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## Teacher accountability in Education – The Irish Experiment

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### Introduction and Background

School and teacher accountability have had a somewhat fluctuating existence in Irish education. For example, in the nineteenth century, and up to the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922, various frameworks for teacher and school accountability, such as incidental inspections and the Payment by Results system,<sup>1</sup> were regular and at times an unnerving feature of school life. The rating of primary teachers by inspectors<sup>2</sup> and the public availability of post-primary schools examination results were also significant means of making teachers accountable to school and state. At primary level, the frequency of inspections also related to the perceived quality of the school and teacher, as determined by the inspectorate; what might be referred to as incidental or proportionate inspections in the modern era.

However, inspectorate appraisal of Irish schools and teachers has not always been a regular feature of teacher accountability in Irish education. In the last decades of the twentieth century, excepting the inspection of probationary teachers, inspection of individual post-primary teachers was limited.<sup>3</sup> The primary school inspectorate also reverted back to a cyclical model of inspection where schools were visited on a cyclical basis once every four to seven years, resulting in the production of an inspection report referred to as Tuairisc Scoile (School Report).<sup>4</sup> At post-primary level, for various reasons, such as the multitude of duties assigned to inspectors, coupled with the strongly held view of the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI) that 'a teacher may or may not decide to carry on teaching in the presence of an inspector'<sup>5</sup>, the inspection of individual post-primary teachers, had almost ceased to exist. However, with the implementation of various circulars and legislation, such as the Education Act of 1998, and the public availability of school inspection reports since 2006, an increasingly transparent and frequently applied framework for teacher and school accountability has once more emerged within the Irish education system. According to the Department of Education and Skills, at the primary level, from 2010 - 2012, 'inspection visits of some type took place in over half of all primary schools in the country'.<sup>6</sup> In the case of post-primary schools, from 2010-2012 'inspections of some type occurred in 93% of second-level schools'.<sup>7</sup> As a result, regular and incidental, teacher and whole school inspection, have once more become part of what it means to be a teacher in twenty-first century Ireland.

This chapter examines the evolution of inspection and accountability in the Irish teaching profession from the early nineteenth century up to the middle of the twentieth century, a period of school reform that saw the establishment of a publically funded system of primary and post-primary education. The chapter describes how that accountability has articulated itself over this period and how this has influenced the present culture of accountability and transparency through inspection and legislation. The chapter starts by providing an overview of the establishment of a national system of school inspection the origins of which date back to early nineteenth century Ireland and examines why, historically, the teaching cohort managed, to a degree, to avoid accountability, a situation that was not fully resolved until the Inspectorate was placed on a statutory basis by the Education Act of 1998. The next section provides an overview of teacher and school accountability in the first decades of independence. Taking the position that 'educational development always occurs within a larger social, economic, and political

context, and it is difficult to appreciate the former without the latter,<sup>8</sup> the final section discusses the milestones of school and teacher accountability during this period and how these accountability mechanisms influenced the re-emergence of teacher and school accountability that currently exists through the process of whole school, incidental and subject inspections.

### **School Inspection and Teacher Accountability: The Irish Experiment**

The context for the evolution of accountability in Irish education is closely linked with the establishment of a national system of education the implementation of which can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. Up to this period, education for the majority of Catholic children in Ireland was through an illegal network of schools, more commonly referred to as the hedge school system; what Coolahan (1981) describes as a ‘wide-ranging, if rather haphazard system of unofficial schools’.<sup>9</sup> However, with the easing of the penal laws during the later parts of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the practice of educating children ‘beneath the sunny side of the hedge’ (so called because this was deemed the safest place to keep children safe and to alert the master of the imminent arrival of soldiers)<sup>10</sup> began to be increasingly replaced by a national system of non-denominational education. This system was under, primarily, the initial guidance and control of The Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in Ireland, unofficially referred to as ‘The Kildare Place Society’. It was through the establishment of The Kildare Place Society in 1811 that the foundations of a national system of school inspection began to materialise. According to O’Heidean (1967), ‘an inspection carried out on behalf of the Kildare Place Society in the Autumn of 1818 by John Vevers is regarded as the first approach not only in Ireland but in England and Scotland to a government inspection of schools’.<sup>11</sup> In many respects this is no surprise given the view that Ireland was sometimes used as a ‘social laboratory where various policy initiatives were tried out’.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, prior to the establishment of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland (CNEI) in 1831, the Kildare Place Society had developed through various mechanisms, such as teacher observation, a national system for school inspection that was almost identical to that used by the CNEI inspectors. According to Hislop, ‘the care with which the system of inspection was organised was typical of the managerial efficiency of the Kildare Place system, so much so that it became the working model for the Inspectorate of the National Commissioners in 1831’.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, O’Heideain, comparing the code of instruction for inspectors of the Kildare Place Society and the CNEI concludes, ‘in the two codes, therefore, there are enough similarities to make one feel that the author of the National Board’s instructions had the other document before him as he wrote’.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the only significant difference between the methods of inspection of the two inspectorates was the introduction of unannounced, incidental, inspections to CNEI inspection methods; that is, the inspector ‘is not to give previous notice to the conductors of any schools of the time of his visit, but rather endeavour to arrive with each when he is unexpected’.<sup>15</sup>

The justification of incidental inspections during this period are very much in line with that given when similar inspections were reintroduced for all teachers in Ireland at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ‘because it is an unannounced inspection, an incidental inspection can provide a more authentic quality assurance process than inspection models that provide schools with advance notification’.<sup>16</sup> A more colourful explanation of the importance placed on incidental inspections is supplied in the 1855 report of the CNEI which stated that, ‘as many abuses may be prevented or corrected by incidental visits to schools, the inspectors are required to make as many such as possible, and in every case after having ascertained whether former suggestions have been attended to, and evils previously pointed out and corrected, to leave an entry of such visit in the Report Book, and record it under the head, incidental visit in his weekly diary, accompanied if necessary, by a special letter, in the case of anything of pressing importance having come under his notice’.<sup>17</sup> An inspector giving evidence at a Special Committee of Inquiry in 1837 further emphasised the benefits of incidental inspections, ‘I would not venture

to report positively on the character of the school unless I come upon it unawares, and when I cannot succeed in doing so, I always take another opportunity of coming upon it unexpectedly before I make up my mind as to the character of the school'.<sup>18</sup>

