



INSPECTING THE SCHOOL INSPECTORS

New plans, old ills

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The Author

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1. Introduction

This paper considers the future nature of school inspection as a result of the 1992 Education (Schools) Act. It argues that the new school inspection will fail, with serious consequences for standards in our schools, if it is implemented as planned. The problem is that the plans for implementing the act are over-prescriptive, over-detailed and over-subjective; for that reason effective inspection will be impossible. The paper therefore recommends that the detailed implementation of the Act should be looked at afresh to ensure that it is in keeping with the spirit of conservative educational reform. School inspection, it argues, should be carried out on the basis of clear, delimited, essential and objective criteria, rather than on that of an over-prescriptive list of inessentials. And in order to secure good inspection, not only will the detailed regulations need to be revised so that they are clear, simple and objective, but the Government will need to restore the original scheme to promote the highest standards amongst inspectorates through competition, allowing schools to choose the best inspectorates from a registered list.

2. Inspection and the law. Competition without choice?

Before the 1992 Act, school inspection was conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI). In addition, each local authority tended to employ inspection and advisory teams to inspect LEA schools. However, by the end of the 1980s it was not clear either that school inspection was working or even what the purpose of inspection was. This was due partly to the dual nature of the inspectorate. On the one hand HMI furnished general and theoretical advice to government and the nation, and it explored and presented educational theories, often in the context of their relationship to a particular phase of schooling or a specific issue such as teacher training. On the other, HMI was employed in the practical task of inspecting individual schools and reporting on their standards. But the two roles conflicted with one another. Once HMI had identified a particular emphasis or technique or method as desirable, there was the temptation to impose it on schools through the comments and criticisms made in its reports of individual inspections. Instead of gathering objective evidence about schools and reporting on their failings, the inspectors tended towards more impressionistic comments, shaped by the particular theories they happened to hold and designed to induce doctrinal conformity.

In fact, though more moderate than many educational theorists, HMI had by the 1990s become the central – and powerful – protagonist of progressive doctrines. Nowhere in its publications did it expressly support traditional teaching methods or approaches, while implicitly or explicitly castigating those who used them (irrespective of academic standards or results).

It tended to espouse all the approaches which became fashionable amongst educational theorists in the decades since the 1960s – as for instance in the 'Curriculum Matters' series.¹ One well-publicised example was the HMI report of 1989 on King Edward VI School in Stratford-upon-Avon. Although the inspectors acknowledged that pupils were 'well motivated, well behaved and receptive' and although examination results were good and pupils 'thoroughly prepared and almost all gain the requisite qualifications to enable them to enter higher education', nonetheless the inspectors castigated the school principally because it did not follow the progressive fashions. Throughout the report HMI highlighted

what it regarded as failings – deficiencies in complying with different progressive orthodoxies. And in the conclusion, HMI claimed that pupils' needs would "not necessarily be met by reliance on 'traditional' methods". It noted the use of a 'narrow range of teaching styles', which it faulted for not allowing pupils to use their own initiative. The overall impression conveyed was that HMI was more concerned with the school's failure to follow HMI's preferred educational theories and preferred teaching methods, than with reporting, objectively, on standards found – which were high.²

HMI's failure to identify in good time weak schools or falling standards meant that the system did not work. Nor did the existence of the LEA inspectorate make for checks and balances. The LEA inspectorates, for the most part, tended to be more extreme in their advocacy of progressive educationalism than HMI. Nor could schools escape. They were obliged to submit to inspection by HMI, but without any reassurance that the inspectorate would inspect standards.

The reform of school inspection proposed in the run up to the 1992 General Election was designed to tackle this problem. But it was also part of the wider context of conservative educational reform since 1979: at its heart is the conservative ideal of a community built on the small institutions without the artificial constraints imposed by the large bureaucracies. Greater responsibility and power was to be devolved to the small – parents, schools, teachers, governors – away from the big – the bureaucracies (often monopolies) of state. In the case of school inspection, schools would choose from a list of registered professionals, who in turn would compete for the contract of the school. To the legal requirements the team would add – and the school would require – particular qualities. School inspection would therefore be on a par with other professional inspections – surveyors, lawyers, accountants – where the inspectors were engaged directly by those seeking their services, on the basis of conducting a professional activity to which they would bring special qualities. This reform would serve to devolve further responsibility and power away from the state to the small institutions so that they could choose what was best for them.

However, the Bill setting out the Government's proposals and the principles on which they rested was opposed and amended during its passage through the Lords. Labour and Liberal peers took advantage of their Tory colleagues' delaying over dinner to ambush the Bill and carry an amendment preventing schools from choosing their inspectors. The fear was that there might be collusion between

schools and inspectors and the Opposition peers instead demanded that inspectors be allocated. The Government, hurrying to enact the measure before a general election, reluctantly accepted the amendment and put on a brave face; the Bill was amended to prevent schools choosing their inspectors, although it was simultaneously contended that the principle of competition would remain. The new Chief Inspector would be bound, under the Act, to promote competition amongst the inspectorates.

The Act which now governs school inspection – the Education (Schools) Act 1992 – sets out the legal basis for school inspection. The new Chief Inspector (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England, HMCI) will be appointed for five years and will be responsible for informing the Government about standards and quality of schools under four specific headings: the quality of education; the standards reached; the management of resources; and the development 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural' of pupils. All schools will be inspected on these four counts. The Chief Inspector will keep a register of inspectors; provide guidance to them; and promote efficiency by encouraging competition amongst registered inspectors (by inviting tenders from at least two registered inspectors for inspection).³ This compromise represents neither a victory for Government nor Opposition. For although the principle of competition remains, nonetheless the competing inspectorates will not be chosen by the school.

