responses were seldom elicited and teachers were more inclined to instruct students and to provide students with line-by-line interpretations of texts as opposed to facilitating the development of the students' own responses.

Hallmarks of good English lessons included students writing in a range of genres, with a tight focus on the specific task set; good mastery of forward movement in developing a plotline or an argument; fluent and efficient use of language; and the ability to use knowledge of their studied texts to good effect. The best practice in this regard was noted where teachers shared assessment criteria with students to help them understand what was required to achieve a good standard.

English: Learning from Inspections

- **Collaborative planning:** There is a need for teachers in English subject departments to collaboratively identify appropriate learning outcomes for students and appropriate teaching material to achieve those learning outcomes for each year of the students' engagement in post-primary education.

- **Texts:** Students should experience a wide range of literary and non-literary texts in each year of junior cycle. Care should be taken in the selection of texts in both junior and senior cycle to ensure that they are sufficiently challenging for and of interest to the particular student cohort.

- **Skills:** Students should be provided with frequent opportunities to actively engage in reading, writing, speaking and listening in all lessons. Their personal responses to texts should be

encouraged and developed and their ability to speak and write accurately assured. There is a need, from first year onwards, to make specific, planned targeted provision for students that are at risk of not developing adequate mastery of the basic skills. The use of the assessment information now available in primary schools should inform and support such planning and provision.

- **Writing:** Evidence from some inspection reports shows that students are sometimes not challenged by the writing tasks they are assigned. Many are assigned short, uncontextualised comprehension type questions which fail to develop higher-order skills. Appropriate emphasis should be placed on the writing process, namely the drafting, writing and editing of written pieces of work. Students require frequent opportunities to write purposefully and should be required and assisted to write extended compositions in a range of genres.

How good is the teaching and learning of Mathematics in post-primary schools?

The period 2010-2012 was one of significant change in Mathematics because of the phasing in of Project Maths in all post-primary schools. Project Maths emphasises student understanding of mathematical concepts and the use of contexts and applications that enable students to relate Mathematics to their everyday experience.

The need for change has been identified in a number of studies[18] and reports conducted since 2002. These include the Chief Examiner's Report for Mathematics (2005), the results of PISA 2009 which highlighted poor performance of Irish students in Mathematics, and reports of inspections in Mathematics undertaken by the Inspectorate. Further, the continuing decline in the uptake of higher-level Mathematics, particularly in senior cycle, meant that fundamental changes to the manner in which Mathematics was taught, learned and assessed were essential.

Findings from 124 subject inspection reports in Mathematics during 2010-2012 indicate that while schools generally strive to engender positive attitudes towards Mathematics amongst their students, in a considerable number of schools there are problems with the teaching, learning, assessment of and planning for Mathematics.

Inspectors found that the quality of subject department planning in Mathematics was satisfactory in 80% of schools that had a mathematics inspection. In such schools there was good coordination of curriculum delivery, of assessment events and of the development of written schemes of work. Other positive features of effective planning, although noted less frequently, were planning to address the quality of student learning, planning focused on teaching for understanding, advance agreement amongst teachers on common approaches to key mathematical operations and on strategies for linking the various curriculum strands.

In a significant minority of schools (20%), deficiencies in planning and preparation in the teaching of Mathematics were evident, particularly with regard to planning for the use of resources in mathematics lessons and planning for the assessment of students' learning.

Inspectors found that the quality of teaching of Mathematics was satisfactory in just 77% of the lessons visited during subject inspections.

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18 Elwood, J. and Carlisle, K. (2003) *Examining Gender: Gender and Achievement in the Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations 2000/2001.* NCCA Research Report. Lyons, M., Lynch, K. Close, S., Sheeran, E., and Boland, P. (2003) *Inside Classrooms: a Study of Teaching and Learning.* Dublin: Institute of Public Administration; Smyth, E. and Hannan, C. (2002) Who Chooses Science? Subject Take-up in Second-Level Schools. Dublin: Liffey Press/ESRI; Smyth, E., McCoy, S. and Darmody, M. (2004) *Moving Up: The Experiences of First-Year Students in Post-Primary Education.* Dublin: Liffey Press/ESRI

Quality of teaching in Mathematics: inspectors' evaluation (subject inspections)

77%	23%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Satisfactory   Less than satisfactory
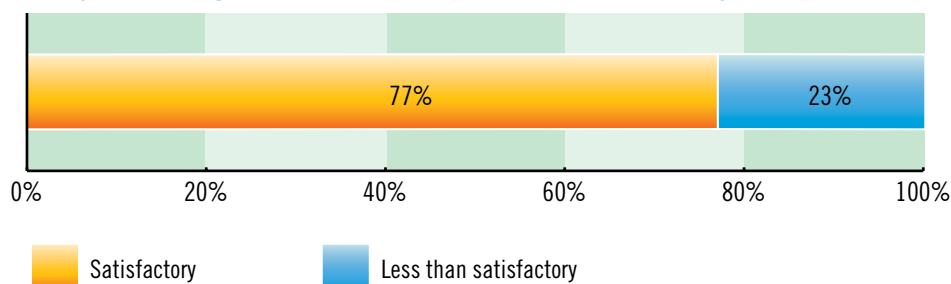
In the best mathematics lessons, the lesson content was treated with an appropriate degree of rigour and was differentiated to meet the needs of the students. There was also a reduced emphasis on teacher-led activities and the students were afforded opportunities to engage in collaborative activities. In cases where there was scope for development, the lessons were largely teacher led, the depth of treatment was inadequate and the students engaged in repetitive, context-free tasks which focused solely on routine procedures and skills development.

Inspection reports show that there is scope for developing how resources are used in the teaching and learning of Mathematics. Where resources were used, inspectors found that their use was generally to enhance the presentation of the lesson content rather than to actively engage the students in their own learning. In a small, but increasing number of lessons, resources are being used for investigation and hypothesis testing.

The finding that in 23% of mathematics lessons the teaching was deficient is worrying. Inspection reports indicate that there is considerable scope for improvement in the manner in which students are facilitated in recognising connections between mathematical ideas, exploring the Mathematics embedded in context-rich situations, finding multiple solutions to the problems they encounter in class and creating multiple representations to express their ideas. The lack of consistency in implementing the teaching approaches promoted by the new syllabuses across mathematics departments is also a cause for concern. Inspectors have noted that the depth of mathematical knowledge required to deliver the objectives of Projects Maths challenges some teachers.

Inspectors found that student learning was inadequate in more than one quarter (26%) of the lessons they observed during subject inspections of Mathematics.

Quality of learning in Mathematics: inspectors' evaluation (subject inspections)

74%	26%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Satisfactory   Less than satisfactory
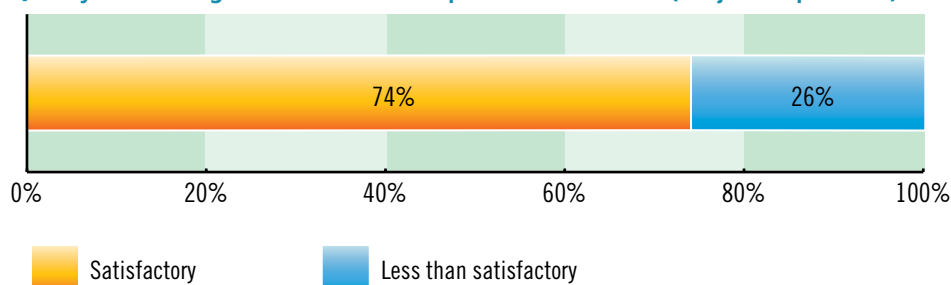
One of the primary concerns of inspectors about student learning in Mathematics relates to the breadth and depth of the response students are expected to provide to their teachers' questions and in their written work. It was evident to inspectors that many students were competent in producing correct answers to well-rehearsed questions framed in familiar contexts but were given little scope to explore the deeper meaning of the Mathematics underpinning these questions or the extent to which alternative approaches could have been used to arrive at the answers. Inspectors noted that teacher questioning focused, in the main, on establishing the degree to which the students had mastered routine procedures and skills rather than on applying these in unfamiliar contexts or in situations containing inherent ambiguity.

It is acknowledged that mathematics teaching must focus on skills and routine procedures if students' understanding of, and their fluency in, Mathematics is to be developed. However, student disposition and commitment are equally important. These can be developed through enhanced exposure to open-ended questions and situations where they are required to show their working processes and to use reasoning to justify their answers. This requires that the type of questions students encounter during school and homework be extended to include open-ended and multi-step questions. Students should be required to defend their reasoning as an integral part of the process.

Features of good assessment practices included the use across the mathematics department of assessment for learning to enhance the students' understanding and appreciation of Mathematics. In the more effective classrooms, the assessments reflected the changed emphasis of the revised curricula and featured differentiated questions to reflect the range of abilities of the student cohort.