With advances in transport in the modern era, one can readily ascertain how incidental inspections are conducted today. However, in relation to incidental inspections in nineteenth century Ireland, Akenson asks the following, 'it would be interesting to know how an inspector was supposed to be able to manage an unexpected visit in rural Ireland'.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, the commissioners also required that, 'every National School be inspected by the Superintendent of the district, at least three times in each year',<sup>20</sup> of which, 'he is not to give any intimation of his visit, but during the middle term of the year, from the 1<sup>st</sup> of May to the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, when the inspection is to be made Public...'.<sup>21</sup> (It is questionable, however, whether inspections of individual schools were ever this frequent and perhaps, once per year is suggested as a fairer estimate).<sup>22</sup> Indeed, apart from the harsh terrain in which inspectors were required to travel, inspectors, like those operating today, had other duties to perform. For example, they were also expected to investigate new applications for aid and to investigate complaints relating to teachers. In one such example, a complaint was made by a clergyman concerning a teacher whom the former felt was promoting 'Liberty and Religion', '...after this second application, the Board, without the slightest notice to the clergyman sent down an inspector, but, unhappily, for want of notice, no witnesses were forthcoming'.<sup>23</sup> Another example of the work of an inspector that, in many ways, sums up the reciprocal relationship between inspectors and schools during this period, is when inspectors were asked to provide opinions relating to the suitability of, for example, dwellings for teachers, 'some of Board's inspectors are of the opinion that residences should not be too near the school, suspecting that the teacher will not be constantly in the school-room as he ought, if his own dwelling is close at hand'.<sup>24</sup>

Incidental inspections became a significant part of the framework for teacher accountability in the early years of primary school inspection. Remarkably, it was only in 2004 that prior notice inspections, and in 2011 that incidental inspections, were introduced for post-primary teachers. The reasons for the omission of post-primary schools from school inspection during the early period of educational reform primarily relates to the initial funding arrangements for a national system of education in 1831 as described in what is commonly referred to as the Stanley Letter<sup>25</sup>; that is, to the 'granting [of] aid for the erection of schools'.<sup>26</sup> By way of explanation, although the National System (established in 1831) was state-funded, and the post-primary, Intermediate System (established in 1878) was funded, as in England, by a system of payment-by-results, Parliament's position, that publically funded schools should be publically accountable, was hard to implement. This is because Irish post-primary schools, in particular, had been privately established and funded prior to 1878, and they were unwilling to countenance the incursion of 'spies' (inspectors) into their schools. This led to post-primary schools remaining without any significant mode of inspection until the advent of Whole School Evaluation in the late 1990s.

The funding of a national system of primary education is particularly relevant to the rapid expansion of a quasi-private secondary education system in Ireland, and also to the history of school accountability in Irish education more generally. Between 1831 and the establishment of the Vocational Inspectorate in 1900, it was only the primary school system that had a formal inspectorate. Furthermore, although post-primary schools were to receive state funding with the passing of the Intermediate Education Act of 1878, it was not until 1902 that the post-primary inspectorate came into being with the appointment of temporary inspectors. These were 'mainly imported English HMIs (His Majesty's Inspectors). These were replaced in 1909 by permanent inspectors many of whom had been former primary inspectors'.<sup>27</sup> O'Buachalla's assertion that, 'the existence of these inspectorates proved remarkably resilient to attempts to

modify the structure’<sup>28</sup> proves true as it was not until 2004 that these three separate bodies merged into one inspectorate - ‘the unified school system’ or ‘royal highway’ which the first Minister for Education, Eoin MacNeill, claimed he had created in 1925.<sup>29</sup>

For those primary teachers who were subject to inspection, Akenson notes that, ‘as far as routine inspection visits were concerned, the inspectors’ tasks were just what one would expect’.<sup>30</sup> For example, upon arrival, inspectors were required to examine attendance patterns, the structural state of buildings and other matters not directly related to teaching and learning. In terms of teacher observation, inspectors were required to ‘observe the course of instruction given and the methods and processes of teaching employed...Whether the teachers are competent, efficient, and influential, faithful in the observance of all suggestions left for their guidance, prompt in the correction of abuses, and eager for improvement; duly impressed with the importance of their office, and earnest and content in the discharge of their duties’.<sup>31</sup> Further, inspectors were also required to inspect the proficiency of students in areas such as: ‘Reading (including oral language and spelling); Arithmetic; Penmanship; Writing from Dictation; Grammar; Geography; Needlework; Extra Branches (such as singing, drawing...)’.<sup>32</sup>

Inspection and teacher accountability continued along these lines until the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education (1870) (Powis Commission). The Commission’s recommendations significantly shaped the future of school inspection and teacher accountability for the remainder of the nineteenth century. For example, in moving teacher accountability away from the Government and towards the school—what might be referred to as decentralisation in the modern era—the Powis Commission recommended that ‘the power of appointing and dismissing teachers should be in the hands of the local Managers’.<sup>33</sup> However, perhaps one of the most significant interlinked recommendations for teacher accountability during this period related to that of teachers’ remuneration, whereby salary was to be ‘fixed – the class salary allowed by the Board’.<sup>34</sup> However, it was also to be ‘variable – the capitation fees due for the “passes” at the last general inspection, school pence, and the payment out of the rate according to average attendance’.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the Commission acknowledged that, ‘these three called variable, would be liable to fluctuation from year to year, according to the popularity and success of the teacher’.<sup>36</sup> This heralded the era of the ‘Payment by Results’ system, whereby inspectors examined the proficiency of all eligible students, that is, of those students who attended school on a minimum number of days, in the subjects of Arithmetic, Reading and Writing, or what might be referred to as Literacy and Numeracy in the modern era. Moreover, if eligible students, that is, those students who had achieved the minimum level of attendance, were successful in these subjects, they could also be tested at senior class level in two other subjects. From this, a significant proportion of a teacher’s salary was to be based on the results obtained by students in these examinations. Consequently, student attendance became increasingly important for schools, and it is no wonder that the focus of teaching and learning shifted from that of process to output as the salary given to the teacher was directly proportional to the result obtained by each student. Coolahan notes the following, ‘as a system of accountability for teachers it laid down precise programmes, regular examinations, and encouraged a narrow and mechanical approach to teaching’.<sup>37</sup> Adding further scepticism to the Payments by Results system was the fact that examination standards seemed to vary considerably during the Payment by Results era. Madaus *et al.*, analysing the annual reports of the Intermediate Education Board during the nineteenth century indicate that, ‘when the pass rate became too high, and thus too costly, the tests were made more difficult and the standards of passing were increased in order to reduce the pass

rates. This manipulation of pass rates assured that there was no significant upward or downward trend in the percentage of students passing during the results era'.<sup>38</sup>

