

Chapter 7

Step by Step: An Introduction to the History of Catholic Denominational Inspection in England and Wales



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Abstract This chapter will review the origins and development of Catholic denominational inspection. It will outline how the state and the Catholic Church first sought to collaborate 170 years ago when the state began to contribute to the provision of Catholic schools and then consider the subsequent introduction of diocesan inspection which, unlike the state, included inspection of religious instruction. The evolving roles and responsibilities of diocesan inspectors in different dioceses will be outlined along with the significance of their annual meetings. It concludes with a review of the complexity of the legislation that introduced the contemporary inspection system and the steps taken by the Church to work within it.

Keywords Denominational inspections · Ofsted and catholic schools · Church and state

Introduction

The present system of diocesan inspection of Catholic schools in England and Wales has been in place since 1993, following the passing of the *1992 Education (Schools) Act* and subsequent legislation that revised the whole system of inspection of state-funded schools. Since then there has been a regular programme of reviews of Catholic denominational inspection; that initiated in 2018 is the most thorough going to date. Thus it is appropriate after some 25 years of the present pattern of inspection to review, if briefly, the development of the Catholic Church's denominational inspection since its inception in the nineteenth century.

The history will be reviewed under four distinct phases: the beginning of Catholic school inspection undertaken by *Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI)*¹; the origins of denominational Catholic school inspection; 100 years of denominational inspection; statutory denominational inspection since 1993.

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The Beginning of Catholic School Inspection Undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectors

State school inspection goes back to 1839 when the *Committee in Council for Education*—earliest predecessor of the *Department for Education*—resolved to oversee the financial grants introduced in 1833 to support school building. The first steps in state inspection had begun. At that time all schools were religious foundations—overwhelmingly Anglican—so the expanded remit of state aid in 1839 to ‘the purpose of promoting public education’ (Adamson 1930) led to a conflict with the Church of England. Many Anglican bishops and others argued that the state had no competence to inspect Church schools, including their curriculum which included religious instruction. Eventually a solution was found in what is called a *concordat* with the Church of England: the government agreed that only Anglican clergymen, approved and retaining the confidence of the Church of England, would inspect Church of England school (Bishop 1971).

When grants were finally extended to Catholic schools, a similar *concordat* was agreed with the Catholic Church, Religious Instruction being specifically excluded from inspection.

The first Catholic inspector, Thomas William Marshall, examined his first pupil–teacher apprentice on 6 February 1849 and inspected St Cuthbert’s school Durham 16 days later. Two months later the first examinations for teachers’ *Certificate of Merit* and associated state grants for augmentation of salaries were held in London and Sunderland.

It is interesting to note that from the outset inspections included both teachers and pupil–teacher apprentices—the normal entry route into school teaching at the time—as well as school inspection itself. Similar tasks were to be undertaken by diocesan denominational inspectors in the future.

Also of note is his background: Marshall was a former Anglican clergyman converting to Catholicism in only 1845 but with a key role within four years. His extensive remit—all aided Catholic schools throughout Great Britain—was such that he sought assistance in 1851 but it was not until April 1853 that Scott Nasmyth Stokes was appointed as HMI for Catholic schools in North Wales, much of the North of England and also Scotland. Stokes is an interesting appointment. He also converted in 1845 and, apparently at the suggestion of Dr Wiseman, was offered the post of secretary of the Catholic Poor School Committee when it was established in 1847 and arranged grants for Catholic schools from the government (Tablet 1889) prior to his appointment. John Reynell Morell—another convert—became the third Catholic inspector in 1857. Thus initially Her Majesty’s Inspectorate was established on denominational lines, only becoming non-denominational under the 1870 Education Act.

The Origins of Denominational Catholic School Inspection

Chapter 3 of session 24 of the Council of Trent required bishops to undertake an annual or bi-annual visitation of their diocese (Council of Trent 1563)². In France (a Catholic country at this time) evidence shows that this included inspecting schools (Carter 2011). In England, following the Reformation there were no Catholic diocese for approximately 300 years and no Catholic schools in the conventional sense. The recusant community struggled, experiencing periods of respite such as under James II when some Catholic schools opened briefly, only to close under the succeeding sovereign. Circumstances only started to improve late in the eighteenth century.