Inspectors found that practices to determine the educational needs of students during the transfer from primary to post-primary school were generally very good and communication between primary and post-primary schools in this regard has greatly improved in the recent past. These practices were effective in identifying students with special educational needs or in need of learning support in Mathematics. They were less effective, however, in identifying shortcomings in the students' understanding of Mathematics or in identifying gaps in their basic skills. More work needs to be done to ensure that these gaps are identified at the point of entry to second level and that the first-year mathematics programme is tailored to address them.

Mathematics: Learning from inspections

While inspection evidence points to improvements in the delivery of the mathematics curricula in many schools, there are still evident challenges for teachers:

- **Teaching for understanding:** Teaching in Mathematics should have greater focus on teaching for understanding which emphasises the connections between mathematical ideas and engages students in finding multiple solutions, and demands that they establish links between the solutions and the processes used in arriving at them. Effective differentiation of lesson content should be a feature of all mathematics lessons. Particular care should be taken to ensure that the more able students are appropriately challenged.

- **Questioning:** In order to improve student learning in Mathematics, the range and quality of questions encountered by students should be extended to include open-ended and multi-step questions. Further, the need for students to justify their solutions and explain the strategies they adopted in addressing the questions should be adopted as standard practice.

- **Planning:** Subject department planning should include approaches to enhance students' learning and teaching for understanding. Common approaches to teaching the more important mathematical procedures, resource integration and strategies to explore and exploit links between the different curriculum strands should also be included.

- **Assessment:** Assessment for learning should be more widely adopted as a tool in improving students' understanding and appreciation of Mathematics. The outcomes of the assessments used at the point of entry to second level should have greater impact on the content and delivery schedule of the first-year mathematics programme.

- **Project Maths approach:** It is heartening to see the commitment of teachers to developing a Project Maths approach. Research conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) suggests that the degree to which teachers employ traditional teaching methods diminishes with increased exposure to the new syllabuses. It is anticipated that, with the passage of time and the continuing professional development provided to support the rollout of Project Maths, a greater balance between the teaching approaches deployed heretofore and those espoused by the new curricula will be found.

How good is the teaching and learning of Irish in post-primary schools?

The year 2012 was significant in the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish in post-primary schools in that it marked the first year of major changes in the Leaving Certificate examination marking schemes. The most notable of these changes was the increase of marks for the oral component of the Leaving Certificate examination from 25% to 40% across higher level, ordinary level and foundation level. The Chief Examiner's Report on Leaving Certificate Irish in 2012 attributes the fact that many students, across the three levels, performed very well in the oral part of the examination to the widespread use of Irish as the everyday language of communication in the classroom.

These positive findings by the Chief Examiner with regard to performance in oral assessment are supported by evidence from subject inspection reports from this period. A total of 121 Irish subject inspections were carried out in post-primary schools in the years 2010-2012 during which a total of 729 Irish lessons were evaluated. Findings from those published reports indicate that inspectors noted satisfactory or better practice in relation to the use of the target language in the majority of lessons observed. Inspectors also noted increased opportunities for students to apply their learning practically through the use of collaborative learning in group work, pair work and role play. This is in contrast to findings in the published report *Looking at Irish at Junior Cycle* (Department of Education and Science: 2007) which referred to at least one third of Irish inspection reports expressing concern at the overuse of translation in lessons.

An increasing number of inspection reports refer to schools submitting students for the oral component of the Junior Certificate examination. This is a positive development as it represents a welcome change in attitude to the use of Irish as a spoken language in lessons and to teachers' interest in putting their students forward for an optional oral. In a small number of inspection reports, teachers were advised to avoid the use of translation as a method and to ensure, instead, that the target language was used more consistently in lessons. It is hoped that the new specification for Irish as part of the junior cycle reform, to be implemented in 2015, will promote spontaneous language production, will cultivate confident speakers of Irish and will impact positively on language acquisition at senior cycle.

Many reports refer to Irish having a high profile in the school and to many positive interventions to encourage students' access to Irish as a living language outside of the classroom. Where these interventions or supports exist, unsurprisingly students' engagement in learning the language tends to be better and overall student attainment in the language is increased. The impact of cross-curricular and extra-curricular supports for Irish on positive societal attitudes towards Irish as a living language and its inherent worth on the school curriculum should not be underestimated.

Notwithstanding the positive developments in Irish, inspection findings with regard to Irish are significantly less positive than those for many other subjects. During the years 2010-2012 inspectors found that the quality of students' learning in Irish was problematic in almost one in three (32%) of Irish subject inspections and deficiencies in how the subject was taught were evident in 28% of the Irish lessons inspected.

Quality of teaching in Irish: inspectors' evaluation (subject inspections)

Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
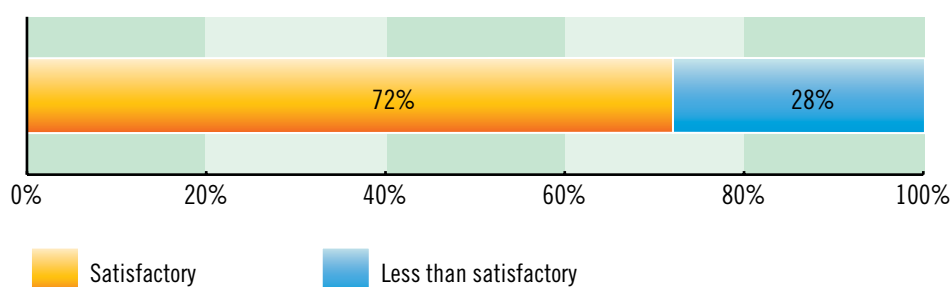
Quality of learning in Irish: inspectors' evaluation (subject inspections)

Satisfactory	Less than satisfactory
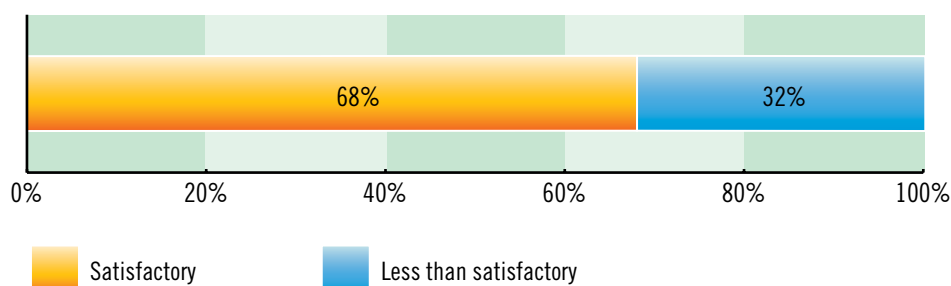
Inspection reports highlight a number of specific difficulties in the teaching and learning of Irish in a significant minority of post-primary schools. One difficulty concerns the use of resources. Inspectors point to the need for teachers to use a wide range of resources, including authentic language materials and ICT in lessons to challenge and interest students and to avoid an over-reliance on the textbook. Inspectors also refer to the need for greater attention to phonological awareness, a stronger focus on the acquisition of language structures and grammar rules and the consolidation of newly-acquired aspects of language. The need to challenge the more able student effectively is also noted, as is the importance of strategies to enrich the written and oral language of students. Further, teachers are urged to share information on methodologies and approaches. Worryingly, inspectors found that in a small but significant number of classrooms, teachers' own linguistic skills were deficient. Inspectors also advised on the need for teachers to attend to the development of all four language skills during Irish lessons.

There was scope for development in assessment practices in Irish in almost 40% of schools. Inspectors advised on strategies such as the setting of common tests with the inclusion of assessment of all language skills, the inclusion in school reports of marks for oral skills, and the careful monitoring of homework. Interestingly, almost all Irish inspection reports refer to the need to assess the oral language skills of all students from first year onwards.

The findings in relation to the quality of planning for Irish in post-primary schools are disappointing. 30% of the Irish subject departments inspected had deficiencies in their planning and preparation processes. Inspectors advised that the schemes of work devised by Irish subject departments should be more integrated and should include more detailed information on themes, methodologies, teaching resources, the use of ICT, differentiated approaches and assessment for learning approaches.

Irish: Learning from inspections

The inspection data from 2010-2012 illustrates clearly the challenges for considerable numbers of schools and teachers with regard to Irish:

- **Development and assessment of language skills:** Students must be given ample opportunities to engage with all four key skills in language learning, including oral skills through active methodologies and collaborative work. Due consideration must also be given to the acquisition and development of language structures and syntax, to grammar, to phonetics and to the use of dictionaries.

- **Target language:** Improvements in the use of the target language as the main language of communication in Irish classrooms are welcome. It is critical that the target language be used in lessons and that translation be avoided. Subject planning should reflect a very definite policy in this regard. A pro-active approach to promoting the language should be adopted in schools leading to higher numbers of students opting for higher-level Irish in State examinations, increased self-confidence and interest in language use and better attainment generally.

