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Excellence, improvement, and HMle's new six-point scale

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Excellence, improvement, and HMIe's new six-point scale

Donald Gillies

Synopsis

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIe) recently redesigned its evaluation scale for use in its inspections, with the stated purposes of highlighting and recognising excellence, and creating a more discriminating scale, better able to track improvement over time. The role of HMIe in promoting improvement in educational provision has been emphasised in recent years and this paper offers an analysis of the new evaluation scale in the light of that aspect of HMIe's functions. It identifies some inherent difficulties with the scale both in terms of its definition of 'excellence' and of its efficacy in motivating improvement. The paper concludes by considering the broader issue of the extent to which the current system of inspection can be seen to be functioning in a formative way to promote improvement in educational provision.

Background and context

In August 2005, HMIe introduced a new six-point evaluation scale, replacing its previous four-point scale, for use in its inspections of schools, the educational functions of education authorities, and community learning and development. A rationale for, and explanation of, the new system was published in the spring of 2005 (HMIe, 2005a) prior to the official on-line launch in August 2005 of *How Good Is Our School?* (HMIe, 2005b), redesigned to incorporate the new six-point scale.

Since 1992, HMIe had operated a four-point evaluation scale, and, indeed, it was the one which schools and others came to operate, or were encouraged to operate, in any self-evaluation exercises undertaken. The previous four-point scale can be seen in *Table 1*.

Table 1. The previous HMIe evaluation scale

| | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 4 | very good - major strengths |
| 3 | good - strengths outweigh weaknesses |
| 2 | fair - some important weaknesses |
| 1 | unsatisfactory - major weaknesses |

(HMI, 2001)

In the rationale provided for the change to a six-point scale (HMIe, 2005a), HMIe argue that the four-point scale has limitations, the major one of which is that 'it does not provide a way of highlighting and recognising excellence'. Secondly, HMIe argue that the four-point scale is also deficient in that 'there is limited ability to differentiate awards where, in broad terms, strengths outweigh weaknesses'. The final reason given for change is that the four-point scale made it 'difficult to track progress and improvement over time'.

It is worthy of note that HMIe has credited the reason for the change to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning who 'recognised these issues and asked HMIe to move to a more discriminating scale with a view to raising expectations and highlighting excellence more clearly' (HMIe, 2005a). This is an unusual step for HMIe to take, as previous changes were undertaken without reference to outside influence. It may be, however, that this public acknowledgment of Executive influence is intended simply to stress HMIe's re-formed status as an agency quite separate from government.

Certainly it is true that since 1997 and the election of the Labour Government, there has been a striking and repeated use of the term 'excellence' in government policy documents and rhetoric. Yet throughout this period of the 'excellence renaissance', it could be viewed as anomalous that HMIe continued to evaluate Scottish educational provision with a system unable to recognise, identify, or highlight excellence.

Table 2. The new HMIe evaluation scale

| Old level | New level | Definition | Description |
|-----------|-----------|----------------|---|
| Level 4 | Level 6 | Excellent | Excellent or outstanding |
| | Level 5 | Very good | Major strengths |
| Level 3 | Level 4 | Good | Important strengths with some areas for improvement |
| | Level 3 | Adequate | Strengths just outweigh weaknesses |
| Level 2 | Level 2 | Weak | Important weaknesses |
| Level 1 | Level 1 | Unsatisfactory | Major weaknesses |

(HMIe, 2005a)

Issues from the new six-point scale

'Recognising excellence' is reputedly central to the changes to the four-point scale. However, making provision for this in the new scale is only part of the picture. A 'more discriminating' scale has also been created and it is one which has brought with it a number of difficulties for the inspection process and its intended link to school improvement.

The new scale, and its correlation to the old scale, can be seen in *Table 2*. What is immediately noteworthy about the new scale is not so much the recognition of excellence but, rather, that it appears markedly more critical and negative in tone than its predecessor. Of the previous four-point scale, three of the definitions could be deemed to be positive and only one negative; in the new scale three are positive but, now, three could be construed as negative assessments. Nowhere is this more telling than in the re-labelling of Level 2. Although described previously as referring to provision which had 'some important weaknesses', such provision was still defined as 'fair'. Now, however, this has been described slightly differently as 'important weaknesses' but defined very differently as 'weak'. What makes this even more striking is that the illustrations of Level 2 provision in the updated *How Good Is Our School?* document (HMIe, 2005b) remain unchanged from the previous edition. What was previously produced as an illustration of 'fair' provision, now becomes illustrative of 'weak' provision. This represents a considerable shift in tone, and not one which is adequately explained or defended in the document.