A common objection raised to the idea of competing inspectorates was the fear that schools would use their freedom of choice to select a team of inspectors which would gloss over faults and give a good report. However, if the obligatory part of inspection is concerned in the main with the reporting and verification of factual information, then the prospect of inspectors colluding with a school to conceal problems and deficiencies would be unlikely to arise. This is not say that the guidelines would be so narrow that competing inspectors could only offer the same thing. Schools would choose their inspectorates because of the team's known professionalism, efficiency, qualifications, ability and composition – and the approach adopted. So if LEA inspectors wished, in addition to the obligatory factual reporting of information, to include a more subjective evaluation on the lines of previous LEA reports they could do so. But the school would decide whether it wanted this or preferred to engage a team which approached the task exclusively in terms of the objective reporting of information. And suppose that one team became known for its tendency to add laudatory passages of subjective

assessment to the factual information it was obliged to report. A weak school might indeed engage this team in a bid to buy praise. But any such encomium would ring hollow if it had to be set beside a report of objective factors which quite clearly reflected poorly on the school. Indeed, such attempts might serve to highlight defects rather than conceal them.

Not only has the Opposition amendment taken away the task of engaging inspectors from schools. The schools themselves are now expected to submit a standard specification for inspection (albeit 'tailored to the particular school ... its type and size'). HMCI will group this with a number of other schools and then put the 'lot' out to tender. HMCI will award the contract (on the basis of value for money). After the inspection has been carried out and the report submitted, HMCI will pay the registered inspector. If a school wants some extra feature inspected, it may request this and expect to pay extra. This means that even the standard specification will be treated as part of a lot to be put out to tender. And despite the large sums of public money to be paid for inspection (between £5,000 for a small primary school and £30,000 for a large secondary) this will not pay for inspection outside a standard format. Moreover, it is envisaged that the total budget for inspection presently estimated at £75 million a year (roughly half of that spent currently on LEA inspection and advice) will be put into HMCI's budget as the system develops, rather than being broken down and given to the schools to pay for inspection themselves.⁴

3. The new framework for inspection

Since the election the detailed basis for future inspection has been drawn up and published – the ‘Framework for the Inspection of Schools’ (hereafter referred to as the Framework). All inspectors will be obliged to follow this Framework – with the result that both inspectors and schools will be left with very little room for diversity given its prescriptive and rigid nature. The Framework will be issued in its final form before the inspections begin in September 1993. In addition, a number of other documents illuminate further aspects of future school inspection. A briefing paper and handbook have already been published and a departmental circular will be issued by the Department for Education (DFE) and regulations will be issued.⁵

Much of the Framework is based on a series of principles and preconceptions which will undermine effective inspection. And so detailed and prescriptive is the Framework that inspectors are not merely obliged to follow the document, but will have no leeway to conduct inspections in a manner in any sense distinct from it. Indeed, unless the basis on which inspection rests is radically different to that proposed, there is every danger that the new arrangements will perpetuate the worst of the old system and undermine the central task of the objective reporting of standards. Like so many other education reforms, the danger for the Government is that as the Act is put into practice, the original intentions will be turned on their head: instead of giving schools responsibility and choice, and opening up the system to competition, the danger is that schools will be turned into mere franchise operations.

The Framework is in two sections. The first sets out the principles on which inspection should be based and the second is a schedule or detailed list of specific inspection requirements ‘to ensure full coverage of all significant aspects of the school’s provision, work and achievements’.⁶ Whereas there are some sensible and useful things in the document, they tend to be lost under the welter of inessential, vague, or woolly requirements, many of which reflect the progressive educational orthodoxies of recent decades. And running through both sections are three fundamental problems. First, so extensive, elaborate and over-regulated a Framework is envisaged, that the central task of reporting educational standards will be overshadowed by a mass of other, inessential (and possibly misleading) activities. Inspection as envisaged here will be far too complicated, time-

consuming, and fussy to be effective. (Indeed it may undermine the aims of inspection so clearly set out by the new Chief Inspector that 'parents and school governors must be given a clear and accurate picture of the standards being achieved by each school and of the quality of education being provided within the school'.⁷) Second, the presumption is of a mostly subjective approach to inspection, in line with the former practice of HMI, which preferred the hunches, opinions, feelings of inspectors to objective evidence as the basis for judgements. This will result in time-consuming and inaccurate inspection. Third, the Framework is biased against traditional teaching and in favour of the educational fashions and theories of recent decades. The upshot will be to perpetuate the poor practices of HMI and LEAs in the past in which emphasis is put on schools' perpetuating favoured educational theories rather than on achieving the highest educational standards by whatever methods they choose. (This problem is partly the result or confusion about the nature of inspection – which is to inspect and report rather than produce a lengthy judgement – and the misconception that inspection can achieve everything or be all things to all men.)

