



Working document in the series:
Trends in school supervision

Making school inspection visits more effective:

The English experience

Brian Wilcox

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International Institute for Educational Planning



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Making school inspection visits more effective: the English experience

Brian Wilcox



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PRESENTATION OF THE SERIES

This publication forms part of a series on 'Trends in school supervision', which accompanies the implementation of an IIEP project on 'Improving teacher supervision and support services for basic education'. The project, which began in 1996, is one of the main research components of the Institute's Medium Term Plan 1996-2001. The Institute wishes to express its sincere thanks to BMZ (the German Federal Ministry for Technical Co-operation) and to UNICEF for their support to the implementation of this project.

Earlier research, at the Institute and elsewhere, has pointed to the need, in an era of increased decentralization and school autonomy, to strengthen the skills of personnel involved in supervision and support at local level and in schools.

Two related points are worth mentioning here, as they form both the background to and the rationale for the IIEP's concern with this area of management. Firstly, professional supervision and support services for teachers, although existing in almost every country for a long time, have been ignored, increasingly so since resources have become more scarce. This neglect has, until recent times, been reflected by a similar indifference among researchers. Secondly, one important reason why the quality of basic education has deteriorated in many contexts is precisely related to the weakening of these services.

The IIEP project, developed against this background, consists of research, training and dissemination activities. Its specific objectives are to assist countries in diagnosing and reforming the existing services of supervision and support, and to identify promising

strategies for their reorganization and strengthening. The series of publications, of which this monograph forms a part, is the result of research, implemented in several regions, to address a number of questions, such as:

- How is supervision and support organized in different countries? What have been the major trends in their recent evolution?
- What are the principal problems which supervision and support services are presently facing in terms of: organizational structures; overall management; and daily functioning?
- To what extent and under what conditions do these services have a positive impact on the quality of the teaching-learning processes in schools?
- What are the major innovations taking place, mainly in respect of the devolution of supervision and support to the school-site level? How do these innovations operate? What are the main results?

In order to formulate answers to these questions, the project elaborated the following operational definition of school supervision and support services: all those services whose main function is to control and evaluate, and/or advise and support schoolheads and teachers. The focus of the project is on external supervision and support, that is to say on the work of inspectors, supervisors, advisers, counsellors, etc. located outside the school, at local, regional or central levels. A common characteristic of these officers is that regular visits to schools are an essential part of their mandate.

However, many countries, in their attempts to reform and innovate supervision, are increasingly relying on in-school or community-based strategies (such as resource centres, school clusters, in-school supervision by the principal or by peers, school-based management) to complement, if not to replace external supervision and support. The project therefore also pays attention to a number of such

innovations and, in more general terms, the strengths and weaknesses of strategies, aiming at the reinforcement of internal quality-control mechanisms.

This series: ‘Trends in school supervision’, thus consists of a variety of titles: national diagnoses on supervision and support, comparative analyses of the situation by region, case studies on innovative experiences, monographs and discussion papers on specific management issues. It is hoped that this series will fill a gap in education research as well as be an inspiration, in particular to policy-makers intending to reform supervision, and to supervisors who want to improve on their practice.

Other titles in the series include:

- Ali, M.A. 1998. *Supervision for teacher development: a proposal for Pakistan*. Paris: UNESCO/International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Carron, G.; De Grauwe, A. 1997. *Current issues in supervision: a literature review*. Paris: UNESCO/International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Carron, G.; De Grauwe, A.; Govinda, R 1998. *Supervision and support services in Asia. Volume 1: A comparative analysis. Volume II: National diagnoses (Bangladesh, the State of Uttar Pradesh in India, the Republic of Korea, Nepal and Sri Lanka)*. Paris: UNESCO/International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Fergusson, V. 1998. *Supervision for the self-managing school: the New Zealand experience*. Paris: UNESCO/International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Gurr, D. 1999. *From supervision to quality assurance: the case of State of Victoria, Australia*. Paris: UNESCO/International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Khaniya, T.R. 1997. *Teacher support through resource centres: the Nepalese case*. Paris: UNESCO/International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Perera, W.J. 1997. *Changing schools from within: a management intervention for improving school functioning in Sri Lanka*. Paris: UNESCO/International Institute for Educational Planning.

SUMMARY

The rationale of this study is to provide a critical examination of the nature of inspection and to identify a rigorous inspection approach which can have a beneficial impact on schools. Despite its long history and ubiquity, inspection has existed until comparatively recently in a surprisingly a-theoretical limbo with practices and procedures assessed on little more than the commonsense of those who commend or criticise them. The perspective adopted in this monograph, is influenced by the English experience, in particular the introduction of a new system, carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

Inspection, a process of assessing the quality and/or performance of schools by external agents, is a near world-wide educational practice. In recent years many countries have re-examined their inspection systems in the face of demands that their schools should be made more transparently accountable for the outcomes and standards which they achieve. Inspection, however, is never only an instrument of accountability – it has always assumed, as a potential consequence, the improvement of the institution inspected.

A paradox, which every inspection faces, lies in the fact that what is very much an individual activity focussing on particular aspects of a school, is supposed to reflect an overall approach covering the whole school. “Sampling” is unavoidable and the problem of generalising judgements from a particular inspection period to the school as a whole will always be encountered. Several interrelated suggestions are made to solve this paradox. Firstly, it is necessary that inspectors clarify and agree on the purpose, focus and scope of inspection activities and that these be communicated to those being inspected. Secondly, inspection covers a number of aspects (characteristics) of a school; for each aspect,

several criteria (standards of good practice) are identified. These criteria need to be unambiguous and their application should be a straightforward process in all areas. The model of school, which is underlying the selection of aspects and criteria, has to be shared by all actors involved. Thirdly, inspectors can access different sources of information (observations, interviews, questionnaires and/or documents) to help form their judgement.

The trustworthiness of its judgements will always be a problem for any inspection service, because inspection is inherently a form of qualitative enquiry, which cannot satisfy the conventional criteria of validity and reliability. That however does not mean that inspection is intrinsically subjective. Alternative criteria can be applied: credibility, dependability and confirmability. Inspection findings need to be credible. This demands checking opinions with all school actors and other inspectors, e.g. through peer debriefing so that all partners recognise and accept the findings. Dependability concerns the extent to which a process of enquiry is trackable and documented, while confirmability relates to the product of an enquiry and the fact that its findings are well rooted in the data. This implies that the trail followed to arrive at a final judgement is clear and transparent.

Transparency is one way to smooth the conflict between the inspector and teachers. This conflict is born from the difference between the character of teaching (private, autonomous and immediate) and the intrusive nature of inspection. It is equally important that inspectors act within a clear ethical framework and be guided by a code of conduct which reflects the etiquette of inspection. This helps to establish trust and to show that the inspector respects the teacher's integrity.

Inspection is as much about improvement through change as it is a mechanism of accountability. The process of preparing for an

inspection, of experiencing the diagnosis, of digesting inspection recommendations and of defining action plans, all have effects on the actors involved in schools and can be conducive to change. But how to implement inspection recommendations remains problematic. Schools and inspectors both have a role to play. Schools increasingly are encouraged to prepare school development plans. However, it is difficult to achieve consensus around this plan, and to ensure ownership by the staff. Neither do all schools have access to the necessary resources (human experience, material, financial, time). It appears that the most fundamental changes – those relating to pedagogical behaviour – are the most difficult to put into practice. The intensity of the follow-up also depends on whether inspectors are accountable for the implementation of their advice, which is all too seldom the case.

For the foreseeable future it would seem that inspection will keep a central place in the policy and practice of education. Its greatest challenge is to become a positive force in the drive for greater accountability and improvement. But, to achieve this, inspection needs to find in its recruitment procedures the right balance between qualifications and experience; to regularly assess the available skills and to develop appropriate training; to motivate its staff with a salary and an attractive career pattern; and to be clear and transparent in its methodology. A promising change is that inspection is increasingly integrated into an overall process of quality assurance, which includes school self-evaluation. But self-evaluation faces similar challenges as external inspection: it has to demonstrate its credibility; it is not cost-free and is particularly demanding in time; and the involvement of school staff cannot be taken for granted. Inspection versus self-evaluation is a false dichotomy and the combination of the two models in a quality assurance model is an increasingly common feature.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this short monograph is not to provide a detailed manual on school inspection. The production of such would be illusory because the author does not believe that a universal approach appropriate to the requirements of different countries and regions is feasible. The rationale of the present work is somewhat different: it is to provide a critical examination of the nature of inspection and so identify important issues for consideration by those responsible for devising or revising their inspection practices.

The perspective adopted here is strongly influenced by the English experience of introducing a new system of inspection from 1993 carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). It is recognized that much of this experience may at first seem inapplicable to other countries. However the adoption of this perspective is justified on three grounds. First, the OFSTED approach to inspection is probably the most comprehensive and publicly transparent yet implemented. Second, OFSTED inspections have prompted a burgeoning of associated research, one effect of which has been that we now know more about inspection and its effects than ever before. Finally the critical examination of the OFSTED methodology provides a unique opportunity to identify the fundamental issues which *any* inspectorate *anywhere* is required to face.

It is hoped that the monograph will be of help to those concerned with the organization and conduct of inspectorates and related supervisory and support services for schools.

I. THE NATURE OF SCHOOL INSPECTION

Inspection is perhaps the oldest method of supervising teachers and schools. In many countries inspection had its origins in the development of public education in the nineteenth century. In England, for example, the first two inspectors of schools were appointed in 1839, only six years after the first government grant was made to help establish elementary schools.

Since that time inspectorates have generally developed in both size and scope, although it is fair to say that there have been periodic reversals in their fortunes as indicated by the degree of professional, public and government support received. As the provision of education has increasingly come to be seen as a prime responsibility of local and national governments it has inevitably become part of the political process. At the present time inspection and inspectorates are high on political agendas and associated in many countries with radical reform. For example, changes in inspectorates are taking place in more than half the member countries of the European Union and even in the USA, a country where traditional inspection has never found a secure place, programmes are under way experimenting with inspection or variants of it (see Carron and De Grauwe, 1997). The time is therefore particularly opportune to look afresh at inspection as part of the 'Trends in School Supervision' project.

Inspection: accountability and support

So what exactly is inspection and what is its purpose? Inspection in its most general sense may be defined as the process of assessing the quality and/or performance of institutions, services, programmes or projects by those (inspectors) who are not directly involved in

them and who are usually specially appointed to fulfil these responsibilities. Inspection involves visits made by inspectors, individually or in teams, to observe the institutions, services etc. concerned while they are actually functioning (i.e. in real time). The most common outcome of an inspection is a written report of the inspectors' findings.

As to the purpose of inspection, consider the case of the English national inspectorate, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI). Throughout its long history, inspection has been deemed to contain three principal functions:

- checking on the use of public funds;
- provision of information for central government;
- provision of advice to those responsible for running educational establishments (DES/WO, 1982).

