

**IPPN Submission –
Draft Inspectorate Strategy Statement 2026-2029**

Prepared for:

The Department of Education & Youth Inspectorate

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1 INTRODUCTION

IPPN is grateful for the opportunity to review the draft Statement of Strategy 2026-2029 and to provide observations to the Department in its deliberations.

This submission aims to provide feedback from a school leadership and management perspective. It is hoped that these observations and feedback will help to strengthen the final Statement and to clarify the Strategy. We would be happy to engage with you further if you would like us to clarify any of the points made.

2 KEY OBSERVATIONS

2.1 MISSION, VISION, VALUES

Having recently undergone a similar process to clarify who we are, what we do, how we do it and why we do it, IPPN believes it is well placed to offer feedback on the Inspectorate’s Draft Strategy Statement. The clarity of the priorities highlighted on the draft cover is excellent:

1. Putting learners first
2. Evaluating education
3. Supporting improvement.

In IPPN’s view, schools and school leaders aim to do precisely the same. What tends to get in the way of schools achieving these priorities is captured in numerous studies and reports, including the UNESCO GEM Report - inadequate resources, lack of time for leadership and too many initiatives that do not take into account schools’ context and improvement plans. Ideally, this would be reflected in some way in the strategy.

Who we are

‘Function’ references three aspects of the role of the Inspectorate

- To evaluate
- To advise and
- To support capacity-building across the system

However, the ‘Core Activity’ section references only evaluation and quality assurance. Immediately, this points to a system of inspection that focuses primarily on evaluation rather than on advising or supporting.

‘Mission’ derives from ‘Vision’ – perhaps switch the placement of the statements on the page.

The language in the Vision statement reinforces the focus on external evaluation being the driving factor in the work of the Inspectorate with no mention of advice or support. Values – read well.

2.2 STRATEGIC PILLARS AND OBJECTIVES

The strategic pillars, objectives and enablers all make sense, are well-thought through and expressed in high-level terms. From a presentation perspective, consider the following:

- Place Strategic Objectives with Strategic Enablers under each pillar.
- Add Pillar 1, Pillar 2, etc., before listing the objectives e.g.
- Pillar 1: Accounting to the public about quality
- Pillar 2: Informing education policy development.
- Strategic Enablers
 - Move ***Culture and practice*** to the top of the list.
 - Clarification is needed re. the reference to ‘shared commitment’ among staff and stakeholders. A commitment to what?
 - What measures of success will the Inspectorate use to track progress? For instance, for the objective ‘strengthen alignment between internal and external evaluation processes to support schools and settings build capacity for continuous improvement’, how will the Inspectorate know that it is achieving its objectives? If measures of success are included, it will support school leaders in understanding the role and function of the Inspectorate.

We would like to see more emphasis on the advisory and support for capacity building aspects of the Inspectorate’s role to balance the evaluator aspects, which predominate at present.

There are many mentions of stakeholders throughout the document. It would be helpful to mention teachers, middle leaders (assistant principals), senior leaders (principals and deputy principals) and school governance (Boards of Management) where this is meant, as these are the key school-level stakeholders that impact on outcomes for children and those who are most impacted by the work of the Inspectorate.

Again, taking into account the reality of school leaders is paramount, when more than half of principals have one day a week and 98% of deputy principals have no discrete leadership time to attend to all aspects of leadership and management, and far less than they want and need to address the aspects that align to their core purpose of leading teaching and learning. This will be particularly important

over the three-year implementation period of the Inspectorate’s Strategy Statement as it aligns with the process of enactment for the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum. IPPN and its members are seriously concerned about school leaders’ capacity to lead this enactment under the current circumstances. All the evidence points to the fact that ‘impactful school leadership transforms the lives of children by enhancing their experience of school, the culture of learning and the quality of education in Ireland’ (*Leading for Impact – 2026-2030 – Helping all children to thrive*). Without additional time and space for school leaders to engage with middle leaders and teachers, the Department’s investment in the redevelopment of what is a wonderful Primary School Curriculum may be seriously comprised. The Inspectorate’s three-year Strategy could leverage its unique, independent and respected position in the system to support the development of an environment in which school leaders are truly empowered to undertake their roles as leaders of teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the reality for Boards of Management – and indeed in some cases the management bodies to which they report - is that they do not have available to them the capacity, skills and expertise required to comply with the numerous legislative requirements around HR, finance, construction and other aspects of governance they are expected to oversee and manage. Simply put, governance structures are not fit for purpose and this needs to be taken into account in inspection reports.

2.3 IMPLEMENTATION

The Education Act (1998) as it impacts on the role of the Inspectorate is referenced at the beginning of this Strategy. The Act also empowers the Inspectorate:

‘13 (3) g: to advise the Minister on any matter relating to education policy and provision, including the curriculum taught in recognised schools, assessment and teaching methods, and

13 (4) d: in collaboration with parents and the Principal and teachers in recognised schools, to assist in the creation of a school environment which prevents or limits obstacles to learning which students may experience,

*13 (5): Where an Inspector has carried out an evaluation or an assessment under subsection (3)(a)(i), he or she **may make recommendations to the Minister in respect of improvements that he or she considers appropriate.***

IPPN believes that these sections and subsections empower the Inspectorate to be a real and powerful agent for change in the system. This is particularly true where the Inspectorate sees the impact of an environment that does not allow school leaders and leadership to flourish because of lack of time and space to lead and because they are not adequately supported by a governance structure that is fit for purpose.

Where the Inspectorate has formed the view that a school has done its best to improve teaching and learning, to create an inclusive culture and to build capacity with the resources and capacity at its disposal, and could do even more if the school had the required resources, training and funding in specific areas, it would be very helpful for the resulting report to state this.

To take one aspect of evaluation – inclusion, which is prominent in the draft strategy - IPPN has been saying for several years that additional needs are either met or they are not. If they are not, there is a consequential impact not only on the child with additional needs, but also on the other children in the class. This holds true for special educational needs as much as for socio-economic disadvantage, children for whom English is an additional language, and for many other categories of additional need.

Taking into account the lived reality on the ground in schools in all three aspects of the Inspectorate's work: evaluations, advice and support will enhance the credibility and trust placed in the Inspectorate. It will also better inform the system in matching expectation to reality, at both a policy development level and at a resourcing level. To ignore context and resource levels diminishes trust and credibility.

2.4 EVALUATION, ADVICE AND SUPPORT TO BUILD CAPACITY

It would be helpful to set out the advisory and support aspects of the Inspectorate's role work - how these are structured, resourced and implemented. There is far more clarity on the ground around the evaluation aspects, although IPPN still hears of issues around consistency of approach among practitioners.

2.5 CLARIFICATIONS REQUIRED

Further clarification is required regarding what is meant by ‘capacity-building activities’. Also, whether and how school context is taken into account by the Inspectorate in the various types of inspection, with regard to suggested improvements and in analysing a school’s achievements:

- workload of school leaders
- SIP and SSE endeavours
- system imperatives e.g. child protection, PCF
- Resource gaps - teachers, SNAs, substitute teachers, funding.