



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

Independent Schools Council Inspections 2000/01

April 2002

HMI 404

A report from the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools

© Crown copyright 2002
Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

Telephone 020 7421 6800 or 6774
Web site: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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

Contents

Introduction	4
Main Findings	5
Recommendations	5
Responses to the Recommendations of the First OFSTED Report	7
The Conduct of Inspections	9
Inspection Reports	10

Independent Schools Council Inspections 2000/01

Introduction

Background

1. Since January 1999, the Independent Schools Council (ISC) has been responsible for publishing reports on schools which are members of associations forming the Council. The reports have given advice to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (now the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)) on whether the schools meet the requirements for continued registration.
2. Until April 2000 there were two inspection regimes, each with its own framework. Schools belonging to the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC) were inspected by HMC's Schools Inspection Service (SIS). The Accreditation, Review and Consultancy Service (ARCS) inspected schools in the other associations which together with HMC form the ISC. In April 2000, these two inspection services merged to form the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and from September 2000 worked to a common framework and procedures. In January 2000, the ISI appointed its first Director of Inspection to oversee and manage the new inspection system.
3. Under an agreement between the then DfEE and the ISC associations, which took effect from January 1999, OFSTED undertook to monitor the new inspection arrangements. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) would in future visit association schools only if they presented serious concerns or if the DfES requested a visit.

The report

4. This is OFSTED's second report on the inspection of schools conducted under the new arrangements. The first report covered the first three terms, starting in January 1999. This report covers the three terms from September 2000, when the ISI started to use a common framework.
5. OFSTED undertook to monitor 10% of the inspections carried out by the ISI and to check 15% of its reports. In the period from September 2000 to August 2001, the ISI carried out inspections of 217 schools. HMI monitored 21 of these inspections and scrutinised 31 reports.

Main Findings

- The Independent Schools Inspectorate has made good progress since the last report on the inspection system. The quality of inspections and reports has improved.
- Of the inspections monitored, all were at least satisfactory and slightly more than half were good. Only one of the reports scrutinised did not meet requirements; of the remainder, half were good and the rest were satisfactory.
- Fresh structures and more consistent procedures have been established under the ISI's new management. Changes have also been made to improve the financial foundation of ISI operations.
- The ISI has responded well to the regular advice they have received from HMI and to some of the recommendations in the first OFSTED report, but there are some areas which still require development.
- There is further improvement needed in the creation of teams, the deployment of team inspectors and the training and other support for those who inspect infrequently.

Recommendations

1. To improve the quality of inspections:

- the ISI needs to make sure that the team inspectors deployed all have appropriate expertise, recent training and regular experience of inspection
- Reporting Inspectors need to ensure that all the inspection criteria are covered when aspects are discussed at team meetings
- in some inspections, team inspectors need to be given more detailed and timely information on their roles and responsibilities
- some team inspectors need further training in reporting orally on subjects and aspects
- team inspectors on their first inspection should be assigned a mentor who is an experienced inspector - a step which the ISI is already considering.

2. To improve the quality of reports:

- Reporting Inspectors should give clear evidence, within the body of the text, that the requirements for registration are met, with the coverage of these requirements being subject to agreement between the DfES and the ISI
- significant variations in the standards achieved between subjects or between pupils of different ages or abilities should be highlighted in the relevant sections of reports and, where necessary, in the main findings

- all inspection reports should include the statistical results of the parental questionnaire and make explicit comments on the views of parents
- the editing of reports needs to ensure a better balance in the length of the subject and aspect sections and greater consistency in the style, structure, content and judgements made in the different sections
- sections on boarding need to be clearer and to cover fully the criteria in the ISI framework.

3. In addition:

- the ISI should inform OFSTED of the outcomes of any complaints from schools about the inspection process or the inspection report, and of the action taken on such complaints.

Responses to the Recommendations of the First OFSTED Report

6. OFSTED's first report on the new inspection arrangements made a number of recommendations. These are shown below, together with a commentary on developments.

The deployment of team inspectors needs to ensure that all have appropriate expertise, training and regular experience of inspection.

7. The ISI has recognised this as a continuing challenge and one it will have to take further steps to overcome. All new team inspectors have a two-day training course and are accredited only after they have successfully completed their first inspection. In principle, this is helpful in identifying any unsuitable inspectors. The system, however, is not yet entirely reliable and further rigorous monitoring and evaluation are required.

8. The ISI policy is that, on any given inspection, a maximum of one in four team inspectors should be on their first inspection. In the majority of inspections this has been the case, but there have been occasions when it has not. For example, in one inspection, five of the ten team inspectors were taking part in their first inspection. When this happens it puts a particular burden on the Reporting Inspector and could jeopardise the integrity of the inspection.

9. In addition, there are still some team inspectors who have not inspected for some time and need further training. The ISI is to run three one-day training courses designed for such inspectors in 2001/02. To improve matters, the ISI will also need to continue to recruit, train and retain sufficient team inspectors. However, there are signs that the quality of the work of team inspectors is improving.

