The unintended consequences of school inspections

Karen Jones

Kemethofer, D; Tymms, P.; O’Hara, J.; Myrberg, E.; Skedsmo, G.; Huber, S. & Greger, D.

European Commission funded project

Durham University, England
Overview

• Context of the paper
• Inspection in Europe (2009/10)
• Background literature and rationale
• Research Questions
• Method/survey instrument
• Results
• Summary
• Hot of the press – teacher survey results
Context of the paper

• Part of an EU funded project
  “The impact of school inspections on teaching and learning”

• Rationale:
  • Empirical evidence limited and inconclusive.

• Project Aims:
  1. To measure the effects of school inspection
  2. Discover what aspects of inspections work
Countries in the project

- Netherlands
- England
- Ireland
- Sweden
- Austria
- Czech Republic
- Switzerland
- Norway
Inspection in Europe (2009/10)

Common to all
  – Aim for good education
  – Use cyclical inspection of all schools
  – Use self-evaluation
  – Provide feedback

Differentiated
  – Thresholds
  – Publication
  – Carrots and sticks
Inspection in Europe (2009/10)

• Thresholds (pass/fail)
  Netherlands  Sweden
  England    Ireland
  Czech Republic  Austria
  Switzerland

• Public Reporting
  Netherlands  Sweden
  England  Czech Republic
  Ireland  Austria
  Switzerland
I feel pressure to do well on the inspection

Mean with 95% confidence intervals

England, Netherlands, Sweden, Ireland, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Austria

Research Questions

1. What part does pressure play in precipitating unintended consequences?
Literature: Categories of unintended effects

1. Intended strategic behaviour / gaming
   - window dressing
   - misrepresentation
   - fraud and deception
   - orchestration of peer review
   - reshaping the test pool

2. Unintended strategic behaviour
   - formalisation & proceduralisation
   - teaching to the test
   - teaching to inspection
   - tunnel vision
   - indicator fixation
   - sub-optimisation
   - myopia
   - convergence
   - ossification
   - isomorphism

3. Other side effects
   - stress
   - good schools ‘resting on their laurels’
   - market effects

De Wolf & Janssens (2007)
### Literature: Empirical evidence

| 1. Intended strategic behaviour / gaming | window dressing | England |
|                                         | misrepresentation | Netherlands |
|                                         | fraud and deception | US |
|                                         | orchestration of peer review | US, Netherlands |
|                                         | reshaping the test pool |

| 2. Unintended strategic behaviour        | formalisation & proceduralisation | England |
|                                         | teaching to the test |
|                                         | teaching to inspection |
|                                         | tunnel vision |
|                                         | indicator fixation |
|                                         | sub-optimisation |
|                                         | myopia |
|                                         | convergence | England, US |
|                                         | ossification |
|                                         | isomorphism |

| 3. Other side effects                    | stress | England |
|                                         | good schools ‘resting on their laurels’ |
|                                         | market effects |
Research Questions

1. **What part does pressure play in precipitating unintended consequences?**

2. **What is the prevalence of unintended consequences of school inspections?**
Method: survey items

1. I discourage teachers to experiment with new teaching methods that do not fit the scoring rubric of the Inspectorate
2. School inspections have resulted in narrowing curriculum and instructional strategies in my school
3. School inspections have resulted in refocusing curriculum and teaching and learning strategies in my school
4. The latest documents/facts and figures we sent to the Inspectorate present a more positive picture of the quality of our school then how we are really doing
5. Preparation for school inspection is mainly about putting protocols and procedures in writing that are in place in the school and gathering documents and data.
## Sample sizes and response rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Targeted Sample</th>
<th>Actual sample - Year 1 (response rate in brackets)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>1422</td>
<td>637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1167</td>
<td>987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>3200</td>
<td>729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria (Styria)</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2325</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Limitation, threats and mitigation

Risk of bias from:

• sampling
• low response rates
• missing data
• wording and translation
Results

2. School inspections have resulted in narrowing curriculum and instructional strategies in my school
3. School inspections have resulted in refocusing curriculum and teaching and learning strategies in my school.
1. I discourage teachers to experiment with new teaching methods that do not fit the scoring rubric of the Inspectorate.
4. The latest documents/facts and figures we sent to the Inspectorate present a more positive picture of the quality of our school than how we are really doing.
5. Preparation for school inspection is mainly about putting protocols and procedures in writing that are in place in the school and gathering documents and data.
### Key Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>% Positive Response (agree/strongly agree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I discourage teachers to experiment with new teaching methods that do not fit the scoring rubric of the Inspectorate</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. School inspections have resulted in narrowing curriculum and instructional strategies in my school</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. School inspections have resulted in refocusing curriculum and teaching and learning strategies in my school</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The latest documents/facts and figures we sent to the Inspectorate present a more positive picture of the quality of our school then how we are really doing</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Preparation for school inspection is mainly about putting protocols and procedures in writing that are in place in the school and gathering documents and data.</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Findings

• Pressure is **associated** with narrowing of curriculum and refocussing of instructional strategies
• Some evidence for ossification
• Some evidence for misrepresentation
• Some evidence that inspection focuses on documents and procedures – a “tick box” exercise.
Hot of the press – teacher survey results

• Teaching to the test
• Teaching to inspection
• Ossification/fear of experimenting
• Narrowing of curriculum/teaching strategies
• Misrepresentation
Hot of the press – teacher survey result

Teaching to the test
Teaching to inspection

“29% claim to be teaching test-taking skills almost every day or at least once a week”

“10% change their teaching during inspection”
Thank you

- Karen.jones@cem.dur.ac.uk
- schoolinspections.eu