- **Planning and preparation:** Planning and preparation need to be comprehensive and practical. In addition, subject planning and schemes of work should provide information on themes and topics, methodologies, resources including the use of ICT, assessment for learning strategies and overall assessment.

- **Assessment:** Consistent monitoring and correction of oral and written homework with the provision of formative feedback is important. All language skills should be assessed from first year onwards, including oral skills, reflecting the importance of spoken Irish and the increased allocation of marks to the oral component of State examinations.

What is this spotlight about?

This Spotlight focuses on some key findings from the inspections of Youthreach centres. These centres provide an alternative education to young people who leave school early.

What are Youthreach Centres?

- Youthreach centres offer second-chance education and training to unemployed young people aged fifteen to twenty years who have dropped out of school early. Youthreach centres provide a way in which adults and young people may return to, or complete their education. The centres operate on a full-time, year-round basis and cater for almost 6,000 learners annually in places funded by the Department of Education and Skills. At the time of the evaluations, management of the country's more than 100 Youthreach centres rested with Vocational Educational Committees (now known as Education and Training Boards).

Objectives of Youthreach

- Overall policy on Youthreach provision is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Skills. The objectives of Youthreach are:
  o Personal and social development and increased self-esteem
  o Second-chance education and introductory-level training
  o The promotion of independence, personal autonomy, active citizenship and a pattern of lifelong learning
  o Integration into further education, training opportunities or the labour market
  o The promotion of social inclusion

The 2011-2012 evaluations

- The evaluations were undertaken by the Inspectorate in a total of 19 centres during 2011 and 2012. The inspection model used in these evaluations was shorter and more focused than that used by the Inspectorate in previous Youthreach evaluations. The model incorporated elements of the recently reformed WSE inspection models for primary and post-primary schools, most notably the use of questionnaires. Further, in line with the commitment in the Programme for Government, the inspectors focused on self-evaluation processes in the centres and the centres' capacity for improvement.

- In the case of each of the 19 centres, the inspectors evaluated and reported on the following themes:
  o The learners' experience:
    - Attendance and retention
    - Educational progression
    - Teaching, learning and attainment
    - Literacy and numeracy
    - Life skills
    - Child protection

  o Centre organisation and management:
    - Management and coordination of the centre
    - The centre's capacity for improvement and development

Youthreach Evaluation Findings Summary

Theme	Successes	Scope for development
General operation of the centre	The overall operation and/or coordination of the centre was found to be effective or very effective in 16 centres The majority of centres were described as having staff who were committed to the holistic development of the learners The majority of centres were well supported by the VEC	Staff morale and communication issues were noted in 3 out of 19 centres Fewer than half the centres provided well-balanced curriculum programmes Recommendations around the timetabling of the curriculum were made in 10 of the 19 centres
Attendance, retention	Good practices for monitoring learner attendance were evident in all centres A caring and respectful atmosphere was noted in most centres	Problems with irregular attendance existed in 5 of the 19 centres The admissions policy of 4 centres required review

Educational progression	Individual learning plans (ILPs) were developed for learners in 12 centres
	
	Effective strategies to encourage learners' progression were noted in most centres. These included:
	    appropriate links with the local community and support agencies
	    good links with tutors, key workers and/or advocates
	
	Educational programmes and progression routes were satisfactory in most centres
		Further development of ILPs was recommended in 12 of the 19 centres to ensure they:
		    were comprehensive and informative
		    charted the learners' educational aspirations and progress as well as their career plans
		
		The progression of learners after they left the centres was tracked in fewer than half the centres
		
		In a few centres the relevance of the core curriculum for all learners and/or the need to expand the range of accreditation pathways open to learners were highlighted

Teaching, learning, attainment	The quality of planning, preparation and selection of resources for lessons was found to be satisfactory in the majority of centres
	
	The quality of the teaching observed during the evaluations was generally satisfactory
		Some deficiencies in planning were noted in 5 of the 19 centres
		
		Learner attainment was appropriate in fewer than half the centres
		
		In a number of centres, recommendations about teaching and learning were made on matters such as:
		    differentiated teaching
		    sharing of the learning intention
		    assessment for learning
		    collaborative learning
		    active learning
		    use of ICT

Literacy, numeracy	In a small number of centres there was positive work underway in the development of learners' literacy skills	The work on developing learners' literacy and numeracy skills required improvement in the majority of centres Fewer than half the centres had a policy on literacy and numeracy In the majority of centres, literacy and numeracy were not effectively integrated in a systematic way across the curriculum
Life skills	Overall, staff in the centres were found to be committed to the personal and social development of the learners The provision of supports such as mentoring, advocacy, guidance and counselling was noted in the majority of centres	In 4 of the 19 centres it was recommended that guidance and counselling be introduced or expanded In 6 centres the provision of SPHE required improvement The curriculum made provision for the development of students' practical, vocational, ICT and life skills in fewer than half the centres

Capacity for improvement and development	In the majority of centres it was noted that management:
	    was committed to ongoing development of the centre
	    had engaged with the Quality Framework Initiative for Youthreach
		Fewer than half the centres had conducted an internal centre evaluation
		
		Fewer than half were described as having good capacity for the future development of their improvement agenda

SPOTLIGHT ON SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION IN PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

What is this Spotlight about?

This Spotlight summarises key evaluation findings about the quality of the teaching and learning of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in primary and post-primary schools.

What is the purpose of SPHE?

- The **Primary SPHE Curriculum** is designed to:
    - foster the personal development, health and well-being of the individual child
    - help him/her to create and maintain supportive relationships
    - help him/her to become an active and responsible citizen in society

- The **Post-Primary SPHE Curriculum Framework** is designed to:
    - enable students to develop personal and social skills
    - promote self-esteem and self-confidence
    - enable students to develop a framework for responsible decision making
    - provide opportunities for reflection and discussion
    - promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being

The SPHE curriculum

- The Primary SPHE Curriculum for each class level comprises three strands:
    - Myself (including a relationships and sexuality component [RSE])
    - Myself and others
    - Myself and the wider world

- The Post-Primary SPHE Curriculum Framework comprises the following modules:
    - Belonging and integrating
    - Self-management: a sense of purpose
    - Communication skills
    - Physical health
    - Friendship
    - Relationships and sexuality
    - Emotional health
    - Influences and decisions
    - Substance use
    - Personal safety

The SPHE evaluations

- The summary findings presented are based on:
    - data from 117 whole-school evaluations at primary level in which SPHE was inspected during 2010-2012
    - the incidental inspection of 164 SPHE lessons in primary schools during 2010-2012
    - subject inspections of SPHE in 63 post-primary schools (involving the observation of 301 SPHE lessons) between September 2010 and May 2011

- The post-primary findings are reported in full in the following publication:
    - *Looking at Social, Personal and Health Education: Teaching and Learning in Post-Primary Schools, Inspectorate Evaluation Studies,* Department of Education and Skills, 2013

Evaluation focus	Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Evaluation Findings Summary	
	Primary Findings	**Post-Primary Findings**
Overall	The overall findings regarding SPHE in primary schools were generally positive. Aspects of SPHE provision needing more focused attention by a considerable number of teachers included preparation for the lessons, assessment practices, and the provision of opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively.	The overall findings regarding SPHE in post-primary schools were generally positive. The most striking aspect of SPHE provision that required development in a considerable number of schools was assessment.

Teaching and learning	The overall quality of teaching and learning in SPHE was found to be good or very good in 93% of the primary schools inspected through WSE.
	
	Incidental inspections of SPHE lessons found that:
	
	    Learning outcomes were satisfactory in 86% of lessons
	    Appropriate teaching approaches, effective use of resources and consolidation of learning were evident in 88% of lessons
	    Pupils were engaged appropriately in their learning in 90% of lessons, and talk and discussion were well used in 91% of lessons
	    Teachers displayed satisfactory classroom management skills in almost all (97%) lessons
	    Pupils engaged in collaborative learning in just 65% of lessons
	
	WSE reports frequently commented on the positive atmosphere evident in classrooms (the school climate and atmosphere being one of the key ways in which the SPHE curriculum is delivered in primary schools).
	
	96% of parents indicated that they agreed that the school helped their child's social and personal development although a sizeable proportion (24%) indicated that they did not know how the school dealt with bullying.
		In almost all (83%) of the post-primary SPHE lessons observed, students demonstrated a good understanding of the material covered.
		
		The general level of teacher competence in facilitative methods to support experiential learning was satisfactory or better in 88% of the schools.
		
		There was a good balance between teacher-led and student-led activity in most of the lessons, with evidence of experiential learning in 78% of lessons.
		
		In 85% of lessons, students were active in their learning; group or pair work was evident in 78% of lessons.
		
		In a small number of lessons there was too much emphasis on passing on information and not enough on developing associated skills, attitudes and values.
		
		The classroom atmosphere was good or very good in almost all (99%) instances.

