

# Transforming Inspection: What can teachers expect?

August 2025

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### Background and context

Over the past 4 years, ETI has focused on the transformation of its framework for inspection. This was underpinned by a determination to develop a process which is fair, transparent, focused on school improvement and sensitive to the varied contexts within which school leaders and teachers work.

ETI wants schools to handle confidently the process of inspection in a way that is beneficial to them to enable inspection to act as a catalyst for further improvement. The new framework for inspection was published in May 2024 and updated in September 2024, and can be accessed at: [Empowering Improvement - New Framework for Inspection](#).

ETI's mission is to '**empower improvement**' and its vision is '**to be the voice for equity and excellence for all learners**'. We have worked extensively with all stakeholders, including the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC), to "lower the stakes and raise the impact" of inspection, ensuring inspections are learner-centred and grounded in the practical realities of life and work in schools. The Empowering Improvement Framework is receiving strong endorsement, and we welcome feedback on how it can be improved further.

### Key aspects of transformed process

The transformed inspection process has five key elements:

- 1. Consultation and co-design with the education system**  
Educators, parents and pupils were heavily involved in shaping the new inspection framework. The co-design with school leaders, teaching unions, teachers and educational bodies has helped rebuild trust in the work of ETI and ensured the new framework reflects real leadership and classroom challenges.
- 2. Context matters**  
The new framework ensures inspection evaluations are sensitive to the context of the school, namely its vision, ethos and community. This is reflected in a new format to reports, with conclusions bespoke to each school.
- 3. Importance of professional dialogue**  
Inspections are centred on professional conversations with staff, where inspectors engage with staff and pupils to understand the school priorities, self-evaluation process and work with them to support school improvement. Inspections have shifted from high stakes 'judgements' to growth and capacity building, enhancing professional learning opportunities.
- 4. Use of existing documents/evidence**  
Inspectors want to use schools' existing documentation rather than requiring new reports or formats. This values the school's own internal processes and aligns inspection with ongoing improvement work.

## 5. **Emphasis on sharing effective practice**

Inspection should be a mechanism for sharing practice that works. ETI reports now explicitly highlight the highly effective practice observed and, by supporting the dissemination of this practice, helps turn inspections into a system-wide improvement tool.

## What's different for teachers?

Although this is a transformed inspection process, for the classroom teacher it might appear that nothing is different, an inspector is coming into my classroom to observe me. Keep in mind, we observe the provision and the pupils at their learning. Inspectors are qualified teachers and are in schools every week, so engage with them confidently as a fellow professional. The new framework brings notable changes for the teacher, middle leader or coordinator, including:

### 1. **The Joint Planning Day (JPD)**

Takes place typically one week to 10 days before the inspection and is an opportunity for the school to set out its context, its uniqueness and its current priorities. The JPD also provides the opportunity for every member of staff to meet with the Reporting Inspector and hear about the process, ask questions and have any concerns addressed.

### 2. **Removal of single-statement evaluations/performance levels**

Individual lesson gradings are gone and inspectors evaluate learning and teaching in the round across a series of lessons, accumulating evidence across all lessons observed in a [Learning Insight Profile](#). When we speak with teachers after a lesson observation, this is all about a joint professional reflection on the pupils' learning.

### 3. **What am I going to be asked? (Five Core Questions)**

This is always a worry going into an inspection. So, if you are a teacher, co-ordinator, middle leader or senior leader, all professional discussions with inspectors will flow from the 5 core questions (outlined in the new

framework). Similarly, the 9 contributory areas, along with the indicators that sit behind them, are designed to support teachers and various staff teams in the self-evaluation process. You do not, however, have to use the framework for self-evaluation; there are other helpful tools out there.

### 4. **Use of existing documents**

Inspectors only want to see what you use in your day-to-day work to guide you and any evidence of impact; this would include, for example, the existing normal long- and medium-term planning, the pupils' work, assessment information and IEPs. This type of documentation should be commonplace in schools. Nothing needs to be created for inspection purposes only. Inspectors are there to see what you do for pupils every day.

### 5. **New report and bespoke conclusions**

Ultimately you will see the extent of transformation in the published report. All performance levels and prewritten conclusions are gone. Through a bespoke conclusion, the school context, uniqueness and where the school is at in relation to achieving its vision for the children and young people should shine through.

## Where are we now and next steps

During the 2024/25 academic year, over 100 schools have had an inspection using the new framework. The transformed process is embedding well, and we continue to keep it under review. We are receiving very positive feedback from the schools inspected. We will continue to visit and take feedback from the schools inspected and make any required changes to the framework as it embeds.

If you have queries around any aspect of the inspection process, please ask ETI by:

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telephone: 028 9127 9726

**OR**

make contact with the school's District Inspector.