



Assuring the quality of SIAS inspection reports

Guidance for critical readers

Version 1 – March 2007

The Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools (SIAS) is governed by section 48 of the Education Act 2005. This document provides guidance to critical readers when assuring the quality of reports resulting from the inspection of Church of England Schools. The SIAS inspection framework and other inspection documents can be found on the National Society's website at www.natsoc.org.uk .

Produced in association with
Frank Knowles Evaluation and Training

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Church House
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3NZ

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
1 Introduction	1
2 Selection and training of critical readers	4
3 Outline strategy for critical reading	5
4 Undertaking a critical read	7
5 Judging the quality of a report	13
6 Text conventions	15

I Introduction

The purpose of critical reading

The process of critical reading is designed to do two things:

- ensure that the report under scrutiny is of sufficiently high quality to be of use to the school and its stakeholders in bringing about improvement
- improve the quality of future reports.

Thus the work of the critical reader has two distinct facets:

- editing the report
- coaching the inspector.

Roles and responsibilities

The prime responsibility for ensuring each SIAS report is of sufficiently high quality falls to the inspector. He or she is bound by a contract to produce the report for the governing body of the school.

However, the diocese has a particular interest in the quality of each report as it has a role in advising the governing body (foundation governors in the case of a voluntary controlled school) during the statutory consultation about the appointment of the section 48 inspector. The critical reading role undertaken by or on behalf of a diocese is important, therefore, in providing a view of the quality of the work of each section 48 inspector so that the diocese is able to give an informed view.

In addition, its role in accrediting inspectors means that the National Society also has an interest in every report. This interest is represented by the work of critical readers in dioceses. Where there is concern about the quality of SIAS reports, the National Society may wish to review the accreditation of a section 48 inspector and make use of information gained through critical reading.

Critical readers must ensure that all reports comply with the requirements of the SIAS framework, that inspectors follow the guidance issued by the National Society and that the report is fit for publication. Inspectors are, therefore, expected to take the advice of their critical reader. Critical readers must not routinely take over the responsibility for preparing the report for publication, however, as this belongs to the inspector. Critical readers should also provide support for inspectors so that they can improve their inspection writing.

Evaluation criteria

Each report should be evaluated under four criteria to see whether it is of sufficiently high quality and is fit for publication. The four criteria are that the report:

- provides a fair, accurate and consistent account of the school
- is helpful to the school's improvement
- is written clearly
- meets the requirements in the SIAS framework.

Critical readers should grade each draft report and maintain records of these grades for use by the diocese and by the National Society as necessary when discussing the competence and performance of inspectors. A set of grade descriptors is provided on page 12.

The SIAS approach to critical reading

Critical readers should adopt a solution-based approach. That is, where changes are needed, critical readers should suggest an alternative piece of text for adoption by the inspector. In most cases, inspectors will adopt the changes as they stand. It may be, however, that the inspector wishes to take up the suggestion and modify it slightly, so it better reflects the inspection evidence. Exceptionally, an inspector may wish to reject the suggestion, having first discussed the matter with the critical reader.

Critical readers should also explain why changes have been made, so that the inspector can improve his or her practice in the future. It is not acceptable just to challenge the inspector with a question, leaving the inspector to decide what to do. Critical readers need to decide when a point is sufficiently important to intervene and then to suggest improvement. This is particularly important where the consistency of the report is at stake.

Critical reading is about partnership. Each partner, whether inspector or critical reader, has a particular role to play and these are best played out in professional dialogue. This dialogue will usually be through written annotations and oral discussions. There is no place for preciousness about personal writing, as inspection reports are written to conform to national guidance. Conforming to national guidance should not, however, prevent individual writing styles being used, as it is not the job of a critical reader to impose a particular style or personal preferences on an inspector but to evaluate the fitness for purpose of the style adopted. It is also very easy to be hypercritical when undertaking a critical read and 'nit pick' when editing another person's writing and this should be avoided.

Critical reading can improve a good or outstanding report just as effectively as a weak one, although the extent of the work needed is less, of course. Improvements in the better reports tend to focus on improvements in the clarity of writing.