The first two of these functions can be related to the issue of *accountability*. At its most fundamental, accountability is the obligation of one party to explain or justify its actions to others. It is important to note, however, that the accountability function inherent in inspection is exercised by a third party – the inspectorate. Thus the account of how well a school is doing is not provided *directly* by those involved (the principal and teachers). It is the inspectorate's responsibility to construct the account (usually in the form of a written report) although school staff contribute *indirectly* through the information which they provide through interview or the provision of documentation. Inspectorates are therefore *external* agents and instruments of accountability.

The third function is concerned with the support and development of institutions and those within them. The balance between these two functions of accountability and support has varied both within

and across inspectorates from time to time. The latter function is particularly apparent in the in-service courses for teachers which inspectorates have often provided. The development aspect of this function frequently assumes that the provision of information, for example about a school, is a crucial condition for improvement. The desirability or otherwise of combining both functions within inspectorates has been a perennial topic of debate. In recent years several countries have attempted to separate the inspection and support roles. In some, the support function has been emphasized with inspectors in effect becoming advisers. In others (e.g. New Zealand, England and Wales) the inspection role has become paramount (Carron and De Grauwe, 1997).

Inspection types

It would be wrong to assume that inspection is a monolithic practice. There are in fact different variants or types of inspection. These can be identified according to such gross characteristics as the number of inspectors involved, the duration of the inspection and the nature and extent of what is inspected. Several inspection typologies have been proposed (e.g. Wilcox et al., 1993; Mordaunt, 1998). At one extreme are the relatively short, and specifically focused, inspections carried out by a single inspector (e.g. a one- or two-day inspection of a school department by a specialist inspector); at the other are the comprehensive inspections of whole institutions carried out by a team of inspectors over a period of a week or more ('full' inspections). Between these extremes may be found a variety of 'short' inspections looking at different features or parts of institutions. In addition, individual inspections may be carried out at the same time, or as separate inspections subsequently brought together, as a 'survey' inspection.

Even within these types more subtle variations can be discerned as a result of at least three other major considerations:

- how inspection is regarded as a social practice;
- how the inspected entity is conceptualized;
- how the inspection is resourced.

Inspection as evaluation

The first of these recognizes that inspection involves the interaction of human beings with each other (inspectors and the inspected) through a variety of formal and informal procedures and conventions, with the aim of making sense of some social situation or institution (e.g. classroom or school). Elsewhere the author has shown that the kind of social practice which inspection represents can be differently understood according to the theoretical perspective adopted (Wilcox and Gray, 1996: 110-126). Here, however, there is mainly reference to one such perspective, inspection as a mode of evaluation, on the grounds that it is more immediately relevant to the interests of inspectors and teachers.

Evaluation has been a major growth area in education over recent decades and has spawned a vast and formidable literature. Although definitions of evaluation abound, that due to Beeby (1977) is useful in bringing out similarities with inspection:

the systematic collection and interpretation of evidence leading, as part of the process, to a judgement of value with a view to action (quoted in Wolf, 1987).

This definition succinctly incorporates four important attributes:

- evaluation is based on evidence *systematically* collected;

- the meaning of evidence is seldom unambiguous and needs to be *interpreted*;
- *judgements of value* are made about the entity being evaluated;
- evaluation is *action oriented*, intended to lead to better practices and policies.

All four of these attributes could be reasonably claimed by most inspectorates for their practice. For example, the English *Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)* has set out in great detail its approach to inspection in a publicly available *Handbook* (see OFSTED, 1995). The Handbook describes exactly what kind of inspection evidence is required; how the evidence is to be collected; how it is to be interpreted (by applying pre-stated criteria); resulting in judgements to inform the formulation of an action plan for improvement.

Inspection is an example of *external evaluation* where the evaluation of an institution, a school say, is carried out by those (inspectors) who are not part of it. Inspection is to be contrasted with those forms of *internal evaluation* where the members of an institution carry out the evaluation. Such internal evaluation is also known as *self-evaluation* and, where a school is involved, *school self-evaluation* or *school self-review*. Schemes of school self-evaluation were in vogue in the 1970s and 1980s although evidence in favour of their support was at best equivocal (see Clift et al., 1987). The notion however returned to some degree in the 1990s in the form of *quality assurance* programmes.

There are many evaluation models and approaches. All can however be located on a continuum with a concern for measurement of quantifiable variables at one end, and an emphasis on rich qualitative variables at the other. Inspection occupies an intermediate position on such a continuum. It is very much a hybrid form of

evaluation which incorporates features of both quantitative and the qualitative approaches, although it draws more on the latter than the former. This is an important point because some critics of inspection expect it to meet criteria of reliability and validity more appropriate to traditional quantitative methods (see Fitz-Gibbon, 1996: particularly 201-209). The view proposed here is that criteria derived from qualitative methods are more appropriate for assessing the *trustworthiness* of inspection (see *Chapter III*). However, even within this notion there is still room for further variation at the level of the specific techniques and procedures used and, crucially, in how inspection data and other evidence are treated and interpreted.

Inspection and the model of the school

The second major factor which will influence the nature of an inspection is the model to which the inspected entity is thought to conform. Inspection necessarily entails a conception of what are regarded as the essential features of schools etc. 'as they really are'. Inspection typically regards a school as composed of *self-evident* structures and outcomes. This is not necessarily the case. How one decides to interpret the reality of a school depends upon prior assumptions, whether recognized explicitly or not, about such matters as the nature of the curriculum, the organization and purposes of the school.

All such assumptions are potentially contestable. For example some would see the curriculum in the form of discrete separate subjects, others would prefer to view it in terms of broad interdisciplinary areas. Another example would relate to the way in which the role of the headteacher is interpreted within a school. A school in which it is widely recognized that the headteacher is the principal change agent will be a different entity from one in which he is regarded simply as *primus inter pares* encouraging collegiality, or from one

where he is essentially the chief administrator. A more radically distinct model still would be where notions of traditional staff/pupil hierarchies are rejected in favour of joint decision-making.

Different models of the school then inevitably lead to somewhat different approaches to inspection. This is not as clearly recognized as it should be because in many countries at present there tends to be a remarkable consensus on how schools are to be understood and developed. There undoubtedly is a widespread acceptance of a particular model of the school and of educational institutions generally. The model is one set within a 'management systems' perspective. This is a perspective which has received increasing emphasis in educational policy and practice over the last 20 or more years and embodies such key management notions as standards, quality, efficiency and performance. The consequence has been that the discourses of management have progressively displaced other lexicons for describing and understanding schools (Ball,1994).

The OFSTED *Handbook* (OFSTED, 1995), which is among the most detailed prescriptions of inspection ever produced, provides a clear example of how specific management and curricular assumptions structure the nature of inspections. It may be that at the present time there is little support for approaches to inspection based on somewhat different assumptions and thus different models of the school, although this may not be so in all countries.

Resources

A third factor which influences the nature of inspection is the level of resourcing devoted to it. Inspection is a manpower-intensive operation. The main costs associated with inspection are those involved in employing inspectors. In the past the real costs of inspection remained hidden, not least because in many inspectorates inspection was just one among several responsibilities. The number,

type and other responsibilities of inspectors will affect the nature and extent of the inspections that can be carried out. For example, a full inspection of an average-sized secondary school may involve a dozen or so inspectors working for periods up to a week in the school. In addition they will need to spend further time, before the inspection, in planning and, afterwards, in compiling and producing their report. In England the inspection of a secondary school by OFSTED may cost as much as £25,000.

Despite the considerable variety resulting from the interplay of these three factors – the inspection approach, the model of the school assumed and the availability of inspector resources – one underlying constant feature can be discerned. At root, in all inspections, inspectors act largely alone in observing specific situations (classrooms etc.); talking to individual teachers and others; and examining particular documents. Even where a team of inspectors is involved they typically operate as individuals, coming together only in planning the inspection, sharing their findings and agreeing their conclusions. The fundamental building block of any inspection is the lone inspector inspecting. It is the recognition of this fact that enables us to grasp what initially may seem a complex and confusing phenomenon. In other words, shaping the individual inspection event in the light of the three factors (how it operates, within what conceptual assumptions and how much time and other resource can be devoted to it) goes a long way towards clarifying the nature of the total inspection. How this follows is outlined in detail in the next chapter.

II. ISSUES IN PLANNING AN INSPECTION ACTIVITY

The basic building block of all inspections is that of the individual inspector inspecting a specific aspect of education or institutional organization. Very often this basic inspection activity is part of a larger enterprise involving other inspection activities. These are either activities carried out by the same inspector in different situations (e.g. an inspector inspecting the classrooms of several teachers rather than just one) or those arising from other inspectors operating in their different fields of special interest (as when a team of inspectors work together in inspecting the whole or part of a school).

How an individual inspection activity relates to a larger composite inspection is usually determined by the overall approach adopted by the inspectorate. As already noted, the approach will be influenced by the models of inspection and the models of educational institutions adopted by the inspectorate. If inspections are to command respect it is essential that an inspectorate's approach is broadly acceptable to teachers and others involved. In the past this requirement may not have been seen as necessary. Today, however, with the general trend towards 'transparency' in the public services, wider consultation beyond an inspectorate itself would be expected.

One way of attempting consultation is illustrated by the recent experience of OFSTED. Prior to the introduction of the new inspection arrangements, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) of Schools in England issued a *Framework for the Inspection of Schools* (DES, 1992) which was widely distributed for comment to schools, local educational authorities and other interested parties. The Framework was revised in the light of the responses received and became the basis for a more detailed *Handbook for Inspection of*

Schools (OFSTED, 1992) which itself went through several revisions as a result of further consultation exercises. It should be said however that such exercises left the models of inspection and schooling implicit in the documents largely unchanged. This may reflect at least broad acceptance of, if not total agreement with, the proposals. On the other hand OFSTED, because it was circumscribed by statutory requirements, may have felt unwilling or unable to respond to any radical alternatives that may have been proposed. Where inspection has high political salience it inevitably has to reflect the assumptions embodied or implicit in any legislation from which it is derived.

Purpose, focus and scope of an inspection activity

In an inspection activity – whether that involves visiting an individual classroom, interviewing a particular teacher, or examining school documents – it is essential that there is clarity of purpose, focus and scope.

The *purpose* of any inspection activity should be consistent with the overall purpose of the inspectorate's approach to inspection. For example, the purpose of a particular OFSTED inspector observing a specific lesson will be to contribute in some measure to an assessment of one or more of the following general areas:

- the quality of education provided by the school;
- the educational standards achieved by the school;
- whether the financial resources made available to the school are managed efficiently; and
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school (OFSTED, 1995).

The *focus* of the inspection activity might be to assess 'the quality of the teaching and its contribution to pupils' attainment and

progress'. This could be narrowed further to a particular subject area and aspect within that.

Taking another example, an inspection activity examining the budget details of a department will be contributing to the general purpose of assessing the school's efficiency in managing its resources. The inspector's specific concern however may be focused on the purchase of new science equipment in recent years and whether it represented value for money.

The *scope* of inspection activity will be determined by the type of evidence sought (as perhaps set out in the inspection handbook), its actual availability in practice and, crucially, by the time allotted to the activity.