Planning and preparation	Preparation by teachers for 24% of the lessons evaluated through incidental inspection was found to be less than satisfactory and for 16% of the lessons, the teachers did not have written plans for SPHE.	School practices and procedures to support subject planning for SPHE were effective in 75% of schools. 83% of the schools inspected had developed a programme plan for SPHE but some modules of the Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum Framework were not adequately emphasised in 21% of programme plans. It was recommended that every school establish a core teaching team for junior cycle SPHE and senior cycle RSE, to be led by a subject co-ordinator. There was some exemplary reflective practice evident among teachers which supported on-going improvements in planning for SPHE and RSE and involved the subject coordinator playing a key role in leading a school-improvement agenda that enhanced teaching and learning in SPHE and RSE. The quality of advance planning and preparation by teachers for the lessons observed was, for most lessons, good or very good.
Assessment	In 33% of the SPHE lessons evaluated through incidental inspection assessment practices were found to be less than satisfactory.	Weaknesses outweighed strengths in the assessment practices used in SPHE in 56% of the schools. There was scope to develop strategies to consolidate students' learning in one third of the lessons observed.

SPOTLIGHT ON SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS 2010-2012

What is this Spotlight about?

This Spotlight summarises key inspection findings on the quality of special educational needs provision in post-primary schools. It draws on 50 subject inspections of special educational needs provision in post-primary schools during 2010-2012.

The inclusion of students with special educational needs in post-primary schools

- The inclusion of students with a diverse range of special educational needs in mainstream post-primary schools is supported by legislation and informed by best international practice. Dedicated additional resources are provided to schools to facilitate this inclusion. All post-primary schools (other than fee-charging schools) have a Department-funded learning-support teacher service. Further, additional teaching resource hours are allocated by the National Council for Special Education for students requiring additional support based on assessed levels of need and on disability categorisation.

The 2010-2012 Evaluations

- During the period 2010-2012, the Inspectorate carried out a total of 50 subject inspections of special educational needs provision in post-primary schools.

- In their evaluations, inspectors visited both mainstream classrooms and small-group withdrawal settings to observe the teaching and learning of students with special educational needs. They interacted with the students and with their teachers; they examined the students' work and the teachers' preparation and they had discussions with the schools' principals and teachers. They also reviewed relevant school policies and other relevant special educational needs documents provided by the schools.

Special Educational Needs Provision in Post-Primary schools: Summary Findings

Overall	The overall quality of provision for students with special educational needs was found to be satisfactory or better in the majority of the lessons evaluated. Aspects of provision frequently identified by inspectors as requiring further development included assessment and whole-school approaches to planning and preparation.	
	Successes	**Scope for Development**
Teaching	Overall, the quality of teaching was found to be satisfactory or better in the majority (90%) of the lessons evaluated. Strengths in teaching noted by inspectors included: *Purposeful lessons that took due account of students' needs and differentiated learning tasks accordingly* *Linkage of new material to students' prior knowledge* *Clarification and repetition of instructions* *Good use of "wait time" when questions were directed at particular students/groups of students* *Appropriate attention to the development of literacy and numeracy skills* *Subject-specific support* *Promotion of appropriate behaviour, communication, social and life skills*	Teaching was found to be less than satisfactory in a minority (10%) of the lessons inspected. Where there was scope for development of teaching in special educational contexts inspectors advised on matters such as: *The use of team-teaching to facilitate in-class support* *Pre-teaching of key words in advance of lessons* *Asking students to compose both questions and answers related to the lesson topic* *Using ICT to publish students' work; developing displays of students' work* *Ensuring that all assessment instruments are age-appropriate and fit for their intended purpose* *Using the attainment of individual education plan (IEP) targets to monitor progress*
Learning	Students' learning was found to be satisfactory or better in the vast majority (89%) of the lessons evaluated. In the more effective lessons, students' learning was well supported by strategies such as: *Sharing of intended learning outcomes with students at the start and end of lessons* *Repetition, consolidation and reinforcement of material during the lessons* *Effective use of ICT and visual imagery* *Flexible deployment of SNAs to support access to the curriculum and to promote the independence of targeted students*	The learning of students receiving special educational support was found to be less than satisfactory in 11% of the lessons evaluated. In their advice to schools regarding how student learning could be supported more effectively, inspectors encouraged wider use of strategies and resources such as: *Co-operative learning* *Paired and small-group work* *Graphic organisers, text highlighting and memory aids*
Planning and preparation	Satisfactory or better whole-school planning and preparation of provision for students with special educational needs was evident in 40 (80%) of the schools. Strengths in planning among those schools included: *The gathering of relevant information on students at entry from parents and feeder schools* *A focus on the development of literacy and numeracy* *Effective communication between resource teachers and subject teachers regarding their planning* *Well-constructed targets in students' IEPs with clear achievement criteria set out* *Use of a school template to record completed work*	Inspectors found that a significant minority (20%) of the schools needed to develop further their approach to planning for special education delivery. To assist schools in developing planning processes, inspectors, in their reports, advised on matters such as: *More active involvement of students and parents in the development of IEPs* *Ensuring that IEP targets are specific, measurable and achievable within a specific timeframe* *Sharing learning, social, behaviour and communication targets with relevant teachers* *The development of a whole-school policy on the support of gifted and talented students*

School organisation and provision of supports	Inspectors found that many (86%) schools were using the allocated special education resources effectively for their intended purpose. Typically these schools had:	Inspectors' recommendations regarding the organisation and provision of supports covered matters such as:
	Efficient systems to coordinate provision *Policies and practices to support inclusion* *Staff that were caring towards students* *Staff that collaborated to meet students' needs*	*Devising a student register to track the use of the allocated teaching hours and factoring those hours into the school's master timetable at the time of its construction* *Minimising the number of teachers involved in delivering the support hours* *Use of cooperative or team teaching for some students as an alternative to withdrawal* *Development and review of policies to guide provision of supports*

Chapter 5

MAKING SURE IMPROVEMENT HAPPENS

5.1 Schools driving improvement

Effective teachers and school leaders frequently reflect on their work and on the learning of their students. By asking themselves questions about how learning and teaching can be improved, teachers can improve the learning achieved by their students. For this reason, one of the key actions in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is to introduce more systematic school self-evaluation (SSE) in all Irish schools.

For many years, teachers and boards of management in Irish schools have used the School Development Planning process to identify what is working well in their schools and what might be improved. School self-evaluation is a way in which this process of reflection and improvement can take place in a more systematic way. As planned in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, schools were asked to build on their existing school development planning and assessment processes by engaging in school self-evaluation of teaching and learning from the 2012-2013 school year onwards. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this Report, the Inspectorate supported this initiative through the development of SSE guidelines, the use of a pilot SSE project in a number of schools, and the commencement of a programme of SSE advisory visits to schools. This work is continuing in 2013.

The recent focus on SSE reminds us of the key role that boards, school leaders and teachers must play in bringing about improvements. The commitment of teachers, leaders and boards to effecting change is essential if students' learning is to improve.

5.2 Inspections supporting improvement

Inspections have a role to play in encouraging improvements in teaching and in students' learning. Inspections provide an objective, external perspective on the work of the school. The interviews that take place with school personnel in inspections and with board members, parents and students in whole-school evaluations are intended not only to collect data for analysis but also to encourage the school community to consider questions about their work. Inspectors use opportunities for oral feedback and their written reports to acknowledge good practice and to identify where they judge improvements are needed.

There is evidence to show that schools and teachers take seriously the recommendations made to them in inspection reports and that they act on them. Following whole-school evaluations, for example, boards of management are invited to provide a school response document in which they may set out the actions that they are taking or are planning to take to improve the work of the school. These school response documents are published with the Inspectorate's report on the website of the Department. Generally, the school responses show that most schools have accepted the recommendations made to them and have either begun to act on them or are planning to do so.

5.3 Follow-up inspections

Follow-up inspections also show that improvement happens following evaluations. In 2012, the Inspectorate began planned, routine follow-through inspection visits to a random sample of schools where inspections had been completed in the previous three-year period. The visits were intended to monitor the extent to which schools had addressed recommendations in previous inspection reports.

The visits took place in a variety of school contexts - mainstream schools at primary and post-primary level, including English-medium and Irish-medium schools and schools within the Gaeltacht, special schools, High Support Units and centres for education.

The follow-through visits involved a selection of evaluation activities, such as:
• Meetings with principals or senior management teams
• Interviews with members of the in-school management team or subject coordinator
• Interviews with relevant teachers/members of staff
• Reviews of school documentation, records and students' work
• Reviews of resources and facilities
• Observation of teaching and learning in classrooms
• Interactions with students
• Contact with chairpersons of boards of management.

The follow-through visits assessed the progress made by schools in addressing the recommendations made in the previous inspection. An analysis of 90 such follow-through visits in primary schools shows that inspectors judged that 84% of the recommendations made to the primary schools had been fully or partially implemented and that no progress had been achieved in relation to 15% of the recommendations. 4 (1%) recommendations were considered no longer relevant. Inspectors recommended further follow-through activities in the case of 11 (12%) of the 90 primary schools in the sample.