All critical reading should be done electronically and records kept at all stages of the process in case of query or challenge. Thus inspectors and critical readers are

expected to be familiar with, or become familiar with, the editing features of a word processor. The most familiar of these, of course, will be the *Track changes* facility in Microsoft Word and the insertion of comments.

Critical reading should:

- improve the report (editing) and improve the subsequent work of the inspector (coaching)
- ensure a report of sufficiently high quality for publication and to help the school move forward
- adopt a solution-based approach, with explanations where needed
- be done electronically
- record a grade for use by dioceses and the National Society when reviewing the performance of inspectors.

2 Selection and training of critical readers

Selection

Critical readers should have some or all of the following characteristics:

- be trained to undertake critical reading
- have a good track record of critical reading in the past
- have the ability to write good section 48 inspection reports
- be competent in related areas and have experiences that support successful critical reading.

All critical readers should be capable of providing secure advice during editing and thus must have good grasp of both the SIAS framework for inspection and the SIAS guidance used by inspectors for writing reports. They must also have the interpersonal skills to support inspectors' further development through coaching.

Drafts of inspection reports can vary considerably in quality and critical readers must be capable of tackling the most difficult assignments as well as the straightforward cases.

Training

By the end of 2007, it is expected that all critical readers used by dioceses will have been trained by the National Society in the strategies used to assure the quality of section 48 inspection reports. This is particularly important for inexperienced critical readers and those critical readers who do not themselves inspect regularly. Until that point is reached, it is expected that critical readers will make use of this guidance in their work. From time to time, training courses for new critical readers will be arranged.

It is expected that dioceses will record the outcomes of critical reading and use the information in regular reviews of the performance of inspectors and to indicating where further training and support are needed, both for individual inspectors and more generally.

Critical readers should:

- be competent and trained in quality assurance strategies
- be capable of assuring the quality of any report.

3 Outline strategy for critical reading

The strategy

This chapter presents an outline strategy for critical reading. It can be adopted with little or no modification by dioceses, or it can be tailored specifically to the needs and working practices of dioceses. In particular, timescales will need to be determined to meet report publication deadlines. The process contains a number of key features, summarised below, which all dioceses should build into their critical reading processes.

The strategy does not specify how the critical reader should undertake the work, what sort of comments and editing changes should be made or, indeed, everything that a critical reader should look for. It does provide a clear way of working, within which each critical reader can develop their own style.

Stage 1 – Inspector

Before sending the draft report to the school for checking, the inspector sends the critical reader an electronic copy of the complete draft report (Word format), together with the judgement recording form for the inspection (NSJRF) and the SIAS inspection briefing (SIB).

Stage 2 – Critical reader

The critical reader saves the draft report electronically as sent. The critical reader makes a separate copy of the draft report and annotates it using track changes (where changes are suggested) and comment boxes (for explanations and coaching points).

Stage 3 – Critical reader

The critical reader grades the draft report using the SIAS four-point scale, communicating the grade (using the terms *outstanding*, *good*, *satisfactory* or *inadequate* and not numerical grades) on the front of the report and summarising its main strengths and the areas that need attention. If a draft report is graded *satisfactory* or *inadequate*, the critical reader should see a further draft to ensure that sufficient improvement has been made. For *inadequate* drafts, the subsequent draft should be given a further full read.

Stage 4 – Inspector

The inspector makes the necessary changes suggested by the critical reader before sending the draft report to the school for checking. Where the inspector does not agree with the critical reader, the inspector should discuss the issue with the critical

reader to resolve the matter. Where matters cannot be resolved in this way, the inspector should indicate in writing why suggested changes have not been made. Although advice may be given strongly, it is the inspector who is contracted to write the report and therefore must be able to have the final say. However, the inspector's continuing work for a diocese and their national accreditation may well be affected by such actions. If the draft report has been graded *satisfactory* or *inadequate*, the inspector should provide a further electronic draft for the critical reader.

4 Undertaking a critical read

Ways of tackling a critical read

There is no single method that guarantees the best critical read possible and no single right approach to the task. Individual readers vary in their styles of working and each report is capable of presenting unique issues that need resolution. The most important point is to improve the quality of the report so that it is sufficiently good (or better) for publication, and that it is as helpful to the school as possible in bringing about improvements.