Consider the possible case where an inspector chairs a meeting to which parents of a school have been invited before the start of its inspection. The purpose may be to contribute to an assessment of the standards achieved by the school by focusing on parents' views of this aspect. The specific focus might be to obtain their views on the standards of behaviour of pupils at the school. There are several ways of obtaining this kind of information. Perhaps because of time and resource implications the scope of the activity may be limited to a single group meeting rather than conducting individual interviews.

Inspectors then need a clear notion of the purpose, focus and scope of their activities and, where this is possible, these should also be communicated to those being inspected or surveyed.

Sampling and inspection criteria

Clarification of these matters is however only the first step. Suppose, for the sake of argument, the inspection activity is to assess

geography teaching in a school. To translate this intention into practice requires that the issue of *sampling* be addressed. First there are likely to be several geography teachers in the school and the inspector will probably wish to observe all of them. However, during the inspection period the number of individual geography lessons taught to pupils of different ages may be considerable. It may not be possible to cover them all and so inevitably only some are sampled. Under these circumstances inspectors often seem to operate on the principle of *representativeness*, that is they try to see every teacher teaching, preferably more than once and, across the sample of lessons as a whole, they aim to see every age group and ability of pupil being taught. This will help to allay any anxieties that the sample of lessons seen was unrepresentative of the total *population* of lessons taking place during the inspection period.

Any judgements made on this sample of geography lessons do not necessarily apply beyond the period inspected. Arguments can always be mounted that the geography teaching was atypical during the period of the inspection. For example, some teachers may have been absent and other teachers drafted in to take the classes affected. Or it may be that the classes were preparing for forthcoming end-of-year examinations and so were revising material already taught rather than encountering new topics. This means that any attempt to *generalize* the judgements from a particular inspection period to what is typical or characteristic of the school as a whole will always be potentially assailable.

What can be done to ameliorate this problem? Inspectors usually seek support for their judgements from other evidence. Inspectors may look at the work produced by the pupils over a longer period and assess how far this evidence may be considered consistent with the teaching observed. They may also in talking to teachers and pupils

gain further understanding of the range of the teaching occurring in the school. And, of course, if evidence is provided that there were exceptional or untypical features during the inspection then the inspectors can take these into account and moderate their judgements accordingly. In other words, inspectors should have access to different sources of evidence which can be employed to corroborate their judgements. How exactly this is done in practice is important and is taken up further in the next chapter.

Of course in some cases an inspection will be carried out because of a specific known problem in an individual school or even a group of schools. This might be associated with a particular curriculum area or some other aspect of the school. In this case the sample is already predetermined – this particular school for this specific reason. However it will still be necessary in most cases to sample within the range of activities which fall under the aspect being inspected.

Thus the issue of sampling and how it is tackled in practice adds further clarity to the purpose, focus and scope of an inspection activity. Even this however leaves at least one other matter to be considered for an inspection activity to have credibility. Consider again the case of inspecting geography teaching. How exactly is this going to be done? Any judgement on geography teaching will presumably be based on a notion of what constitutes *good* teaching in this area. What constitutes good practice is usually expressed as a list of characteristics or *criteria*. These may be formulated by consulting appropriate research studies, teaching manuals and recognized good practitioners in the field. The latter is especially important if the criteria are to command general acceptance by teachers of the subject.

While it would be possible to establish criteria in this way for every subject there would be a major disadvantage. If totally different

criteria were identified it would be very difficult to compare the teaching in one subject area in a school with that in others. So while it would be possible to develop an inspection approach that was idiosyncratic to subject areas this has not been the practice of inspectorates in general. Rather the approach has been to identify broad criteria of effective teaching that would apply to all subject areas. Doing so, of course, reflects the assumption that there is a generally agreed model of good teaching per se.

OFSTED defines the criteria of teaching in terms of the extent to which teachers:

- have a secure knowledge and understanding of the subject or areas they teach;
- set high expectations so as to challenge pupils and deepen their knowledge and understanding;
- plan effectively;
- employ methods and organizational strategies which match curricular objectives and the needs of all pupils;
- manage pupils well and achieve high standards of discipline;
- use time and resources effectively;
- assess pupils' work thoroughly and constructively, and use assessments to inform teaching;
- use homework effectively to reinforce and/or extend what is learned in school (OFSTED, 1995).

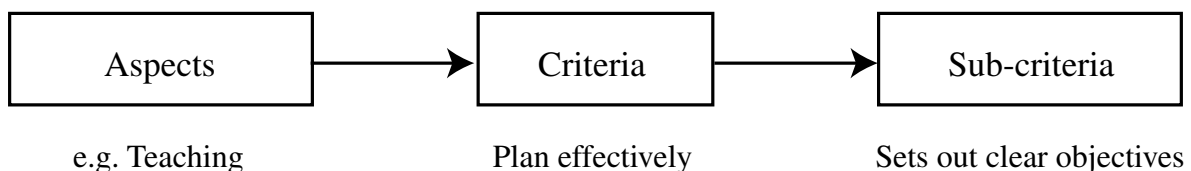
Each of these criteria is very broad in coverage. Any one of them needs further clarification. This is typically done by specifying sub-criteria. So, for example, the criteria for 'plan effectively' is further defined by the sub-criteria:

- incorporates National Curriculum programmes of study, syllabus and course requirements;

- sets out clear objectives;
- summarizes what pupils will do and the resources they need;
- shows how knowledge and understanding can be extended, and the work adapted to suit pupils who learn at different rates.

Such sub-criteria have the added advantage of enabling subject-specific considerations to be brought into play - particularly in the example here through the first and last in the list. However it will be noted that the sub-criteria still consist of rather broad statements. There is room therefore for difference of interpretation. In principle the sub-criteria could be further analyzed into sub-sub-criteria! An infinite regress appears to confront us. In practice the process has to stop at a stage which is considered *reasonable* and this is typically at the first sub-criterial level of analysis. This is an important point but one which will be deferred to the next chapter for fuller consideration. For the time being, the main point to grasp is that the formulation of criteria tends to be the universal way by which inspectors formally justify the credibility of their judgements.

This process can be, and is extended to each of the main defining characteristics or aspects (of which teaching is invariably one) of the school model adopted. The school model implicit, if not explicit, in the approach to inspection adopted by most inspectorates can be summarized as follows:



This shows the general case in which the school is defined in terms of two or more different aspects. Each of the aspects (e.g. teaching) are expressed by means of two or more criteria (e.g. plan effectively).

Then, in turn, each of the criteria may be further sub-divided into two or more sub-criteria (e.g. sets out clear objectives).

It is of course possible to conceive of variants of this general model. In the OFSTED model some of the aspects (attainment and progress; attendance; attitudes, behaviour and personal development) are regarded as constituting *outcomes* which are summarized as *educational standards achieved*. Other aspects are considered as *contributory factors* either under the general rubrics of *provision* (e.g. curriculum and assessment, teaching) or *management* (e.g. staffing, accommodation and learning resources). Some of these factors (e.g. approach to teaching) are more directly controlled by school staff than others (e.g. overall budget provision, curriculum content where a prescribed national framework exists) and need therefore to be taken account of in forming final judgements.

It is clear therefore that the relationship between inspection criteria and the various aspects inspected constitutes a specific model of the school. It is important therefore that the model is made explicit not only to inspectors but also to those being inspected. If a model is widely rejected then no subsequent inspection system based upon it will command general acceptance. This is particularly crucial in situations where a system of inspection is introduced for the first time or where a previous system is replaced by a new one. Close co-operation involving *all* interested parties, is highly advisable in all stages of development and dissemination. It may be argued that the early hostility to the new inspection system introduced in 1993 in England was to a considerable extent dispelled by the willingness of OFSTED to revise earlier versions in the light of comments from teachers and others.

Collecting inspection evidence

The judgements that inspectors make against their inspection criteria will be based on evidence or data accumulated during, and indeed before, an inspection. Evidence collected before an inspection is invariably in the form of documents. The range of documents required will depend on the scope and purpose of the intended inspection visit. As a general rule only those documents should be sought which are essential in helping to form an initial overview of the area to be inspected and provide an indication of what specific aspects to follow up in detail. In the special case of a full inspection of a school the range of documents is likely to be very comprehensive:

- any pre-inspection forms and/or questionnaires devised by the inspectors;
- school prospectus;
- school development plan or equivalent planning document;
- annual report to parents;
- recent minutes of the governing body and/or local authority;
- curriculum policies, plans and schemes of work;
- other policy documents;
- school timetable;
- other information the school wishes to be considered.

(based on OFSTED, 1995)

The collection of such documentation usually means that the school concerned has been given prior notification of the inspection visit. The question is often raised as to whether inspections should be announced in advance or whether they should occur without the school receiving prior notification. It may be argued that in a 'surprise' visit inspectors are more likely to see things 'as they really are': for it is the case that schools can spend an inordinate amount of time in preparation for an inspection and perhaps put on special shows to

impress the inspectors. On the other hand, the efforts a school might make to put its house in order before the inspectors come can be beneficial and regarded as part of the improvement process which it is hoped that inspection achieves.

In practice it is difficult to see how a substantial inspection could take place without prior notification. If a team of inspectors descended on a school completely unannounced it would cause some considerable confusion and disruption. The likely result would be that the inspectors would *not* see the school under typical conditions.

Unannounced visits by individual inspectors concerned with a specific aspect of a school are more feasible and possibly acceptable to staff. Inspectorates are likely to hold different views on this issue. Some may stress their collegiality and therefore consider that unannounced visits would be treating teachers with less than professional courtesy.

Most of the evidence and data for an inspection is collected during the process itself. Inspectors employ similar methods to those familiar to evaluators, i.e. observing activities, asking questions and analyzing documents.

Observation

Inspectors generally adopt a *non-participant observer* role. In practice however the inspector may sometimes find himself adopting a more interactive role – perhaps asking children about the work they are doing in order to assess their level of understanding. Much will depend also on the nature of the activity observed and the age-range of the actors involved.

Observational methods may be distinguished according to their position on a *structured-unstructured* continuum. At the structured

end, methods use pre-determined categories based on specific observable behaviours which are recorded on a regular timed basis. The prototype is the Flanders Interaction Categories (Flanders, 1970) which codes different categories of teacher and pupil talk. In applying such systems inferences have to be made as to which categories are apparent in the behaviour being observed. The Flanders categories require low levels of observer inference. For example, the category 'giving directions' (where the teacher gives directions, commands and orders to which the pupil is expected to comply) can be easily recognized as an unambiguous aspect of behaviour. Such 'low inference' schedules are generally impractical in inspections given the large volume of classroom visits inspectors make over a short period of time. The schedules also tend to focus on a narrow band of behaviours which are not necessarily those of greatest educational interest. In practice therefore inspectors generally record their observations under more holistic or 'high inference' categories such as 'quality of learning'. Such categories are less unambiguously identified since they rely to a greater extent on the inferential abilities of the observer.

Inspectors thus tend to operate more towards the unstructured end of the continuum. Clearly inspectors need to be guided by some sense of purpose and require at the very least a framework which allows some flexibility to respond.