Equally significant is the new Level 3 definition: 'adequate – strengths just outweigh weaknesses'. The term 'adequate' could hardly be viewed as positive: after all, this is a level of performance in which 'strengths' outweigh weaknesses, and which in the previous scale was characterised as being 'good'. While a new more discriminating scale will inevitably involve new criteria and descriptors, to characterise this level of performance as 'adequate' seems very grudging. This also has two further consequences. If the aim of HMIe's evaluation is indeed improvement, then this type of labelling is counterproductive. Firstly, the negative connotations of the label 'adequate' are not motivational and unlikely to stimulate action for further improvement – to 'good', 'very good', or 'excellent'. Secondly, it does not act as any sort of incentive for establishments where provision has been labelled as 'weak' or 'unsatisfactory'. It would be extremely disheartening for an establishment to have worked hard to improve performance from those levels, to have reached a point where strengths outweigh weaknesses, only to find their efforts

described simply as 'adequate'. One could argue that there is a need for a separate vocabulary to label the *scale* of improvement. An establishment which was evaluated as being unsatisfactory would have had to put in a prodigious amount of effort to move from that position – Level 1 – to Level 3 and ought to be given the recognition for such improvement, a recognition which is by no means recognised in the term 'adequate'.

While the four-point scale may have been too broad, at least the labels were positive and could be seen to provide motivational targets. That cannot be said for the use of the terms 'weak' and 'adequate', which are certainly closer to 'naming and shaming' than to stimulating and motivating. So, although the new scale is designed to 'recognise' excellence, the reality may well be that, in practice, the new scale will come to focus much more on negative labelling of less celebrated provision. It is true that for 'insiders' in the past, an evaluation of 'fair' would certainly not be taken as a ringing endorsement, but at least it did not evaluate the provision in such a crushing way, and left the staff involved with room to endeavour to effect improvement, free from the glare of public shaming.

A further difficulty in the new scale rests with the move to identify 'excellence'. This development, while seeking to match official rhetoric, is also in keeping with HMIe's affection for the terminology of business management theory, of which 'excellence' is a current example. (Its titular use in *A Curriculum for Excellence* was recently dismissed by Gordon Kirk as 'vacuous spin': TESS, 21 January, 2005.) In addition to introducing a new Level 6 of 'excellent' to their evaluation scale, HMIe has also now published *The Journey to Excellence* (HMIe, 2006), the first in a series of publications, centred around 'ten dimensions of excellence', intended to support self-evaluation within establishments 'which are now ready to make that step change: from good to great' (p.1). This reflects HMIe's own institutional commitment to business models such as those of EFQM, the European Foundation for Quality Management (HMIe, 2001, p.6), but it is a notoriously contested approach to attempt to apply private sector business models of organisational evaluation to the educational domain.

Despite the focus on excellence, the term itself is not defined clearly in the new evaluation scale. Previously, the highest level achievable was Level 4 – 'very good'. This has now been graded as Level 5, with a new Level 6 introduced, termed 'excellent', further described as meaning 'excellent or outstanding'. Immediately one can see here the seeds of potential confusion. By applying evaluations to specific quality indicators, and by

providing illustration of levels of performance, it is clear that HMIE intend the term 'excellent' here to be understood in criterion-referenced terms. However, this is immediately undermined by the use of the description 'outstanding'. That word, defined literally as 'standing out', would tend to suggest a norm-referenced meaning of excellence, in the sense of being superior, prominent, and so not universally achievable. To have all of a class labelled as 'outstanding' would be a contradiction in terms, while it could be perfectly appropriate for a whole class to be designated 'excellent'.