Following the restoration of the hierarchy, the bishops first met formally in 1852 at Oscott for the first Synod of Westminster—famous in Catholic education for the injunction to ‘build schools before churches’. They responded positively to the suggestion of the Catholic Poor School Committee that they undertake the inspection of Religious Education. In the words of the official statement, the *Acta et decreta primi concilii provincialis westmonasteriensis* of 6 July 1852.

we have gladly adopted, for this purpose, the excellent suggestions made to us in Synod, by the Poor School Committee, through its worthy chairman. We propose, therefore to appoint in our respective dioceses, ecclesiastical inspectors of Schools, whose duty it will be to examine the scholars in the religious portion of their education, [and] to grant certificates and award prizes, for proficiency in it... (Migne 1853; Beale 1950; Whitehead 1999)

It was four years before the first inspectors—all clerics as they would be for over a century³—were appointed. In 1854, the Poor School Committee publication *The Catholic School* noted that the Catholic Church had no officers of her own ‘especially charged in each diocese to visit and examine schools and teachers’ for ‘this part of the episcopal office has not hitherto been delegated to anyone’ (Edmonds 1962, p. 60). Initially only four of the dioceses appointed inspectors in 1856: Westminster, Southwark, Liverpool and Salford (Tablet 1856). On 12 May 1856 Bishop Goss of Liverpool (Doyle 2014) informed the *Poor School Committee* that he had appointed six inspectors and the first evidence of an inspection I have found is a report in *The Tablet* (Tablet 1857) of inspections in St Augustine’s deanery, Preston in March 1857. By 1868, only 8 of the 15 dioceses had appointed diocesan inspectors, according to the Secretary of the *Poor School Committee* (Tablet 1870).

The Church was particularly concerned that the substantial 1870 *Education Act* would result in large numbers of Catholic children attending the new *Board schools* where religious instruction, if any, would be non-denominational and based on Protestant translations of the bible. Its response was to fund a large school building programme to provide a place for every Catholic child in a Catholic school, and recruit many more Catholic teachers, well qualified to undertake Catholic religious instruction; hence there was a renewed emphasis on denominational inspectors. To finance the expanded ecclesiastical inspection system, together with prizes and rewards for noteworthy pupil–teachers and their teachers observed by inspectors, the bishops at their annual meeting in April 1875 approved the *Poor School Committee* discontinuing support grants to schools in seven of the largest dioceses and diverting the

funds to finance inspectors (Tablet 1875; Bland 1976). The following month diocesan inspectors convened for the first of what would be annual overnight meetings to develop a uniform course of religious doctrine and sacred history for pupil–teachers, agree on recommended texts and on the timing and questions for the annual exams which pupil–teachers needed to pass in order to attend the three Catholic teacher training colleges.⁴ Initially these meetings were attended by inspectors from Scotland as well as England and Wales; as late as 1887 the meeting was held in Glasgow.⁵ Thus, they established in effect the first British—wide scheme of Catholic Religious Education, albeit for a very small but potentially significant group of students. An anonymous commentator remarked,

For the next 80 years the Inspectors tried to be faithful to this original commission. They did this both by the course they proposed and by religious inspection of schools. (NBRIA archive commentary)⁶

100 Years of Denominational Inspection

The work of inspectors was soon to expand from inspecting schools and examining potential pupil–teachers, depending on the wishes of the diocesan bishop. School inspections usually resulted in a written report and contributed to an annual diocesan report that included a wide range of educational statistics. For example, Herbert Vaughan, Bishop of Salford,⁷ increased the scope of inspections to include *Industrial and Poor Law schools* and workhouses attended by Catholic children and to Sunday schools in addition to parochial schools. Around the turn of the twentieth century, inspection reports show an increasing similarity with our contemporary Section 48 reports, commenting on the interest of students, concern at the failure to build on earlier work when moving between phases, displays in classrooms and the presence, or not, of crucifixes and statues around the building.