Although such schedules may vary in content according to different contexts (classroom lessons, laboratory sessions, meetings etc.) they tend to have a common general structure. In essence this consists of an organizing structure of headings representing what are considered to be the main features of the aspect being inspected. These features may simply be the relevant inspection criteria. The headings are typically elaborated by a small number of prompts, questions or items

(inspection sub-criteria). The comments usually take the form of short notes of a descriptive and evaluative nature.

OFSTED, drawing on earlier HMI practice, has also introduced a system of supplementing its comments with a system of numerical ratings (see *Table 1*), for example:

Table 1. Example of numerical ratings

Teaching should be graded as:		Where the net effect of its strengths and weaknesses is best summarized by the descriptor:
Grade 1	Excellent	
Grade 2	Very good	promotes very high educational standards
Grade 3	Good	
Grade 4	Satisfactory	promotes sound educational standards
Grade 5	Unsatisfactory	
Grade 6	Poor	promotes very low educational standards
Grade 7	Very poor	

Source: Guidance on recording inspection evidence and summarizing judgements, OFSTED, 1995.

This has the advantage of allowing ratings made on different occasions or by different inspectors to be aggregated so as to give quasi-quantitative summaries of the form '80 per cent of lessons seen were satisfactory or better'.

An important distinction should be noted between the typical practice of inspectors and researchers towards the recording of observational data. A researcher will generally maintain a set of field-

notes from which evaluative and other judgements are made after the data which they contain have been analyzed. Inspectors, in contrast, tend to record their evaluations directly on to observation forms. So there can be no certainty about the nature of the processes involved between the inspector experiencing an event and recording it on the form (see Maw, 1995:79).

In principle there is no reason why inspectors should not maintain field-notes from which they subsequently compile their final judgements. In practice however, given the short time-scales over which inspections occur, this is not really feasible.

Interviewing

Inspectors have always obtained evidence through discussion with teachers and others involved in the work of a school. Although in the past much was done through relatively informal talk, more recently inspectorates have felt the need to move towards more formal interviewing.

Approaches to interviewing for research purposes can be located on a structured-unstructured continuum. At the structured end, reliance is placed on the use of a carefully constructed interview schedule made up of a number of precisely focused and worded questions. Structured interviews can often resemble orally administered questionnaires. A tightly structured interview tends to be used where the interviewer has a fairly clear model, theory or view of the entity being investigated.

At the other end of the continuum are interviews which are open-ended and allow interviewees to talk freely about the topic under consideration. In practice, as with observation, an intermediate approach is likely to be more useful for inspections. That is to say, an inspector will tend to have a number of general issues and concerns

to explore, but will be relatively relaxed about the manner and order of their elicitation. Interviewees will be encouraged to talk about their views on the particular theme of the interview. For example, a headteacher might be asked about the nature and extent of staff development within the school. In so doing, some of the inspector's specific concerns may be addressed naturally; if not, the interviewee's responses will be sought directly. In other words, a loose structure of issues can constitute a series of prompts which the inspector intersperses, where appropriate, in the interviewee's flow of talk.

Research practice such as the recording of interviews, followed by playback and detailed analysis is not generally a realistic proposition for inspectors given the time and other constraints under which they operate. Usually therefore interview responses are recorded directly in note form and organized perhaps under individual themes for subsequent consideration. The use of large samples of interviewees is also usually precluded in inspections. In some cases, however, this may not be a problem since the population of relevant interviewees may be sufficiently small in number for all to be interviewed. For instance, in the inspection of a mathematics department an inspector may well be able to interview all of the teachers involved.

Pupil interviews are now becoming a more familiar feature of inspections and here, because of the sheer number of pupils potentially involved, some form of sampling is usually necessary. Group interviews are one way of dealing with larger numbers. These bring together people who are encouraged to talk about the topic of interest under the guidance of the interviewer. The method has been used with teachers, pupils and even with parents. Managing the group dynamics of such situations, while at the same time keeping discussion

on track and encouraging participation, can be more difficult than that for individual interviews.

As already noted, interviewing is not always a formal activity, separate from observation. Individual teachers may be interviewed more naturally and conveniently in the contexts in which they are observed. Teachers' views will therefore often be incorporated within the observation record. Formal interviews will always present some organizational problems such as the potential disruption of lessons by the withdrawal of pupils or the need to create special occasions to bring together people such as governors and parents. In some cases therefore it may be more convenient to use a questionnaire.

Questionnaires

If questionnaires are to be used they need to be easily and quickly completed. It is also essential that the results from questionnaires can be rapidly analyzed so that the evidence they provide can be considered without undue delay. This means that questionnaires should be brief – composed of items requiring short or closed responses. A good example is provided by the one-page questionnaire sent to all parents in advance of an OFSTED inspection. This consists of 11 short statements about the school which parents are required to rate on a five-point scale of disagreement-agreement. The statements included are listed below.

1. I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school.
2. I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren).
3. The school handles complaints from parents well.
4. The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught.
5. The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress.

6. The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work.
 7. The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons.
 8. I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home.
 9. The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren).
 10. The school achieves high standards of good behaviour.
 11. My child(ren) like(s) school.
- (Parents' Questionnaire, OFSTED, 1995).

Results can be quickly summated so as to give a picture of the extent of parental consensus on these issues.

Questionnaires constructed in this way have been developed on a variety of aspects of school life for completion by parents and other groups such as teachers and pupils. Some of the more interesting and useful models were elaborated in the Australian State of Victoria by the Education Review Office and are being used now in a great number of schools.¹

Documents

A variety of documentation is usually available to inspectors. Much of this will consist of documents and records provided by the school. The amount of such material will be considerable even in the case of the smallest school and so a sample will need to be chosen with care and discrimination. School prospectuses, curricular and other policy statements, records of meetings and various forms of school statistics

¹ The range of questionnaires available can be accessed via <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/ofreview>.

are likely to be among those that inspectors will find particularly valuable.

Documentation serves two broad purposes: to help formulate an initial understanding of the school, to identify possible issues for subsequent inspection; and also to help substantiate judgements emerging from other sources of evidence. A special case of the use of school documentation is the common practice of scrutinizing a sample of pupils' work.

Given the different varieties of documentation available it is much more difficult to describe an overall approach for their treatment and use. As a result, inspection handbooks and the like tend to devote less attention to relevant procedures than to those for observation and interviewing. In general however it can be said that documents and records should be interrogated with the appropriate inspection criteria very much in mind.

Developing bespoke instruments or using existing ones?

Where an inspection handbook or manual exists it will generally specify in some detail the range of evidence on which inspectors will draw. As already indicated, this evidence will be generated from observation, interviews, surveys and the use of in-school documentation. The extent to which these methods may be made explicit in the form of specific schedules, questionnaires, observational categories etc. will no doubt vary from inspectorate to inspectorate. Although in most cases inspectorates will wish to develop their own 'bespoke' materials, they are likely to gain some guidance by examining those which have been developed by researchers.

Knowledge of research into fields related to inspection such as school effectiveness and school improvement will be useful to

inspectors in two main ways. First, it will bring to mind some of the methodological pitfalls involved in investigating school processes. Second, it may identify methods and techniques which, if not usable directly for inspection purposes, could be appropriately adapted. To take but one example, educational researchers have long been interested in the notion of school ethos or culture and particularly its relationship to pupil achievement. The significance of ethos or culture is clearly implicit, if not explicit, in the concerns of school inspection. Research questionnaires measuring this aspect have been developed which are also suitable for administering to groups of teachers, pupils and others. These have the advantage of being relatively easily analyzed (see Gaziel, 1997 for a recent example). Such instruments, although they may need some modification in the light of different national contexts, have great potential in providing possible cost-effective alternatives to at least some inspection approaches.

III. CARRYING OUT TRUSTWORTHY INSPECTIONS

There is little doubt that most teachers find inspection an occasion of anxiety and stress (Brimblecombe et al., 1995; Dean, 1995; Jeffrey and Woods, 1998). Much of the anxiety touches something fundamental in the teacher psyche - the reluctance to be observed teaching, even amounting to fear in some cases. This in turn is perhaps related to the special characteristics of the act of teaching:

Teaching combines privacy, autonomy and immediacy to an unusual degree. No act infringes these three properties so completely as inspection by an unknown observer. Full formal inspection applies that infringement on the scale of the whole institution and does so within a limited span of time (Pearce, 1986: 134-5).

To be observed teaching is to present a window on to the self. The act of teaching lies at the heart of the teacher's sense of professional and personal identity and self-esteem. When teaching competence is perceived to be wanting, a major aspect of the teacher's life-purpose can be brought into question.

Given then the intrusive nature of inspection and the often strong emotional reactions which it can engender, it is very necessary that individual inspectors act within a clear ethical framework.

The ethics of inspection

Inspection, like any form of evaluation, is not a value-free enterprise and consequently ethical issues are inevitably involved, even if not explicitly recognized. There is a modest literature concerned with the ethics of evaluation but much less attention has

been paid to the ethics of inspection. Although there is some overlap between the purposes of inspection and evaluation, it is fair to say that the former is more concerned with issues of accountability whereas the latter tends towards description and perhaps explanation. Nevertheless it is instructive to consider some of the main aspects identified by evaluators in the ethics of their practice, in the light of their possible significance for an ethics of inspection.

Simons (1989), comparing the ethical guidelines used in research and evaluation, identified three major features:

- the balance that needs to be maintained between the public right to know and the individual's right to privacy;
- the necessity for a set of specific procedures to guide the conduct of the study;
- the requirement that guidelines apply equally to all participants – all are treated equally in the conduct of the study (there is no privileged access or treatment).

In the case of the first, inspection tends to emphasize the right to know because its major concern is with accountability. This typically results in the publication of an inspection report for those judged to have that right, and this could extend to include the general public. The individual's right to privacy has traditionally been respected by such safeguards as not referring to specific individuals or quoting them by name in the report. A common inspectorial dictum was 'inspect the teaching not the teacher'. These principles are not necessarily sacrosanct and much depends on the political climate of the times in which inspection operates. For example, OFSTED practice now requires inspectors to report to headteachers those of their staff who are rated at either end of the teaching-quality scale.

The second aspect, adherence to specific procedures, is seen as essential to the growth of trust between the evaluator and those involved in the evaluation. Procedures for inspection may be set out explicitly in a handbook or manual, available to all. However, as already noted, a handbook enshrines a particular school model and approach to inspection, both of which may be contestable. Getting prior agreement on both by all concerned is therefore desirable, although not easy in a pluralist society.

The third aspect may be seen in inspectors encountering all of those involved in the educational process: teachers, senior staff, other staff, pupils etc. and moreover in treating all equally, although not necessarily identically. Thus the principle of confidentiality should apply to pupils as well as to teachers, although the method of specific engagement will differ. For example, pupils will generally be observed as a group or class, whereas for teachers the focus will be on individuals in the context of their classroom and other duties.

Simons argues that certain features of these ethical guidelines are generally applicable whatever the context of evaluation, such as:

- no documentation will be examined or copied without explicit authorization;
- permission will be sought for publication of interview data that are attributable or identifiable to individuals;
- information that is not identifiable or summarizes general issues will not require specific clearance;
- data will be stored in locked files and destroyed after a specified time.