The following steps, however, give one clear route through for critical readers to follow. They cover Stages 2 and 3 from Chapter 2 of this guidance.

Step 1 – Stage 2

Save an electronic copy of the draft report under a new filename so that you can always go back to the original if necessary. In the **new file**, use *Tools* then *Track Changes* to set up **track changes** so that any annotations or comments you make are recorded.

It is also easier to edit a document if it is **left justified**. In general, it is worth converting a text to this format for editing, even if the final version is fully justified. The standard format for SIAS reports is, in any case, left justified, except for the headings, which are centred.

Have beside you a copy of the **SIAS framework** (*A framework for the inspection and self-evaluation of Church of England Schools*) the **SIAS report-writing guidance** (*Writing SIAS inspection reports*), which can be found at www.natsoc.org.uk, and a **blank report template**, which can also be found at www.natsoc.org.uk, for reference.

It is also helpful to have a copy of the **SIAS inspection briefing (SIB)**, although it is not essential. It enables you to see how the inspection was focused.

Step 2 – Stage 2

Read the **header information** and the section on the **context of the school** so that you gain an overview of the sort of school that has been inspected. For example, the context section might cover size, age range, and main characteristics of the intake and catchment area. A list of points to include and avoid are noted in the writing guidance on the context section of the report.

Where you see obvious errors in the header information (for example the URN is not right, the dates are in odd formats (the format 7 October 2007 is preferred), or the wrong local authority is given, for example, make the necessary changes.

Where the context does not give the sort of information you need to read the report (or you find this out later), suggest what needs to be included.

Step 3 – Stage 2

Check the **grades** recorded in the judgement recording form to see whether they have the usual relationship with each other, and that they are consistent with the summary judgements recorded in bold at the head of the relevant sections.

Typically, the grades for leadership and management, the way the school meets the needs of all learners though its Christian character, and the overall distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school would match. Where they do not, you will need to note this and when you get to the relevant sections check that the grades given are sufficiently well argued and convincing.

Typical pitfalls to watch out for are:

- a higher (or lower) grade for leadership and management than for the other sections
- a higher (or lower) grade for the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school than for the sections contributing to that judgement
- a high grade (for example *outstanding*) for the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school when a much lower grade (for example *satisfactory* or *inadequate*) for another section would seem to counter this.

The graded judgements may well be the correct ones but apparent discrepancies from what is usually found require a very clear explanation in the text of the report.

Check also that the verbal equivalents of the grades in the text are identical, as they should be, to the grades in the judgement recording form.

Make a note of any discrepancies or issues you will need to return to later.

Step 4 – Stage 2

Skim-read the **whole report** to get a feel for the school as portrayed by the inspector. Don't make any annotations at this stage.

Here you are looking to see that the report makes sense as a whole and that text supports the grades. This applies particularly to the judgement about the overall distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school. If the text does not support one or more grades, your task is mainly to improve the clarity of the report so that the arguments put forward are clear and convincing. If the report does not hold together, you need to find out why and suggest ways of rectifying the situation.

Make a note of any issues you need to return to when you move to edit in detail.

Step 5 – Stage 2

Undertake a **section by section edit** of the sections that answer the four key questions. The following sequence is suggested:

- collective worship
- religious education (where inspected)
- leadership and management
- meeting the needs of learners through the school's Christian character.

These sections are very similar in purpose and style of presentation, and so are covered together here.

All comments and suggested improvements should be sensitively written. In particular, statements such as 'This doesn't make sense' and questions such as 'How can this be true when . . .?' tend to make inspectors defensive when what is needed is an open dialogue. Make sure that you are providing a possible solution wherever you can.

Check that **the bold headline judgement is correctly stated**, and is one of the four words *outstanding*, *good*, *satisfactory* or *inadequate*. It is not acceptable for inspectors to hedge their judgements with variations such as '*good with many outstanding features*', which immediately raises a concern about why the judgement was not *outstanding*. You should delete all additions to the main judgement.