10. Reporting Inspectors appraise all team inspectors on their work. This system needs to be, and is being, tightened so that appraisal more fully matches performance. The information gained from the appraisal system then needs to be gathered and used to inform the deployment of teams and the future training of team inspectors.

Appropriate training should be given to those team leaders who have had limited experience of the independent sector.

11. This has not been done explicitly but has been addressed through the general training and support given to Reporting Inspectors. It is important that Reporting Inspectors, particularly those without experience of independent schools, have appropriate training in the inspection of boarding.

Reports should give clear evidence within the body of the text that the requirements for registration are met by the school.

12. This is an improving area, but there is still too much variation between reports. For example, some reports make specific reference to checks on the suitability of staff, while others do not. There needs to be a clear agreement between the DfES and the ISI as to which requirements should be referred to in the report.

Reports should make more consistent use of performance data, including a clear reference to the ability, or prior attainment, of pupils in judging standards.

13. Progress is being made in this area but there are still significant differences between reports. The ISI is seeking to judge a school's performance by comparing independent school examination results with those of maintained schools with no pupils taking free school meals. In one good report on a selective school, examination results were compared with selective maintained schools. However, there is a lack of consistency in the way standards are referred to, for example in relation to pupils' ages and abilities. Comments on standards of pupils' work need more emphasis and exemplification.

Significant variations in the standards achieved between subjects or between pupils of different ages or abilities should be highlighted in the relevant sections of reports and, where necessary, in the main findings.

14. There are signs of improvement in this respect, but still too much variation between reports. For example, there is sometimes a lack of consistency in the terms used to judge and compare standards, both between and within subject sections.

Quality assurance procedures should be strengthened so that there is better internal consistency, for example to ensure that subject paragraphs follow a consistent pattern and that all criteria in the framework are met.

15. There has been improvement here, although some subject sections still show inconsistencies in style, structure and content. However, subject sections have improved, along with the general quality of reports.

To ensure consistency, inspection reports should include the results of the parental questionnaire.

16. From autumn 2001, the ISI adopted a policy that reports should refer to the views of parents gathered through the questionnaire and at any meeting. At present, practice varies. Some reports make explicit and full reference to parental views throughout the report, while others fail to do so. Some summary reports, while commenting on links with parents, do not always refer to their views. Although the ISI gathers information from the parental questionnaire, it does not publish the results in the reports. The publication of the questionnaire with explicit reference to the views of parents would be a step forward.

It would be helpful if the outcomes of future monitoring visits made by ISI were made available to OFSTED, together with evidence of any action planned or taken.

17. At present, OFSTED does not receive information on the outcomes of monitoring visits. Since the ISI does not make many monitoring visits, it would be helpful for OFSTED automatically to receive all such reports. The ISI is seeking to change the nature of its monitoring visits so that they are more supportive of the Reporting Inspector.

OFSTED should be informed by ISI of the outcomes of any complaints from schools about the inspection process, or the inspection report, and of the action taken on such complaints.

18. This has not been done. It is important that OFSTED and the DfES have a clear view on the overall success of the inspection system as viewed by the schools and of the nature of the ISI's response to the issues raised by those who complain.

The Conduct of Inspections

19. HMI made monitoring visits to 21 inspections in the period covered by this report. Of these inspections, 12 were of a good standard and nine were satisfactory.

20. The good inspections were well managed by the Reporting Inspector. A useful pre-inspection analysis prepared the team well. Team meetings were well conducted, with team inspectors encouraged to express their views and make an appropriate contribution to corporate judgements. Team inspectors were managed effectively and they worked hard to complete their tasks. The Reporting Inspector supported team members and was helpful in providing necessary guidance or training. Team inspectors valued the advice and support given.

21. Where inspections were good, the expertise of the team was well matched to their duties and inspectors had sufficient confidence to inspect. The team gathered enough evidence from lesson observations to make secure and firsthand judgements. Lesson observation forms were completed to a good standard and monitored and improved by the Reporting Inspector.

22. The good inspections were carried out in a positive and professional manner, with the team establishing good relationships with the school staff and the governing body. When team inspectors reported orally on subjects, they were generally clear, concise and covered all aspects of the department's work. Similarly, there was full coverage of the ISI framework criteria in reporting on aspects. Good use was made of the parental questionnaires, which were analysed well, shared with the headteacher and used in the body of the report to reflect parents' views. The inspection was rigorous in its checking of regulatory requirements.

23. In inspections which were satisfactory, but not good, the following features were identified by HMI as in need of improvement.

24. Some teams had a collective lack of experience and this could put pressure on the Reporting Inspectors in their role of supporting their colleagues. Furthermore, there was not always a good match between the expertise and experience of the team inspectors to their duties.

25. Monitoring by the Reporting Inspector did not always ensure that lesson observation forms were satisfactory. For example, some made too little comment on pupils' attainment, were not sufficiently complete, or contained insufficient text to justify the grades given.

26. The criteria for the aspects discussed at team meetings were not always sufficiently covered by the team inspectors when reaching overall judgements.

27. Oral reports given by team inspectors on subjects sometimes had weaknesses, for example because they were not sufficiently full or clear. Some team inspectors used imprecise language or did not give a sufficient flavour of the subject. These oral reports did not always allow teachers to engage in a discussion of the issues.