Their application to inspection tends to be rather less precise. Access to documentation is generally assumed and may be explicitly authorized by local or national legislation and regulation. As already

noted, direct attribution or identification is typically avoided, although it must be admitted that a reader 'in the know' may successfully infer the contribution made by a specific teacher to some aspect referred to in an inspection report. Also, references made in a report to the headteacher and senior management team inevitably refer to identifiable individuals.

Specific clearance of an inspection report, and issues within it, is often of a limited nature, with most influence being exerted by the inspectors. For example, the publication of an inspection report may be a statutory requirement and any influence which school staff have in determining its content restricted to correcting matters of factual inaccuracy rather than modifying the judgements made.

Destruction of data after use may not necessarily occur. Data from OFSTED inspections are stored in summary form within a schools' database from which they may be extracted for further analysis (in 'desk-type' surveys).

Where an inspection system is well established, ethical and other procedures may be taken for granted as the way things are - their origins perhaps lost in time. However, where an existing inspection system is being reviewed with a view to change, or where a system is being established *de novo*, the question of procedures will need to be directly addressed and the opportunity for wide consultation to reach broad agreement should be grasped.

The etiquette of inspection

The formulation of a set of ethical guidelines may be expressed, as some inspectorates have attempted, in the form of a 'code of conduct'. Inevitably such codes will be expressed in broad terms and will require sensitivity and care in carrying them through. As in all

successful human intercourse, broad guiding principles need the application of finer-grained behaviours to lubricate the gears of day-to-day interaction. There is a need for what, in an earlier age, was understood by the notion of 'etiquette'.

The etiquette of inspection is reflected in numerous courtesies which sensitive inspectors have always employed and which perhaps merit explicit formulation. For example, although inspectors may have the right to enter any classroom, it does make a difference if they say to teachers something like: 'Would you mind if I joined your lesson?' When in the classroom the inspector may wish to talk to individual pupils. This might be appropriate when pupils are working on their own at some task, but clearly not when the teacher is engaged in teaching the whole class. Even in the former case, the inspector should ask whether the teacher would mind if he/she talked to the pupils. Being as unobtrusive as possible in classrooms should be a major concern of inspectors so that any disturbance of the normal situation is minimized.

One complaint that teachers frequently make is that, after being observed, the inspector leaves and provides no comment. This is not necessarily drawing attention to a lack of common courtesy in thanking a teacher on leaving, but rather in not providing any comment to the teacher on the lesson. Now there are some difficulties here. It would not be appropriate to carry out a conversation within the ear-shot of pupils and time may have to be found outside of the lesson. That may not be easy because both teachers and inspectors have very full timetables. Teachers are however keen to talk about their teaching and to hear inspectors' views of it. If it is not possible to comment on every lesson seen, time may nevertheless be found for a summative comment at some point during the inspection period - during lunch or at the end of the day.

In the early days of OFSTED inspections, a rigid separation was made between inspection and the provision of advice. Advice was interpreted widely to include giving feedback to individual teachers on their classroom performance. As a result of teacher complaints this restriction was lifted and inspectors are now required to provide such feedback. The point at which feedback shades into the provision of explicit advice is of course not sharply defined. In England it is still the case that the provision of general advice on how to improve aspects of teaching and the school as a whole is not seen as the responsibility of inspectors. Such advice, if it is needed, is to be provided by those who are separate from, and not involved in, the inspection process. This separation was not so in the pre-OFSTED days and remains a contentious issue and one on which inspectorates in other countries may have a different view.

On the matter of etiquette the important point for an inspector to bear in mind throughout is ‘how can I show that I respect the integrity of this person as a teacher, pupil, governor etc.?’ Or more fundamentally, ‘how can I show my respect for this person as a fellow human being?’ Observing etiquette does imply a certain degree of formality and ‘distance’. However, this should not be carried too far. Teachers frequently indicate that they do not like inspectors who are seen as ‘cold’ or ‘aloof’ inquisitors. They welcome a degree of collegiality and even touches of humour.

Making trustworthy judgements

The key challenge of all inspections is to ensure that the reports which are produced are considered trustworthy. The problem is that it is not easy to apply the criteria for assessing the rigour of conventional research (validity, reliability) to the conduct and outcomes of inspection. This is because such criteria are derived from

quantitative assumptions and procedures which play a relatively small part in inspections, where the making of qualitative judgements is the more typical feature. It is more appropriate to use analogous criteria derived from the tradition of qualitative enquiry. One set of alternative criteria, which the author has shown elsewhere (Wilcox, 1992) as having relevance to inspection, and indeed being consistent with some well-established inspection procedures, draws from the work on qualitative evaluation of Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba propose the criterion of credibility as equivalent to that of internal validity in conventional research. Internal validity is concerned with the extent to which an evaluation establishes how things really are. The notion of credibility, however, reflects a scepticism about an unambiguous reality 'out there' and a recognition that complex interactions, such as those associated with teaching and learning, are better regarded as 'social constructions'. Lincoln and Guba suggest several techniques for enhancing credibility, some of which can be regarded as intuitively present in some inspection practices.

Triangulation

Triangulation is perhaps the most commonly recommended procedure. In brief it involves the collection of different kinds of data so that these can be subsequently used to corroborate one another. Triangulation may involve the use of multiple and different sources, methods and evaluators. When applied to inspection, the use of different sources can be seen in multiple instances of one type of source (e.g. observation in classrooms), information from different interviewees (e.g. pupils or teachers), or different sources of the same information (e.g. comparing a description of staff development given by teachers, headteacher and as found in a school policy document).

The use of different methods may be represented by the use of different techniques of data collection (e.g. use of observation, interviews, document analysis) and, although more rarely, different inspection models.

The use of different evaluators is clearly the case for an inspection involving a team, particularly for cross-school aspects which are not the specialist preserve of any one inspector. For example, everyone in an inspection team will form a judgement on such an ubiquitous aspect as pupil discipline. As a result, the evaluation of each inspector should be considered in arriving at an overall assessment.

Peer debriefing

This involves an evaluator engaging with a disinterested peer in an extended discussion about all aspects of an evaluation as it progressively unfolds. The role of peers is to pose searching questions in order to help evaluators to assess critically the methods used and the quality of the research findings. Such a function might be fulfilled by an experienced inspector not formally involved in the inspection concerned. In addition something analogous to this can be said to occur in inspections through the informal interactions and formal meetings that take place between members of the inspection both in school and outside.

Member checks

These are regarded by Lincoln and Guba as the single most crucial technique for establishing credibility. They occur where the analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions of an evaluation are tested with members of the stakeholding groups from whom the data were collected. It can be argued that inspections typically include such member checks in the feedback sessions that may occur during an

inspection and particularly at the end when the inspectors' final judgements are being shaped up. However, the extent to which in practice such sessions go beyond simply checking for factual inaccuracies to allow the questioning of actual judgements and the basis on which they rest is more questionable.

Member checks serve a number of purposes, namely to provide opportunities for respondents: to clarify intentions; to correct factual errors and challenge interpretations; to volunteer additional information; and to comment on the adequacy of the evaluation in part or whole.

Dependability and confirmability

Two other fundamental issues of conventional research enquiry are those of reliability and objectivity. *Reliability* is concerned with consistency in the production of results. It rests on the assumption that, in principle, every repetition of the same methods to the same phenomena should give the same results. The achievement of high reliability requires particularly the use of instruments with constant and known characteristics. *Objectivity* seeks to ensure that the findings of research are determined only by the subjects and conditions of the study and not by the biases or interests of the researchers. It is assumed that the effects of human bias or distortion will be reduced, if not eliminated, by the use of the experimental method.

Both of these concepts need some modification in the case of inspection where human judgement features so strongly and where one-off, experimental designs are not feasible. Inspections are by their very nature individual, highly context-specific and more in the style of enquiries which, although framed within a broad design, evolve so as to respond flexibly to the manifold and unpredictable contingencies of school life.

In such situations Lincoln and Guba would propose the terms *dependability* and *confirmability*. Dependability is associated with the process of an enquiry and the extent to which it is trackable and documented. Confirmability is concerned with the product of an enquiry and the assurance that the integrity of the findings is properly rooted in the data.

The major technique which Lincoln and Guba propose for establishing dependability and confirmability is the *external audit*. In order to carry out an audit there must be a residue of records stemming from an enquiry: the audit trail. Miles and Huberman (1984) have developed the notion of the *audit trail* further by suggesting that researchers document the procedures used during the conduct of a study. They propose the use of a series of forms outlining the procedures used for sampling, development of instrumentation, data collection and data analysis. A completed set of forms would enable an external auditor to follow an audit trail more easily and thus more quickly assess the accuracy and legitimacy of the procedures used. The act of completing the forms is also useful for the evaluator in helping to systematize the whole conduct of the evaluation.

The auditing model is particularly relevant where inspection has assumed, as in many countries in recent years, a high political profile. As a result, we can expect inspection to come under increasingly closer scrutiny than hitherto. Inspectorates will be required to convince practitioners, the public and their governments that they use methods and procedures which are systematic and worthy of confidence. This will require inspectorates to make their *modus operandi* explicit, and demonstrate the dependability and confirmability of their findings by internal auditing (as OFSTED attempt to do) and more importantly by periodic external auditing. Inspectorates will also find it advisable in maintaining their credibility

to publish details of their training programmes for new recruits and for experienced staff. A significant element of such programmes would be concerned with the acquisition, retention and development of inspection and auditing skills.

External auditing is a very costly and time-intensive exercise if applied to every inspection. Random sampling of inspections for auditing is therefore a more feasible proposition. In addition, random ‘spot checks’ might be made by an auditor (perhaps someone from another inspectorate) while an inspection is actually under way.

Another safeguard of dependability and confirmability is the wide availability of the inspection procedures and code of conduct. This, together with a recognized ‘complaints procedure’, will do much to ensure that inadequately carried out inspections are identified as soon as possible.

The role of judgement

As was suggested in *Chapter II*, inspection is essentially based on a model of judgement involving the application of specific criteria. There are at least three assumptions behind this model. The first assumption is that the criteria are regarded as standards of good practice which are generally accepted. This, however, cannot be automatically guaranteed. For example, there is some difference of opinion as to the merit of keeping strictly to pre-determined lesson plans:

The pre-ordained scheme stubbornly persisted in involves the use of violence against the spirit, and springs from a bluntness and insensitivity alien to the good teacher. He is not concerned with enforcing conformity to a design but with encouraging the unfolding of an aspiration (Walsh, 1964, Chapter 1).

The second assumption is that the *meaning* of the criteria is in turn unambiguous, in that they are immediately and transparently the same for all. Bowring-Carr (1996) suggests that this involves adopting a 'formalist' view of language which assumes that meaning can be fixed among readers over time. He argues that reading involves the active creation of the reader's own meaning and not the passive reception of someone else's: consequently different readers will assign different meanings and emphases to the same terms. This difficulty may be overcome by the 'concept of the "interpretative community" [which] makes possible a shared meaning, arrived at over time and with a lot of discussion, by a community of people working and reading and talking together' (op. cit.: 44). On this view an inspectorate *might* constitute such an interpretative community, although clearly reliance on just being a group of permanent members *per se* would be insufficient. An inspectorate would have to work consciously to achieve such a desirable state by regular and carefully constructed meetings and training programmes.