Section One opens with a list of seven attributes which inspectors must demonstrate can be applied to their judgements: 'secure', 'first-hand', 'reliable', 'valid', 'comprehensive', 'corporate'⁸. These may seem admirable qualities at which to aim. But the list does not focus on the central task: that of inspecting and reporting standards on the basis of objective data. Indeed the lack of focus is compounded by the nature of the remit – elaborate, exhaustive and inflexible. The minimum number of inspector days is laid down: for secondary schools with fewer than 401 pupils the minimum is 33 inspector days, whilst larger secondary schools (with over 1,500 pupils) the minimum is 57 days. These figures – as a minimum – may prove too rigid. Should such an extensive inspection be routine for a flourishing school, any more than a regular medical check-up (rather than a full-scale investigation) should be for a healthy person? Is it really necessary for one inspector to spend 33 days or six and a half school weeks in a small, middle/secondary school with 300 pupils, particularly if that school is obviously flourishing with good results and high standards, or for four inspectors to spend eight days each?⁹ Apart from the waste of time and money, such elaborate inspections will interrupt the proper work of the school – teaching pupils – over an unnecessarily long period. Moreover, the very format set out for full inspection may prove a wasteful and redundant way of organising inspections. The list is over-extensive: inspectors must inspect everything 'significant', with a full list set out in a schedule

to 'ensure full coverage of all significant aspects of the school's provision, work and achievements'. This is justified as a way of securing 'consistency and comparability' – though it would be more legitimate to seek comparability on the basis of the objective standards of pupils.¹⁰

Moreover, the requirement that every team be fully comprehensive may need refinement to clarify the nature of what constitutes qualification. For instance, able and educated people, and subject specialists, should be qualified by virtue of their academic record; and the obligation on all inspectors to undergo training should not mean that 'training' in itself constitutes the qualification.¹¹ The 'Briefing' notes that the registered inspector will want to ensure that the team as a whole can cover everything in the Framework. But what does this in practice mean? Does it mean that a team will consist of graduates in every subject or, as happens with teacher training, that 'training' rather than subject specialism constitutes the qualification? What are the implications for primary schools? What will qualify a primary school inspection team? Will it be subject specialism in subjects taught, or 'training' in inspection?¹²

The second part of the Framework, the inspection Schedule, sets out the six headings under which inspections should be conducted and also indicates the subsidiary headings, the evidence to be used, the evaluation criteria, evidence and material to be included. Some of the headings are sensible, as are some of the ways in which they are broken down. For example, the first heading, 'Introduction' is broken down into the four types of information required about a school – most of it factual or statistical which, if properly presented, will illustrate the kind of school (numbers, intake, class sizes, attendance, results in summary). Elsewhere, however, the proposed headings or sub-headings are unnecessarily complicated or broken down into unnecessary things or the evidence required is over-elaborate and beside the point. The second heading, 'Main Findings' is divided into 'standards, quality, efficiency and ethos' and 'key issues'. Here, a series of activities is proposed which are peripheral to the central task of inspection, and which will marginalise the use of the objective data mentioned above under the first heading – data and 'indicators'¹³. The general proposals here tilt away from the reporting of objective information and the evidence, to such things as analysis of 'all written evaluations, indicators and other inspection evidence' and the 'corporate judgements of the team'. And the impression conveyed under the third heading, 'Standards and Quality Achieved' is that standards are to be judged in a variety of complicated and vague ways rather than principally on the basis of objective

information. The evaluation criteria refer to the qualities which have come to be substituted for the more traditional aim of knowing the subject: '...evidence of what pupils know, understand and can do.' The proposed evidence, in addition to the sensible requirement for results, includes a variety of subjective measures based on discussion, observation and parental views.¹⁴

Running through much of the Framework are the two fundamental weaknesses which characterise the approach as a whole. The 'evaluation criteria', 'evidence' and statements of what the report should include (the subdivisions within each subsection) will all make for impressionistic and subjective inspection of schools and serve to impose the educational orthodoxies of the recent past. Much of what is envisaged also displays an anti-traditional bias. For instance, the recent fashions for a 'cross-curricular' and child-centred approach, as well as theories about race and gender, have all left their mark. Inspectors, for instance, are asked to comment on pupils' 'skills which occur across the curriculum in the key skills of literacy, oracy and numeracy', rather to inspect the precise activities of reading or writing correct English, or calculating accurately.¹⁵ And the criteria for evaluating the 'quality' of learning are also vague – 'gains in knowledge, understanding and skills... Relevant learning skills include observation and information seeking; looking for patterns and deeper understanding; communicating information and ideas in various ways; posing questions and solving problems; applying what has been learned to unfamiliar situations; evaluating work done; and the ability to concentrate, cooperate and work productively with others.' There is also a requirement that results be analysed by gender and ethnicity.¹⁶

The bias towards subjective reactions and progressive education characterises the subsequent chapters. Chapter 5, 'The Quality of the School as a Community', requires inspectors to evaluate behaviour and discipline both through factual evidence (e.g. statement of the school's aims and policies, data on exclusions and referrals) and by means of a variety of vague tasks, involving, for example, observation of behaviour and 'quality of relationships', 'discussion with pupils and staff', hearing parental views, and seeking additional views on bullying. The social and cultural development of pupils is to involve judgements about, for example, relationships in the school or pupils' 'understanding of the structures and processes of society...'. Cultural development is to be judged 'by the extent to which pupils' personal interests and experiences are widened through the curriculum and through participation in a range of cultural activities...'. The evidence for this includes 'the quality of relationships between pupils and their peers', 'Discussion with the head,

staff and, if possible, Chair [sic] of governing body', 'Observation of all aspects of the life of the school, Discussion with pupils and parents about the extent of the school's contribution to social and cultural development'. And the important inspection – required by law – of pupils' spiritual and moral development will not be a matter of expressly reporting the objective standards of knowledge (of, for example, scripture, moral and spiritual teaching in the curriculum) but will involve consideration of a diverse range of activities, including 'contributions and responses', taking account of the school's aims and policies, observing 'all aspects of the life of the school', 'the whole curriculum', 'pupils' relationships with staff and with their peers', and discussing 'with pupils and parents about the extent of the school's contribution'. A further paragraph requires an evaluation of the school's 'policy for equality of opportunity' for meeting needs 'arising from gender, ability, ethnicity and social circumstance'.¹⁷