Check that **the text as a whole supports the given grade**. Where it does not, suggest changes to the text to ensure that it does. In exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to challenge a grade, especially where the grade is inconsistent with other grades and the text seems to sit more easily with the rest of the report than with its own headline grade. Changing a grade in this way can easily give rise to a complaint, especially if it is a downward change, as the school has already had oral feedback. However, it is more important to get the report right, and if it is necessary for the inspector to go back to the school to correct an erroneous section grade, this must be done, with full apology and clear reasons for doing so.

Make sure **the text covers the right elements from the SIAS framework**. The text should not merely rehearse the criteria, however, but should include the key features of the school that lead to the inspector's view that is presented. For example, if the teaching of RE is good, the report should highlight the key features of RE teaching that make it good, not just make the judgement. Check illustrations to ensure they actually illustrate the point or judgement being made. Suggest alternatives where you can, but it may be necessary to ask the inspector to provide a better example to support the judgement or illustrate the point.

Each section has its own 'flavour' derived from the key questions in the SIAS framework, so have these in mind when doing the critical read. In particular, it is inconceivable that the section on collective worship will have no reference to pupils'

spiritual growth or development, yet draft reports sometimes do not evaluate this. Similarly, the inspector's views on standards, achievement, teaching and learning in RE, where it is reported, are important but sometimes missing elements of the RE section.

Check in the leadership and management section for references to the school's self-evaluation, as the framework requires this to be verified (or otherwise) during the inspection, and yet reports sometimes contain no evidence of the school's work in this area.

Finally, check that the sections cover the **outcomes for pupils**, and not merely the school's input. This is particularly important in the sections on collective worship, religious education and the Christian character of the school. Suggest changes to shift the focus to the impact on pupils and away from what the school does.

Where non-denominational RE is taught (typically in voluntary controlled schools and Academies), check that the impact of it is covered as part of the evaluation of the school's Christian character and the school's leadership and management. Check also that an RE section is included only where denominational RE is taught.

Check that **the text holds together** and does not present its own internal inconsistencies. Cross-checking with references in other parts of the report is also important to ensure they make the same point. Suggest ways of reconciling any differences.

Check **the text is clearly written**. Often reading aloud will identify points where clarity can be improved. If a critical reader is confused, it is likely that parents will be too, so a thorough check on clarity of expression is important. Suggest modifications using track changes and explain why there is an issue in a comment box. Use the guidance in *Writing SIAS inspection reports* to ensure consistency across dioceses.

Step 6 – Stage 2

Focus on the big picture of the school and **edit the sections that form the summary of the report**. The following sequence is suggested:

- established strengths
- focus for development
- the summary judgement.

The section on **established strengths** should contain no more than four bullet points. They should be:

- in order of priority, most important first (if not reorder them)
- genuine strengths that have been highlighted, though not necessarily using exactly the same words, in the text of one or more of the main sections (if not consider deleting them here or providing more supportive text)
- noun phrases or complete sentences, but not a mix of both (if necessary, change them)

- clearly and concisely expressed (if not suggest changes)
- no longer than two lines each (if not, shorten them).

The section on the **focus for development** should similarly have no more than four bullet points. They should be:

- the most important things that the school needs to do to improve, avoiding minor points (if not, suggest changes)
- in order of priority, most important first (if not, reorder them)
- sharply focused, avoiding vague goals such as ‘raise standards’ or ‘improve monitoring’
- expressed as actions the school should take (if not, rephrase them)
- free from phrases like ‘continue to’ and ‘further develop’ (if there, delete them, making sure that the action the school is already taking is covered in the text)
- clearly and concisely expressed (if not suggest changes)
- no longer than two lines each (if not, shorten them).

The **summary judgement** is probably the most difficult to write as, once the headline judgement is in place, the text to support it really needs to include two distinct elements: something on the school’s effectiveness; and something on its distinctiveness.

As with other sections, check that **the bold headline judgement is correctly stated**, and is one of the four words *outstanding*, *good*, *satisfactory* or *inadequate*. It is not acceptable for inspectors to hedge their judgements with variations such as ‘*satisfactory with many good features*’, which immediately raises a concern about why the judgement was not *good*. Delete any additions or riders to the main judgement.