The latter strategy could be extended to teachers so that they too become part of the community. Indeed the OFSTED inspection manual is widely used by schools not only in preparing their staff for inspection, but also for general curriculum and management training. As a result, a broad consensus on the interpretation of school practices and structures can be said to exist amongst teachers and inspectors. It should be noted, however, that not everyone would regard such apparent agreement as necessarily a good thing.

The third assumption is that the application of criteria is a straightforward process. Guidance on precisely how to use and apply the criteria would be necessary although typically this is sparse to the point of non-existence. Consider some general questions. Are all the designated criteria of equal value and importance in helping to

form judgements of specific aspects? Clearly not. How do inspectors deal with those frequently encountered cases where one or more of the criteria are just not in evidence in certain situations? How are these 'omissions' taken into account in the judgements made? How are judgements made in relation to criteria that may be transformed into a grading on five- or seven-point scales? No doubt inspectors develop 'rules of thumb' to deal with these issues, which are likely to vary from one inspection team to another. The scope therefore for a wide variety of practice within an inspectorate could be considerable, thus casting doubt on a report's dependability and confirmability.

How can such variation be minimized? All inspection judgements arise from two principal sources: from individual inspectors acting alone; or from a group of inspectors collaborating together. The first case is exemplified by a specialist inspector assessing the teaching of a particular subject department. This will involve judgements being made on different aspects (quality of teaching etc.) on the basis of definite criteria. Judgements made on each of the criteria may be recorded separately or 'combined' into a single overall judgement, including perhaps as a rating on an appropriate point-scale.

The operations involved should be made clear so that, in principle, they could be followed by other specialist inspectors in that field. If there are such in the inspectorate team, then it will be possible for them to agree on what combination and rating 'rules' to follow. In addition they would be able to carry out 'dependability' checks among themselves so as to ensure that they are broadly making the same kind of judgements. Initially they might inspect in pairs, separately recording their judgements and ratings and then meet to compare notes and resolve differences of approach. This might result in some modification of the rules to ensure closer agreement of judgements. Ideally this would continue until an acceptable level of consistency

was achieved. Thereafter there would be periodic checks to ensure that the dependability of their judgements was maintained.

The second case arises where judgements have to be made on aspects which are not the exclusive concern of a single inspector. For example several, if not all, inspectors may be expected to contribute to judgements made on cross-curricular and other school-wide matters such as management. The task here is to agree on an overall judgement or set of judgements which take appropriate account of the individual judgements of the separate inspectors contributing to the process.

Most inspectorates claim that this is accomplished through discussion involving all team members during, and especially towards the end of, the inspection. How exactly a team meeting accomplishes this task is by no means clear and there is much scope for variation from meeting to meeting. If team judgements are to be secure (dependable and confirmable) it is essential that there are agreed procedures for how team meetings are to be conducted. In an attempt to streamline the process an inspection team leader typically brings provisional judgements, based on prior access to the judgements of individual inspectors, to the meeting for consideration. Clear procedures will be necessary to ensure that any disagreements with the provisional judgements are aired. This requires that adequate time is available to examine any conflicting evidence and to resolve any differences of view to the satisfaction of all. In other words, just as conventional committee meetings are often governed by a set of standing orders, inspection teams should work to a set of explicit 'judgement forming' procedures.

This is especially necessary where, as is usually the case, there is an attempt to summarize the myriad of judgements made during the

course of an inspection into a limited set of summary recommendations for subsequent action by the school.

Confirmability of the ‘findings’ on an inspection may be accomplished by an audit. In general terms the process may be represented schematically as follows:

Report

Main recommendations for action

Detailed findings

Second-stage summaries

Aggregated judgements and ratings

First-stage summaries

Completed observation, interview and other forms

Inspection activities

Observation of classes and other activities, interviews, scrutiny of documents etc.

Starting with the report, the auditor would be able to check whether the main recommendations for action were consistent with the detailed findings dispersed throughout the text. The findings could then, in turn, be examined for consistency against the ‘second-stage summaries’, which consist of the various forms aggregating the judgements and possibly the ratings made on the different aspects of the school. These summaries should also be consistent with the ‘first-stage summaries’, which include the individual recording forms completed by each inspector.

These various forms of documentation: the report; the second-stage summaries; and the first-stage summaries constitute the ‘inspection evidence’. It should be noted that this evidence cannot, in most cases, be compared directly to the individual inspection activities, since these occurred as irretrievable happenings in the past

(e.g. observation of a particular lesson). As Maw (1995: 79) has rightly commented “[t]here is no quantitative record of classroom events, there is no descriptive record either, nothing comparable to the ethnographer’s notebook, for instance. The only recorded outcome is itself evaluative”. There can be no certainty about what processes were involved between the inspector experiencing an inspection event, and recording it on a form. At best it can only be assumed that the processes involve proper application of the inspection criteria.

It might be argued that the trustworthiness of a report can be assessed by the degree to which those who ‘know’ the school, particularly the teachers, recognize and accept its findings. Indeed, it is not uncommon for headteachers to comment that the report describes the school as they know it to be. There are problems with this of course. For example, a headteacher might be relieved to learn that inspectors had not uncovered ‘skeletons in the cupboard’ and be only too willing to agree to an overall favourable report. Then again, the findings of reports can sometimes be fiercely contested by schools, particularly when the overall situation is described in unfavourable terms. Contestation may imply a lack of trustworthiness, although not necessarily so. In other words, inspections, like other modes of evaluation, are always potentially assailable. Eisner reminds us that evaluation is a form of criticism and that:

every act of criticism is a reconstruction. The reconstruction takes the form of an argued narrative, supported by evidence that is never incontestable; there will always be alternative interpretations of the ‘same’ play, as the history of criticism so eloquently attests (Eisner, 1991, p. 86).

The evidence on which the inspection report of an individual school is based can be stored on computer. When inspection data

from many different schools are brought together in this manner, they constitute an 'inspection database'. Such a database can be accessed in many different ways to generate further data and reports in the form of cross-school surveys, for example. OFSTED has established a database involving every school in England. This is now a key tool for generating the annual report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector on educational trends across the country. Computerization of inspection data and its use in this way is perhaps the most radical development in inspection technology in recent years.

Individual or team inspections?

The argument developed in this chapter is equally relevant to inspections carried out by individuals or by teams. Which broad mode is adopted will depend, as already noted, on the purpose, focus and scope envisaged for an inspection and the level of inspector resource that can be devoted to it. The more comprehensive the area to be inspected, the more likely it is that a team of inspectors will be necessary in order to guarantee the required range of specialist expertise and experience. Where the focus of an inspection is narrower (e.g. a particular curriculum area) the involvement of a single inspector will often be sufficient.

However, it would be possible for an inspectorate to operate a systematic programme of individual inspections based on the visits made by inspectors according to their areas of specialist expertise. Indeed many inspectorates in the past mainly relied on such an approach. Its weakness was that the information collected was often idiosyncratic to individual inspectors and not in a form to provide useful evidence of school- or system-wide effectiveness. However, given the recent growth in standardized formats for recording inspection judgements and their storage by computer, some of the

problems can be overcome. For example, an inspector could, over a period of time, examine the teaching of a curriculum area across all or a sample of schools. From the information obtained, a report could be made of the general state of the curriculum area concerned. It would also be possible to bring together the results of the individual visits made separately by different inspectors to a particular school, although the resulting report would probably lack the comprehensiveness and immediacy of the conventional team inspection. Inspectorates will normally therefore use both types of inspection and no doubt some of the variants between the two.

IV. FOLLOW-UP OF INSPECTION VISITS

Inspection is generally assumed by its advocates to lead to desirable change. It is also usually seen as a mechanism of accountability. However, there is no necessary contradiction between the two. Satisfying the demands of accountability implies that some action (and thus change) should follow from the production of an inspection report, especially if it contains elements of criticism.

How then can inspection lead to real change? Some change can occur as a result of the process of preparing for an inspection. School documentation may be brought up to date and in line with the expectations of inspectors. School premises may be smartened up in a variety of ways. Teachers are likely to attend more closely to the preparation of their lessons, the setting of homework and the marking of pupils' work, particularly during an inspection. As already noted, inspection can give rise to additional stress and anxiety. Such effects, both positive and negative, are, however, likely to be relatively short-lived, with 'normality' returning when the inspection is over.

Whether or not schools change in any permanent way is a consequence of the extent to which the conclusions of an inspection are acted upon. All inspections, irrespective of their length and scope, seek to draw out some general conclusions which are usually framed in an evaluative form. These may be positive – indications of where things are going well and/or negative – where attention is drawn to aspects which are less satisfactory. Inspection findings may be delivered orally and then, as is usually the case, backed up later by a written report.

The report, especially of an inspection involving the whole or a large part of a school, will contain very many individual findings or judgements about the various aspects involved. The general conclusions represent an attempt to summarize these in a form in which the essential issues can be readily comprehended. As outlined in the previous chapter, the process by which these conclusions are distilled from the bulk of the report generally occurs when the inspectors involved meet during the inspection, and particularly at its end, to consider their detailed findings.

Action on the recommendations proposed will be facilitated if they are realistic and expressed in as clear and unambiguous a way as possible. Opinion differs between inspectorates as to whether they should offer suggestions on how the recommendations for action are to be implemented. Some inspectorates will argue that this is best left to the school and that inspectors should not jeopardize their impartial, 'arms length' relationship with teachers by espousing favoured approaches. According to this view, if a school does require assistance it should be provided by a third party not directly involved in the inspection.

Implementing inspection recommendations

Recent research has indicated that the implementation of inspection recommendations is far from unproblematic (Ouston et al., 1996; Wilcox and Gray, 1996; CEPPP, 1999). This research can be used to suggest some general guidelines for effective implementation.

In recent years schools in many countries across the world have been encouraged to make explicit their aspirations in the form of a school development plan (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; 1992). The first step therefore in deciding how inspection recommendations are to be implemented is to check whether any of them are already

anticipated in the school's existing development plan (SDP). If so, it may be necessary to consider whether the time-scales and activities proposed in the SDP reflect priorities appropriately. If not, then some adjustments to the plan will be required.

Details of the implementation of any recommendations not covered in this way should be formulated using the general format of the SDP. This typically requires specification of the activities necessary to ensure implementation, the resources needed, staff responsibilities, time-scale, monitoring arrangements, and the evaluation criteria by which implementation will be judged. *Table 2* below shows an example of how a recommendation following the inspection of a primary school was translated into practice.

Details of this nature can then be included within the SDP. The overall effect therefore is to update the SDP to reflect the priorities identified in the inspection. As a result, inspection is less likely to be seen as an arbitrary 'bolt on' and more as an opportunity to reassess the emphases and time-scales of the SDP.

In the case of schools which lack experience of school-wide planning, the task of implementing an (generally more limited) action plan following an inspection provides a good introduction to the later development of a more comprehensive SDP.