Part of the purpose of the Payment by Results system was to allow for a rigorous evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning, and by association an increase in the quality of education provided in the school. On the other hand, Madaus *et al.* also make the following observation regarding the Payment by Results system—a comment that can be equally applied to the value placed on human capital and high stakes testing in this century, ‘a more telling commentary on the reality of the Payment by Results system is provided by the Newcastle Commission of 1858’.<sup>39</sup> which showed that, ‘as in other periods of history, in the face of expenditures on war [Crimean War], national education was regarded as a suitable field for economics. At any rate, value for money should be received’.<sup>40</sup> In other words, as with other publically funded initiatives in this era, the overarching motive of the Payment by Results system was to ensure that there was a financial return received from the government’s initial investment in the school and the maximum return was dependent on the teachers who were tasked with managing the initial investment.

However, this method of ascertaining the quality of teaching and learning through high stakes examination was eventually viewed as a very crude method of evaluation, with many unintended consequences, such as: ‘(i) restrictions on the scope of a good teacher, (ii) “overpressure” on pupils, in the general drive to win results, fees and prizes, (iii) a neglect of weaker pupils, and (iv) unhealthy competition between pupils and between schools’.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Coolahan, in reference to Literacy and Numeracy statistics up to 1899 notes, ‘despite various caveats which can be made about these statistics, evidence of significant improvements in literacy and numeracy was recorded during this period. However, the system took a serious toll on various other aspects of schooling. Educationally speaking, the evaluation of the quality of a school system by such a crude evaluation scheme was unsatisfactory’.<sup>42</sup>

This system of teacher accountability continued into the early twentieth century. However, it is thought-provoking to note that the perceived interconnectedness between examination and inspection as a form of teacher accountability during this period has, it can be argued, remained constant for most inspectorates up to this date. According to the former Chief Inspector of England to the Committee of Enquiry into Primary Education in Ireland:

I am quite with you that the results system was vicious, that its principle was vicious, and its practice was injurious, and that too much was put on the teacher and too much put on the children...I object myself to the antithesis drawn between inspection and examination. Inspection, as I understand it, includes a certain amount of what I call informal examination, and examination is useless without some form of inspection’.<sup>43</sup>

After the formation of an independent Irish Free State in 1922, a significant focus of government policy, which was to significantly affect education during this period, related to the setting up of State Certificate examinations at primary and post-primary level, and the re-vitalisation of the Irish language. This was particularly evident in the primary sector. As Coolahan observes, ‘gaelicisation was the paramount concern in many respects and nowhere

more centrally than in the primary education sphere'.<sup>44</sup> It is this era of school and teacher accountability that forms the next part of this chapter.

### **School Inspection and Teacher Accountability in the Free State**

In line with the government agenda at the time, a significant priority for the inspectorate related to the development of policies towards the restoration of the Irish language, which was to be achieved chiefly through the national system of education. Moreover, because the primary inspectorate was involved in almost every aspect of primary education, from inspecting teachers to sanctioning what textbooks could be used in schools, they were seen as a significant asset for the Gaelicisation of the Irish people. The importance placed by the inspectorate on the Gaelicisation agenda is evident in a summary of inspectorate findings relating to the lack of progress in this respect:

There is a general note of disappointment in the Inspectors' reports with regard to the work of the schools in making Irish speakers of the pupils. If the majority of our schools pupils do not acquire a reasonable facility in expressing their ordinary ideas in Irish before they leave school and if they are not imbued with a love for the language that will urge them to employ it in daily use and to seek opportunities after leaving school of improving their command of it, we shall make little progress in getting nearer the goal of an Irish-speaking Ireland, and our efforts in the schools will be almost fruitless.

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The key milestones for school and teacher accountability in the Free State related primarily to the introduction of, at primary level, the teacher rating system and the Primary Certificate examination and at post-primary level, the establishment of the state examinations and the public availability of examination results.

An intensive mode of accountability was initiated, or rather extended, for all primary teachers in Ireland following the formation of the Department of Education in 1924, to be achieved through a combination of school inspection and standardised testing of students, referred to as the Primary Certificate. Indeed, following the *Report of the Committee on Inspection of Primary Schools*,<sup>46</sup> the most significant changes to school inspection arrangements occurred when the Department of Education published a new framework for inspection outlining how inspection of primary teachers was to occur.<sup>47</sup> This heralded a new, although analogous, era to that of the previous high stakes accountability measures, and consisted of two types of inspection, referred to as 'Incidental' and 'General' inspections. For incidental inspections, it was stated that, 'incidental visits should, in future, be much more frequent than they have been in the past'.<sup>48</sup> In terms of the continuous improvement function of evaluation, a record was also to be left in the 'Observation Book' and 'should give praise and commendation where deserved, should indicate any serious faults or weaknesses in the work where found and make suggestions for their removal'.<sup>49</sup> However, and quite extraordinarily, in terms of the tools used for teacher observation, a retired inspector notes in Frehan that, 'the observation book used by the inspectors remained unchanged from 1834 to 1959'.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Coolahan, summing up the rate of change within the Free State primary inspectorate up to the 1960's, notes, 'the most significant feature of the primary inspectorate as the years passed was that very little had changed'.<sup>51</sup> Information obtained from incidental inspections would also be used to determine the frequency of more intensive inspections, that is, '...constant incidental visits will always enable inspectors to judge when a more thorough inspection is necessary'.<sup>52</sup> Thorough inspections referred to as General Inspections were far more intensive than incidental inspections and consisted of various pre-observation tasks such as an examination of schemes of work, records of preparation for work and so forth. Indeed, every class and subject was to

be 'carefully tested'.<sup>53</sup> Finally, as with most inspections, the sum total of all evaluation methodologies employed resulted in the production of a report on the teacher.