Collectively inspectors were sensitive to the manner in which the substantial *1902 Education Act* was being implemented. Besides meeting the newly appointed Secretary to the *Board of Education*, Robert Morant, in 1903 to secure the training of Catholic pupil–teacher (NBRIA archive commentary), they expressed concern that some newly established local education authorities were seeking to reduce the time available for religious instruction (Lannon 2003) or restrict opportunities for pupils to attend church (IBID; Tablet 1904a, b).

‘The disturbed state of the times’ (NBRIA archive commentary) is the recorded explanation of why the annual meetings of inspectors were suspended during the Great War. At least two post-war inspectors were military chaplains who experienced at first hand the faith of soldiers who had been educated in Catholic schools with their emphasis on the catechism together with hymns and prayers. Fr Drinkwater, diocesan inspector for Birmingham from 1922 to 1954, noted how in times of the greatest stress, hymns and religious practices were recalled but not the catechism. He wrote about this and how best to pass on the Catholic faith in a magazine he founded called *The Sower*. In this, he developed what Archbishop Williams⁸ adopted in 1929

as the official scheme of religious instruction for Birmingham, at a time when dioceses generally followed the national syllabus.

Drinkwater was well regarded by his fellow inspectors, serving as the Secretary of the *Board of Inspectors* from 1924 to 1945. At the time same diocesan lead inspectors served for many years: Salford had two between 1918 and 1957 while in Westminster Canon Sutcliffe served from at least 1893, initially as assistant and later as chief inspector, until 1935, also serving as chair of the *Board of Inspectors* for some of this time.

Canon Norris served from 1902 as assistant to Sutcliffe and inspector for the county of Essex. On the formation of the Diocese of Brentwood in 1917 Norris became its chief inspector until succeeded in 1928 by his assistant inspector Canon Cameron. Fr Heenan, ordained in 1930 soon joined him as assistant inspector. Heenan observed in his autobiography that the canon was not well qualified for the post. He goes on to describe the work

In those days a religious inspector was an external examiner. A school was warned two or three months in advance that the examiners were coming and from that moment the children were subjected to intense pressure to make them word perfect in the answers to the catechism. (Heenan 1971, p. 87)

He continued ‘I was never able to see much value in the old style religious examination’, before explaining how he visited one of *His Majesty’s Inspectors* of religious knowledge to explore the best focus for an inspector. ‘The good inspector should gather ideas and carry them from one school and teacher to another... As a result of this and other meetings with government inspectors my examinations gradually became inspections.’ Here the now Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster⁹ concludes the page devoted to the subject by noting ‘[s]ometimes we had a staff meeting to discuss methods of religious instruction. This routine is commonplace today [writing in 1971] but in the 1930s it was new’ (IBID).

During the Second World War, the significant *1944 Education Act* strengthened the position of Catholic schools. Post-war, inspectors were involved in setting standards for newly trained teachers graduating from the expanded teacher training programme. In the 1950s, increasing interest in catechetics resulted in the opening in 1959 of the *National Catechetical Centre* and increasing discussion of the respective roles of catechetics and classroom religious instruction. The deliberations of the *Second Vatican Council* raised further the level of debate.

At the October 1969 meeting of the *Board of Inspectors and Religious Advisers*, the Minutes record

The main problem was seen to be that the Inspectorate of schools in the way in which it had been envisaged when the Board was convened in 1876 seemed to have given way to a far more broadly based religious advisory service with the coming of the new look in R.E. under the name Catechetics (NBRIA archive commentary).

To meet the contemporary development of dioceses appointing Directors of Catechetics—notwithstanding that two-thirds of dioceses appointed their Religious Inspectors to the new role—it was decided to co-opt Directors of Catechetics onto

NBRIA, giving them a corporate status as well as providing an official channel of communication to the Hierarchy.