This lack of clarity is also evident in the 'key characteristics' of the six new evaluations. In the description of 'excellent' provision, the following synonymous equivalences are used: 'a model of its type...of a very high quality...outstanding standard...very best...very high...'. One does not need to be a lexicographer to see that the term is being used to cover a very broad evaluative range from 'very high' to 'very best' and 'a model of its type'. 'Very high' leaves some room for advancement to 'highest' or 'extremely high', whereas the same cannot be said of 'very best'. One must therefore assume that HMIE expect to use the term 'excellent' to cover quite a range of levels of provision, from that which just exceeds the 'very good' assessment to that which approaches perfection. In addition, the repetition of the term 'outstanding' adds a normative, hierarchical element to the evaluation. Some may see this ambiguity as beneficial to HMIE, and more deliberate than clumsy. From such a perspective, the lack of a consistent definition may enable HMIE to cater for a broad range of educational standpoints: for those who view excellence in an elitist way, for those who view it in a criterion-referenced way, and indeed for those who view it in a purely subjective, motivational way – 'the best that we can do'.

One further oddity lies in the final sentence of the description of 'excellent' which states: 'It [the use of the evaluation 'excellent'] will imply these (sic) very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained'. This is the only one of the six categories to which such a statement is attached and it is hard to see any justification for it. Why should the evaluation of 'excellent' be deemed to be more susceptible to sustainability than any of the other levels of performance? Evaluation is based on evidence and speculation of this sort is entirely inappropriate. Inspections have often, rightly, been described as 'snapshots' of provision, based as they are on a few days' observations, so to create instead a 'movie' with a happy ending from such evidence is baseless and unwarranted. Even if one were to sanction this speculative thrust, there is no reason why it should not also be applied to provision that

was 'weak' or 'unsatisfactory' which would be just as likely to be sustained and maintained as any other level of provision.

HMIE's inconsistent use of the term 'excellence' can also be revealed when one contrasts what is said about 'excellent' with what is said about its nearest neighbour 'very good'. 'While an evaluation of very good will represent a high standard of provision, it is a standard that should be achievable by all.' The same is not said of the evaluation of 'excellent', however, which implies that excellence is not achievable by all. Why should this be so? If one has set criteria for 'excellent', why should it be implied that not everyone can achieve it? After all, it is not being applied in some general sense but to specific, defined quality indicators. Why should it be that all establishments could not expect to achieve an 'excellent' evaluation in any one of the inspected quality indicators? There are only two possible reasons, if one assumes that creating this anomaly is not planned: either HMIE has muddled a criterion-referenced meaning of excellence with a norm-referenced meaning of excellence, or the criteria have been set so high as to assume perfection. And this cannot be examined further: HMIE does not provide illustrations of 'excellent' provision. The revised *How Good Is Our School?* only illustrates 'very good' and 'adequate' provision.

It is indeed surprising that, in introducing a new system of evaluation, specifically designed to highlight and recognise excellence, no attempt is made to illustrate, or exemplify, 'excellent' provision. Instead, one is left to extrapolate, from the descriptor of 'very good' provision, what could be considered to be superior to, better than, the examples quoted in the document. Of the six new levels, only two are illustrated: the precise nature of the other four levels simply has to be a matter of supposition, based on an imprecise process of terminological deduction. This is hardly a model of good formative assessment practice.

In defence of HMIE, it should be acknowledged that the major initiative of *The Journey to Excellence* is intended to fill this very gap as it provides examples and illustrations of what HMIE understands excellence to be, across the 'ten dimensions'. In this publication excellence is defined as 'the farthest end of the quality spectrum' (HMIE, 2006, p.5), thereby firmly committing HMIE to a criterion-referenced definition of 'excellence'.

Some may argue that to focus thus on terminology and definition is to miss the point: the purpose of all recent HMIE initiatives has simply been to encourage all in Scottish education to aim for the very best. On this view, analysing vocabulary and

meaning in this context is mere pedantry. However, such an attitude – the educational equivalent of ‘never mind the ball get on with the game’ – is in danger of blinding us to the key educational issues at stake. If we are, as it now seems, to be committed as an education system to the cult of excellence, then we do need to be able to question what is meant by excellence, what the criteria are, and to encourage debate about direction.