Table 5.1: Progress made by primary schools in implementing recommendations in inspection reports as evaluated in subsequent follow-through inspections

Area	Number of recommendations	Fully achieved	Partially achieved	No progress made
Management	104	41	45	18
Communication	19	10	7	2
Planning	115	27	70	18
Teaching and learning	129	37	75	17
Assessment	34	15	16	3
Special needs education	36	3	26	7
No longer relevant	4	-	-	-
Total	441	133	239	65
Percentage	100%	30%	54%	15%

A similar pattern emerged in an analysis of 80[19] follow-through inspections conducted in post-primary schools in 2012. Inspectors judged that 90% of the recommendations had been fully or partially implemented and that no progress had been made in respect of 10% of the recommendations. 5 (less than 1%) of recommendations were considered no longer relevant. Inspectors recommended further follow-through activities in the case of 11 (14%) of the 80 post-primary schools covered in the sample.

19 This figure includes 79 regular follow-through inspections and one school being monitored by the Department's School Improvement Group

Table 5.2: Progress made by post-primary schools in implementing recommendations in inspection reports as evaluated in subsequent follow-through inspections

Area	Number of recommendations	Fully achieved	Partially achieved	No progress made
Management	112	50	51	11
Communication	1	0	0	1
Planning	85	23	54	8
Teaching and learning	86	26	56	4
Assessment	58	19	33	6
Special needs education	3	0	3	0
No longer relevant	5	-	-	-
Total	350	118	197	30
Percentage	100%	34%	56%	10%

5.4 Schools in which significant weaknesses occur

From time to time, inspectors identify a small number of schools in which significant weaknesses occur. In these schools there may be significant weaknesses in the leadership or management of the school or in the quality of teaching and learning. In some cases, several aspects of the work of the school are poor. These findings are set out in the reports of the inspections and in the oral feedback provided to school staffs and boards of management.

While responsibility for improving the work of the school rests primarily with the school's board and leadership, the Department has recognised that in some of these schools, additional inputs are required to ensure that improvement happens. Given the independent nature of school management and the role of the patron in Irish schools, the powers available to the Department are limited. This has meant that in some of these cases it has been necessary for the Department to engage with the patron, trustees or management of the school to ensure that the need for improvement and change is fully appreciated by the school and by those responsible for its management. The engagement of the Department with the school authorities is managed through the Department's School Governance section with the assistance of the Inspectorate. This work is overseen by the Department's School Improvement Group. This is an internal coordinating group of senior officials drawn from the Department's School Governance section and the Inspectorate (and involving officials from other sections of the Department, as necessary).

Experience here in Ireland and in other countries has shown that it is a difficult and normally a slow task to improve the quality of teaching, learning and management in such schools. The Department also believes that these schools often require an intervention that is tailored to the particular circumstances and context of the school. Therefore, a range of specific monitoring actions takes place. The actions that have taken place in the case of these schools include:
• Meetings with the management of the school or the patron body
• The provision of assistance from the school support services such as the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) or from the patron or trustee bodies
• Changes to the management or staffing of the school
• The provision of progress reports by the schools' boards to the Department
• Further inspection visits
• Financial penalties on boards of management.

As Table 5.3 demonstrates, the process of engagement with these schools by the School Improvement Group has shown a positive impact on a proportion of these schools. In the period from the establishment of the School Improvement Group in February 2008 until the end of December 2012, a total of 68 schools were referred to the School Improvement Group and were subject to a specific monitoring process. Of the total number of schools referred, 21 (31%) cases were resolved by December 2012 either through showing improvement or through the closure of the school by the patron. 47 (69%) schools that were referred to the School Improvement Group did not show sufficient evidence of improvement to be removed from this monitoring process or had been in the process a relatively short time by December 2012.

Table 5.3 Schools referred to the Department's School Improvement Group in the period February 2008 to December 2012

	Primary	Post-primary	Total
Schools referred to the School Improvement Group	41	27	68
Cases resolved	16	5	21
Active Cases	25	22	47

5.5 Reviews of the work of teachers under Section 24 of the Education Act 1998

Revised arrangements to enable school boards to take appropriate steps to deal with significant difficulties that may arise regarding a teacher's professional competence and/or conduct were negotiated and agreed by the education partners in autumn 2009. These were published in Department Circulars 59/2009 and 60/2009 entitled *Revised Procedures for Suspension and Dismissal of Teachers under Section 24(3) of the Education Act 1998.*

The procedures provide for a staged process whereby boards of management can bring their dissatisfaction with a teacher's work or behaviour to the attention of the teacher and require him/her to engage in steps to bring about improvement. When professional competence issues are raised in this process, the school must put in place an improvement plan and any necessary supports for the teacher. The Revised Procedures are intended to resolve most cases at the school-based informal or formal stages of the procedures. If, however, the school's board remains dissatisfied with the teacher's work, the Revised Procedures provide that the board should request a review of the teacher's work by the Inspectorate. The report from the Inspectorate may be used by the board in its deliberations concerning the teacher's employment.

In the period 2010-2012, boards of management requested the Chief Inspector to conduct reviews of the work of two teachers. The requests were acceded to in both cases and inspections of the work of the teachers were completed.

Chapter 6

6.1 Introduction

The Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012 reports on quality and standards in Irish primary and post-primary schools and centres for education that were inspected by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills. It describes a significant programme of reform undertaken to improve the inspection of schools. It also highlights key strengths and key areas for development in schools and centres for education.

6.2 Context 2010-2012

The period 2010 to 2012 was one of change and challenge for those involved in providing, leading and quality assuring education in schools and centres for education. These changes and challenges arose from the growth of student numbers, from the financial crisis in which Ireland found itself in the period and from the need to address a number of concerns about the quality of the education provided in Irish schools. All of these factors affected the environment in which the work of schools and the Inspectorate took place. Some key factors and developments included the following:

Student and teacher numbers

- The number of students in schools and centres for education grew by over 27,500 (5.5%) at primary level and by over 21,500 (6.3%) at post-primary level in the period 2010-2012.

- The numbers of whole-time equivalent teachers in primary, special and post-primary schools remained more or less the same, rising only slightly from 57,510 to 57,549.

- Over the period 2010-2012, the pupil-teacher ratio (the number of pupils divided by the number of classroom teachers and support teachers) grew in primary schools from 15.7 to 16.4 and in post-primary schools from 13.6 to 14.3. The impact of growing enrolments and relatively static teacher numbers was reflected in the average class size in primary schools which increased from 24.3 to 24.8.

Spending on education

- Schools, and the education system generally, certainly experienced considerable financial pressures in the period 2010-2012, yet current expenditure on education at primary and second level actually rose slightly from €3.218 billion to €3.263 billion at primary level and from €3.070 billion to €3.147 billion at post-primary level.

- A number of financial and staffing measures impacted on schools and centres for education, including decreases in capitation grants to schools, the non-replacement of many promoted posts in schools and some changes in the staffing schedules used to determine the appointment of teachers to schools. The staffing schedules for primary schools were changed in 2009/10 but were unaltered for most of these schools thereafter.

- Significant changes occurred in the leadership and staffing of schools because of retirement schemes implemented across the public service and the general non-replacement of promoted posts such as assistant principal and special duties posts.

- Despite financial pressures, the Government took measures to protect teaching and learning in schools. Teacher vacancies and vacancies for principal and deputy principal posts were excluded from the moratorium on public service recruitment which was introduced by Government in March 2009. This meant that these posts continued to be filled when they arose in schools in accordance with specified enrolment thresholds (staffing schedules).

- Expenditure on the Department's action plan for educational inclusion (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools – DEIS) was maintained and the first evaluations of DEIS demonstrated the effectiveness of aspects of the plan, especially in primary schools.

- The provision of supports for students with special educational needs increased from €1.2 billion in 2010 to €1.3 billion in 2012 representing a spending increase from 14% to 15% of the total Department budget.

The provision of support services

- The Department continued to fund a range of support services to schools though the spending on these services was curtailed. The services supported initiatives targeted at improving practice and standards in literacy, numeracy, teaching and learning in DEIS schools, improved special education provision, school leadership and management, and the implementation of Project Maths, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and child protection procedures.

- Continuing substantial investment was made over the 2010 to 2012 period in expanding and improving school infrastructure at both primary and post-primary levels. Total capital investment in school infrastructure over the period amounted to €1.327 billion.

An ambitious programme of reform in education

- An ambitious programme of reform in education was initiated in the 2011-2012 period. Several of the significant elements in that programme of reform were outlined in *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020* launched by the Minister for Education and Skills in July 2011. The Strategy initiated wide-ranging reforms in teacher education, curriculum content, the assessment and reporting of student progress, and evaluation and assessment policies.

