



Independent Schools Council inspections 2005/06

**Better
education
and care**

This is Ofsted's seventh report on the work of the Independent Schools Inspectorate. It covers the first inspections carried out under a new framework in the second inspection cycle and inspection reports from both cycles.

Of particular interest to:

Parents, Independent Schools Council, Independent Schools Inspectorate and the Department for Education and Skills.

Age group

Primary and secondary

Published

November 2006

Reference no.

HMI 2375

© Crown copyright 2006

Document reference number: HMI 2375

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Contents

Executive summary	1
Key findings	1
Recommendations	2
The conduct of inspections	2
The quality of reports	3
Responses to the recommendations of the 2004/05 Ofsted report	4
The quality of ISI's monitoring arrangements	4
Notes	5

Executive summary

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) for the purposes of inspecting and reporting on all schools in membership of the Independent Schools Council (ISC).¹ By the end of December 2005 ISI had completed its first six-year cycle of inspections for all these schools. A new framework for the second cycle of inspections was introduced in January 2006.²

ISI has maintained the good quality of its inspections during 2005/06. Good leadership and management continue to be strong features of these inspections. Despite some weaknesses identified in the spring term, reports have also been good and have benefited from effective editing and quality assurance procedures. ISI has responded to the issues identified in Ofsted's report for 2004/05 and training is being provided to remedy identified weaknesses.³

Key findings

- The quality of ISI inspections continues to be good. All 18 inspections monitored by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) during the spring and summer terms of 2006 were judged to be good. ISI has made some considered changes in procedures for recording evidence and judgements but the undue variation in the quality of lesson observation forms completed by inspectors remains a weakness.
- The quality of ISI reports is generally good. During 2005/06, 21 reports were scrutinised, the majority from inspections previously monitored by HMI. Sixteen of these were judged to be good and five satisfactory. During the summer term 2006 all the reports scrutinised by HMI were judged to be of good quality. These came from the second cycle of inspections.

¹ The Independent Schools Council website is www.isc.co.uk/. The Independent Schools Inspectorate website is www.isinspect.org.uk/.

² During the spring term 2006 Ofsted checked the reports from inspections conducted under ISI's previous framework. The new framework was in place for both inspections and reports from January 2006; available from www.isinspect.org.uk/documentation/docindex_inspect.htm. Reports were available for scrutiny during the summer term 2006.

³ *Independent Schools Council Inspections 2004/05* (HMI 2531), Ofsted, 2005; available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=4102.

Recommendations

Training for all inspectors should continue to focus on two issues:

- improving the quality of evidence recorded during lesson observations: the evidence should be sufficient to support clearly the grade awarded and make clear reference to the achievement of all the pupils observed
- improving further the reporting of schools' ability to meet the regulatory requirements through closer checking against the inspection evidence.

ISI should also reconsider the use of the judgement 'no contrary indication' (NCI) in the record of statutory compliance where a reasonable judgement can and should be made using available evidence.

The conduct of inspections

1. Inspections are well planned and organised. Teams are effectively briefed. A full range of evidence about the school, relating to both academic and welfare provision for pupils, is evaluated systematically.
2. In the best practice, pre-inspection documentation produced by ISI reflects thorough preparation. The commentary is detailed and highlights issues for inspectors to pursue. It includes guidance for team inspectors on ways to collect evidence. The best briefings clarify the specific characteristics of the school and the nature of the pupil intake. The time provided for preparation in the new framework has been helpful for inspectors to develop pre-inspection hypotheses to be pursued in the course of the inspection and to focus inspectors' attention on key regulatory requirements. Occasionally, the pre-inspection guidance did not provide enough detail to direct inspectors towards issues for further exploration.
3. Positive professional relationships are established with headteachers and staff. Regular contact between the reporting inspector and the headteacher ensures that a professional dialogue is maintained throughout the inspection. Good inspections demonstrate a balance between rigour and sensitivity, and are fully compliant with the inspection code of conduct required by ISI.
4. Good leadership and management continue to be strong features of ISI inspections. This is important as the majority of team inspectors do not have regular experience of inspection; however, they are well supported and help to make a positive contribution to the inspection process. In team meetings reporting inspectors take a strong lead in the discussion of emerging issues, in clarifying judgements and in directing further inspection activities.

5. Procedures for checking regulatory requirements are generally effective. In most cases the pre-inspection commentary identifies clearly which regulatory issues are to be checked by the team. Inspectors understand how the regulations relate to their other delegated responsibilities. Regulatory matters are discussed at team meetings to ensure that judgements are supported by sufficiently robust evidence. On some occasions, however, the NCI judgement is used too freely by inspectors to avoid making positive or negative judgements, sometimes on important issues such as the checks made on the employment of staff. ISI should reconsider its use where reasonable judgements could be made.
6. Reporting inspectors monitor the quality of team inspectors' work and, importantly, provide on-site training and support for less experienced inspectors. They regularly and systematically scrutinise and evaluate the evidence gathered by their team. Nonetheless, despite the efforts of most reporting inspectors, the quality of recorded evidence from lesson observations remains variable. In some cases, for example, limited reference is made to the achievement of pupils of different ability groups; in others insufficient evidence is advanced to support the awarded grades.
7. In those few inspections of boarding schools where an inspection by the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) ran concurrently with the ISI inspection, good cooperation between the inspectorates contributed effectively to judgements about pupils' welfare.