A subsequent chapter, 'Factors contributing to these findings' makes it clear schools will be evaluated and considered in the terms recently fashionable with educationalists. For example, under the heading of 'quality of teaching', the evaluation criteria include a list of characteristics ranging from the goals set 'for the group and for individuals' to whether 'activities ... engage and motivate all pupils'. The report must, for example, comment on 'effectiveness and range of the teaching techniques and organisational strategies ... the degree to which work is matched to pupils' individual characteristics, needs and abilities...'. In addition the inspectors are to evaluate a variety of other ancillary things: 'assessment, recording and reporting'.¹⁸ They are to inspect the quality and range of the curriculum through such evaluation criteria as 'the extent to which its content, structure, organisation and implementation contribute to ... standards and to quality in learning, complies with statutory requirements ... and provides equality of access for all groups of pupils and is enhanced by extra-curricular provision'.¹⁹

Likewise, the proposals for inspecting the efficiency of a school are likely to involve over-elaborate and peripheral activities. Instead of a clear and simple report on assets, income and expenditure, how the money is spent, and the financial health of the school, past and anticipated, the Framework proposes a range of fussy themes, very often in managerialist jargon (see e.g. 6.4. 'Management and Planning' or 6.6. 'Resources and Their Management'). Inspectors, for example, are obliged in the course of evaluation of 'Management and Planning', 'Organisation and Administration', 'Resources and their Management',

'Accommodation' and 'Community Links and Liaison with other Schools' to engage in such things as evaluating 'management' and 'middle management' and the 'effectiveness of the planning procedures'.²⁰

The central problem with the Framework, therefore, is that of excessively complicated requirements, the subjective nature of many of the judgements, and the bias against traditional teaching. Whereas the Act itself sets out the headings under which schools will be inspected, the Framework 'describes the principles ... and the criteria' for inspection and assessment and sets out the 'specific inspection requirements'.²¹ In fact, both Sections of the Framework go way beyond the Act in introducing a number of fresh 'principles' and 'inspection requirements' which have no real basis in the Act itself, being concerned, as they are, with one idiosyncratic interpretation of how schools should be inspected. Moreover, they are couched in the language of the educational theorist and professional, not in the terms of traditional teaching and received wisdom. As these instructions stand, there is every reason to fear that they will undermine the new school inspection. Inspectors will concentrate on a multiplicity of incidental qualities which are the by-products of a good school, rather than trying to measure the cause which underlies them: excellence of teaching.²² Instead of being required primarily to concentrate on the inspection and reporting of educational standards objectively, a welter of other obligations and activities will therefore be required. Indeed so complex is the proposed process of inspection, that it would, under normal circumstances, be impossible to realise. In addition, many of the requirements imply the imposition of 'correct' attitudes *vis-à-vis* educational theories of gender and race, and of progressive teaching approaches, and consequently go against traditional wisdom. While introducing a measure of common sense – reporting objective standards – to inspection, they also perpetuate the worst of the old regime. And the danger remains that the dubious philosophies of the educational and management theorist will undermine future inspection just as in the past.

There are other dangers. Not merely is the period of inspection envisaged too great, and the scope of inspection far too wide to be effective, but the extensive inspection of every superficial cranny will prove counter-productive. Nor indeed is it clear that the complicated proposals here are those best calculated to reveal all about the failing school. They appear to possess the worst and potentially most self-destructive features of the national curriculum: an elaborate web of educationalese lacking clarity and focus, and requiring interpretation by the educational establishment. Indeed, the proposals seem such as to give rise to a new

educational activity, that of training inspectors to judge the many peripheral things set out here, and then discuss them in the educationalists' language. If the Framework is not changed, inspection may follow the example of the national curriculum: here a whole industry has grown up in the training colleges to 'train' teachers – not to master the individual subjects – but to interpret and apply the whole concept of a 'national curriculum' as interpreted by the trainers.

Nor do the proposals differentiate adequately between good and bad schools. The good and flourishing school is to be treated to the same intensive – and expensive – inspection as the poor or failing school. Initial inspection should surely be a matter of identifying success and weakness, after which the weak schools should receive a more intensive second inspection.

4. Who will be the new inspectors?

It is not only in matters of regulation that the new proposals threaten to perpetuate the shortcomings of the old system. The detailed arrangements for recruiting the new inspectors do little to encourage new blood. The danger now is that future inspection will be undermined by virtue of being run by the same people and inspectorates as managed previous LEA and HMI inspection. This will compound the prospects of perpetuating old attitudes as well as the failed practices of the past.