- Developments included the continued roll-out of Project Maths at post-primary level, the introduction (from summer 2012) of mandatory standardised testing in primary schools and the introduction of school self-evaluation to complement external inspection from the 2012/13 school year. The Minister also announced a fundamental reform of Junior Cycle in October 2012 to affect students commencing second-level schooling from September 2014 onwards.

6.3 Reforming the work of the Inspectorate

The period 2010-2012 was a period of significant reform in the work of the Inspectorate. Substantial changes were made to enable the Inspectorate to deliver a more effective quality assurance system

of Irish schools while at the same time using the resources available more effectively. The reforms to the work of the Inspectorate were implemented in a context where overall staffing had fallen very considerably and quickly in 2009 and in the following years. Key developments have included the following:

A range of inspection approaches to provide more frequent and more effective inspection

- A range of new or revised inspection models was developed for use in both primary and post-primary schools and in centres for education so that the frequency and effectiveness of inspection could be increased. These changes included the use of unannounced (incidental) inspections in schools and centres for education, more efficient whole-school type evaluations and shorter notice periods for many notified evaluations.

- Inspectors conducted 2,133 inspections in primary schools in the period 2010-2012, excluding inspections of the work of individual teachers on probation. This significant increase in inspection coverage meant that inspection visits of some type took place in over half of all primary schools in the country.

- Inspectors conducted a growing number of inspections of the work of probationary teachers in primary schools on behalf of the Teaching Council. The work of 6,424 newly qualified teachers was inspected in the school years 2009/10, 2010/11, and 2011/12.

- The total number of inspections in post-primary schools and centres for education grew from 706 in 2010 to 903 in 2012. Between 2011-2012 inspections of some type occurred in 93% of second-level schools.

- In 2012, the Inspectorate took a decision to make a once-off reduction in the number of whole-school evaluations to accommodate the introduction of advisory visits to school staffs to support the roll-out of school self-evaluation (SSE). These advisory visits covered 354 primary schools and 160 post-primary schools in November and December 2012.

More focused external inspection

- All inspections seek to recognise the strengths of schools and encourage good practice. They also focus on how schools can improve and they seek to provide sound recommendations for teachers, school leaders and boards of management.

- The Inspectorate chose to place the focus of inspection work on a relatively small number of key features of schools that have most impact on the quality of the learning experience. These include the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms and the quality of leadership and management.

- The planning of inspections has become more focused. Having a range of inspection models available has allowed the Inspectorate to target a proportion of our inspection activity where the risk to students' learning is greatest. For example, information acquired during short, unannounced inspections can now be used to highlight where further, more intensive inspections such as subject inspections or whole-school evaluations, are needed.

A stronger voice for parents and students

- To strengthen the voice of students and parents in evaluations, confidential learner and parental questionnaires were introduced as part of whole-school evaluations in primary and post-primary schools in 2010. These questionnaires collect information on the views of parents and students about the work of the school and their experiences at the school.

Follow-up to inspections

- Systematic follow-up procedures were developed and introduced on a pilot basis in 2012 to enable the Inspectorate to monitor how well school communities had responded to the recommendations made in the previous inspections. These follow-through inspections were conducted in 98 primary schools and 79 post-primary schools in 2012.

- Inspectors prioritised follow-up actions in schools with the most serious weaknesses. Since 2008, inspectors have collaborated with officials from the School Governance section of the Department of Education and Skills on the Department's School Improvement Group. This group seeks to coordinate the Department's engagement with schools where very serious weaknesses are identified. The approaches used vary depending on the nature of the issues in the school.

School self-evaluation

- The Inspectorate has supported the formal introduction of school self-evaluation through the development and publication of school self-evaluation guidelines for primary and post-primary schools, the provision of online support to schools and a programme of advisory visits to schools.

Collaboration with others

- The Inspectorate collaborated closely with stakeholders in the school system and beyond in the development of its inspection processes. It has also cooperated with other Inspectorates and research bodies. This has helped to evolve robust yet well-accepted evaluation models and to communicate that the primary focus of school inspection is on improving learning and teaching.

Staffing

- Owing to the effect of the public service recruitment moratorium, the staffing of the Inspectorate declined from 154 inspectors at the beginning of 2009 to 116 inspectors in June 2012 and, following a recruitment campaign, rose to 124 inspectors by December 2012.

6.4 What does inspection tell us about primary and post-primary schools and centres for education?

The findings in this report are based on information collected during a wide range of inspections, including:

o almost 800 whole-school evaluations (WSE) at primary level and almost 190 whole-school evaluations – management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLLs) at post-primary level

o over 1,100 incidental inspections at primary level and over 430 incidental inspections at post-primary level

o thematic inspections of planning and target setting in 68 DEIS schools (34 primary and 34 post-primary)

o over 1,400 subject inspections and 62 programme evaluations at post-primary level

o almost 36,000 pupil questionnaires at primary level and over 29,000 student questionnaires at post-primary level

o over 47,600 parental questionnaires at primary level and over 20,000 parental questionnaires at post-primary level.

This Chief Inspector's Report focuses on key aspects of schools and centres for education, including the teaching of English, Irish and Mathematics. Findings in other subject areas are not included but will be published in forthcoming reports.

This report presents *Spotlights* on educational provision in DEIS schools, Gaeltacht schools, and Youthreach centres. It also includes *Spotlights* on the quality of special educational needs provision in post-primary schools and on the quality of SPHE provision in primary and post-primary schools.

Quality of school management

- Primary WSE reports indicate that the overall quality of management was satisfactory or better in 88% of the primary schools inspected.

- 82% of whole-school evaluations reported that principals, deputy principals and other members of the in-school management team provided satisfactory or better leadership to their primary schools. While such findings are positive, inspectors found that the work of in-school management teams required improvement in 18% of schools.

- Primary schools were found to be managing their pupils well and the vast majority of parents were happy with their child's school.

- At post-primary level, inspectors found that most boards of management provided good strategic leadership in their schools. Inspectors judged that the overall quality of leadership and management was satisfactory or better in 89% of schools.

- The critical role played by principals and deputy principals, in particular, was emphasised in post-primary inspection reports. One of the most common features of successful senior management teams observed during inspections was their ability to distribute leadership across the school.

- Parents were also well satisfied with the management of post-primary schools and the level of care that their child received.

- The findings from questionnaires at both primary and post-primary level point to a need for schools to raise awareness of their anti-bullying measures, to strengthen communication with parents and to take the pupil/student voice more into account in their decision-making processes.

- Questionnaire findings at post-primary level also highlight the need for schools to improve the information that they give to parents in relation to subject and curriculum choice at key transition points for their child.

Quality of planning

- School planning processes were found to be satisfactory or better in almost three quarters of the primary schools inspected. However, less than satisfactory planning processes were in place in over one quarter of schools.

- The outcomes of incidental inspection at primary level indicate that teachers were not adequately prepared to teach in 18% of the lessons evaluated. Less than satisfactory planning by teachers was also reported in a significant minority of English, Mathematics and Irish lessons.

- Just 81% of subject departments in post-primary schools had good or better planning processes in place. In 77% of schools, the quality of planning and preparation in English departments was satisfactory or better, while the comparable figure for Mathematics was 80%. Worryingly, the quality of planning and preparation in Irish departments was satisfactory or better in just 70% of schools.

- There is evidently a need for better planning processes at subject department level and at whole-school level in a significant number of primary and post-primary schools. Effective planning and review can and should drive improvement and lead to better outcomes for learners.

Quality of teaching and learning

- The Chief Inspector's Report provides evidence that most primary schools are working satisfactorily with regard to the quality of the teaching they provide and the progress of their learners. Incidental inspections found that the quality of teaching overall was satisfactory or better in 86% of schools while the quality of learning overall was satisfactory or better in 87% of schools.

- Incidental inspections in primary schools showed that the learning outcomes for pupils were satisfactory in 87% of the English lessons inspected and that the teaching approaches used were appropriate in 86% of lessons.

- The report makes specific recommendations in relation to teaching approaches in English, Mathematics and Irish and the use of resources for Irish and Mathematics.

- Inspectors reported that teaching approaches in mathematics lessons were satisfactory or better in 83% of lessons evaluated during incidental inspections and that learning outcomes for pupils were satisfactory or better in 85% of lessons.

- Inspectors' findings with regard to Irish in primary schools were significantly less positive than those for English or Mathematics. The quality of Irish teaching was problematic in one fifth of the lessons observed and the quality of learning was problematic in almost one quarter of the lessons observed.

- Inspectors judged that the standard of teaching observed at post-primary level was satisfactory or better in over 85% of all inspections. The report makes specific recommendations in relation to teaching approaches in English, Mathematics and Irish.

- Evidence from subject inspections in post-primary schools indicates that the quality of teaching of English was satisfactory or better in 87% of English lessons and the quality of learning was satisfactory or better in 84% of lessons.