The general report should be comprehensive and balanced. Instead of the comparatively short minute, there should be given, as regards each subject in charge of a teacher, an account of the points, favourable or otherwise, observed in his teaching, and of the results, good or bad, attained by him. Attention should be made of any abnormal circumstances which may have affected the results of his work.<sup>54</sup>

The final judgement relating to the efficiency of the teacher resulted in the production of a 'voucher' where the teacher was classified according to a three point rating scale, 'Non Efficient', 'Efficient', 'Highly Efficient'. According to the Department, 'the rating should be the sum-total of the inspector's estimate of the teacher's success or lack of success in the discharge of all his many-sided duties'.<sup>55</sup> Most interestingly, in terms of the shift towards proportionate or risked based inspections among European Inspectorates in this century the frequency of inspections was to be based on a proportionate risked based model. In other words, 'General Inspections need not be held in all schools as frequently as heretofore. The constant incidental visits will always enable inspectors to judge when a more thorough inspection is necessary or advisable'.<sup>56</sup> In other words, Annual General Inspections were obligatory for those classified as 'Non Efficient'. For those teachers who did not fall into this high risk category, that is in 'schools not visited during the school year for the purpose of holding a general inspection'<sup>57</sup> inspectors were still required to produce an annual voucher detailing the teacher's scaled status. However, if during the course of incidental visits inspectors noticed a deterioration in the 'not at risk' classified teachers these teachers would also receive a general inspection that could ultimately change their quality rating. That is, 'teachers whose work appears to the inspector, from observations made in the course of his incidental visits, to have deteriorated to such an extent that it does not justify the retention of the existing rating'.<sup>58</sup>

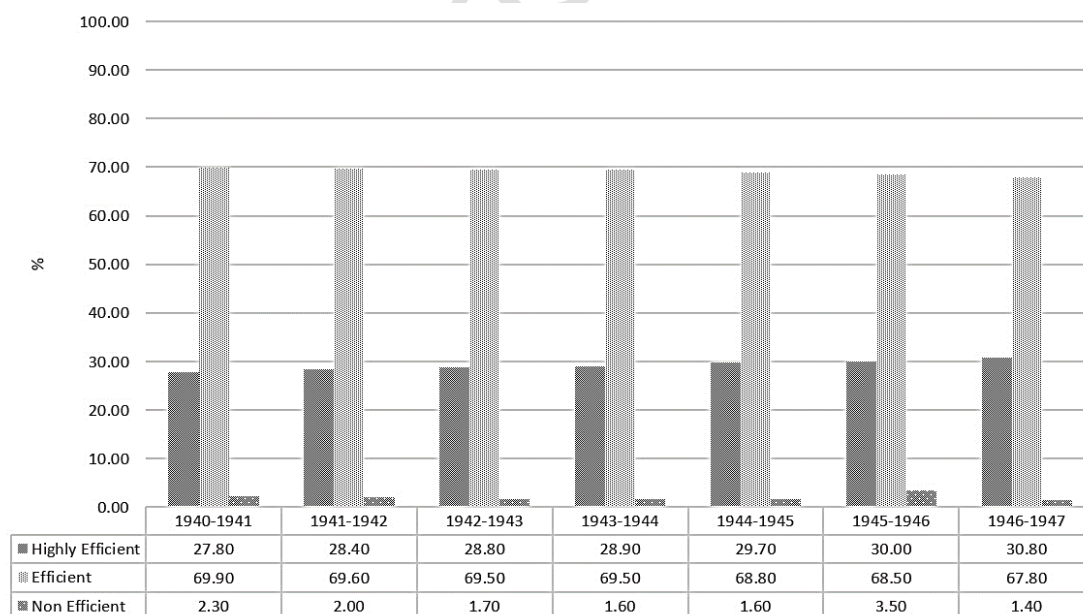
As with the former payment by results system, the rating (voucher) received directly affected a teacher's annual salary so that those teachers who received a status of 'Highly Efficient' received a higher annual salary than those in the other two categories. For example, the *Report of the Department of Education 1936-37* states that in a school with an average attendance of 30 or more pupils, a trained male post-primary teacher was to receive an annual salary of '£140, rising by seventeen annual increments to £300'.<sup>59</sup> However, if the teacher was rated as 'Highly Efficient', they then entered what was termed a 'supernormal scale' and 'proceed by five annual increments to maxima varying from £340 to £377'.<sup>60</sup> The reasons for teachers not to be accorded the 'Highly Efficient' rating were varied and many. For example, it was suggested that, 'the principal teachers of some large schools do not exercise a directive influence over the work of their staffs'.<sup>61</sup> Another reason given for teachers not receiving a 'Highly Efficient' rating was due to the increased use of 'Motor Cars' by teachers travelling to schools in rural areas. It was claimed that, 'this weakens the bond which ought to exist between teachers and parents, between the school and the school district'.<sup>62</sup> In reality however, it would appear that the most significant reason for a teacher not to receive a 'Highly Efficient' rating related primarily to the teacher's competence in the Irish language, 'many teachers do not yet possess a competent knowledge of Irish, and the preparation for Irish teaching is often inadequate, or unsuitable. This criticism applies to a lesser extent to other subjects'.<sup>63</sup>