Henceforth the role of inspector gradually morphed into that of advisor and the appointment in 1974 of Fr Kevin Nichols as *National Advisor for Catechesis*, and subsequently Religious Education, led to members of NBRIA being increasingly drawn into national discussions about the appropriate place and form of both activities. In some dioceses, former inspectors took on the title and role of advisers and inspections seldom occurred. Elsewhere diocesan inspections continued as before, with diocesan staff also undertaking an advisory role. Thus the national picture was mixed and some would not completely agree with John Sullivan when he wrote

[F]or many years prior to the present arrangements, religious inspections of Catholic schools were carried out in a patchy way, with little evidence of regularity, consistency or rigour. Reports were not published. Criteria for inspections were unclear. No training for this kind of inspection was provided. (Sullivan 2001, p. 57)

When government moved to reform statutory school inspection, having introduced the National Curriculum in 1988, it recognised that it had to make specific arrangements for denominational inspection and entered into discussions with the three principal providers, the Church of England, the Catholic Church and the Jewish community. The Catholic Church explained clearly that inspection of its schools was an established practice in line with Church discipline, most recently stated in the revised *Code of Canon Law* (1983). This sets out as a specific duty that ‘The diocesan Bishop has the right to watch over and inspect Catholic schools situated in his territory....’ (Canon 806).

Statutory Denominational Inspection Since 1993

Specific provision for denominational inspection was included in Section 13 of the *Education (Schools) Act 1992* but in ambiguous terms. Section 13(2) explained that *denominational education* means Religious Education given ‘otherwise than in accordance with an agreed syllabus’, thus confining it to classroom Religious Education. The inspection remit was broadened in of the *1993 Act* ‘to secure that the content of the school’s collective worship is inspected’ (Section 259) and that the denominational inspector ‘may report on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school’. It is noteworthy that under Section 13(4) of the *1992 Education (Schools) Act*, unchanged in 1993, that the inspection shall be conducted by a person chosen by the governing body of a Catholic school, whereas in Canon Law an inspection is undertaken by or on behalf of the bishop so the inspector would be an episcopal appointment.

This was one of the many issues addressed by a working party of representative diocesan inspectors and *Catholic Education Service* (CES) staff who met regularly to devise an inspection framework that respected both the canonical and evolving statutory requirements because the expectation was that one inspection would fulfil

both functions. The CES issued interim guidelines in October 1993 ahead of a formal report that complemented the working party *Handbook for the Inspection of Religious Education in a Catholic school* published in July 1994. This was adopted by every diocese, some in its entirety but some making minor adjustments, recognising the autonomy of the diocesan bishop and the principle of subsidiarity. Subsequently the *1996 School Inspection Act* addressed denominational inspection under Section 23 of the Act prompting NBRIA to revise its documentation and published *Guidelines for the Inspection of Religious Education in a Catholic school—second cycle* in 1998.

Under Canon Law, dioceses have responsibility for appointing and training denominational inspectors. The number needed to inspect every maintained Catholic school regularly required a new approach to recruitment and appointment. Dioceses ran training courses that explained the statutory and canonical roles and explored the reality of school inspection, appointing those who successfully completed the course. Many were drawn from serving senior staff in schools while others were diocesan advisers and, a few, independent consultants. The conflicting statutory and canonical responsibilities of appointing the denominational inspector was soon addressed by governors accepting the inspector nominated by the diocese except where there was a possible conflict of interest. However, there is at least one occasion when a governing body insisted on its own choice of inspector and the diocese responded by holding a separate canonical inspection with its own appointed inspector: the two inspections were held collaboratively and concurrently.

When Catholic Sixth Form Colleges¹⁰ became subject to statutory inspection under the *Learning and Skills Act 2000*, the legislation did not provide for denominational inspection. However, a protocol was agreed by Ofsted and the CES for the inspection of Catholic ethos, mission and general Religious Education in Catholic Sixth Form Colleges. This protocol explained that the inspection team for Catholic colleges would include one qualified Ofsted inspector who was also an accredited diocesan inspector. This ‘nominated inspector’ was responsible for co-ordinating relevant findings regarding the ethos, mission and general Religious Education, and also GCSE and GCE Religious Studies where these were included in the inspection of the humanities area of the curriculum. Their findings were to contribute to all appropriate sections of an Ofsted inspection of a Catholic Sixth Form College, and so constitute the denominational inspection as part of the statutory inspection.

