



Department of  
**Education**

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AN ROINN

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Dear Principal/Chair

The Minister wrote to schools on 31 October outlining the arrangements for 2014/15 and how they have evolved. You will have seen that the Minister's letter<sup>1</sup> was very clear in stating that end of Key Stage (KS) outcomes taken in isolation are not a sufficient indicator of quality of provision at school level. We recognise that more needs to be done to communicate to schools the Department's position on this issue. The purpose of our letter, therefore, is to clarify how the Department uses schools' end of KS outcome data and to dispel some of the common myths around the requirements of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) during the inspection process.

In policy terms, the principal value of end of KS assessment (as with all assessment) is to the individual pupil and their parents, given that they demonstrate (based on the judgment of the teacher in the classroom) whether a child has mastered the knowledge and skills that our curriculum is designed to deliver and that we all expect to see. However, in common with most other education systems across the world, we do have some minimal requirements for reporting outcomes at a system level. In our

circumstances, for the period from Foundation to Year 10, we presently confine those requirements to just two cross-curricular skills (Communication and Using Maths) and to just three reporting points in a child's schooling: the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

It is very important that we stress that the collation and reporting of end of KS outcomes are a means by which the Department itself is held to account, as well as a means by which it demonstrates improvement and makes the case for investment in education. Our interest is in the assurance they provide at system level that the curriculum is doing what it was intended to do.

As the Minister made clear in his letter, the Department and its arm's-length bodies will not use KS outcomes on their own to determine how effective a school's teaching and learning is. We will, of course, continue to use KS outcomes as the trigger for engagement designed to support schools including through access to programmes and funding that can help pupils achieve.

As you know, the Department also adopts a very firm position on the creation of so-called 'league tables'. We take a very clear view that publishing single indicators, be they end of KS outcomes or examination results, and then using these to draw conclusions about the quality of provision in schools or compare schools with other schools is both inappropriate and misleading. For that reason, the Department does not publish such tables and does not encourage schools to make those sorts of comparisons.

As principals and governors, you know very well that a school's effectiveness can best be measured by looking at a wide range of indicators. In response to your concerns about how information is used, the Minister has requested that the Department work collaboratively with schools to develop a dashboard of measures suitable for assessing the effectiveness of schools and further details of how the next stage of this work will be taken forward will follow later in the school year.

In terms of inspection, the ETI starts from the position that the fundamental purpose of the end of KS arrangements is to help confirm and ensure that learners are making sufficient progress: that they can communicate well (through talking and listening, reading and writing), can use and apply mathematics in familiar and unfamiliar contexts and can use and apply information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance and develop their skills and capabilities. Therefore the interest of the ETI is in how the KS assessment arrangements work in schools as an assessment tool used for improvement in order to raise the quality of the provision for numeracy, literacy and using ICT and to advance the skills of pupils in these crucial areas.

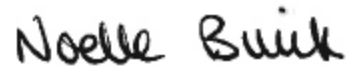
Inspectors are sometimes asked what they are 'looking for' during inspection: it is important to realise that, in an important sense, they are 'looking at' not 'looking for'. The 2012-14 Chief Inspector's report states that; "*The most effective leadership is able to measure and demonstrate clearly the value which their provision adds to each learner's progress.*"<sup>iii</sup> The ETI's foremost interest on inspection, therefore, is to see how a school approaches assessment to promote learning (assessment for learning) and then makes use of outcomes in subsequent projections, tracking (assessment of learning), and intervention in the interests of the pupils, promoting improvement and raising standards. For example, whatever arrangements the school makes for assessment and whichever measures it uses to complement the statutory end of KS assessment, inspectors expect to find that they provide information that the teachers can act upon, are robust and are providing the school with outcomes that are a reliable and valid assessment of the pupils' abilities. They will also look at how these arrangements are used to effect collaboration across the curriculum in order that the quality of learning experiences is of a high standard. In this context, inspectors are interested in how schools set and value KS outcomes alongside whatever other assessment information they may have. Schools may be assured that the ETI does not use KS outcomes in isolation, or indeed those from any other test or assessment, as an external measure.

In conclusion, it is clear that, despite the Department and CCEA's efforts to date in providing assurance, there remain challenges which we need to address to increase understanding of how the Department (including the ETI) uses information such as end of KS assessment outcomes and to provide assurance that it is not used within the Department to make judgements about the quality of provision at individual school level or as the sole component by ETI to evaluate the value a school adds to a pupil's learning.

We hope that the contents of this letter will go some way to reassuring you about our position and to continuing to build the mutual trust and understanding that will be essential as we move forward in the months and years ahead.



**Katrina Godfrey**



**Noelle Buick**

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.deni.gov.uk/end\\_of\\_key\\_stage\\_assessment\\_letter\\_to\\_teachers\\_and\\_principals\\_-\\_october\\_2014.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/end_of_key_stage_assessment_letter_to_teachers_and_principals_-_october_2014.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Chief Inspector's Report, 2012-2014 ETI 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014 page 28. <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/inspection-reports/the-chief-inspectors-report/ci-report-2012-2014.pdf>