Inspection and improvement

Much is made of HMIe’s current role in promoting improvement in educational provision. This was not always the case: inspection and evaluation were the seen as the dominant purposes (Weir, 2003, p.152). In a statement to the House of Commons on 16 December, 1992 on the role of Her Majesty’s inspectors of schools in Scotland, the then Secretary of State for Scotland clarified the position:

It is important that we have an inspection system that is independent of the providers of the education service. Education provision in Scotland is the responsibility of local education authorities. . . I look to Her Majesty’s inspectorate in Scotland to monitor and report . . . I look to its reports to provide frank and clear assessments of . . . strengths and weaknesses. . . to assess the standards being achieved and the arrangements made to monitor and improve these standards. . . to monitor the performance of all schools and colleges. . . to identify elements requiring attention and improvement in individual institutions and in the system as a whole.
(Ian Lang, Commons Written Answers, Schools Inspectors, House of Commons Hansard Debates for 16 December, 1992)

This statement made a very clear distinction between the Local Authority’s responsibility for the *standard* of provision, in the case of state schools, and the Inspectorate’s responsibility for *assessing* such standards and the arrangements made to monitor and improve them. It was also charged with *identifying* elements requiring improvement. This statement, the first on the Inspectorate’s functions for a decade, since the contested Rendle Report (Humes, 1986, pp.66-75), was very important. At no point was the Inspectorate charged with any duty or function in *addressing* improvement directly. Their task was of identifying and evaluating.

This fits very well with the findings of Bennett (2001) who studied the role of the inspectorate in Scotland in the late 1990s. She reported that inspectors themselves did not view their function as involving improvement. The view of those inspectors

interviewed was that ‘inspection is not the way to improvement’ (p.231). Instead, they saw this improvement as flowing much more from the self-evaluation conducted by individual establishments.

However, in its Charter document of 2001, HMIe states: ‘HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) promotes improvements in standards, quality and attainment in Scottish education through first hand, independent evaluation. . . We use the evidence from inspections and reviews, and our direct knowledge of the system, to: identify and promote best practice in improving standards and quality. . .’ (HMIE, 2001, p.1).

This function is forcefully reiterated by the Education Minister, in the Executive Agency Framework Document of April 2005: ‘HMIE’s principal activity is to promote sustainable improvements in standards, quality and achievements for all learners in Scottish education through first-hand independent evaluation’ (Scottish Executive, 2005, Foreword).

With the changes to the status of the Inspectorate and their re-formation as HMIe in 2001, therefore, came an explicit focus on improvement. At times HMIe has even expressed this in stronger terms. In its information leaflet for parents, it is stated: ‘HMIE works to improve education in Scotland’ (retrieved on 1st November from www.hmie.gov.uk/about_us/inspections/documents/parents%20leaflet.doc) which is a much more involved and responsible role than their Charter task of ‘promoting sustainable improvements’. The current chief Inspector, Graham Donaldson, also states, in a website overview of the history of the role of the Inspectorate, that ‘what has not changed is the emphasis on the relationship between inspection and improvement’ (retrieved on 1st November, 2005, from www.hmie.gov.uk/hmie.asp). Humes (2003) detects a tendency by the Inspectorate to write its own history with a particular slant (p.78). This may be another example, as improvement was not an explicit function of the Inspectorate although clearly Donaldson’s choice of the word ‘relationship’ is judicious. The ‘relationship’, as has been established above, was that the Inspectorate, in the past, identified where they judged improvements to be required but did not have a formal role in either ‘promoting’ subsequent improvement strategies and certainly not in ‘working’ to make such improvements happen. The most that one could say is that the Inspectorate had a vicarious role in improvement: weaknesses were identified by their inspections; establishments tried to improve as a consequence; the Inspectorate re-inspected.

Given what is now known about the principles of

formative assessment (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998), it would seem to be prudent for HMIe to have adopted some of these principles into its own *modus operandi* if it wishes to capitalise on the possibility of its evaluations leading to improvement.

Bennett (2001), however, found that this aspect of the role of the Inspectorate was a problematic one: inspectors carried out their defined roles of assessing and identifying, without any sense of a need to become involved in designing corrective strategies. This was the most common complaint of teachers, that the inspection process was inherently inimical to formative ideals in that there was insufficient interaction with, and limited feedback from, the inspectors. Teachers were also 'critical at (sic) the Inspectors' reluctance to offer practical strategies for remediation given their readiness to offer criticism' (p.161).