Given the ramifications that these judgements could have on a teacher it is no wonder that inspection, incidental or otherwise, was a significant and unnerving event for teachers who wanted to maintain or increase their status. Indeed, due to the benefits of obtaining a 'Highly Efficient' rating, it is no surprise that often general inspections carried out were at the written request of a teacher who considered his rating to be too low. Sadly, however, very few teachers attained this rating. The *Report of the Department of Education 1930-1931* shows that the rating of primary teachers by inspectors in Ireland was: '30% - Highly Efficient; 65% - Efficient; 5.0% - Non Efficient'.<sup>64</sup> 16 years later, an analysis of the *Report of the Department of Education 1946-1947* shows that the rating of primary teachers by inspectors in Ireland was : '30.8% - Highly Efficient; 67.8% - Efficient; 1.4% - Non Efficient'.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, while trying to ascertain if there was any significant increase or decrease in teacher ratings for the school years 1940-1941 to 1946-1947, an analysis of Department of Education annual reports reveals that teacher ratings remained constant throughout these years (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Analysis of Department of Education Primary Teacher Efficiency Ratings (1940-1947) According to O'Connell, 'this consistency in the grading and classifying of so many thousands of individuals into three groups was a source of wonder if not of admiration to the individuals concerned!'<sup>66</sup>

The 1940s also saw significant changes in other school accountability arrangements. From 1943 all primary students were required to sit the Primary Certificate Examination in Irish, English and Mathematics. Until this point, since the introduction of the Primary Certificate in 1929, this decision had been at the discretion of the school. The logic of making the Primary Certificate compulsory for all students was based on the view that, (1) educational standards had fallen since the foundation of the state, (2) as with the Payment by Results era, there was a need to assure the public that they were getting value for money and (3) in the absence of competence based testing, it would not be possible for an inspector to gauge the progress made for each student. The Minister for Education at the time put it as follows:



If we are to get down to the individual pupil in such a way that we can be sure of his or her progress, it is obvious that some other more detailed test than inspection must be applied and there is no way of supplying this additional test except by the reintroduction of the former system of a definite examination of each pupil in each subject, at least at some stage towards the end of the normal primary course. Until we have such an examination, the public cannot have any real guarantee that the actual proportion of pupils who leave the Primary Schools with a satisfactory knowledge of reading, writing



and arithmetic, is such as to justify our huge expenditure of nearly £4,000,000 on these schools.<sup>67</sup>

Despite strong opposition from members of the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), this mode of competency based testing was widely embraced by primary schools in which preparation for the examination became a significant and ever-present feature of school life up to the cessation of the Primary Certificate in 1967. According to O'Connell, 'the emergency was upon us. The inevitable rise in the cost of living caused the teachers, in common with other workers, to concentrate on questions of remuneration, and matters like the primary certificate, had to take a backward place in their activities'.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, for the first time in the history of the Irish State, the Department was able to execute minimum competency standards on schools and, by association, they also had another evaluative tool from which to gauge the competency of students at both a system and school level. In other words, for the inspectorate, the benefits of introducing standardised testing were very much akin to the re-introduction of such testing as part of the Department of Education and Skills National strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy in 2011 namely 'to use aggregated data from standardised tests as one element of the evidence used to support the inspection of schools (for example, in inspection planning; during the inspection process; in the identification of good practice; and in the targeting of under-performing schools)'.<sup>69</sup> Whereas previous annual Department of Education reports provided a quantitative analysis of the quality of teaching through the rating scale system, with the introduction of the Primary Certificate for all students, the Department of Education reports now provided a statistical analysis of Primary Certificate examination results at both a system and, quite peculiarly, at a county level. For example, the *Report of the Department of Education: 1948-1949* states, 'the percentage of passes was highest in Clare at 85.8 per cent and lowest in Donegal at 63.08 per cent; the overall average percentage was 77.1 percent'.<sup>70</sup>

Gradually however, both the Primary Certificate and the teacher rating scale became highly contentious issues for teacher unions, and, until their cessation, were of significant concern to the INTO. The first substantial change to the rating system occurred in 1949 when the 'Highly Efficient' rating system was discontinued, to be replaced by an inspector giving a teacher a rating of 'Satisfactory' or 'Not Satisfactory'. However, except for those newly qualified teachers on probation and extreme cases of teacher transgression, the rating system was further modified in 1959, to be replaced with a short inspection report detailing the collective strengths and weaknesses of the school.<sup>71</sup> If the Stanley Letter was a significant milestone in the formation of an independent inspectorate, it would be reasonable to suggest that Circular 16/59<sup>72</sup> created a fundamental shift to a new mode of school, as opposed to teacher accountability in education. Indeed, O'Connor makes the following observation on these new inspection arrangements, 'here then for the first time was the forerunner of the more formalised whole school inspection of today with its primary focus on the school as a central unit'.<sup>73</sup> Previously inspection was viewed by many teachers as being a somewhat punitive measure where the main focus of the inspection centred on the quality of the individual teacher. New inspection arrangements would now focus on the collective quality of education provided in the school and in consequence was greeted far more favourably than previous forms of inspection.

In the wake of the cessation of the Primary Certificate Examination, a significant task for the primary inspectorate was the development and implementation of the radically new Primary School curriculum in 1971. Coolahan refers to this as 'the finest hour so to speak of the primary inspectorate in its long history'.<sup>74</sup> In terms of the changing face of school and teacher accountability, it became evident that contemporaneous school inspection arrangements needed to be more in line with the implementation of the new curriculum, and in 1976 further modifications were made to how schools would be inspected. Within these arrangements, schools were to be visited every four years on a cyclical basis and, from this, a *Tuairisc Scoile*

(School Report) would be provided by the inspectors, with the overarching theme being that of ‘an assessment of the organisation and work of the school as a whole’.<sup>75</sup> Inspection of primary schools continued along these lines for the remainder of the twentieth century and was greeted far more favourably than previous modes of inspection. Indeed, as stated by the INTO at the time:

It is to be regretted that in 1976 the Annual Congress of INTO found it necessary to pass a resolution evocative of the periodic malaise in the relationships between teachers and inspectors. Just as in Britain, where they [Inspectors] exist side by side with advisers, there will always be a place for Inspectors in Ireland. Combined with the other players on the stage of Irish Primary Education, they have constituted an alliance which, in the past, was often afflicted with unease. It is time instead to constitute a partnership, sine die.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly to the arrangements in place in pre-independence Ireland, post-primary Schools and teachers were largely excluded from any form of centrally administered accountability in the form of teacher observation in the new state. The main work of post-primary Inspectors at the time related to, among other tasks, the voluminous development of curriculum specifications and the establishment of the State Certificate examinations, a preoccupation that was to continue into the twenty-first century.