How can it be ensured that able and open-minded people become inspectors, and that the new inspectorates are not simply the old under a new name? Under the Act, the Chief Inspector has the duty of establishing a register of inspectors and of seeing that every school is inspected at certain intervals by a registered inspector. Nobody may conduct an inspection under Section 9 unless registered for that purpose. And nobody may be registered by the Chief Inspector unless he appears a fit and proper person to discharge the functions, and unless he conducts inspections under this Act competently and effectively. An application for registration is to be made 'in such a manner' as directed by the Chief Inspector and be accompanied by the prescribed fee. On application, the Chief Inspector may register or refuse to register the applicant or register him subject to certain conditions. The Chief Inspector may also remove an inspector from the register and there is provision for appeal.²³ In the note prepared for those intending to become registered inspectors or inspection team members, it is explained that the first step must be the satisfactory completion of a training course. The training will involve a five-day course in the use of the Framework for Inspection and participation in an institutional inspection conducted by HMI. The course will concentrate on six headings: (i) the scope and conduct of the inspection as set down by HMCI; (ii) the inspection of standards achieved and the quality of a school's education provision and the factors that contribute ...; (iii) the evaluation criteria ...; (iv) the completion of schedules ...; (v) the preparation and presentation of reports; (vi) procedural matters. Potential inspectors will be judged on their performance in the course and if judged to have completed this satisfactorily, they will be asked to participate in an HMI inspection. At this they must observe HMI at work, undertake inspection tasks under supervision, compare their judgements with those of HMI and present findings in the approved manner. Moreover, when a registered inspector begins to conduct inspections, HMI will monitor his work to keep under

review the standard of inspections and as the basis on which re-registration will occur.²⁴

Application forms for potential candidates suggest that such factors as race and gender will count towards the process of acceptance, and that there will be openings for candidates who offer specialism in such dubious 'subjects' as environmental education, equal opportunities, health education, media studies, outdoor education, personal and social education. So too for specialists in languages such as Arabic, Bengali, Urdu, Turkish, Gujarati and Hindi, Japanese, Dutch and Danish which, although worthwhile areas of study in themselves, are not central to the school curriculum. None of these things should be the basis for the registration of inspectors. Inspectors are appointed to inspect the standards of a school. The HMCI should, therefore, in addition to revising the Framework, reconsider the basis on which applicants are invited and registered as inspectors. And the HMCI should then clarify the new position for the public.

5. The way forward

School inspection should primarily be a matter of inspecting the academic standards of a school on the basis of objective evidence. It should identify the poor or failing school with low or declining standards, or the school in breach of the law or regulation. Once identified, the failing school can receive the necessary help, advice and support. To succeed, school inspection must, like other inspection, concentrate on this central – and limited – task. Attention, time and money should be concentrated on essential things. And the central purpose of inspection should not be confused by including a range of inessentials or tangential matters. Moreover, inspection should be based on the premise that high academic standards and aspirations are the surest basis for all the other things which make for a good school: politeness, discipline, order, good relations between pupils and teachers and amongst pupils, and a sense of the importance of education and cultivation. The 1992 Education (Schools) Act requires that that some of these things should be inspected under separate headings, and this can also be done simply and objectively. But only an inspection which concentrates on the essentials and reports accordingly will reveal accurately the standards in a school and serve to identify failure or likely failure.

The corollary to clear and limited requirements is that the individual teams and inspectors develop their different strengths – their diverse qualities – and on that basis compete for the contract of the school. Competition, not prescription, promotes both excellence and diversity. Even with the best intentions, the offices of HMCI cannot produce the same result; and indeed, so unwieldy is the whole process likely to prove and so labour-intensive, that it is hardly likely to serve its purpose. The Government might therefore reconsider the decision not to allow schools to choose their inspectors. It could either amend the legislation or propose that schools would state their preference and that HMCI would be responsible for sanctioning the arrangements. (The HMCI would have to have a reason for refusing.) Not only would this simplify matters and make for less government centralisation, but it would also restore competition. There should be no greater fears of collusion between inspector and inspected in the case of the school, than in the case of a medical examination. Nobody would dream of insisting that registered accountants were individually appointed to conduct the audits of individual firms by a government department. And there is no particular likelihood that responsible

head teachers could collude (in effect, cheat). Such a fear should not influence how an inspection is set up and should be dealt with, if at all, through sanctions. Nor should it be forgotten that the teams are to be led by registered inspectors, whose work will be subjected to monitoring and scrutiny by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). The present arrangements make for unnecessary bureaucracy and paperwork as schools submit specifications, then schools are 'grouped', then the inspectors tender, and finally an inspector is allocated.

This paper therefore proposes that HMCI's final guidelines and 'Framework for Inspection' are revised to ensure inspection radically different to that now envisaged. As the draft Framework is due to be put into its final form before the inspections of secondary schools begin in September 1993, HMCI is urged to revise the Framework in line with the spirit of the Act: at the heart of inspection should be the objective inspecting of standards on the basis of clear criteria.²⁵ There is no reason why the form of inspection envisaged by the Framework should not be changed, especially as the Act itself envisages HMCI keeping under review the system of inspection.²⁶ And it would be far better for simple, clear and effective inspection criteria to be introduced before the inspections began, rather than, as with the national curriculum, the Government having – albeit courageously – to revise original proposals which turned out to be over-prescriptive, over-complex, and over-detailed and reflecting more the wishes of the educational theorists than the spirit of conservative reform.

A revised Framework could set out clearly and precisely the essential headings under which the legal requirements for inspection could be met. It would require that, in place of the elaborate, often subjective and modish welter of activities, specific factual information be at the heart of the report. HMCI's guidelines and Framework should set out clearly the factual information required to fulfil the law. On this basis, clear reports under four headings could be prepared, intelligible to any reader. A summary of the findings written in clear, jargon-free English should be included as a conclusion. One example of the basis for a revised Framework is set out in the appendix. And the extract from a local council's inspection report for a school in the 1992 summer term, also in the appendix, shows how clear and direct effective inspection can be.²⁷ Where there are low or falling standards, or failure to comply with the law, or a school's unsatisfactory meeting of its obligations, then a more detailed diagnostic investigation might be put in motion.