The main points to check are:

- the text conveys something specific and significant about the school which supports the judgement (if not suggest changes)
- the text is not an attempt to summarise each of the four key questions (if so, suggest changes so it is not)
- it covers both the school’s distinctiveness and its effectiveness, though not necessarily using those terms (if not suggest what needs to be included)
- it is concisely written (70 words or less), but is sufficiently long to make a significant points (if not shorten or suggest inclusions).

Finally, check that you have covered any points you noted from your earlier skim read or grade analysis, particularly returning to the context section to check that it includes sufficient to set the scene for the reader.

Check also that significant features of the school in the context section are reflected in the text of the report (for example, the school’s support for specified groups of vulnerable pupils).

Step 7 – Stage 3

Come to a view about **the quality of the report**. You have two sources on information on which to draw to make this judgement. Firstly, you have your knowledge of the coherence of the draft report in terms of grade consistency and text to grade match. Secondly, you have your view of the quality of writing. Both these features will be exemplified by the nature and extent of changes and comments you have made.

Use the grade descriptors in Chapter 4 of this guidance to support your decision, remembering that they are best fit descriptors.

Step 8 – Stage 3

Provide some **summary feedback** on the front page of the report (either as a comment or a piece of text entered using track changes). The summary is very important, as it communicates to the inspector the most important things that need doing to move the report, and his or her inspection practice, forward. Without the summary, the author of a weak report may be overwhelmed by detail and not know where to start or what needs improving in the future.

The summary should give **a clear statement of your view** of the report, using one of the four descriptors *outstanding*, *good*, *satisfactory* or *inadequate*. It should indicate the **main strengths** of the draft report and the **most important things that need to be done** to the report by the inspector. Take a broad view here, as the editing detail is contained in the text itself. Be helpful and developmental and use sensitive language. Even praise needs to be carefully handled, because it can easily be seen as patronising and offensive.

The focus on the rest of the summary feedback should be on future reporting. Give your view of the **main areas for future improvement** in reporting. Again, take a positive and helpful approach and use sensitive language and focus on the main issues only. There could well be only one point or, in good or outstanding reports, no main issues, and this section can be omitted. Where points are included, make sure they focus on future practice and are the most important points. Again, avoid minor points of detail or minor compliance issues.

5 Judging the quality of a report

The following grade descriptors should be used to determine the quality of the first draft report (and of any subsequent draft). They are best fit descriptors and take account of the work that the critical reader has had to do to ensure the report is fit for publication. Once a tentative grade has been reached, it is helpful then to consider the grade above and/or below to check that neither is a better fit and to confirm the chosen grade.

Grade 1: The text contains convincing arguments, perceptive insights into the school, very pertinent illustrations, well chosen strengths and sharply focused areas for development. Strengths and focus areas are clearly and securely supported by the text. Text to grade match is transparent. The report holds together well and apparent anomalies are clearly explained. The report focuses on the main features of the school, not the framework criteria. The text is well written with just a few drafting changes and other minor amendments necessary. Comments from the critical reader are minimal. Template requirements are met in all or almost all respects.

Grade 2: The text contains clear explanations with relevant illustrations, focusing on important features of the school. Strengths and focus areas are supported by the text and well expressed. Grades match the text. The text is most well written but significant points need improvement, or several sections need some editing to improve clarity. Some comments from the critical reader are substantial but none would challenge the consistency or accuracy of the report. Most template requirements are met with any issues easily rectified.

Grade 3: The text is generally well explained and presents a secure picture of the school. The report has a strong focus on the criteria with some material to relate judgements to the school. Strengths and focus areas can be tracked back to the text, but not always clearly. Grades are secure but not always well supported by text. Text is not always clear and needs some significant recasting. Comments from the critical reader are substantial and question the consistency of the text or its clarity, though the headline judgements are not in dispute. Some template requirements are not met and need rectifying.