28. Some team inspectors needed more detailed and timely information on the school and their roles in the inspection. Others, particularly those on their first inspection, needed more support and guidance from the Reporting Inspector.

29. In the inspection of secondary schools, the ISI sometimes had difficulty in finding team inspectors for particular subjects. This could lead to an imbalance in the departments inspected and in the subsequent report.

Inspection Reports

30. HMI monitored 31 reports on schools in the period covered by this report. Of these, 15 were good, 15 satisfactory and one unsatisfactory.

31. Reports of good quality were characterised by clear, precise judgements that were succinctly expressed. Summary reports reflected accurately the findings of the main reports and were likely to be of use to schools in enabling them to improve. They gave parents a clear picture of a school's strengths and weaknesses.

32. The best subject reports were well written, effectively structured, and contained clear judgements supported by sufficient evidence. Good reports were consistent in their coverage of subjects and of aspects, used data well to establish standards of pupils' attainment, and did not shrink from praise or criticism in key areas such as leadership and management, and teaching. Main recommendations emerged clearly from the text and judgements, including those on pupils' attainment and progress, were clearly exemplified.

33. Good reports were well presented, unambiguous and comprehensive in their coverage and gave a clear picture of the school. Close attention was paid to the criteria of the ISI framework. Regulatory requirements were fully reported on in the text, as were serious issues of health and safety. Good reports also took full account of the views of parents, whether expressed through the parental questionnaire or through meetings with parents. The writing was lucid, free from jargon and unexplained acronyms and accessible to parents. The reports were carefully edited and without typographical errors and infelicities.

34. Satisfactory reports do much of the above well, but may contain important weaknesses, or be less effective in a number of respects. For example, they may lack internal consistency between or within sections on subjects or aspects. Also, judgements may not always be clearly expressed, for example those on school management, and subject coverage may be uneven. The views of parents are not always taken fully into account and judgements on specific regulatory requirements are not always mentioned in the body of the report.

35. While much of the writing was satisfactory or good, there were reports where better editing was needed to attend to writing that was obscure, over-descriptive or imprecise. The editing of reports sometimes left imbalances in the length of subject or aspect sections, inconsistencies of judgement or infelicities of expression. There were also some minor typographical errors. Nonetheless, a generally clear picture of a school's strengths, weaknesses and standards was conveyed. The reports usually

provided schools with recommendations for action, supported by evidence, that were relevant to the school's development.

36. There were some issues about competences – for example, reports often made limited reference to parents' views. The inclusion of the results of parents' questionnaires would give clarity and transparency in this respect. Occasionally, reports did not make sufficient reference to previous inspections, including those by social services departments and OFSTED.

37. There is still variation in the quality of the subject sections in a number of reports. Subject sections sometimes showed inconsistencies in style, structure and content. Closer reference to the ISI framework criteria was required in some cases. Not all the subject sections contained clear judgements on teaching. Comments on the standards of pupils' work needed more emphasis and exemplification.

38. There was some lack of consistency in the way in which standards were referred to, for example in relation to pupils' ages and abilities. Comments on pupils' attainment in various subject sections did not always use uniform terminology. Reference to pupils' attainment at the end of each key stage or transitional stages was not always consistent.

39. In some reports, judgements, for example about teaching, in different subject sections did not match the overall judgement in the main body of the report. Sometimes comments on teaching lacked explicit reference to how teachers meet the needs of the full range of pupils. Judgements were insufficiently explicit or lacked clarity, for example where there was no overall clear judgement on leadership and management, or where there was limited reference to management.

40. Occasionally, sections on boarding needed to be clearer and to cover fully the criteria for judgement. More evidence of the attention to issues raised by social services departments, for example in relation to standards of boarding accommodation, would be helpful.

41. Comments on regulatory requirements were not always explicitly made in the text. In a handful of reports, there was no clear information on pupils' attendance.

Background

This is OFSTED's second report on the inspection of schools by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The first report covered three terms, from January 1999, when the Independent Schools Council (ISC) became responsible for publishing reports on those schools that were members of associations which made up the ISC. The reports provided information to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), subsequently the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), on whether ISC schools met the requirements for continued registration.

From January 1999 to April 2000, the ISC had two inspection regimes, each using its own inspection framework. Those schools that belonged to the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC) were inspected by the HMC's Schools Inspection Service (SIS); schools in other associations, which together with the HMC made up the ISC, were inspected by the Accreditation, Review and Consultancy Service (ARCS).

In April 2000, the two inspection services merged to form the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). From September 2000, the ISI used a new, 'common' inspection framework and procedures. The ISI appointed its first director of inspection to oversee and manage the new inspection system in January 2000.

The second report covers three terms from September 2000 when the ISI began to use the common framework of inspection. Under an agreement between the DfEE and the ISC, made in January 1999, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) undertook to monitor 10% of the inspections carried out by the ISI and to check 15% of its reports. From September 2000 to September 2001, the ISI inspected 217 schools. HMI monitored 21 of these inspections and scrutinised 312 of its reports.