

NALDIC Response to OFSTED ‘A focus on improvement: proposals for maintained school inspections from September 2009’

NALDIC welcomes the opportunity to respond to this important consultation. As the UK professional body for all those interested in raising the achievement of bilingual pupils with English as an Additional Language, we see this as an opportunity to support the development of an inspection and regulation system which fully supports these pupils’ access to the full curriculum and appropriate EAL provision thus ensuring that they achieve well. In particular we are pleased to note that the proposals will give greater weight to the progress made by different groups of pupils. We also support the proposals for routine inspections to have a particular focus as we believe this will often include issues relating to English as an additional language.

Q1 Is it appropriate to leave the inspection of good and outstanding schools for an interval of six years between inspections?

We are not convinced that the frequency of inspection is a key driver of school improvement. We believe that the quality of the inspection process is far more important. For example, the CRE (2007) found that a number of schools judged as outstanding did not have a plan for promoting race equality and were therefore not meeting their legal requirements. Changing the frequency of inspection would not, in itself, make a difference to this and similar situations.

Q2 Are the proposals for what a health check should include appropriate?

The proposed health check appears to make use of a number of appropriate materials, including the views of parents and pupils. However we believe that the current inspection system is heavily based on the evaluation of school’s contextual value added data. This data does not give an accurate picture of the progress that bilingual pupils are making. This is because there is no differentiation between, for example, pupils who are fluent in English as an additional language and pupils who are at early stages. CVA and attainment data relating to bilingual pupils are therefore flawed instruments in their capacity to indicate whether pupils at various stages of learning EAL are ‘doing well’. OfSTED has itself noted the limitations in CVA data. In a recent edition of Inspections and Schools (December 2007) it noted that:

Inspectors should be careful when interpreting the RAISEonline performance data for learners whose first language is not/is believed not to be English. RAISEonline does not group these learners based on their individual language needs and levels of proficiency. Consequently, in a given school, this group could include learners at the early stages of acquiring English along with advanced bilingual learners and those with basic literacy needs. As with all performance data, this grouping of learners will be helpful in identifying lines of enquiry that inspectors may wish to pursue. However, the particular context and circumstances of the school and its learners need to be taken into account when making judgements about learners’ achievement.

Whilst a skilled inspector can explore this more fully during a full Section 5 inspection, the proposed health check system would mean that further exploration would not be possible.

We believe that a model of assessment needs to be put in place which would provide a flexible mechanism for differentiating according to the range of learners of EAL, for example, the differing pathways for a Bangla speaker entering the school system at 4 or 5 years old compared with a 14 year old Polish speaker joining a school in Y9. A common national framework would take account of these different points of entry, provide criteria and supporting information about the varying developmental trajectories, recognise positive starting points for EAL and provide positive descriptions of growth.

Q3 Are the proposals for targeting inspection at satisfactory and inadequate schools appropriate?

We are not convinced that the frequency of inspection is a key driver of school improvement. We believe that the quality of the inspection process is far more important.

Q4 Is there a place for unannounced inspections?

Agree. We are familiar with situations where schools have made particular efforts to ensure that provision for bilingual pupils and a focus on diversity have been presented in the best possible light for the purposes of inspection. We believe that schools would be more vigilant in this area if there was a possibility of unannounced inspection visits.

Q5 Do you agree that we should put in place a national survey which captures the views of children and young people?

Strongly agree.

Q6 Do you agree that we should put in place a survey which captures the views of staff ?

Strongly agree.

Q7 Do you agree that a national survey of parents should take place annually?

Strongly agree. However caution will need to be exercised to ensure that this is representative. We believe that it is important for surveys of parents, pupils and staff to request gender and ethnic background details and to be available in a range of languages. This will help ascertain how representative the responses are and also be invaluable in identifying whether there are certain issues where the views of members of different communities are significantly different.

Q8 Should the senior management of the school play a greater part in inspection by shadowing the inspectors?

Agree, however there is a danger that the further formal involvement of senior managers will lessen the ability of the inspection team to probe sensitive issues robustly to fully triangulate perceptions of senior staff with those of other staff, pupils and parents.

Q9 Do you agree that inspectors should focus more attention on the achievement of different groups of pupils?

Strongly agree. However as highlighted in our response to Q2, the data which is currently in the public domain is an inadequate guide to how well bilingual pupils are achieving. It is therefore necessary for the DCSF to ensure that an appropriate system for the assessment of pupils' progress in learning English as an additional language is put into place. In addition, it is essential that inspectors spend more time than they currently do in classrooms to assess how well teaching meets the needs of these pupils on a daily basis. Alongside this, a programme of training needs to be put into place for inspectors to ensure that they are able to make these judgements reliably. The reduction of the size of teams since September 2005 has meant that relatively few schools benefit from inspection by an inspector with significant experience and understanding of issues relating to English as an additional language. As this is unlikely to change, we believe that it is essential for OFSTED to improve the arrangements that are made for training inspectors in this issue.

Q10 Do you agree that inspections should take more account of the capacity of the school to improve?

We would wish to see a stronger focus on whether targets for bilingual and minority ethnic pupils to achieve are incrementally challenging and how well resources made

available through the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant are used to help pupils meet these. Again, this requires a stronger focus on the appropriate assessment of bilingual learners.

Q11 Should we continue to use CVA as a measure of schools' progress?

As outlined above, we believe that CVA does not adequately reflect how well pupils at different stages of learning English are doing. This has already been recognised by OfSTED and caution advised. If this single flawed measure is given too much prominence within the inspection system, then the inspection process will be similarly flawed. In addition, in many schools the numbers of learners of EAL are too small to lead to statistically valid hypotheses.

Q12 Do you agree that we should define minimum standards for learners' outcomes?

Disagree. We believe that there are difficulties in too closely linking inspection judgements to definitions of what outcomes for learners should be. For example, a school with a very high proportion of early stage learners of English may struggle to meet such minimum standards whilst, in fact, ensuring that bilingual learners are well served by teaching and the curriculum and are thus able to make impressive gains in learning EAL.

Q13 Should we inspect the impact of partnerships on outcomes for pupils?

Agree

Q14 Should the inspectors' recommendations focus more precisely on the action the school should take to become good or better?

Agree. We believe that the current inspection regime has made it difficult for inspections to fully probe important issues relating to the provision for pupils learning English as an additional language and for other ethnic minority learners. In our small scale surveys, these issues have received relatively scant attention within published inspection reports. We believe that it is essential that the proposed foci for routine inspections reflect the needs of particular groups of pupils and that these will naturally include aspects of the education of EAL learners. For example, recent migration from the EU accession states has meant that provision for pupils at early stages of learning English has become an issue of great significance for certain localities and yet recommendations re the teaching and support for this group of learners very rarely feature in inspection reports. A combination of focus inspections and more precise recommendations would be helpful in continuing to assure the inclusion and achievement of EAL learners in all circumstances.

Q15 Should we write a letter to parents, setting out what the school should achieve by the next inspection and the actions the school needs to take to make that improvement?

Agree

The consultation is now closed