

Experiences of History Inspection

Sean Murphy experienced Classroom History Inspection for the first time since his Higher Diploma. Here he outlines what's in store for all teachers shortly.

Introduction

Subject inspection has been introduced gradually. It was referred to in

- ♦ The Green Paper (1992) which outlined *'the need for a system of effective quality assurance*

- ♦ The White Paper (1995) which said *'the Inspectorate has the main responsibility for quality assurance.....'*

- ♦ The Education Act (1998), Part 3, where the Inspectorate

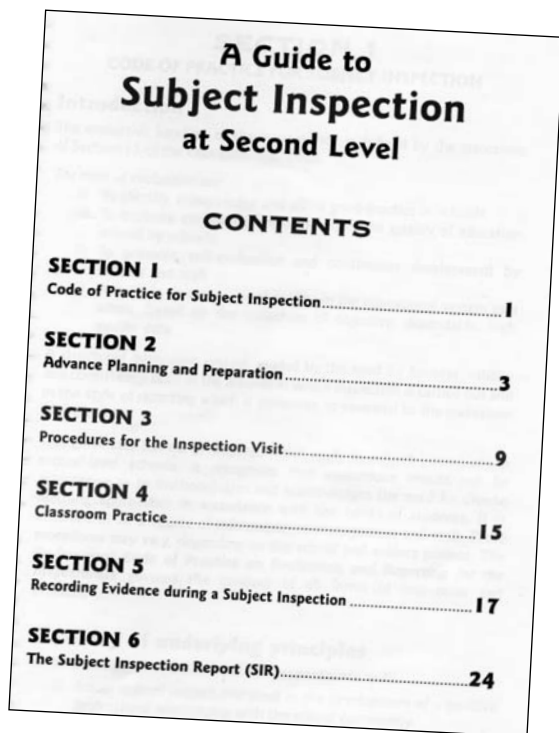
(3) *'shall advise teachers and boards in respect of the performance of their duties, and in particular, assist teachers in employing improved methods of teaching and conducting classes.....'*

History Inspection

Between 2001 and 2004, there were 100 History inspections. This has increased to almost 140 by now. This is relatively high compared to other subjects.

(Source: Chief Inspectors Report 2001-2004)

In 2004, *A Guide to Subject Inspection at Second Level* was published by the Department of Education. This provides the following:



A Guide to Subject Inspection at Second Level	
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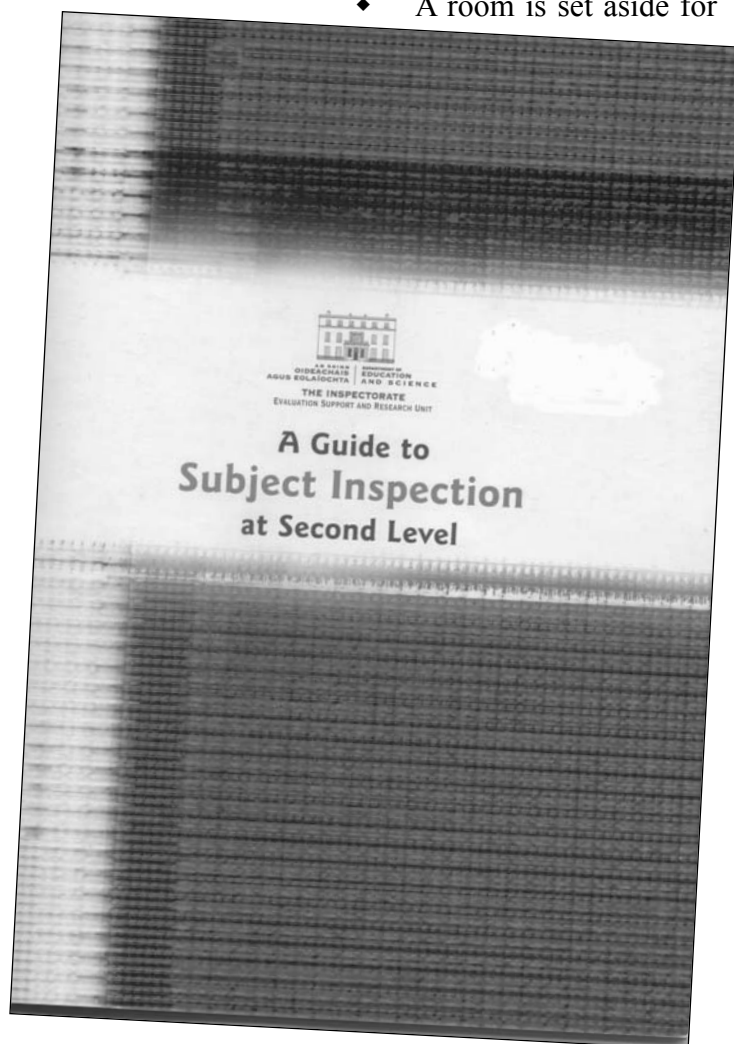
Whole School Evaluation