Post-primary Schools were not completely immune to accountability however. It has been stated that schools in Ireland have managed to avoid high-stakes accountability mechanisms that would allow for the production of League Tables, primarily because of the stance taken by various organisations such as the ASTI and the Department of Education. For example, according to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), ‘successive Ministers for Education and Science have made it clear that comparison between schools in any ‘league-table’ scenario is not envisaged’.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, by act of legislation, the Department of Education is also required to refuse access to any school information that would: ‘enable the compilation of information (that is not otherwise available to the general public) in relation to the comparative performance of schools in respect of the academic achievement of students enrolled therein’.<sup>78</sup> However, this has not always been the case (Conway and Murphy<sup>79</sup>; McCormack *et al.*<sup>80</sup>). For many years, the Department of Education published the Annual State Examination results for every student, including the school that they attended, and these subsequently resulted in the compilation of school performance tables. For example, the *Irish Independent*, August 14, 1928, reads, ‘the Leaving Certificate Examination Results – How Schools Fared’ and provides the cumulative total of the Leaving Certificate Examination results for schools in Ireland, grouped into the following categories: ‘Number of Presented’, ‘Number of Honours’, ‘Number of Passes’, ‘Total Successes’. In the case of one listed urban school, the number of students that presented was 30 and the ‘Total Successes’ was 30, resulting in a pass rate of 100%. In another neighbouring urban school, the number of students that presented was 16 and the Total Successes was 8, resulting in a pass and failure rate of 50%. While there is no empirical evidence to suggest that this was the case, one could infer that, given that these schools were within 4 km of each other, the public availability of these results would have had some effect on the choice of school for those parents who had the means of sending their children to post-primary education. Indeed, continuing with the details of the analysis provided, another column reads, ‘the Leaders – First in each Subject’ and states the name of the student and school where the highest mark was obtained for each subject. Another article the *Irish Independent*, October 31, 1938, leads with the title: ‘The Girl Students were better again’, followed by an analysis of the ‘Leading Boys Schools, Leading Girl’s Schools’. The article then provides a list of the results for every school in the country. However, quite naturally, as the level of data provided by the Department of Education was reduced, the tone and narrative of public commentary also changed over the years. *The Irish Press*, November

6, 1940, comments: 'Schools and pupils are no longer named and it is therefore impossible to select the leading pupils and colleges from the official lists'. Coolahan also notes the following, 'the unhealthy rivalry was further exacerbated by many schools publishing the success rates of their named pupils, as advertisements in the public press'.<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, apart from post-primary schools being classed according to their frequency of instruction through Irish; that is, as Class 'A', 'B', and 'others', with for example, Class 'A' schools representing 'schools in which the whole instruction is given in Irish'<sup>82</sup>, there were no other significant forms of centrally administered accountability mechanisms for post-primary schools and teachers in place during the first 50 years of the Irish Free State. Indeed, on the rare occasion when post-primary inspectors did enter the school, they were always greeted as guests as opposed to having any form of authority over the teachers. School and teacher accountability arrangements for post-primary teachers largely remained the same until, as with primary teachers, the implementation of the Education Act of 1998 that saw a significant change in the way that schools and teachers were inspected.

### **Conclusion**

The emergence of a publically funded system of education in 1831, allowed for the interlinked establishment of a national system of school and teacher inspection that was strongly influenced by inspection frameworks that were previously developed by the Kildare Place Society. In allowing exchequer finances to be used for a national system of education, the government also required that value for money was to be achieved. For this purpose, as stated in the Stanley Letter, exchequer funding was also to be used for 'paying Inspectors for visiting and reporting upon schools'<sup>83</sup>. However, because funding arrangements contained within the Stanley letter specifically related to primary schools, the post-primary education sector remained without any significant form of government mandated accountability mechanisms up to the deployment of the State examinations and consequent school league tables after the formation of the Irish Free State. For primary schools, what emerged from 1831 onwards was a high-stakes accountability environment that used various mechanisms such as incidental inspections and the Payment by Results system to ensure that value for money was achieved. It is unsurprising that the figure of the school inspector became a feared part of school life in nineteenth-century Ireland.<sup>84</sup> Although the payment by results system was eventually abolished at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, inspection of teachers continued in this manner until the establishment of the Irish Free State.

The newly formed government of the Irish Free State saw an opportunity for primary education to be a significant catalyst for the Gaelicisation of the Irish people. As a result, the quality of Irish language teaching became an added significant determinant of the quality of education provided in schools. With the introduction of the voucher system, for teachers to achieve the accolade of 'Highly Efficient', a significant emphasis was placed on the quality of Irish instruction provided. Interestingly in the context of the push to revive Irish the percentage of teachers receiving a 'Highly Efficient' rating remained constant throughout the lifetime of the voucher system. Moreover, in terms of the continuous improvement purpose of inspection, it would be reasonable to suggest that the voucher system had little impact on the quality of education provided as the proportion of teachers receiving an 'Efficient' or 'Non – Efficient' rating remained constant during this period (Table 1).

During the 1940's, there were also concerns relating to falling education standards and as a result, the Primary Certificate became compulsory for all students. The results of the Primary Certificate allowed the government to set minimum competency standards at a system and

school level and allowed inspectors to have another tool from which to judge the quality of education provided in schools.

For post-primary teachers, things remained much as they had been before independence. Teacher accountability was left to individual school managers. Indeed, as previously stated, the only significant mode of school accountability that existed was the public availability of state examination results and consequent publication of informal league tables in the newspapers for the first three decades of the Irish State.