Development planning, if it is to be more than a bureaucratic exercise, has to be based on a genuine collaboration between those who are the stakeholders of the school (teachers, governors etc.). In other words, a format for planning is inadequate if it is not also accompanied by a process of collaboration and decision-making. Only in this way will there be real ownership of the plan and the possibility of its internalization in the consciousness of all concerned.

Table 2. Example of follow-up to a recommendation arising from a primary school inspection

Recommendation

To extend the existing good assessment system in English and mathematics to the science curriculum

Person responsible

Jane Smith

Reporting to:

(a) headteacher; (b) governors meeting

Activities

Jane Smith to attend five-day science assessment course provided by the local education authority: 2/2/98 - 6/2/98 Jane Smith to lead staff in-service meeting: and reach whole staff agreement on the format of individual children's records and class records: 10/3/98

Ongoing monitoring

Jane Smith to examine 10 per cent sample of records each term

Evaluation

Implementation assumed complete when termly monitoring shows consistency of approach among staff

After one year (15/3/99) all staff complete short questionnaire to assess the efficiency of the system, its value to teachers in enabling them to assess individual progress, and report to parents

Resources

Teacher supply cover to release Jane Smith to attend course and work with staff: £600

Stationery materials: £50

Review

Biannually, starting 6/6/99, together with review of whole school assessment system

It is not easy to achieve this kind of consensus and sense of ownership within the large and diverse communities that schools represent. It is time-consuming and there is always the temptation to short cut the process by making the construction of a plan the sole preserve of one or more senior staff. Furthermore, planning may seem a somewhat sterile task that lacks the kind of excitement and creativity that fires the best of teachers. The challenge is to turn what may seem a boring, administrative chore into the realization of an inspiration by demonstrating how the plan seeks to embody and further the realization of the school's aims and mission. This may be made explicit in a preamble to the plan which the headteacher could also announce in a formal launch of the plan. Thereafter school aims, mission and plan should be regularly invoked by senior staff, teachers, governors in their respective formal and informal groups. It should be a constant reminder of the context within which all school activities find their justification and direction.

The literature on school improvement clearly indicates that implementation of change is seldom straightforward. For example, Fullan (1982) holds that the implementation of major change takes two or more years. Moreover, he identifies two phases beyond implementation. *Institutionalization* means changes being sustained beyond the first year or so of implementation and becoming an ongoing part of the system. According to Fullan this can take from three to five years to accomplish after the initial adoption of a change. Ultimately, of course, the hope is that implementation and institutionalization will lead to improvements in the quality of education on offer and the learning achieved by pupils. This corresponds to Fullan's second post-implementation phase of *outcome*.

Whether or not the recommendations of an inspection constitute a *major* programme of change and improvement will depend on the scope of the inspection and the nature of the recommendations and the extent to which they indicate major deficiencies in the school or aspect inspected. Some recommendations will be easier to implement than others. For example, a new policy document on assessment may be relatively quickly created. The actual implementation of the policy in practice and its subsequent satisfactory institutionalization is less assured and will certainly take time. This is implicitly recognized in the case described in *Table 2* above. Getting staff agreement on the new format for science assessment may occur within a month or so. Evidence for implementation and institutionalization from periodic sampling of records and the collection of staff opinion by questionnaire is gathered over a further year or more.

Moreover, no attempt is made to assess whether the outcome phase is reached. This could only be determined after pupils had experienced the new system over a reasonable period of time. Even if this is the case, it will of course be very difficult to show that a specific change or set of changes has resulted in the improvement of pupil learning. Even an improvement indicated from test results compared to those of a previous cohort of pupils could have arisen from some other influence or from uncontrolled variations in pupil ability. Generally speaking, the adoption of an appropriate research design to establish such cause and effect relationships is an unrealistic expectation of teachers in schools. The best a school may offer is evidence which is suggestive rather than conclusive.

A particularly demanding type of inspection recommendation to implement is that concerned with developing the pedagogical skills of teachers. This can involve major behavioural change - in some cases perhaps, eliminating deeply ingrained teaching practices and their

replacement by new ones. To change one teacher significantly in this way will not be easy and may entail a lengthy programme of retraining and subsequent supervision. The task is even more difficult when applied to several teachers or a whole staff.

Often then the process of change following an inspection cannot realistically be achieved in a short period of time, especially if the phases of institutionalization and outcome are to be established. This is certainly in line with research findings. Moreover, the political climate which often surrounds inspection is likely to be hostile to any suggestion that change may take time to accomplish. Politicians tend to expect 'quick fixes'. On the other hand, adherence to realistic time-scales brings its own problems and may mean that there will be difficulties in maintaining the momentum to tackle recommendations as new pressures emerge. If quick implementation is not achieved, schools may be tempted to discontinue their efforts in order to respond to the latest demands.

Changes in teaching behaviour might be observed on a later inspection or re-inspection. Other evidence could be provided by teachers themselves assessing the extent to which they consider their teaching behaviour to have changed as a result of some specific post-inspection initiative. In fact collecting teacher opinion by interview or questionnaire can provide a reasonable 'proxy' for pupil outcomes. In other words, if teachers genuinely consider that their teaching has improved as a consequence, for example, of in-service training, then it is more likely that pupil learning will have benefited.

The resources to which a school has access - particularly in terms of the skills of its staff - are likely to be of paramount importance. If these are not appropriate and readily available, then successful creation and implementation of a post-inspection plan may be delayed or not occur at all. The efforts of the headteacher and senior staff

can prove crucial here. In many cases, therefore, schools will need external help. As mentioned already, some inspectorates may eschew providing post-inspection support and assistance, whereas others may be happy to do so. In either case, in some countries, schools may also have access to totally independent educational consultants. In England, largely as a consequence of the introduction of OFSTED inspections, there has been a significant growth in the commercial educational consultancy field which can offer assistance both before and after an inspection.

Even an 'arms length' inspectorate, while not offering detailed post-inspection advice, may exert influence, by subsequent monitoring visits, in ensuring that schools do produce a development plan and seek to implement it seriously. This may also be a statutory requirement of the governing body of a school as in the OFSTED post-inspection arrangements.

The implementation of an inspection report will in most cases require resources and whatever form these take they represent directly or indirectly a financial cost. It may not be possible to meet this cost from existing budgetary provision and even where it is technically possible, it might result in a severe distortion of other priorities. The crucial role of funding for successful post-inspection development is frequently cited by school staff and underlines the necessity for an inspection system to be complemented by a facility for additional funding.

The role of inspectors in follow-up

Inspectors are clearly accountable for their reports and the trustworthiness of their findings and recommendations. They are accountable to those responsible for the schools they inspect and those who use them. This could include the headteacher, school staff,

parents, governors, any maintaining local authority and government ministers. In practice such multi-accountabilities may be exercised through the provision of complaints/appeals procedures and/or scrutiny of inspection practice and outcomes by an independent body. An approximation to the latter is illustrated by the scrutiny given by HMI to OFSTED inspection teams.

But are inspectors accountable for the implementation of their recommendations? If the answer is 'yes' then they should be involved in some appropriate follow-up action. This could involve subsequent visits, perhaps even a follow-up inspection, to determine the extent to which individual recommendations have been implemented. This could well be prohibitive in terms of inspector time, although the follow-up of a sample of schools might be feasible.

Some might argue that inspectors should also demonstrate their accountability for the implementation of their recommendations by providing direct advice and support. Others would hold that this puts inspectors in the position of inspecting their own work and would therefore prejudice their claims to independence and objectivity. Related to this is the view that the ultimate accountability for implementation of inspection recommendations lies with the school itself - staff and governors. The OFSTED position on this issue is that any help in implementation should only be given by those who were not involved in the original inspection. There is room for a legitimate difference of view however. It could be maintained that those who carried out the inspection are in an unrivalled position to see how implementation is best achieved. Inspectorates in other countries may well hold different views about the desirability of separating inspection from follow-up support.

A special case of follow-up: the failing school

The vast majority of schools may be expected to provide, at the very least, an acceptable standard of education for their pupils. An important expectation of inspection is to be able to identify the minority of schools where this is not so. In such extreme cases it is especially important that the code of conduct is scrupulously observed by inspectors so that their judgements are secure. This in turn means that the criteria for designating a school as failing must be as clear and explicit as possible.

OFSTED (1997) identifies criteria that have to be met relating to three main areas:

- educational standards achieved;
- quality of education provided;
- the management and efficiency of the school.

In order to help determine the extent to which some or all of these criteria apply it is suggested that each one is analyzed into sub-criteria expressed in question form. For example:

Quality of education provided

Is there a high proportion of unsatisfactory teaching?	Yes/No
Are there low expectations of pupils?	Yes/No
Is there failure to implement the National Curriculum?	Yes/No
Is there very poor provision of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	Yes/No
Are pupils at physical or emotional risk from other pupils or adults in the school?	Yes/No
Are there abrasive and confrontational relationships between staff and pupils?	Yes/No

(OFSTED, 1997:22).

Now as already noted, the process of creating further sub-criteria can lead to an infinite regress and so for sheer practical purposes a halt has to be made at some point. Consequently the application of criterial lists cannot be reduced to a mechanical and unequivocal process; the act of judgement is in-eliminable and its status can always be questioned. The issues of credibility, dependability and confirmability discussed in the previous chapter apply with even greater force because of the seriousness of labelling a school as failing when it is not and vice versa.

It is essential therefore that the judgements of the inspection team should be subject to independent confirmation. Under OFSTED arrangements this task is performed through the office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI). This involves a small team of HMI having access to inspection evidence and carrying out a visit to the school concerned. If, after this, HMCI agrees with the judgement of the original inspection team that the school is failing (or likely to fail) to provide an acceptable standard of education, it is designated as requiring 'special measures'.

For an individual inspection team an encounter with a failing school may be a relatively rare event. The experience will be more frequent however for HMI because they are required to scrutinize all such cases across the country as a whole. Under these circumstances, it may be argued that HMI display some of the characteristics of an 'interpretive community' and therefore their judgement on whether or not a school is failing can be accepted with confidence.

'Turning round' a failing school represents a major challenge and the post-inspection arrangements are crucial. A development plan is of special importance – becoming in effect a 'rescue' plan for the school. Such a school is more likely to require external assistance in

constructing its development plan than the normal run of schools. Substantial additional resources may also be necessary in the form of equipment, materials and in-service education. The latter may have to be both intensive and extensive where a school's failure is largely attributed to the quality of its teaching. It may be necessary even to appoint additional staff.

The plan will need to be carefully and regularly monitored locally and/or nationally. Evidence of improvement against specific targets and criteria within defined time-scales will be necessary. Re-inspection will be required as the final test of whether or not a school can be judged to have improved sufficiently to merit return to 'normality'. Where this is not merited a school's ultimate fate may be closure.

The ability to identify clearly such *in extremis* schools and to respond swiftly and successfully to their restoration are major indicators of the effectiveness respectively of inspectorates and education systems.

V. THE FUTURE OF INSPECTION

The challenges to inspection

The resurgence of interest in inspection has arisen because of the worldwide concern about the accountability of schools and the need for their continued improvement. Accountability has been of long-standing interest, whereas school improvement has come centre stage more recently, reflecting the belief that education is crucial for developing a skilled and flexible workforce necessary for a country's survival under global capitalism.

