



Effective inspection feedback

Guidance for SIAS inspectors

Version 1 – May 2010

The Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools (SIAS) is governed by section 48 of the Education Act 2005. This document provides guidance to inspectors when giving feedback 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

© National Society for Promotion of Religious Education 2010
Church House
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3NZ

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
1 Introduction and principles for feedback	1
2 Ongoing feedback during inspections	3
3 Lesson observations	4
4 Feedback at the end of inspections	7
5 Dealing with difficult feedback situations	9
Appendix	10

I Introduction and principles for feedback

Introduction

Inspection is a complex mix of observation, dialogue and analysis. An inspector observes educational practice, holds discussions that provide further evidence of its impact and then uses his or her experience to come to an evaluative conclusion, using an inspection framework. Feedback is the process of communicating the inspector's evaluation, which may or may not include a formal judgement. This guidance is designed to:

- support inspectors in providing feedback
- encourage consistency of practice across dioceses.

Feedback is part of the inspection dialogue with the school. You should always offer feedback after the observation of a substantial part of lesson or an act of collective worship. The offer of feedback applies irrespective of who is leading a lesson or act of worship. Teachers and those leading worship may not, however, wish to receive it – a decision you should respect. This discretion does not extend to headteachers, however, who have a responsibility to receive the findings of external evaluation under a statutory framework and to act upon those findings.

On some occasions, you will need to ensure that the headteacher receives feedback about an observation, for example where a lesson is outstanding, an incident occurred, or collective worship was inadequate. In such circumstances, you must also offer the same feedback to the teacher or leader of the act of worship.

Preparing for feedback

When preparing to give feedback, it is important that you have reached a clear conclusion about the area on which you are giving feedback. In doing this, always refer to the evaluation criteria where you are making a scored judgement. You should make sure that the record of an observation of a lesson is complete, for example by listing a set of bullet points representing an overall evaluation, strengths and areas for improvement. This applies also at the end of the inspection when you prepare feedback on each key question in the SIAS framework, and to the overall feedback about the school. However, you should not feel compelled to complete a draft of the report before giving feedback. Indeed, the use of brief bullet-point prompts to support extended oral feedback is always preferable to reading notes.

Before giving any feedback, you should always take time to reflect on the evidence and analysis so far. For the feedback on a lesson or act of collective worship, this may only take a few moments, with a few notes written down to support the dialogue. However, you should always plan a significant period of reflection before the end of an inspection to ensure you have sufficient time to reach secure conclusions about the school as a whole.

Feedback styles

The way you interact with students, staff and other adults in a school is very much down to your personal style. However, the SIAS framework includes very clear guidelines for inspectors to work to, set out as a code of conduct. This is reproduced as an appendix to this guidance.

It is your responsibility, as the inspector, to create an appropriate ambience within which feedback can take place. This includes the physical environment, privacy, lack of interruption, and a purposeful relationship with the person or persons to whom feedback is being given. You also need to plan carefully how you will deliver the feedback to maximise its impact and ensure its acceptance. Remember, though, that feedback is an extension of your dialogue with the school, and opportunities for debate and discussion need to be created at all stages of an inspection. It is often helpful to summarise what has been said at the end of a feedback session.

Those receiving feedback may on occasions challenge the feedback they are given. This may be on the basis of additional evidence which the inspector needs then to take into account, but is often a simple disagreement about an evaluation. Such cases reinforce the need for preparation, so that the inspector can confidently provide the evidence and refer to the evaluation criteria that result in a particular judgement or evaluation.

Contribution to professional development

Good feedback contributes well to the professional development of staff. A clear understanding of what is good and what needs to be improved will help a teacher improve his or her practice. Feedback about the leadership and management of collective worship or religious education provides similar support to those in positions of responsibility. Your feedback should have a clear focus on a small number of key issues that will support improved practice. A long list of minor improvements will not help nearly as much as two or three key areas that would bring about the most improvement.

Principles for feedback

Feedback should:

- provide clear evaluations using the SIAS inspection criteria
- be based on secure and recorded evidence
- result from a period of reflection on the evidence and on the way the evaluations will be communicated
- indicate an overall judgement, where one is relevant, and include strengths and areas for improvement
- be scrupulously fair and not include biased or personal views and preferences
- be rigorous but be communicated sensitively
- contribute to the professional development of those receiving it.

