

**Draft Guide to Short Evaluations of Schools at High Support Units, Special Care Units and Child Detention Centres**

**Preliminary Response by the Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI)**

**to the**

**Inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills**

**(December 2012)**

 TUI has reviewed the Draft Guide to Short Evaluations of Schools at High Support Units, Special Care Units and Child Detention Centres and wishes to make the following observations.

* The language in the document is somewhat contradictory e.g. ‘evaluation’ is used in the title and throughout the document but ‘inspection’ is used to denote some activity.  This variation in language gives a mixed message as to the actual focus and intent and expected outcome of the evaluation visit. This is unhelpful and further clarity is necessary
* The document seems to have drawn from a number of other guideline documents - incidental inspections, WSE –MLL, self-evaluation. This is useful in many respects as it emphasises consistency and coherence across the suite of approaches to school/centre evaluations and inspections.

However, it raises particular issues for TUI in respect of reporting requirements, notice and duration of visits by the inspectorate to a unit or centre. Issues of general clarity also arise.

* TUI believes that if short evaluation visits are unannounced they should not lead to a written, published report.  This issue has been extensively discussed in communications between the Inspectorate and TUI on incidental inspections.

The union considers the preparation of written reports arising from unannounced visits will place staff in an unfair position. This is especially the case given the highly demanding nature of the work, the specific environment and some of the individuals catered for in special centres and units.   If written reports are to be feature of the short evaluations TUI believes that advance notice of the visit should issue.

* Drawing on approaches to inspection and evaluation by the Inspectorate in other contexts is relevant and important.  Nevertheless, to some degree, this contributes to a lack of clarity about the focus and intent of the visit to a special unit or centre.

TUI considers that the short evaluation as set out in the draft guide is attempting to encompass too much.    A further iteration should address these issues carefully.

* Throughout the document there are a number of references to individualised support and learning plans.  TUI is mindful that the model of resourcing for special units and centres is different in a number of respects to that which prevails in mainstream settings.

It acknowledges that the approach to the deployment of the resources available is, by necessity, different and accommodates as far as possible tailored support to small groups and individualised support for some learners.  It also accepts that a higher level of specialised expertise is available in many, but not all, instances.

However, it emphasises that resources have not yet been provided to support the enactment of parts of the EPSEN Act, including sections relating to individual education plans. Deficits also exist with respect to resources and support available to access and engage with external support agencies or services.

These issues should be more explicitly acknowledged in the final guide. Greater reassurance must be provided that short evaluations and recommendations arising from such evaluations will be mindful of, and respectful to, context.  In this regard, particular reference to contextual factors could be strengthened in the introduction.

TUI offers the above comments as preliminary observations. It looks forward to an opportunity to consider these, and other issues that its members may have, more fully at a meeting in the New Year.

***For further clarification please contact:***

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