There is also a third and perhaps less often articulated factor underlying the drive for greater accountability and improvement. Ours is an age in which the unprecedented pace of globalization, mass communications and social change have put at risk the very stability of society. As people's commitment to family, church, community and the other 'little platoons' which provided the social glue of civilized life have atrophied, governments worldwide have ratcheted up their expectations of schools to help buttress the shaky social and moral foundations of society. Inspection seems to embody the promise of holding schools to account not only for the intellectual development of their pupils, but increasingly for their 'spiritual, moral and cultural development'.

There is no doubt that at the present time inspection is at one of its peaks of popularity, at least with governments. A recent survey of 13 European countries (CEPPP, 1999: Appendix 1) found that although only two have local inspectorates the majority (10) have a national inspectorate. Beneath these general figures the general trends are clear, although there are individual differences:

- almost all countries have moved the inspection focus from that of the individual teacher or pupil to that of the school;
- most inspection is based on ‘connoisseurial and intuitive forms of inspection’ although there has also been a move towards an emphasis on school outcomes as measured partly by indicators and partly by observation;
- in some countries there has been a distinct attempt to distinguish support for development from inspection for control;
- in some countries the feed-in from inspection to policy is reflected in attempts to aggregate data from inspection;
- while many countries are attempting to liberalize their procedures by giving schools more autonomy, some have developed more rigorous control procedures.

If inspectorates are to continue as a major influence in the future they will need to recognize that they encounter an increasingly sophisticated clientele – teachers particularly, but also governors, parents and politicians. Reliance on the awe and deference inspired by the traditional role of inspectors is certainly not enough.

If teachers and teaching are to be inspected they deserve inspectors who they regard as acceptable in the subject or other areas(s) which they inspect and in their professional practice as inspectors. These in turn require the addressing of several important issues.

The good inspector should have appropriate qualifications and experience. A hard-pressed teacher of mathematics is unlikely to take seriously the judgements of an inspector that he suspects as having no academic qualification in the subject and little or no experience in teaching it. The recruitment and selection procedures for inspectors are therefore crucial, requiring at the very least the careful consideration of evidence from referees.

Formal qualifications and experience do not, of course, always go together. This may be particularly the case in developing countries where, for example, primary teachers generally have low formal academic qualifications. If such teachers are to be recruited to inspectorates they will require suitable in-service training with special emphasis on educational evaluation and assessment. This might be provided through appropriate master-level courses in education.

Appropriate training is necessary throughout an inspectorial career, not least to ensure that inspectors' qualifications and experience do not lag behind those in the schools. It is possible that initially well-qualified inspectors who remain in post for a long time may find, as a result of a general improvement in the educational and training opportunities available to teachers over the years, that they are now less qualified and experienced than those they inspect.

This concern is related to the perennial issue of whether or not inspectors should be recruited with a view to their permanent retention within the inspectorate. Some argue that permanent retention results in inspectors getting out of touch with the day-to-day concerns of teachers and that they should 'return' after some time to allow the recruitment of 'fresh blood'. What might be the 'some time'? Given the need for induction and the development of expertise in inspecting, this is unlikely, the author would suggest, to be less than five years. Yet others argue that inspectors should return, but for occasional spells, to schools in order to refresh their experience of the reality of school life.

Another point of view is that an inspectorate should consist of a mix of permanent inspectors and those on short-term contracts. Whichever view is taken, the importance of training and staff development is apparent. As already mentioned in *Chapter III*, training in the skills of inspection and the observance of a 'code of conduct'

are essential. However, the skills of inspection once acquired should be periodically assessed, resulting where necessary in further training. In the past it was assumed that the skills of inspection were connoisseurial and intuitive and that these were acquired by apprenticeship to a 'mentor' inspector and practice in the field. While both mentorship and practice continue to have an important part to play, they are no longer sufficient.

A final point with a bearing on the recruitment of inspectors needs to be made. If able and experienced inspectors are to be recruited, it is also important that associated salaries and career expectations are sufficient to attract appropriate applicants.

The great contribution which OFSTED, more than any other inspectorate, has made to inspection methodology is its attempt to make explicit what are assumed to be the procedural practices implicit in the connoisseurial/intuitive approach – in essence this is the criterial model of judgement described in *Chapter III*.

The approach which has been taken in this monograph is that the methodology of inspection is closest to that of qualitative evaluation as interpreted by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in their 'Naturalistic Enquiry' model. The ultimate acceptability of inspection judgements rests on that approach being widely understood both among inspectors and those inspected. An important element, therefore, in the training of inspectors is their induction into that approach and the development of appropriate accreditation in it.

Narrow training alone is insufficient. Inspection has to be the kind of profession that provides the inspector with continuing satisfaction and challenge throughout his career. Some might suggest that a diet of inspecting day in day out would become sterile and unsatisfying and that inspection activity needs to be complemented with other

professionally rewarding activity. This has, of course, traditionally been the case through inspectors' involvement in administrative, advisory, in-service and curriculum development and suchlike tasks. It is important therefore that there are opportunities for this kind of wider involvement, even where inspectors maintain an 'arms length' relationship with those they inspect. Furthermore, such opportunities are essential for the career development of those inspectors who might wish to leave to take up other posts in education.

Traditionally, inspection makes a sharp distinction between those who inspect and those who are inspected. The common assumption is that those in the latter category are not included in the former. Some attempts have already been made to blur the divide. For example, the inspection approach adopted in the further education sector in England by the Further Education Funding Council includes part-time appointments from the colleges, industry and commerce (Melia, 1995). Furthermore, colleges are actively involved in the planning of their inspection and nominate a senior member of staff as a full member of the inspection team (op. cit.: 38-42).

This kind of development is an example of the move to open up inspectorates and inspection to greater professional and public scrutiny and participation. This is a trend likely to continue given the role inspection is increasingly expected to play as a mechanism of accountability. OFSTED has already done much to make inspection and its procedures more transparent by extending inspectorial functions to include lay inspectors and, more radically, to commercial inspection teams.

Three other developments which help to increase the general transparency of inspection procedures, exemplified by the OFSTED experience, deserve mention.

First, as already noted, the availability of the inspection manual has widely penetrated the schools, where it is used for self-evaluation and development (CEPPP, 1999).

Second, all inspection reports of schools and other inspection activities are freely available to schools and the public generally. Reports can also be directly accessed via the Internet.

Third, the development of the OFSTED approach to inspection has led of late to probably more research being carried out on the inspection process and its outcomes than for the whole of its previous 150 or so years of existence. Initially much of this new research was concerned with the reactions of teachers and others to the process. More recently attempts have been made to assess the extent to which inspection leads to subsequent school improvement. Studies of both primary and secondary school inspections (Gray and Wilcox, 1995; Wilcox and Gray, 1996; CEPPP, 1999) have indicated the problematic nature of post-inspection change. The degree to which inspection report recommendations are implemented are potentially influenced by a variety of factors, not least of which is the extent to which the process can be driven forward and supported by personnel and other resources from within and/or outside the school.

School self-evaluation: an alternative to inspection

Inspection is an example of evaluation by outsiders. An alternative approach is evaluation by insiders, by those directly involved in the school – the teachers and perhaps others such as governors, pupils even. School self-evaluation (SSE) under a variety of titles and acronyms came into vogue in the 1970s and 1980s. In England many such schemes were produced by local education authorities for their schools (e.g. ILEA, 1977). Others were produced by national agencies such as GRIDS (Guidelines for Review and Internal Development of

Schools), McMahon et al., (1984) and through international projects (e.g. the International School Improvement Project sponsored by the OECD (Hopkins, 1987)).

With the rise of school development planning (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; 1992), another international education phenomenon, self-evaluation, received a new boost. School development planning typically involves a planning cycle consisting of four processes:

- *audit*: where the school reviews its strengths and weaknesses;
- *plan construction*: the selection of priorities for development expressed as specific targets;
- *implementation* of the planned targets and priorities;
- *evaluation*: the process of checking the extent of implementation against defined success criteria (Hargreaves et al., 1989).

The processes of audit, progress and success-checking constitute the key features of what is effectively a self-evaluation model. A major aim is to maximize the likelihood that evaluation influences action. In addition, self-evaluation contributes to the school's task of rendering an account of its achievements for the year. School development plans may therefore provide a means of integrating the developmental and accountability functions within a self-evaluation model.

Three major challenges, however, confront those who advocate a central role for self-evaluation. First, self-evaluation has to demonstrate its credibility. This may be attempted by providing an external validation of the process. One approach is through *moderation* which requires an assessment by those external to the school of judgements made by those within it. A moderator ideally brings to bear knowledge of comparable schools and is able to adjust judgements which are considered to be unduly lenient or severe.

Another approach is *accreditation* where a school is approved, for a definite period of time, to carry out its own self-evaluation. The presumption is that the institution has appropriate procedures for evaluation and that the outcome of applying them can be accepted with confidence. Another variant is *auditing*, which is an external check of the process of evaluation carried out and an attestation of the results obtained. Conducting an external audit in this sense would require the auditor to have access to the original data and other information which had been generated and used in the evaluation.

It is probably fair to say that the procedures for carrying out moderation, accreditation or external auditing are not yet worked out in sufficient detail as to command widespread acceptance.

The second challenge is that self-evaluation is never a cost-free exercise. The involvement of school staff means that their efforts are redirected, at least for some time, from other tasks such as teaching, to evaluation. Balancing the opportunity and other costs of engaging in self-evaluation against the benefits is therefore crucial. This, in turn, requires that the methods used are economic in terms of time and other resources. This is an aspect of the third challenge, essentially methodological, of how to collect, analyze and interpret data in effective and efficient ways which command broad acceptance – all of which are equally as problematic in self-evaluation as they are in inspection.

Self-evaluation, however, continues to have its advocates and is currently undergoing a modest revival in a number of countries. MacBeath (1999) has reported on an interesting international self-evaluation project involving 18 countries and a total of 101 schools. A common approach to self-evaluation was adopted by all the schools while respecting their different contexts and cultures.

Self-evaluation versus inspection is something of a false dichotomy. As we have seen, both face similar methodological issues and concerns about credibility and feasibility. A balance between the two approaches is likely to be better than an exclusive concern for one or the other. If the renaissance in self-evaluation continues to take root, then its development may in turn influence inspection.

It is doubtful whether many governments would be content to rely on a system of school accountability based solely on self-evaluation. At the very least there would have to be a reputable external element involved. The combination of self-evaluation and external review is an increasingly common feature in the systems of quality assurance that have developed in many countries since the late 1980s. In the Australian State of New South Wales, school self-evaluation is validated by a review team which includes external members who are principals, teaching and administrative staff from other schools (Cuttance, 1995). Two other well-known cases, where school supervision has taken the form of such a combination, are the State of Victoria in Australia (Gurr, 1999) and New Zealand (Fergusson, 1998).

For the foreseeable future it would seem that some form of school inspection or related external review has a secure place in the practice and policy of education.

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