Bennett concluded that inspection operated more as a control mechanism than as a contributor to improvement and that there was a need for a better balance between the accountability and improvement roles of the Inspectorate. While the Inspectorate could take satisfaction from the study's findings that a clear majority of school managers viewed the inspection process as constructive and 'a catalyst for positive change' (p.145), there were other less supportive findings as we have seen: inspectors did not view the inspection as part of an improvement strategy, and nor did they engage with staff in any process of formative discussion. Given that context, Bennett went on, understandably, 'to ask the question whether the improvement purpose of inspection is fully maximised in the contribution it can make as a formative assessment tool or whether the emphasis is too much on it as a summative and even punitive test to be passed or failed' (p.222). This question remains a key one today.

Since Bennett's study, however, HMIe has made significant changes to its practice which to some extent answer these criticisms. First of all, the new Charter more clearly defines its role in promoting improvement. It could still be argued, however, that there is a degree of ambiguity. Although HMIe now has an explicit role in improvement, the degree of involvement and responsibility is imprecise. Its Charter, as has been noted, states that HMIe 'promotes improvements in standards' and that HMIe will 'identify and promote best practice in improving standards and quality' (HMIe, 2001, p.1). It is significant that its role still remains slightly detached in the sense that HMIe is not actually charged with any duty of *securing* improvement but only of 'promoting' it. Nor is HMIe charged with

explicit responsibility *to work with* those inspected to make improvements. Indeed, the language is sufficiently woolly that it is hard to imagine circumstances where HMIe could be seen to have failed in its requirements. Should improvement occur, all is well; should improvement not occur, HMIe can point to its role as being merely 'to promote' improvement – which, frankly, could be said to be achieved, albeit minimally, by simply making bald negative criticisms of existing practice. All of this, therefore, does serve to undermine the idea that HMIe is in some sense involved in a formative approach to improvement.

However, despite these misgivings about HMIe's statutory role, it has to be acknowledged that HMIe has continued to refine its inspection processes with an evident view to support improvement. The development of the 'proportionate inspection' approach (HMIe, 2004a) has made more of 'follow-through' arrangements, designed to support establishments in addressing weaknesses identified during inspection. And again, HMIe has said it will include more opportunities for discussion with staff during the inspection. Both of these developments could be seen as more in keeping with a formative approach to evaluation. Inspection has also been slimmed down with only a selection of Quality Indicators examined, the criterion being to focus on those more directly related to learning and teaching and the school's capacity to address improvement. This could have other consequences, however, for HMIe. Wilcox and Gray (1996) found that weaknesses relating to teaching and learning, identified by inspectors, were the hardest for establishments to address and demonstrate progress in tackling. They also tended to be a distinct minority as points for action, arising from inspections, which much more tended to focus on general processes of curriculum delivery and management (p.99). Thus, by focusing much more on aspects of teaching and learning, and by stressing their own role in improvement, HMIe is facing a doubly difficult task. If teaching and learning issues are hard to improve, and improvement, as opposed to inspection and evaluation, becomes HMIe's overriding purpose, the future will be challenging, if not daunting.

It should be stressed also that, since Bennett's study, there have been particular developments in the relationship between establishments, local authorities, and inspectors. There seems to be more of an attempt by HMIe to engage with, and work with, key players during the whole inspection process, although there does not seem yet to be a clear agreed method at work. From inspection to follow-up does appear to be moving towards more of a partnership approach. Much of this, however,

can be attributed to local authorities whose staff, such as quality improvement officers, have become much more involved in supporting establishments, in promoting and bolstering increasingly detailed and complex systems of self-evaluation, and thus becoming central to the inspection process, and so to interacting with HMIe. As will be seen below, however, any sense of partnership seems to be confined to this managerial, rather than classroom, level.

However, these HMIe changes which could be seen as realigning inspection to fit better an explicit improvement objective, do face other difficulties. The foremost of these is the very issuing of the inspection report, a report which focuses on inspection rather than resultant improvement. Indeed, the reduced role of the follow-up report (HMIe, 2004a, p.1) means that much more public emphasis will be on this initial report. The purpose may be formative but the effect is summative. If one were genuinely endeavouring to promote improvement within an educational establishment, formative assessment research would tend to suggest that it is the 'report' stage which should be downplayed in comparison with the 'follow-up' stage. If the report stage identifies strengths and weaknesses, then a formative strategy would be to wait until the follow-up stage before making a summative report. The difficulty lies in that the inspection report, with its accompanying publicity and emphasis, is effectively a summative evaluation, to which now is being added a purportedly formative role. Educational establishments are being encouraged to use the HMIe report as a formative tool to secure improvement but still find this same report being published as HMIe's summative findings. It is akin to a school pupil being encouraged and supported in redrafting work, only to find that the summative assessment has been conducted on the first draft after all, rather than the improved, polished redraft.