2 Ongoing feedback during inspections

Setting the climate for productive dialogue

Inspections are best carried out within a climate of professional dialogue. From the first contact you have with the school, and particularly early discussions with the headteacher, you are setting the tone for this dialogue and creating a set of expectations within the school. Given the constraints of what is usually a single day of inspection, most of your work in setting up the inspection will be through the headteacher. You will need to rely on the headteacher, therefore, to pass on these expectations to the rest of the staff. This means you will need to be explicit about how you will handle feedback from observations and enter into dialogue about them.

No surprises

The main purpose of providing ongoing feedback is to build up a picture of the school from your external perspective in the minds of those responsible for its development. This has two main benefits. Firstly it enables the school to provide you with additional evidence to support your evaluation. This might change your view of that aspect of the school but it also may help to firm up a tentative view of the area you were exploring but had not yet gathered sufficient evidence. Secondly, the discussions you have with the headteacher, governors and senior team provide information that helps to set the context for the overall judgements during the final feedback session. Early exploration of areas of weakness will support a full understanding of the focus areas for development. In this way, there will be no surprises during the final feedback.

Where the inspection evidence suggests that an aspect of the school is inadequate, or the school may be inadequate overall, you will need to adopt a particularly sensitive approach. Remember in these situations that you have not yet reached the end of the inspection and the evidence that obtain after that particular feedback may well change your judgement. This means you need to be particularly tentative about your evaluations at this stage of the inspection. This does not apply to a lesson observation, however, where you are providing feedback about a completed activity.

Ongoing dialogue, including feedback

Ongoing dialogue, including feedback should:

- be a natural extension of the positive tone set by discussions at the beginning of the inspection process
- sensitively build up a picture of the school so that there are no surprises at the end of the inspection.

3 Lesson observations and collective worship

Lesson observations

You should always offer feedback after an RE observation of 20 minutes or more. This is consistent with Ofsted's practice in section 5 inspections. It may be possible to provide a clear view of aspects of an RE lesson after observing for less than this time, and there is no harm in providing feedback on those aspects. However, it is not advisable to provide feedback on the quality of teaching, or of the lesson overall, in an observation of less than this period. The likelihood of challenge is much greater and the evidence may not be strong enough to support an overall judgement about the quality of teaching and learning, or of the overall impact of the whole lesson.

Remember also that your focus should be on students' learning in RE and how the teaching brought this learning about. It is not the job of the inspector to evaluate the teacher's qualities (as would be the case with performance management observations) but to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning of RE in the school.

If the same teacher is observed on more than one occasion, you may well find it efficient to provide feedback on all the lessons observed at the same time. This has the added benefit that you can draw common threads together to provide a more insightful feedback. Whatever the circumstances, though, focus first on what students are learning, and follow this up with how the teacher supported or brought about the learning.

Collective worship

The principles behind the observation of an act of worship are similar to those of an RE lesson, although you will need to use extra sensitivity when providing feedback to a volunteer or visitor who is leading collective worship. In some circumstances you may feel it is advisable, in the best interests of the school, not to offer feedback to a visitor but, instead, discuss the evaluation with the headteacher. You should not take this route where the leader of the worship is a member of staff or governor of the school, however.

The main focus of your worship observation and feedback should be the engagement of students in a spiritual experience and the benefits they gained from their involvement. While behaviour, the presentation itself, and the physical environment are important, the core purpose of worship is to engage in a communal and spiritual activity and your feedback should focus clearly on this aspect of worship.

The feedback process

Whatever the message, you must be clear and precise in your evaluations. There is no need to give a numerical grade where you have reached an overall conclusion, but the words you use should accurately reflect the grade recorded on your evidence form.

You must give teachers adequate opportunities to contribute to the feedback. Expect to explain and exemplify your evaluations, offering clarification of any points or queries raised by the teacher or worship leader. Listen to any comments the teacher/worship leader may have to make and check also that he or she understands what you have said. Only if substantial new evidence is provided should you offer to look again at your evaluations.