The quality of reports

8. Overall the quality of reports is good. There were no unsatisfactory reports among those scrutinised by Ofsted. Reports are generally well written in a language accessible to a range of audiences. Details about a school's strengths and weaknesses are clear to parents; areas that require development are identified clearly for school improvement; and issues relating to regulatory requirements are usually made clear to the DfES.
9. Good reports emphasise a school's individual features and characteristics. The best reports use examples judiciously to illustrate and support judgements. These reports frequently draw on the views of parents and pupils. Reference is made to previous inspections and how the school has progressed. Most of the reports scrutinised make clear judgements on regulatory matters and the regulatory checklist provides helpful supporting evidence.
10. ISI's editing and quality assurance procedures are generally successful and ensure that most reports are typographically and grammatically correct, make good sense and are written in an appropriate style. Occasionally some inconsistencies occur, principally where the weight of evidence presented in the text is not reflected in the overall judgements. For example, one report made repeated reference to limited classroom space in the text but did not make this judgement clear in the main

section on premises and accommodation. Occasionally value judgements which appear to reflect an inspector's personal view were not removed during editing.

11. Most of the 21 reports reviewed explain clearly how a school's strengths contribute to educational outcomes for the pupils, and explain unambiguously how weaknesses constrain pupils' progress. However, occasionally reports do not have enough information about the provision or outcomes for significant groups of pupils in the school's population, such as those for whom English is not their first language; some do not make sufficient use of evidence in judging the achievement of different groups, such as boys and girls, where this is relevant.

Responses to the recommendations of the 2004/05 Ofsted report

12. In the 2004/05 report, two recommendations for improvement were made.⁴ The first recommended improving the quality of evidence recorded during lesson observations. This remains a weakness. ISI has identified this as part of its next training programme for inspectors, but admits that this year it has given its main priority to training inspectors for the new framework. The second recommendation was to improve the quality of oral feedback on individual subjects. This is no longer relevant as ISI has discontinued the practice of reporting on subjects.

The quality of ISI's monitoring arrangements

13. In 2005/06 ISI's monitoring arrangements were reviewed by Ofsted for the first time. The procedures are clear and emphasise the importance of checking regulatory matters. The outcome of monitoring activities is shared with inspectors and analysed to identify further training needs.
14. Between the autumn term 2005 and the summer term 2006, ISI monitored 21 of its own inspections and reviewed 15 reports as part of its quality assurance procedures. The monitoring work is undertaken by a core team of ISI inspectors, the majority of whom are former HMI.

⁴ *Independent Schools Council Inspections 2004/05* (HMI 2531), Ofsted, 2005; available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=4102.

Notes

Schools that are members of the associations that constitute the ISC are inspected by the ISI. It also inspects schools from the Council of British Independent Schools in the European Community (COBISEC). Those independent schools which do not belong to the ISC are inspected by Ofsted under the Education Act 2002 (amended in 2005).⁵

Under an agreement between the DfES and the ISC, which first took effect in January 1999, Ofsted monitors the effectiveness of the inspection procedures used by the ISI, at the request of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. It was replaced in December 2003 by an agreement which set out the Secretary of State's expectations of ISI in respect of its functions as an approved body under section 163 of the Education Act 2002 (from September 2005 section 162B), and additional responsibilities as agreed and set out in the document.

ISI inspection teams consist of practising or retired senior teachers from independent schools. The teams are led by reporting inspectors who are often former or current headteachers, former HMI, or inspectors with substantial experience of inspecting both local authority maintained schools and those in the independent sector. Schools are normally inspected every six years. The inspections provide advice to the DfES on whether schools meet the requirements for continued registration.

In the spring term 2006, ISI began its second six-year cycle of inspections of ISC schools. A new inspection framework was introduced.⁶

Ofsted monitors the ISI inspection system and reports annually to the Secretary of State on:

- whether inspections and reports comply with ISI quality requirements, as agreed with the DfES and set out in the handbook, report manual and procedure for team building
- whether inspections establish, and reports state, if ISC schools meet the standards for registration
- any action ISI needs to take to address concerns about inspections and reports.

Ofsted monitors ISI inspections through the work of HMI. It currently monitors a maximum of 10% of inspections and a maximum of 15% of reports. This is Ofsted's seventh report on the inspection of schools by ISI and covers the spring and summer terms 2006. By arrangement with the DfES and ISI, no

⁵ The Education Act 2005; available from www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2005/20050018.htm.

⁶ The framework and related documents are on the ISI website www.isinspect.org.uk/documentation/docindex_inspect.htm.

monitoring activities took place during the autumn term 2005. In 2005/06 ISI inspected over 200 schools. HMI monitored 18 inspections and checked 21 reports. Ofsted selected for monitoring those inspections run by new lead inspectors or those who had not been seen for some time.