To be properly supportive of improvement, the report stage would need to be redesigned as a formative dialogue between inspectors and establishments (including their Local Authority support teams). What is now the follow-up stage would then become the point at which a summative report would be appropriate. During the inspection period, establishments and inspectors could agree on an improvement strategy, based on a consensus drawn from the findings of internal self-evaluation and external inspection, and the re-inspection, the follow-up stage, would become the point at which reporting would be relevant. Thus a fundamental readjustment of the current process would be required so that the follow-up report becomes the highlighted report rather than the existing system where the initial inspection dominates reporting.

There is now a considerable body of literature which points to the importance of self-evaluation in driving improvement and the significant role, not so much of objective inspection as that of the 'critical friend' (Dunford, 1998; Earley, 1998; MacBeath, 1999; MacBeath, Boyd, & Rand, 1996; MacBeath *et al.*, 2000; Swaffield, 2004, 2005; Swaffield & MacBeath, 2005). It is clear from the nature of the inspection process that the role of HMIe is not, but could still have the potential to be, that of a 'critical friend', were HMIe inclined to play that role. The research suggests such a role is a better driver of improvement but it is also the case that this would also have potential implications for the credibility of HMIe's other key roles of independent inspector and assessor (Brighouse, 1995, p.14). If HMIe were to become an active agent in an improvement strategy and remain in an evaluative role (in the follow-up report, for example), then that would create the very same type of conflict of interest which prompted the reformation of their role and status in 2001 (Humes, 2003, p.78). It will not be easy for HMIe to manoeuvre itself into a position which both increases its formative involvement but at the same time maintains its status as independent inspector.

The second problem which undermines the improvement purpose of HMIe inspection is that the degree of discussion between staff and inspectors remains limited and schools report varying degrees of satisfaction with its efficacy (HMIe, 2004b, p.7). It is not certain that the process has become shared or collaborative, although certainly more participative. One headteacher, as recently as November 2005, described the dialogue between inspectors and teaching staff as 'very much a case of wham, bang, thank you mam' (TESS, 11 November, 2005, p.4). It remains, therefore, a problem for a formative approach that there are so few opportunities for discussion of strengths and weaknesses, and for agreeing strategies for improvement, with teaching staff, as opposed to managers, a key flaw previously identified by Bennett (2001).

Conclusion

It is clear from a study of the new HMIe six-point scale that it does contain a number of problems, mostly related to its role in improvement. Had the new scale and its introduction been subjected to a process of consultation, this could have stimulated a productive debate amongst interested parties and many of the issues raised in this paper could have been addressed.

There is, in addition, a degree of inconsistency in HMIe's proposed use of the term 'excellence' in evaluations and that may serve to blunt the effectiveness and the validity of the evaluations

made under the new system. The continuing commitment of HMIe to borrowing the terminology of business management theory will continue to create difficulties unless greater care is taken to remould such language and usage to educational reality.

Of more importance for the improvement agenda is the fact that the mix of summative and formative purposes in HMIe's evaluations creates complications. The negative tone of the definitions used in the new scale is not indicative of a formative purpose. Categorising provision, previously adjudged to be 'fair', as 'weak', and labelling provision where strengths outweigh weaknesses as merely 'adequate' is more likely to be demoralising than stimulating of improvement. The continued system of publishing HMIe reports in the form of summative evaluations further undermines the formative, improvement function. It is also true, however, that any attempt by HMIe to marry its apparent desire for increased formative involvement with its continued key role in independent evaluation will represent a very tough strategic challenge.

The suggestion by HMIe that schools continue to use the four-point scale for self-evaluation while the Inspectorate use the six-point scale will only create confusion and disappointment (HMIe, 2005c, p.3). When the same evidence may be 'fair' on one scale but 'weak' on the other, the result is likely to be friction and conflict.

What is encouraging is the fact that HMIe has taken steps in recent years to refine the inspection process. Inspection clearly always had a formative element, by default: establishments did change in response to inspection. However, new insights into formative assessment have now identified a number of key features which the inspection process still needs to adopt, or have regard to, if the formative aspect of inspection is to be secured and its potential maximised.

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