School and teacher accountability continued along these lines until the 1950s and what had originated as a high stakes accountability environment eventually evolved into one where accountability arrangements were left largely to the discretion of the school. However, in many ways, there was no option but to move in this direction. At post-primary level, inspectorate resources were limited and devoted for the most part to the state examinations. Moreover, Ireland had introduced a free system of post-primary education for all of its citizens in 1966. Any policy that would upset teachers and the teaching unions and endanger the acceptance of a free post-primary education system would be unwise. For primary teachers, what was initially an immensely high stakes accountability environment, eventually transformed into one where high stakes testing and inspection were to be replaced with cooperation and trust between inspectors and schools. As O'Connell remarks, 'fault finding, threats and penalties as incentives were to be replaced by sympathy, friendliness and co-operation'.<sup>85</sup> This can only be described as a remarkable turnaround given that, for more than 100 years, inspectors were often regarded with a degree of dread by teachers. However, it was probably an inevitable for several reasons but in particular because when the radical new 'child centered' primary curriculum of 1971 was in its infancy it was imperative to ensure that primary teachers gave it their full support. In the words of O'Connor:

The School Report does not represent a threat and, according to the Deputy Chief Inspector...this is in accord with a deliberately contrived though unstated policy of the Department of Education to ensure that the new curriculum gains a foothold in a poorly resourced school system.<sup>86</sup>

In conclusion, there are many lessons that can be learned from the history of accountability in Irish education. In particular, as is usually the case when high stakes accountability mechanisms are applied to any education system, there will be a greater probability of unintended consequences. In the case of Ireland, these unintended consequences related to hostility and a lack of partnership between inspectors and teachers and the mechanical mode of teaching and learning as a result of the Payment by Results and Voucher systems. In contrast more modern forms of accountability which stress the collaboration and trust between schools and inspectors that was largely absent for more than 100 years, has completely changed the picture. Inspection is now perceived to be one of several methods, not only of assuring educational quality but of driving school improvement. It is interesting to note that that inspection as thus conceptualised has now migrated from the small number of countries where it was developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to virtually every education system in the world' 'school inspection has become so generally accepted and adopted throughout the civilised world that it needs no supporting argument to recommend its continuance'.<sup>87</sup>

Perhaps it is fitting to leave the final word to the pioneers of school accountability and inspection in Ireland, the success which has attended our labours, as appears by the progress we have made, abundantly proves that the system of education committed to our charge has been gratefully received and approved by the public in general; we trust it will continue to spread and prosper'.<sup>88</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education (Ireland), *Teachers in National Schools*, Vol. 1, Part IV [C-1], 1870.
- <sup>2</sup> See: Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education for the school years 1925-26-27 and the Financial and Administrative Year 1926-27*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 1928.
- <sup>3</sup> See: Department of Education, *Circular 12/76, Inspection of Schools*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 1976.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Cited in John Coolahan, *Ireland's School Inspectorate 1831–2008* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), 207.
- <sup>6</sup> Department of Education and Skills, *Chief Inspector's Report: 2010-2012*, Dublin: Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills, 2013, 102.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>8</sup> George F Madaus, Joseph P. Ryan, Thomas Kellaghan, and Peter W. Airasian. 'Payment by results: An analysis of a nineteenth century performance-contracting programme', *The Irish Journal of Education/Iris Eireannach an Oideachais* (1987): 80.
- <sup>9</sup> John Coolahan, *Irish education: Its history and structure* (Dublin: Institute of public administration, 1981), 9.
- <sup>10</sup> Antonia McManus, *The Irish hedge school and its books, 1695-1831* (Dublin: Four Courts Press Ltd., 2002), 16.
- <sup>11</sup> Eustas O'Heidean, *National School Inspection in Ireland: The Beginnings* (Dublin: Scepter Books, 1967), 12.
- <sup>12</sup> Coolahan, *Irish education*, 3.
- <sup>13</sup> Harold Hislop, 'Inspecting a Doomed Non-Denominational School System: The Inspectorate of the Kildare Place Society in Ireland, 1811–1831', *Paedagogica Historica*, 35, no.1 (1999): 178.
- <sup>14</sup> O'Heidean, *National School Inspection in Ireland*, 31
- <sup>15</sup> Commissioners of National Education, *3<sup>rd</sup> Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the Year 1836*, Appendix, Section II (E). Inspection of Schools. 1836, in: *Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland from the Year 1834 to 1845, Inclusive, Vol. 1*, ed. (Dublin: G and J Grierson, 1851), 109.
- <sup>16</sup> Department of Education and Skills, *A Guide to Incidental Inspection in Second-Level Schools and Centres for Education*, Dublin: Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills, 2012, 2.
- <sup>17</sup> Commissioners of National Education, *2<sup>nd</sup> report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the year 1854*, Appendix, Section IV (D): Instructions for District and Sub Inspectors. Dublin: Alex Thom and Sons, 1855, 435.
- <sup>18</sup> Cited in O'Heidean, *National School Inspection in Ireland*, 100.
- <sup>19</sup> Donald H. Akenson, *The Irish education experiment: The National System of Education in Ireland in the nineteenth century* (London: Routledge, 1970), 146.
- <sup>20</sup> Commissioners of National Education, *9<sup>th</sup> Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the Year 1843*, Appendix, Section IV. Inspection of Schools. 1843, in: *Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland from the Year 1834 to 1845, Inclusive, Vol. 1*, ed. (Dublin: G and J Grierson, 1851), 203.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.
- <sup>22</sup> See: O'Heidean, *National School Inspection in Ireland*, 85.
- <sup>23</sup> Commissioners of National Education, *3<sup>rd</sup> Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the year 1836*, 1836 in: *Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland from the Year 1834 to 1845, Inclusive, Vol. 1*, ed. (Dublin: G and J Grierson, 1851), 52.
- <sup>24</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry, 381.
- <sup>25</sup> *Letter of the Right Hon. E.G. Stanley, Chief Secretary to His Grace the Duke of Leinster*, London, 1831 in: *Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland from the Year 1834 to 1845, Inclusive, Vol. 1*, ed. (Dublin: G and J Grierson, 1851).
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>27</sup> Seamas O'Buachalla, 'The Inspectorial Role in Twentieth Century Irish Education', *European Journal of Education*, 21, no.4 (1986): 359.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> Akenson, *The Irish education experiment*, 146.
- <sup>31</sup> Commissioners of National Education, *2<sup>nd</sup> report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the year 1854*, 437.
- <sup>32</sup> Commissioners of National Education, *34<sup>th</sup> report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the year 1867*, Appendix, Section VII (D): Extracts from District Inspectors' Annual Report for the Year, Observations as to the Proficiency of Pupils. Dublin: Alexander Thom and Co. 1868, 236.
- <sup>33</sup> Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education, Vol. I, Part IV-Teachers, Chapter I, 'Teachers in National Schools', 1870, 383.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>37</sup> Coolahan, *Irish education*, 28.
- <sup>38</sup> George F Madaus, Michael S. Russell and Jennifer Higgins, *The paradoxes of high stakes testing: How they affect students, their parents, teachers, principals, schools, and society* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2009), 121.
- <sup>39</sup> Madaus *et al.*, 'Payment by results', 81.
- <sup>40</sup> Newcastle Commission of 1858 cited in Madaus *et al.*, 'Payment by results', 81.
- <sup>41</sup> Palles Commission, 1889, cited in Pdraig Hogan, 'The Fortress of the Good and the Liberation of Tradition: A Review of Irish Education in the Late Twentieth Century', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* (1986): 270.
- <sup>42</sup> Coolahan, *Irish education*, 29.