At the heart of a good school is the fact that pupils are taught and learn; that they are educated in the wider sense; and aspire to the highest possible academic standards. The good characteristics of a school – discipline, relations between staff and pupils, behaviour of pupils – are closely related to a school's academic performance, and cannot be treated in isolation as ends in themselves. The inspection of schools should, therefore, address itself to the first and central task of a school: its academic standards and record. Inspection is not a substitute for good teaching; nor should it be seen as a means of enforcing an approved method of teaching or of running a school.

Good inspection will take place only if there are good inspectors. As they stand, the new proposals move in the right direction by opening a full or part-time career as a school inspector to a wide field of potential applicants. But the detailed basis for application and registration needs to be revised in order to encourage new blood into school inspection: teachers and other professionals; teachers in higher and further education who are retired, on secondment or simply supplementing their incomes by spending, say, a couple of months each year of their vacation working in an inspection team; scholars; literary figures; historians and scientists from outside the world of education; married women educated and with good honours degrees who have abandoned their careers in order to bring up their children; educated people whose vocation has not been in schools – retired and otherwise. All of these people – educated to degree level and with an experience wider than that of the world of education – should be heartily encouraged to become inspectors, possibly for a limited time each year. Such appointments would help to break the mould and make for greater competition. They would not count as lay inspectors, given that they are educated in specific subjects to degree level or beyond, and should take their place as registered inspectors or team inspectors. Lay inspectors could be drawn from members of the public who need not necessarily have been educated beyond school. HMCI should publish the criteria.

Registration as an inspector should, of course, disregard differences of gender, religion and race. OFSTED should be careful not even to give the impression that it will practise positive discrimination, thereby excluding abler candidates in favour of less able because they happen to belong to the wrong sex, race or faith. It should be open to people of any age, although it might be unlikely that someone in his early twenties would have the other qualities necessary for the job. Whilst it might be necessary to register some inspectors with specialisms in subjects followed by

relatively small numbers, OFSTED should be very wary about including anyone who does not also have a very good basis in some subject more central to the school curriculum.

In addition, the basis for training inspectors should be reformed. As matters stand, inspectors are trained on the basis of the Framework, which itself is flawed. And the registration, supervision and training of new inspectors is presently superintended by HMI. Given that the Chief Inspector, as advised by HMI, has ultimate power to register an inspector, power will inevitably be concentrated in OFSTED. Every indication to date has been that such power will be exercised to perpetuate the old order, rather than encourage new and effective inspection. It is no secret that many inspectors from the previous inspection regime have taken the steps necessary to continue inspecting under the new – no doubt their ideological bias being reinforced, rather than challenged, by what they are now expected to do. While there is no reason to exclude such people, unless new blood enters the profession, and unless the Framework is changed to allow for true competition, future inspection will go the way of former inspection; indeed it may be more intrusive and more damaging to schools than in the past.

In order to counteract these trends the training, like the Framework, should be simplified so that inspectors are expected to inspect and report on objective data. The basis and procedures for registration should be relieved of the baggage of educational progressivism, and clear criteria and examples published which would stipulate that inspectors are welcomed from those who have been educated in science, the humanities, law and medicine to university degree level or beyond. Moreover, an effective set of checks and balances needs to be introduced so that the power concentrated in OFSTED is not used to eliminate the possibility of change.

Once the arrangements for registration and training of inspectors had been made, and the detailed guidelines for their reports established, the role of OFSTED would be limited in a properly competing system of school inspection. Its function would be to ensure that inspection was carried out as required by the law. It would keep the register of inspectors and lay inspectors and determine whose names could be added to it. Schools would be required to submit inspection reports to OFSTED as soon as they received them. OFSTED would then check that each school had been inspected once every four years, that the inspection had been carried out by registered inspectors and lay inspectors, and that it had been carried

out in accordance with the guidelines. Where inspectors failed to follow the guidelines, OFSTED would have powers to advise, admonish, warn and – where serious mistakes were repeated – remove individual inspectors or whole teams from the register. If a school believed that an inspection had not been carried out according to the guidelines, it could draw this to the attention of OFSTED, which would investigate the complaint. If, however, a school's complaint was that an inspection, although following the legal guidelines, had not fulfilled any extra promises which had been made by the inspection team, this would be a private matter of breach of contract, to be settled through normal legal channels. It would be for the inspectors to publicise themselves and their abilities, and for schools to go about choosing inspectors, as they saw fit. Inspectors would be providing, schools using and paying for, a service. There is no reason to believe that the normal commercial mechanisms of advertisement, competition and selection would not develop here, as they have everywhere, provided that the market is free and not monopolised.

If our maintained schools are to develop and grow as small, independent institutions, each with its own character and particular aspirations, and if teachers are to enjoy respect as professionals, making their own decisions about the best methods necessary to achieve an agreed aim, then inspection must not be an instrument of heavy-handed and damaging central prescription. Inspectors should be drawn from the wide field of people with sufficient learning, not from a narrow pool of specialists in education. They should be allowed to compete freely, within the framework laid down by the law. And, in their reports, they should concentrate, before all else, on reporting objective data which give a clear measurement of standards.