For some teachers, providing feedback about the quality of their teaching is very sensitive. In such cases, you will need to plan carefully how you will minimise stress for the teacher, deal with any disagreement, and maintain a sensitive but firm approach throughout your feedback. This situation might arise where:

- the teacher believes students' learning to be better than the inspector judges it to be
- the lesson has a greater weight of areas for improvement than strengths
- the teacher has already been extensively monitored by senior staff, diocesan staff or local authority advisers
- the teacher is not feeling well or is distressed.

Practical strategies

One strategy for feeding back is to start by asking the teacher/worship leader to give a view of the lesson/worship seen. In many cases, teachers are good at self-evaluation, recognise their own strengths and weaknesses and want to know how to improve. You can use this self-evaluation as a starting point on which to build your feedback. Where a teacher identifies any areas for improvement in their work with which you agree, build on these and go on to discuss other areas where attention is needed, not forgetting any strengths. Some inspectors do not feel this is an appropriate strategy, preferring to provide the external view before hearing the teacher's perspective. However, its advantage in difficult situations is that it provides more opportunities for the teacher to contribute fully in the dialogue. In all circumstances, it is good practice to summarise what you have said at the end.

It is much more difficult to engage with teachers who do not recognise their strengths or weaknesses. Wherever possible use a practical example as a starting point for your discussion, give the facts without the evaluation and then relate your evaluation to the impact of the teacher's actions on students' learning. Always ask for comments and, where necessary, use further examples to illustrate your point.

If the lesson is outstanding, or there are substantial weaknesses and few strengths try to be selective about what you feedback. In the latter case, concentrate on one or two significant areas for improvement and do not be tempted to present a whole

catalogue of disasters. Find something positive to say if possible, and try to finish on a positive note.

Key points for feedback on RE lessons and acts of collective worship

Feedback on RE lessons and acts of collective worship should:

- focus on students' learning and spiritual outcomes, with the teaching and leadership of worship being seen as contributory factors
- engage the teacher/worship leader in dialogue about the evaluation
- be clear, precise and sensitive
- highlight the most important strengths and areas for improvement
- provide a summary view, where appropriate.

4 Feedback at the end of inspections

Reflection on the evidence

Always ensure that you allow sufficient time to come to secure conclusions about each of the key questions and the overall effectiveness of the school as a Church of England School. It is better to delay a final feedback session for half an hour than it is to rush into judgements and later find that you cannot substantiate them in your evidence.

Ordering your feedback

You will develop your own personal style and adapt it to suit the context of the school. However, some pointers to the order of feedback in relation to the framework are appropriate. Answers to the key questions on religious education and collective worship both influence your judgement about the leadership and management of the school as a Church of England school. In turn, your evaluations of all three of these key questions influence your judgement on whether the school is meeting the needs of all learners through its distinctive Christian character. Finally, your judgements on all four key questions need to be weighed up carefully before you reach an overall conclusion about the school. This ordering is, therefore, recommended for your feedback on the school as a whole.

For each key question, your feedback should begin with material that is consistent with the grade you have recorded in the evidence base. It is best not to begin with the strengths, as this approach can give misleadingly positive view of the school. Do not neglect the school's strengths in each area, however, which can come next, ending with any areas for development in relation to that key question. It is acceptable to indicate the grade (in verbal, not numerical, form) for each key question, although it is also acceptable to give only the overall conclusion as an unequivocal judgement. No matter what the decision, it is important to match the feedback to your judgement in each area and avoid suggesting orally that your evaluation of the key question is better (or worse) than the grade you have decided on by using the evaluation criteria.

When giving feedback on the effectiveness of the school as a whole, start the feedback with a clear view of the grade, given in words, and why you have come to that conclusion. Then indicate the key strengths that you have identified to go into the report, finishing with the focus areas for development. It is preferable to leave these until last, and they then provide a lasting reminder of what the school needs to do. Remember that the school will not see the report again for some days (or even weeks), so it is worth making sure, through dialogue about them, that the school has understood and accepted them.

As with feedback to individuals, make opportunities to engage in dialogue about your findings. It is particularly important to ensure the headteacher and governors

understand what actions the governors and staff need to take to bring about improvement.

Focus areas for development

Getting the main focus areas for development right is critical in any inspection as their main purpose is to provide a clear set of actions for the school to take. Key features of good areas for improvement are that they need to:

- be clearly and concisely expressed
- number no more than four
- be presented in order, most important first, to maximise impact
- stem from the feedback you have given, and not be a surprise
- be expressed as actions the school can carry out.