Grade 4: One or more of the main criteria are not met, and/or one or more of the sections of the report are inadequate. The text does not support one or more headline judgements. Grades are not fully supported by text and/or inconsistencies between grades are not explained convincingly. Arguments in the text are not convincing and/or conclusions are inaccurate. Insensitivity of language indicates potential issues with the reception of the report by the school. The critical reader has had to undertake extensive recasting of the text to achieve a secure report. Template requirements not followed and/or there are significant structural problems.

5 Text conventions

Text conventions change over time. For example, it is rare these days to find full stops (periods) after each letter in an abbreviation, which was accepted practice some years ago. Such conventions are also a matter of style or accepted practice rather than based on any 'correct' approach. This section considers the most common conventions in current use.

Capital (upper case) letters

Avoid them wherever possible. Most of our usage of terms which might or might not take an initial capital letter comes from their presentation in national legislation. Use capital letters only for proper nouns, names of people organisations or places. Subjects such as religious education do not take capital letters, but French and Spanish do as they are languages. Use lower case letters for collective worship. Christian takes a capital letter, as does the Bible. Generic titles such as headteacher, chair of governors, vicar and church do not take capital letters, but the Church of England does, as do other faiths.

In inspection reports, the governing body of a school, its governors, including its foundation governors, and its clerk all take lower case letters. Unless the initial letter is at the beginning of a sentence, voluntary aided schools and voluntary controlled schools take lower case letters, as do community, foundation and special schools. Bizarrely, Academies always begin with a capital letter. Use Key Stage 1 (etc) and Year 5 (etc) rather than their abbreviations and use Reception and Nursery with capital letters.

Abbreviations

Abbreviate without using full stops between letters. When writing about religious education, for example, RE is the abbreviated form. The first time it appears, the phrase should be written out in full and the abbreviation defined, as in religious education (RE). However, it is best not to overdo it, and 'RE GCSE' is to be avoided in favour of 'the GCSE course in RE'. It is generally accepted that it is not necessary to define GCSE or A level in inspection reports.

Quotations

Enclose quotations in single quotation marks, reserving double quotation marks for a quotation within a quotation. Where you report a short piece of direct speech, use a comma to separate speech from commentary. Punctuation goes within the quotation marks for longer pieces such as complete sentences, and outside the quotation mark if the extract is a word or short phrase.

Punctuation

Use commas sparingly. Colons are used to introduce lists. Semi-colons join two parts of a sentence that could well be written as two shorter sentences, which is preferable, as they are found difficult by many readers. Where you finish a list with words such as 'and assessment' a comma is not necessary, except to make sure the last item is seen as a single entity. Commas are useful after initial conjunctions, such as 'Consequently, the leadership . . .' and 'However, standards are . . .'

Hyphens

Use hyphens to ensure that compound adjectives such as whole-school improvement are correctly stated and to distinguish, for example, between seven-year-old children and seven year-old children. Self-evaluation and self-esteem take hyphens.

Inclusive language

Avoid using terms for groups that could be considered biased. In particular, avoid using he or she when pupils of both sexes are involved, rephrasing in the plural, as in 'When work is matched to pupils needs, they respond . . .' This avoids the awkwardness of 'When the work is matched the needs of each pupil, he or she responds . . .' Avoid sentences that suggest links between disadvantage or low ability with particular groups or people.

Numbers

Use words for numbers up to and including nine and the numerals themselves for numbers from 10 upwards. Use a comma as a separator in numbers of more than four digits. Use the % sign rather than the words 'per cent', so a school's overspend (deficit) would be written as 15%. Key stages take numerals as in Key Stage 4. The sixth form and the Foundation Stage are not key stages and have no numbers.

Singular and plural verbs

Several features of the SIAS framework such as leadership and management, teaching and learning, effectiveness and efficiency take plural verbs, as in 'leadership and management are decisive'.

Nouns used as verbs

Avoid 'pupil progress' and 'teacher marking', both of which need the apostrophe as in 'pupils' progress' and 'teachers' marking'. Avoid also phrases like 'teaching impacts on pupils progress' and 'pupils progress well', where 'impact' and 'progress' are nouns used as verbs.

There is / there are

Avoid sentences or clauses beginning similar to 'There are many pupils who are well behaved and . . .' when the simpler 'Many pupils are well behaved and . . .' would be clearer.