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- <sup>43</sup> Vice-Regal Committee of Inquiry into Primary Education, *Appendix to the First Report of the Committee: Minutes of Evidence 13<sup>th</sup> March – 25<sup>th</sup> June, 1913, With Appendices*. Dublin: Alexander Thom and Co. [Cd.7229]. 1914, p.250.
- <sup>44</sup> John Coolahan, *Ireland's School Inspectorate*, 115.
- <sup>45</sup> Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education: 1930-1931*, Dublin: Stationery Office. 1932, 17.
- <sup>46</sup> A committee was initially set up to make recommendations for new modes of school inspection and assessment in Ireland. The committee was tasked with various duties such as a review of primary certificate programs and inspection practices in European Countries. The outcome of the committee were published as: Report of the Committee on Inspection of Primary Schools, 1927.
- <sup>47</sup> Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education for the school years 1925-26-27*, 1928.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*,10.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> Pádraic G. Frehan, *Education and Celtic Myth: National Self-image and Schoolbooks in 20th Century Ireland, vol.20* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 165.
- <sup>51</sup> Coolahan, *Ireland's School Inspectorate*, 132.
- <sup>52</sup> Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education for the school years 1925-26-27*, 11.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>55</sup> Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education for the school years 1925-26-27*, 12.
- <sup>56</sup> Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education for the school years 1925-26-27*,1982, 11.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*,14.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>59</sup> Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education: 1936-1937*, Dublin: Stationery Office. 1938, 131.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup> Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education: 1930-1931*, Dublin: Stationery Office. 1932, 16.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>64</sup> Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education: 1930-1931*, 16.
- <sup>65</sup> Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education: 1946-1947*, 1948, 87.
- <sup>66</sup> Thomas J. O'Connell, *100 years of progress - The story of the Irish national teachers' organisation 1868 – 1968* (Dublin: Dakota Press, 1968), 416.
- <sup>67</sup> English translation, cited in George F. Madaus and Vincent Greaney, 'The Irish Experience in Competency Testing: Implications for American Education', *American Journal of Education* 93, no. 2 (February 1985): 271.
- <sup>68</sup> O'Connell, *100 years of progress*, 426.
- <sup>69</sup> Department of Education and Skills, *Literacy and numeracy for learning and life. The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011–2020*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 2011, 84.
- <sup>70</sup> Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education: 1948-1949*. Dublin: Stationery Office. 1950, 9.
- <sup>71</sup> Department of Education, *Circular 16/59, School Inspection*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 1959.
- <sup>72</sup> Department of Education, *Circular 16/59*.
- <sup>73</sup> Patrick P O'Connor, 'The policy, process and impact of whole school inspection at primary level in the Republic of Ireland from the perspective of some inspectors and teachers.' ( EdD diss.,The Open University, 2001), 18.
- <sup>74</sup> Coolahan, *Ireland's School Inspectorate*, 185.
- <sup>75</sup> Department of Education, *Circular 12/76*.
- <sup>76</sup> Irish National Teachers Organisation, *A Proposal for Growth (1980) – The Administration of National Schools. Report of a Special Committee* (Dublin: Irish National Teachers Organisation, 1980), 23.
- <sup>77</sup> National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, *Supporting Assessment in Schools. Standardised Testing in Compulsory Schooling - April 2005* (Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2005), 15.
- <sup>78</sup> Government of Ireland, *Education Act of 1998*, Section 53 (a): Refusal of access to certain information. Dublin: Stationery Office. 1998.
- <sup>79</sup> Paul F. Conway and Rosaleen Murphy, 'A Rising Tide Meets a Perfect Storm: New Accountabilities in Teaching and Teacher Education in Ireland', *Irish Educational Studies* 32, no. 1 (March 2013): 11–36.
- <sup>80</sup> Orla McCormack, Raymond Lynch, and Jennifer Hennessy, 'Plastic People in Pinstripe Suits: An Exploration of the Views of Irish Parents on the Publication of School League Tables', *Educational Studies*, (July 9, 2015), doi: 10.1080/03055698.2015.1062080 (accessed July 28, 2015).
- <sup>81</sup> Coolahan, *Ireland's School Inspectorate*, 136.
- <sup>82</sup> Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education: 1928-1929*. Dublin: Stationery Office. 1930, 16.
- <sup>83</sup> *Letter of the Right Hon. E.G. Stanley, Chief Secretary*, 4.
- <sup>84</sup> See Madaus *et al.*, 'Payment by results', 81
- <sup>85</sup> O'Connell, *100 years of progress*, 420.
- <sup>86</sup> O'Connor, 'The policy, process and impact of whole school inspection', 20.
- <sup>87</sup> John V. Gallagher, 'Economic value of school inspection', *The Journal of Education* 73, no. 14 (1824) (APRIL 6, 1911): 372.
- <sup>88</sup> Commissioners of National Education, *1<sup>st</sup> Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the year 1836, 1836 in: Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland from the Year 1834 to 1845, Inclusive, Vol. 1*, ed. (Dublin: G and J Grierson, 1851), 14.