Where possible, draw together threads from more than one key question to provide a combined area for development. For example, if the issue is the need to improve self-evaluation in RE, in collective worship and in the school as a whole, a single focus area is likely to have greater weight with the governing body than separate issues on RE, collective worship and leadership and management.

Examples of precise, well targeted areas for development, drawn from evaluations in the relevant section of feedback, include:

- *Extend the school's assessment processes to include RE, and use this assessment information to differentiate learning to meet students' individual needs.*
- *Provide more opportunities for students to participate in acts collective worship to support their spiritual development.*
- *Change the focus of the school's self-review to evaluate the impact of the school's distinctive Christian character on students' achievement and spiritual growth.*

Avoid asking schools to “Continue to” or “Further develop”, and instead focus clearly on what needs to be done. You can acknowledge orally, and in the text of the report, the school's previous work in that area. Avoid also vague areas such as “Raise standards in RE” which give no indication of what actions the school should take to bring about improvement.

Key points for feedback at the end of an inspection

Feedback at the end of an inspection should:

- give a clear view of the overall judgement about the effectiveness of the school as Church of England school, and the reasons for that judgement
- include evaluations of each of the key questions in the SIAS framework
- include particular strengths, as far as possible in each of the key questions
- include areas for development, as far as possible in each of the key questions
- leave the school with a small number of focus areas for development, expressed as clear actions for the school to take.

5 Dealing with difficult feedback situations

Disagreement about judgements

The most common difficulty you are likely to encounter is in convincing those receiving your feedback that your evaluation leads to a lower grade than they expected. The most effective way of doing this is to be well prepared with the evidence and the criteria you have used in coming to your conclusion. Within this approach, a strong focus on the impact of the school's actions is important. Too often, staff focus on their own input, rather than its impact on students' learning or its effectiveness in bringing about improvements. Simply working hard is not sufficient to create a good or outstanding school, but the hard work must have been linked to relevant input and some successful outcomes. In such circumstances, you will need to go back to the evidence and, sensitively, stand firmly behind a well argued case.

Of equal importance is not to over-praise a school through loose phrasing of feedback. Extensive use of words such as *excellent*, *very* and *really* all serve to suggest that a school is better than the *good* or *satisfactory* judgement that you have reached. This means you need to be measured in your feedback language so as not to lead the school to feel it is better than it is.

Dealing with distress

Sometimes you will encounter situations where a teacher, headteacher or governor is distressed, either by the feedback itself or by factors outside the inspection. In the case where you have judged the leadership and management of the school to be inadequate, you must ensure that, where possible, the headteacher understands the reasons for that judgement and also that the headteacher is supported, usually by another member of staff or a governor. In all cases, however, you should consider the timing of your feedback so that the recipient is not then immediately undertaking a professional task in a distressed state. This is especially critical when planning negative feedback to a teacher (for example an inadequate lesson), when you should time your feedback to avoid the teacher going straight back into the same class which you observed, or another similar situation.

Key points on dealing with distress during feedback

When providing feedback that could, or does, cause distress:

- ensure your feedback is well grounded in evidence and uses SIAS criteria
- treat all feedback with great sensitivity
- seek support for the recipient if needed from a familiar and suitable adult
- time your feedback thoughtfully to avoid putting the recipient in a potentially difficult situation following the feedback.

Appendix

Code of practice for SIAS inspectors (from the SIAS framework 2009)

SIAS inspectors will maintain the highest standards of professional practice at all times. They will always seek to secure the full co-operation of everyone involved in the process, inspire confidence in the fairness and accuracy of judgements and make a valuable contribution to improvement.

Inspectors are expected:

- **to carry out their work with integrity, treating all those they meet with courtesy and sensitivity;**
- **to be aware of the particular relationships the school has with its local community, church/es and diocese;**
- **to do all they can to minimise the pressure on those involved with the inspection in the school, giving priority to their best interests and well-being;**
- **to respect the confidentiality of information about individuals and the work they do;**
- **to maintain purposeful and formative dialogue with all those being inspected, and communicate judgements clearly and frankly;**
- **to evaluate objectively, be impartial and have no previous connection with the school which could compromise their objectivity;**
- **to report honestly and fairly, ensuring that judgements are accurate, reliable and based on secure and sufficient evidence.**