Appendix (i) A fresh basis for inspection under the law. What the inspectors should ask or bear in mind:

The law requires an inspection which will allow for a report on the school under four headings:

- ‘(a) the quality of the education provided by schools ...
- (b) the educational standards achieved in those schools
- (c) whether the financial resources made available to those schools are managed efficiently; and
- (d) the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at those schools’.

Inspectors might therefore consider their task in terms of these headings and questions:

Introductory statement about the school, its character, aims, number of pupils, number (and percentage) of under-fives/over-16s, number of teachers, teachers’ qualifications, type of school.

Quality and standards of education

1. What curriculum is offered, what extra-curricular activities exist, whether (and how much) homework is set and marked? What proportion of time is spent on teaching the academic and on non-academic curriculum?
2. (a) How is teaching organised? Is it mixed ability, or is it organised by setting or streaming?
(b) What are the attendance and truancy rates ?
3. What general statement can be made about the standards reached by pupils on the basis of external examination results, including a comparison with the national average? Breakdown of results to be appended.

4. General statement about other results: National Curriculum, vocational qualifications, internal tests. Breakdown by subject and by year to be appended. Comparisons with standards at entry and with average national standards to be presented in an easily intelligible way.
5. Summary of main findings, noting strengths, weaknesses and whether standards are rising, remain the same, or are falling.

Efficiency

6. What is the annual budget of the school, its income and expenditure? What is the breakdown of income in terms of recurrent grant, capital allocation and other (e.g. GEST, Section 11, donations, earnings by, for example, letting out facilities)? What is the breakdown of expenditure (by total amount and by percentage) in terms of teachers' salaries, other salaries, outside services (e.g. musical instrument teaching, catering), books, equipment, maintenance, other? Capital expenditure and projects. Audit report.
7. What, if any, substantial changes to 6 are envisaged?
8. Do the keeping of records, the publishing of results, and the reporting to parents conform with the law?

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

9. What compulsory spiritual, religious and moral teaching is offered and what is optional? What percentage of time does this take up and what percentage of pupils take part? What religious education syllabus is used, what examinations (internal or external) are taken and by what percentage, and what standards reached? Does the school comply with the law on the teaching of religious education and the daily act of worship? What are the school's aims ?
10. What cultural activities does the school encourage over and above the formal curriculum (e.g. music, plays)? How much time does the school devote to these over that recommended? In addition, does it make a point of teaching English to those pupils for whom English is not the maternal language?

11. Does the school meet the statutory requirements for reporting attendance and truancy rates? What general statement can be made on the basis of the evidence about attendance and behaviour?

12 What sanctions and rewards operate?

General

Summary of main findings and conclusions

13. Summary of inspection and conclusion of whether school is satisfactory, highly satisfactory, failing or in danger of deterioration. If either of the latter, a recommendation for further and detailed investigation to be made. Details of Inspectors and conduct of inspection.

Appendix (ii) Extract from a local council education department inspection report

14. The school has recently completed the end of Key Stage 1 assessment and has achieved the following results:

Percentage of Y2 pupils who have achieved each level				
Subject	Working Towards level 1	level 1	level 2	level 3
English <i>Borough</i>	0 2	13 22	61 51	26 25
Maths <i>Borough</i>	4 3	26 21	26 62	43 14
Science <i>Borough</i>	0 2	0 12	0 62	100 24
Technology <i>Borough</i>	0 4	4 15	39 63	57 18

These results indicate that high standards have been achieved, particularly in science and technology. The results are consistent with the standards of work observed by the Inspectorate.

15. In the sessions observed, particular note was taken of five important aspects of teaching: planning, clarity of purpose, teaching approaches (including classroom organisation and management), pupil involvement and evidence of learning. Of the 30 sessions observed:
 - 5 demonstrated all five aspects at a level that could be held as an exemplar to other teachers;
 - 11 had some aspects that could be offered as exemplars to other teachers;
 - 7 were of an acceptable overall standard but required development in up to two areas;
 - 6 were found to be in need of development in three or more areas.

One lesson was below the standard which would allow it to be included in the above classifications.

16. Clarity of purpose was a particular strength in the majority of lessons observed, leading to clear evidence of learning.
17. Pupils are allocated to classes on the basis of their ages. Within some classes there is grouping by attainment for particular activities. In the majority of lessons observed, teaching was directed to the whole class. The tasks given were largely "open-ended" and could be performed by pupils at a variety of levels. In these lessons, expectations were high and pupils were constantly encouraged to improve the quality of their work. Where tasks presented difficulties additional support was provided rather than a simpler activity. Inspectors' observations, work achieved and records of achievement indicate that in most lessons the strategies used are proving successful in meeting the needs of all the ability groups. However, in 8 of the sessions observed there were instances when the reliance on undifferentiated tasks, especially writing tasks, resulted in difficulties in timing and managing the lesson and a pattern of unfinished work for some pupils.
18. The length of time allocated to teaching is 21 hours 45 mins for infants and 23 hours 55 mins for juniors which in both cases is more than the minimum lesson times, 21 hours and 23 hours respectively, suggested by the Department of Education. Teaching time was used effectively, with appropriate pace and

challenge in two-thirds of the lessons observed. All the teaching sessions observed began at scheduled times. There were 26 instances of pupils being recorded late for morning and afternoon sessions during the inspection period. All but one of these instances were in the morning and 15 of them on the Monday morning.