- It is of concern that the quality of Mathematics teaching was satisfactory or better in just 77% of the lessons observed in subject inspections in post-primary schools. Inspectors also found that student learning was less than satisfactory in more than one quarter (26%) of the lessons.

- The quality of students' learning in Irish was found to be problematic in almost one in three (32%) of the Irish subject inspections conducted in post-primary schools. Deficiencies in how the subject was taught were evident in 28% of the lessons.

Quality of assessment

- There were significant shortcomings in assessment practices in almost one quarter of the English lessons, in 29% of the mathematics lessons and in 35% of the Irish lessons evaluated through incidental inspection in primary schools during the period 2010-2012.

- At post-primary level, evidence available from subject inspections shows that assessment practices were less than satisfactory in 23% of schools.

- Many inspection reports recommended increased use of the outcomes of assessment to aid planning to inform teaching and learning at primary and post-primary levels.

Follow-through inspections

- Pilot follow-through inspections, introduced in 2012, indicated that schools were generally making good efforts to implement the recommendations made in previous inspection reports.

- A small number of schools where very serious weaknesses were identified during inspections were referred to the Department's Schools Improvement Group. Follow-through inspections were among the range of measures taken by the Department to ensure that patrons and school management took steps to improve school quality in these cases.

6.5 Conclusion

A positive picture of the work of schools is evident from the inspections conducted during the period 2010 to 2012 and at a time when schools and the education system faced a number of challenges. At both primary and post-primary levels, inspectors found that the majority of schools are well managed, most teachers work effectively, and the overall learning of students is generally satisfactory. However, there are, as the evaluations clearly show, dimensions of education delivery that are, to varying degrees, problematic. The findings point to satisfactory or better practice in the vast majority of our schools,

but what about those schools and lessons, between 10% and 15% at the very least, where less than satisfactory practices exist?

Fundamentally, there are weaknesses in the teaching and learning of Irish in particular and, to a lesser degree, Mathematics in a significant proportion of our schools. Definite shortcomings in approaches to planning and preparation for students' learning exist in both the primary and post-primary sectors. Critically related to this are the crucial issues of how students' learning is assessed, and how assessment information is used in planning programmes of work that ensure that learners receive an education that challenges them and is appropriate to their needs. Improvements in how schools assess and monitor the learning experiences and performances of their learners and in how they use the resulting information to plan for future teaching and learning are particularly important. Indeed, this approach is what should inform all schools' implementation of the newly introduced school self-evaluation process.

The picture that emerges in this report lays down challenges for all of us who work in the education system – to teachers and school leaders, to managers and patrons of schools, to policy makers and teacher educators and to the Department and Inspectorate. Fundamentally, this report challenges schools and the education system to ensure that our learners experience very good, not just good, teaching and learning, that satisfactory provision becomes better, and that excellence in terms of learning experiences and standards can be achieved. That is the task facing us in the years ahead.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

Overview of the Inspectorate

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┌─────────────────────────┐
│     Chief Inspector     │
│     Harold Hislop       │
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┌─────────────────────────┐
│  Deputy Chief Inspector │
│    Gary Ó Donnchadha    │
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Business Unit 1:	Business Unit 2:	Business Unit 3:	Business Unit 4:	Business Unit 5:	Business Unit 6:	Business Unit 7:	Business Unit 8:
North East & Dublin North Region	South East & Dublin South Region	Midlands & Dublin West Region	South Region	West and Mid West Region	Evaluation, Support & Research Unit	School Improvement and Quality Unit	Literacy, Numeracy, Curriculum & Assessment
Head of Unit: Emer Egan, Assistant Chief Inspector	Head of Unit: Margaret Condon, Assistant Chief Inspector	Head of Unit: Don Mahon, Assistant Chief Inspector	Head of Unit: Martin Lally, Assistant Chief Inspector	Head of Unit: Doreen McMorris, Assistant Chief Inspector	Head of Unit: Suzanne Dillon, Assistant Chief Inspector	Head of Unit: Deirdre Mathews, Assistant Chief Inspector	Head of Unit: Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha, Assistant Chief Inspector

OUTLINE OF BUSINESS UNITS AND ASSIGNED FUNCTIONS

Business Unit 1: North East & Dublin North Region (Emer Egan, Assistant Chief Inspector)	Evaluation, advisory and follow-up work in schools, special schools and centres for education in Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Meath, Monaghan, Dublin (Fingal), and Dublin city (North) Inspectorate involvement in the European Schools
Business Unit 2: South East & Dublin South Region (Margaret Condon, Assistant Chief Inspector)	Evaluation, advisory and follow-up work in schools, special schools and centres for education in Carlow, Dublin South City, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Kilkenny, Waterford, Wexford and Wicklow Professional development programme for the Inspectorate and the PMDS process Management of Inspectorate policy advice re North-South and International issues Management of involvement of inspectors in Section 29 process and FOI process
Business Unit 3: Midlands & Dublin West Region (Don Mahon, Assistant Chief Inspector)	Evaluation, advisory and follow-up work in schools, special schools and centres for education in Dublin (West) and South West, Kildare, Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath Management of Inspectorate policy advice/development re Special Education Management of Visiting Teachers for Hearing and Visually Impaired
Business Unit 4: South Region (Martin Lally, Assistant Chief Inspector)	Evaluation, advisory and follow-up work in schools, special schools and centres for education in Cork, Kerry, Limerick County, and Tipperary South Riding Corporate business planning and quality assurance processes for Inspectorate
Business Unit 5: West and Mid West Region (Doreen McMorris, Assistant Chief Inspector)	Evaluation, advisory and follow-up work in schools, special schools and centres for education in Clare, Galway, Limerick City, Mayo, Sligo, Roscommon, and Tipperary North Riding Management of Inspectorate Secretariat and publication of School Inspection reports Policy advice on social and personal education/codes of behaviour/anti-bullying
Business Unit 6: Evaluation Support and Research Unit (Suzanne Dillon, Assistant Chief Inspector)	Development of inspection models Provision of supports for inspection including inspection districts/divisions, data provision, etc. Publication of thematic composite and summary reports on quality and standards Inspectorate involvement in research and development committee
Business Unit 7: School Improvement and Quality Unit (Deirdre Mathews, Assistant Chief Inspector)	Development of policy and materials for school self-evaluation, school improvement plans and information on schools Policy advice regarding the teacher education continuum (including pre-service, induction, probation and engagement with PDST) Inspectorate involvement in school improvement work Management of Inspectorate policy advice regarding social inclusion issues
Business Unit 8: Literacy, Numeracy, Curriculum & Assessment (Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha, Assistant Chief Inspector)	Inspectorate involvement in policy advice/development regarding literacy and numeracy strategy Inspectorate involvement in policy advice/development in curriculum and assessment issues for early childhood, primary and post-primary education Inspectorate involvement in policy advice/development regarding Irish and liaison with relevant bodies

Inspectorate Staff as at 31 December 2012

Chief Inspector:
Harold Hislop

Deputy Chief Inspector:
Gary Ó Donnchadha

Assistant Chief Inspectors:
Margaret Condon
Suzanne Dillon
Emer Egan
Martin Lally
Pádraig Mac Fhlannchadha
Doreen McMorris
Don Mahon
Deirdre Mathews

Senior Post-primary inspectors
Paul Caffrey
Declan Cahalane
Oilibhéar de Búrca
Carmel Donoghue
Alan Dunne
Gerry Fee
Domnall Fleming
Mary Gilbride
Miriam Horgan
Niall Kelly
Seamus Kelly
Maria Lorigan
Kevin McCarthy
Nora Nic Aodha
Jacqueline Ní Fhearghusa
Kate O'Carroll
Orlaith O'Connor
Fionnbarra Ó Murchú
Máirín O'Sullivan
Lynda O'Toole
Gerardine Skelly
Joan Sutton
Tony Weir

Post-primary inspectors
Siobhán Aherne
Siobhán Broderick
Elaine Collins
Gráinne Conachy
Richard Galvin

Amanda Geary
Aisling Kearney
Diarmuid Haicéid
Jason Kelly
Seamus Knox
Julie Lynch
Colum Layton
Niamh Murray
Kevin McClean
Seán McGrath
Noreen McMorrow
Brian McNamara
Majella Morrison
Linda Neary
Helen Ní Chatháin
Bernadette Ní Ruairc
Eibhlín Ní Scannláin
Catherine O'Carroll
Kevin O'Donovan
Colm Ó Murchú
Liz O'Neill
Ger Power
Linda Ramsbottom
Ruth Richards
H. Alan Sayles
Audrey Scott

Primary Divisional Inspectors
Paraic Barnes
Suzanne Conneely
Brendan Doody
Diarmuid Dullaghan
Margaret Dunning
Anne Feerick
Mags Jordan
Noreen Kavanagh
Yvonne Keating
Treasa Kirk
Karina Holton
Rita Nic Amhlaoibh
Antoinette Ní Ghallchobhair
Marina Ní Threasaigh
Carmel O'Doherty
Séamus Ó hÉilí
Seán Ó Murchú
Patrick O'Neill
Anne O'Sullivan