In our case, History subject inspection was part of Whole School Evaluation (WSE): This is not always the case, and single subject inspection can be done separately.

The steps involved in Whole School Evaluation were as follows:

- ♦ Initial contact by letter
- ♦ Whole School Evaluation
- ♦ History Subject Inspection during the WSE
- ♦ Meeting/Interview with the Principal
- ♦ Preliminary Meeting with Subject Teachers
- ♦ Observation of a Selection of Lessons (2 per Teacher)
- ♦ Feedback to Individual Teachers
- ♦ A review of Students work/school/teacher documents and records

- ♦ A room is set aside for



the Inspectors to inspect any planning documents and students work

- ◆ Feedback to the teachers as a group
- ◆ Feedback to the Principal on findings and recommendations for development of the subject within the school
- ◆ Preliminary Subject Inspection Report within 6 weeks

Classroom Inspection

The Classroom inspection begins with the opportunity for the teacher/s to appraise the Inspector of factors that impinge on the effectiveness of their work. They will discuss the topic, aim and context of the lesson and background information on class.

The Inspector observes teaching and learning including:

- ◆ Methodology
- ◆ Classroom Management
- ◆ Classroom Atmosphere
- ◆ Student Learning
- ◆ Student Engagement with the Subject
- ◆ The Inspector will record and may interact with the class.

- ◆ After the lesson the Inspector will review planning documents, student records and work.
- ◆ There is oral feedback to the teachers.

Teacher's initial reaction

In our case, the initial letter brought fear of the unknown and stress. The traditional view of the Cigire was that of a stern authoritarian figure. There was also the fear of the British Ofsted model which is based on accountability. There was the further factor that the presence of an Inspector changes the dynamics of the classroom. The stress was added to by the daily grind of the existing workload of Junior Cert and Leaving cert. In my case, I had not seen an Inspector in my class since my H. Dip days.

A different experience

In fact the experience of inspection was different from what I expected.

- ◆ There was affirmation and acknowledgement of work done which had not been acknowledged for years. In that sense, inspection was a boost to morale.
- ◆ Collaboration and collegiality developed amongst subject teachers
- ◆ It collated resources among colleagues

SECTION 4
CLASSROOM VISITS

This section provides a practical insight into the range of interactions likely to be involved before, during and after the classroom visits. Ideally, a meeting with the relevant subject teachers as a group will be arranged before the class visits. If this is not feasible or not applicable, as in the case of subjects with only one teacher, the inspector will arrange a brief meeting with each individual teacher prior to the classroom visit.

Before the classroom visit:
The inspector will explain:

- **The purpose of the inspection:**
 - To evaluate teaching and learning of a particular subject.
 - To identify good practice within the school.
 - To provide affirmation to teachers and students.
 - To bring an "outside" perspective.
 - To provide an opportunity for the school to access new ideas.
 - To promote improvement in the teaching and learning in the subject.
- **The inspection process in the classroom:**
 - Observation of learning and teaching.
 - Recording of evidence.
 - Interaction with students.
- **The process of giving feedback:**
 - To the individual teacher.
 - To the subject teachers as a group, if applicable.
 - To the principal.