19. The average daily attendance recorded during the inspection period was 91% for the whole school, and for each year group:

R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
92.2%	94.6%	88.3%	87.3%	93.3%	94.2%	84.6%

The figures recorded in the Borough's attendance surveys are:

May 1990 – 94.4%
 March 1991 – 97.4%
 March 1992 – 100.0%

These figures are consistently above the Borough average.

20. In 23 of the lessons observed, pupils consistently behaved well. In other lessons, where pupils were not fully engaged either because of inappropriate learning activities and pace of work or because of unsure classroom management, there were examples of disruptive behaviour. No pupils have been excluded from the school in the past year.
21. The curricular requirements of the school are well served by a combination of teachers' initial qualifications and the school's staff development programme which takes its priorities from the statutory timetable for National Curriculum implementation. Staff now need to extend their expertise in geography, PE, music and religious education.
22. The school has been able to provide resources to meet the needs of nearly all areas of the curriculum. The exceptions are PE which is constrained by the limited range of gymnastic equipment and aspects of history and geography that require a range of suitable, up-to-date reference books to aid pupil investigations. During the last financial year, out of an available sum of £39,592, £10,658 was spent on administration and £11,797 on learning resources. £17,137 has been carried forward into the current financial year.

Notes

- (1) Curriculum Matters, An HMI Series, London 1985-90.
- (2) Department of Education and Science, Report by HM Inspectors on King Edward VI School, Stratford-Upon-Avon, DES, 1989. See, e.g. paras 6,7,8,9,10,11,12. Even the report on the school's accommodation was coloured by the inspectorate's views on teaching methods. The report claimed that the 'quality of education is hindered to some extent by the nature of furniture in many classrooms, which limits the range of teaching styles'. For the conclusion see 48-50.
- (3) Education (Schools) Act, 1992, 1992 chapter 38, London, HMSO 1992.
- (4) Briefing on the New System on Inspection, OFSTED, October 1992. The briefing sets out that the 'specification for each inspection will follow a standard format, but will be tailored to the particular school'; that while OFSTED would try to meet any 'reasonable request' for special features to be taken into account, where a request would add 'unacceptably' to the cost of inspection, then it would have to be refused. The briefing explains that for tendering and contracting purposes 'it is planned to group schools in 'lots' of different sizes'. The registered inspectors invited to tender will be provided with the specification for each school. The intention is to withdraw in stages the amount from the grant to LEAs that which LEAs would spend on inspection, and to give it to OHMCI. (Paragraphs 37-46 and note 7).
- (5) See Briefing on the New System on Inspection', Ofsted, October 1992, paragraphs 6, 7, 27. The Handbook for the Inspection of Schools', Ofsted, 1992.
- (6) Framework, Section 1. Inspection Requirements, pp iii-x, Section 2: Inspection Schedule, pp 1-22.
- (7) HMCI's covering letter accompanying the draft Framework, 30 June 1992.
- (8) Framework, 1.1
- (9) Framework, 1. 7; Briefing, 31 explains that the framework does not specify the number of days to be spent on the job as a whole, but it does lay down minimum numbers of inspector days.

- (10) Introduction: 5, 1.3; Briefing, 28. See also below, discussion of section 2.
- (11) Framework 1.4,5.
- (12) The primary team, for example, showing balance between 'phase and subject expertise'; the secondary between 'subject specialists and those competent to inspect the broader whole school aspects identified in the schedule. Framework, 1.5.
- (13) Framework, 2.1.1, 2.1.3.
- (14) Framework, 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.3.
- (15) Framework, 2.3.
- (16) Framework, 2.3.1, 2.3.2.
- (17) Framework, 2.5.1, 2.5.4, 2.5.3, 2.6.3.
- (18) Framework, 2.6.1, 2.6.2.
- (19) Framework, 2.6.3.(i).
- (20) Framework, 2.6.4,2.6.5, 2.6.6, 2.6.8. Note, for example, the proposal that 'Management is to be judged in terms of the extent to which the governors, head and staff...determine and implement the school's objectives, set individual and group goals, promote quality and plan improvement, take responsibility for performance in the areas they manage, enable people to give of their best, and manage resources.... Planning is to be judged by the extent to which the school has a means of evaluating its provision, identifying strengths and weaknesses and maintaining a development plan to address priorities. Plans are assessed in terms of whether the priorities for action are appropriate; whether the implications of the development programme have been assessed... and whether criteria have been developed to evaluate success'. Framework, 2.6.4.
- (21) Framework, Introduction p. (ii).
- (22) The Briefing explains: 'The Framework is detailed because schools are not simple institutions. HMCI has to ensure that inspectors look at all those aspects which contribute to a school's success or otherwise, and that in each

school they consider the same range of evidence and apply the same evaluative criteria in reaching their judgements', Briefing, 30.

- (23) Education (Schools) Act 1992, 2(3), 9(1), 10(1), (3), (4), (5)-(9), 11, 12.
- (24) 'Note for those intending to become registered inspectors or inspection team members in England', OFSTED, 1992.
- (25) Briefing, 27 for the timetable. The DFE will issue a draft circular with guidance on the provisions of the Act, and those matters of detail to be prescribed in regulations, will also be issued. Briefing, 6, 7; HMCI is also required to give guidance to registered inspectors on inspection and reporting and that guidance, it is thought, will be refined and completed during the coming year. Briefing, 36.
- (26) Education (Schools) Act, 1992, 3(c), (d), (e); Briefing, 5.
- (27) Appendix (ii).