Eileen O'Sullivan
Gerard Quirke
Máire Uí Chonghaile
Liam Walsh
Martin Whyte

Primary District Inspectors:
Michael Báicéir
Noreen Bambury
Dolores Brady
Eamon Clavin
Ursula Cotter
Michael Crowley
Mary Culhane
Dolores de Bhál
Patrick Delea
Mary Dunne
Noreen Fiorentini
John Fitzgerald
Clare Griffin
Michael Hayes
Leo Kilroy
Catherine King
Brian Mac Giolla Phádraig
Edel Meaney
John Mescal
Maria McCarthy
Maria McGrath
Teresa McSorley
Caitríona Ní Bhriain
Máire Ní Mháirtín
Seán Ó Briain
Gearóid Ó Cearnaigh
Moira Proctor
Mary Regan
Elizabeth Sheridan
Paul Stevens
Fionnuala Tynan
Thomas Walsh
Caitríona Uí Ghrianna
John White

Primary/Post-primary inspectors
Paula Callaghan
Fiona Kearney

Administrative staff

Higher Executive Officer
Deirdre Reid

Executive Officers:
Teresa McCabe
John O'Leary

Clerical Officers
Mary Christian
Anne-Marie Ennis
Bernie Flannery
Peter Kearney
Bernie McGrillen
Margaret O'Grady
Joanne O'Sullivan

Career Breaks and Secondments

Colm Cregan, District inspector
Muireann Ní Mhóráin, Senior inspector
Anne O'Gara, District inspector

Appendix 2:

Monitoring Implementation of Child Protection Procedures

Child protection is an issue of fundamental concern to all those who work with children and young people. The Department of Education and Skills has for many years provided support to schools and to teachers in this regard through the publication of guidelines and procedures which have been developed in line with *Children First* (1999) and with the school setting in mind. Schools' compliance with the Department's guidelines has been routinely assessed by the Inspectorate during the conduct of whole-school evaluations.

Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011 sets out the roles and responsibilities of those working with or for children in relation to their protection and welfare, including Government departments such as the Department of Education and Skills. These include developing and implementing child protection procedures based on Children First: National Guidance and monitoring their implementation.

In September 2011, the Department of Education and Skills issued Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2011). These procedures are intended to provide guidance to primary and post-primary schools regarding implementation of *Children First: National Guidance* in the school setting. They replaced earlier guidelines provided to schools. The Department also has a responsibility to inspect and evaluate the implementation of these procedures in schools. The Inspectorate continues to monitor compliance with aspects of the new child protection procedures as part of the whole-school evaluation process and, since January 2012, has put in place more systematic data collection in this regard.

As part of every whole-school evaluation, inspectors enquire into a school's compliance with the requirements of *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2011). Inspectors do not examine individual case files about pupils. During an inspection, school management is required to complete a Child Protection School Self-Report Form. This is in a simple one-page format which requires both the principal and the chairperson to sign off to a "yes" or "no" answer to nine questions which reflect the key requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.* The form also asks for the date(s) on which the board adopted the policy and the Child Protection Procedures and asks for the names of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy DLP. It also requires the school to indicate the date of the last review of the school's child protection policy. During the in-school phase of the evaluation, inspectors seek additional confirmatory evidence of the school's compliance with the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.*

The following table provides a summary of the level of compliance with the requirements of Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (2011) noted in schools in the calendar year 2012.

Number of schools evaluated and levels of compliance noted, as of 30 June 2013

Evaluation Type		Number of evaluations conducted	Process Completed	Fully compliant at time of inspection visit	Total not fully compliant	Not fully compliant at time of inspection visit but resolved subsequently	Not fully compliant at time of inspection visit and currently in Inspectorate follow-through process	Not fully compliant at time of inspection visit and referred to Schools' Division DES
Primary	WSE	241	241	235	6	3	3	0
	WSE-MLL	21	21	20	1	1	0	0
	Schools at HSUs, SCUs and Children Detention Centres	10	10	8	2	0	1	1
	Special Schools	13	13	13	0	0	1	1
Post-Primary	WSE	4	4	3	1	0	0	1
	WSE-MLL	80	78	71	7	4	3	0
	Evaluation of Centres for Education (Youthreach)	9	9	8	1	1	0	0

Appendix 3:

Inspectorate Publications 2010-2012

Title	Date of publication
Incidental Inspection Findings 2010: A Report on the Teaching and Learning of English and Mathematics in Primary Schools	2010
Torthaí na Cigireachta Teagmhasaí 2010: Tuairisc ar Theagasc agus ar Fhoghlaim an Bhéarla agus na Matamaitice i mBunscoileanna	
An Evaluation of Youthreach	2010
A Guide to Whole-School Evaluation in Primary Schools	2010
Treoir do Mheastóireacht Scoile Uile i mBunscoileanna	2010
A Guide to Incidental Inspection in Second-Level Schools and Centres for Education	2011
Treoir don Chigireacht Theagmhasach i Scoileanna Dara Leibhéal agus Ionaid Oideachais	2011
An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Post-Primary Schools	2011
Meastóireacht ar Phróisis Phleanála in Iar-bhunscoileanna DEIS	2011
An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Primary Schools	2011
Meastóireacht ar Phróisis Phleanála I mbunscoileanna DEIS	2011
A Guide to Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning – in Post-Primary Schools	2011
Treoir do Mheastóireacht Scoile Uile – Bainistíocht, Ceannaireacht agus Foghlaim I Scoileanna Iar-bhunoideachais	2011
Information Note for Boards of Management on Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) in Post-Primary Schools	2011
Eolas do Bhoird Bhainistíochta ar Mheastóireacht Scoile Uile – Bainistíocht, Ceannaireacht agus Foghlaim I Scoileanna Iar-bhunoideachais	2011
Information Note for Parents and Parent Associations on Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) in Post-Primary Schools	2011
Eolas do Thuismitheoirí agus do Chumainn na dTuismitheoirí ar Mheastóireacht Scoile Uile – Bainistíocht, Ceannaireacht agus Foghlaim I Scoileanna Iar-bhunoideachais	2011
Information Note for Students and Student Councils on Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) in Post-Primary Schools	2011
Eolas do Mhic Léinn agus do Chomhairlí Mac Léinn ar Mheastóireacht Scoile Uile – Bainistíocht, Ceannaireacht agus Foghlaim I Scoileanna Iar-bhunoideachais	2011
Oideachas Sóisialta, Pearsanta agus Sláinte sa Bhunscoil (English version published 2009)	2012
School Self-Evaluation: Draft Guidelines for Primary Schools	2012
Féinmheastóireacht Scoile: Dréacht-Treoirlínte do Bhunscoileanna	2012
School Self-Evaluation: Draft Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools	2012

Title	Date of publication
Féinmheastóireacht Scoile: Dréacht-Treoirlínte d'Iar-bhunscoileanna	2012
School Size and the Quality of Teaching and Learning	2012
School Self-Evaluation: An Update for Primary Schools	2012
Féinmheastóireacht Scoile: Nuashonrú do Bhunscoileanna	2012
School Self-Evaluation: An Update for Post-Primary Schools	2012
Féinmheastóireacht Scoile: Nuashonrú d'Iar-Bhunscoileanna	2012
A Guide to Incidental Inspection in Second-Level Schools and Centres of Education	2012
Treoir don Chigireacht Theagmhasach i Scoileanna Dara Leibhéal agus Ionaid Oideachais	2012
Joint Evaluation Report: Dissolving Boundaries Programme 2010/2011	2012
An Introduction to School Self-Evaluation of Teaching and Learning in Primary Schools	2012
Réamhrá don Fhéinmheastóireacht Scoile ar Theagasc agus ar Fhoghlaim i mBunscoileanna	2012
An Introduction to School Self-Evaluation of Teaching and Learning in Post-Primary Schools	2012
Réamhrá don Fhéinmheastóireacht Scoile ar Theagasc agus ar Fhoghlaim in Iar-Bhunscoileanna	2012
Guidelines on School Self-Evaluation for Primary Schools	2012
Féinmheastóireacht Scoile: Treoirlínte do Bhunscoileanna	2012
Guidelines on School Self-Evaluation for Post-Primary Schools	2012
Féinmheastóireacht Scoile: Treoirlínte d'Iar-bhunscoileanna	2012
Science in the Primary School	2012
Eolaíocht sa Bhunscoil	2012
English as an Additional Language in Primary Schools	2012
Looking at English as an Additional Language: Teaching and Learning in Post-Primary Schools	2012
Looking at Biology	2012
Ag Féachaint ar Bhitheolaíocht	2012
The Quality Assurance of Irish Schools and the Role of Evaluation: Current and Future Trends	2012

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