If time permits, the inspector may also facilitate a discussion of general matters regarding subject provision, planning, assessment, state examinations, in-career development.

Immediately prior to each classroom visit:
In advance of each classroom visit, the inspector will meet with the individual teacher to seek relevant context information on the class group, on the work the class is doing/has been doing, on the plan for the lesson about to be observed, on the preparation/homework students had for the lesson and on any other pertinent issues.

In the classroom:

- **Introduction:**
At the beginning of the lesson, the inspector will introduce himself/herself. Typically he/she may explain the purpose of the visit, ask the students to work ahead as normal and explain that he/she may work with them later.
- **Lesson observation:**
During lesson observation, the inspector will concentrate on teaching and learning, observing teaching methodologies, what the students are doing, how they are responding and the use of questions both by teachers and students. The inspector will also note evidence of the level of student involvement, as well as material covered.
- **Interaction with students:**
 - The inspector may engage with students to establish the extent of their knowledge and skills in a subject area. He/she will base the interaction on the lesson content, in support of the teacher's work just observed, or on subject matter previously covered, but will not introduce new material. He/she will involve as many students as possible.
 - When students are involved in a classroom activity, the inspector may mingle among them, in order to look at work in hand, affirm or question, as appropriate.
- **Examination of students' work:**
If the inspector intends to look at examples of students' work (copies, project work, tests, etc.), he/she will collect a manageable number and arrange how and when the material will be returned to the class in question. The task of examining this material will be carried out in the school during/after the classroom visit.

After the classroom visit:

- **Feedback to individual teacher:**
In giving individual feedback to the teacher, the inspector will base his/her comments on the lesson(s) observed, acknowledging the particular learning and teaching context, affirming good practice and making suggestions for improvement.

Quality of Learning and Teaching of the Subject Inspection Framework	
Aspect	Planning and Preparation
Component	<i>Possible areas of enquiry</i>
Planning of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊙ Department/collaborative planning ⊙ Long-term planning/development of subject ⊙ Short-term planning/programmes of work ⊙ Planning in line with curricular requirements ⊙ Student access to subject/level ⊙ Planning for students with special needs ⊙ Cross-curricular planning
Planning for resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊙ Selection and use of resources to support teaching and learning ⊙ Range/variety of resources ⊙ Use of ICT facilities ⊙ Procedures for acquiring and accessing further resources ⊙ Accessibility of shared resources ⊙ Dissemination of official documentation ⊙ Provision for Health and Safety requirements
Possible sources of evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊙ Discussion with principal ⊙ Discussion with subject teachers ⊙ Examination of school documents/records ⊙ Observation of practice

- ◆ It disseminated ideas
- ◆ It enhanced teaching and learning
- ◆ It created a department model for the subject
- ◆ The Subject Inspection Report (SIR) makes recommendations which can be incorporated into the School Development Plan. History can lay claim to resources especially if it was previously under funded. However, the implementations of the recommendations can be at the discretion of the Principal.

The Inspection relies totally on the human qualities of the Inspector himself or herself. It is our experience that the inspection was enhanced by the human qualities of the Inspector – supportive, courteous, a good listener who sees the practical context of schools.

Advice

My advice to teachers based on my experiences of History inspection is

- ◆ To use varied teaching methodologies based on the aims and objectives of the Syllabus, and to make these part of the normal, regular teaching pattern
 - ◆ To include the use of visual aids such as video and the internet, and worksheets.
 - ◆ To engage students with resource material
 - ◆ To include local history in project work
 - ◆ To develop written, literary and reading skills
 - ◆ To make questioning and feedback a constant feature of classroom activity
 - ◆ To foster interest and enjoyment in history
 - ◆ To include the personal development of pupils.

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Some Subject School Inspections 2001-2004

Subject	No. of Inspections	Subject	No. of Inspections
English	99	French	99
Irish	147	German	23
Maths	27	Guidance	103
History	100	P.E.	121
Geography	85	Music	30

Total Inspections: 1,184

Source: Chief Inspector's Report 2001-2004