The inspection framework of denominational education in joint church schools¹¹ has always been determined locally by the respective Anglican and Catholic dioceses to reflect local circumstances. Some pairs of dioceses have developed school-specific frameworks while others have simply alternated inspections between diocesan frameworks; the Anglican diocese usually using the national Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools (SIAS) framework. From 2013, this has been renamed as the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools framework (SIAMS).

Diocesan staff responsible for inspection meet regularly and periodically review the inspection framework to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. Whenever a new national framework is developed, each diocese is expected to adopt it to ensure commonality across the country but may make adaptations, recognising the canonical

autonomy of each diocesan bishop. National legislation also changed in 2005 when a new *Education Act* placed denominational inspection in England in Section 48 of the Act and for Wales in Section 50.

Initially denominational inspections were linked to the scheduling of Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)¹² inspections, some dioceses undertaking inspection coincidentally with Ofsted. This generally worked well, with both sets of inspectors usually operating separately yet harmoniously. The Church was and remains anxious to protect the autonomy of denominational inspections; it wanted Ofsted to avoid commenting on anything relating to denominational education. Ofsted's remit included whole-school topics such as behaviour and support for disadvantaged children so boundaries could be problematic but operational protocols were developed and there are regular meetings between Ofsted and the CES that seek to provide clarity.

In 2012, Ofsted ceased to inspect 'outstanding' schools. Consequently denominational inspection for these schools also ceased. In the ensuing scheduling hiatus, CES successfully convinced the government that it would not be possible to undertake remote monitoring of the quality of denominational education in the way that Ofsted planned to monitor 'outstanding' schools. This led, in turn, to the 'de-coupling' of denominational inspection from the Ofsted cycle, to be replaced by a separate five-year cycle. One consequence of the way in which 'outstanding' school inspections ceased was and remains a bunching of Catholic denominational school inspections occasioned by the new scheduling timetable.

There are 122 Catholic independent schools in England (Catholic Education Service 2018a, b) and one in Wales (Catholic Education Service 2018b), distributed unevenly across dioceses, each of which is subject to the oversight under Canon 806. When combined statutory denominational and canonical inspection was introduced, it was decided that Catholic independent schools would be inspected under the same framework. Those dioceses with few independent schools had little difficulty in incorporating them into the overall diocesan inspection programme but it has been more problematic in some others. The inspection framework has been considered a challenge by some independent schools who regard parts of the framework as inappropriate to their particular circumstances.

A similar charge has recently been made by the small number of Catholic Sixth Form Colleges (just thirteen across England and Wales). The distinct system worked for some years but gradually the number of 'nominated inspectors' declined and inspections of Catholic Sixth Form Colleges occurred without a denominational inspector participating and consequently there was no denominational inspection. When dioceses recognised the situation, they instituted separate canonical inspections using their diocesan inspection frameworks but conversations have been held nationally with the *Association of Catholic Sixth Form Colleges* to reflect upon their particular concerns in future inspection frameworks.

In Wales, the NBRIA framework continues to guide diocesan inspection frameworks but the curriculum and the statutory inspection frameworks in the Principality have been diverging from England for some years. The new *Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government 2020) and related *Estyn inspection framework* (Donaldson 2018)

are significantly different, raising the possibility that the existing NBRIA framework, strongly influenced as it is by Ofsted thinking and practice, may not be well suited to the Welsh context going forward.

Much has changed since the tentative beginnings in 1856 and the commencement of regular meetings of diocesan inspectors in 1875. There is a clear national inspection framework but it remains locally determined by each diocese. There are regular inspections every five years and the reports are published online for all to see. The inspectorate and its relationship with the diocese have certainly changed. The nineteenth century diocesan inspector became the twentieth century Director of Religious Education and latterly Diocesan Schools Commissioner. Their contemporary job descriptions are probably broadly similar to that of a century ago. However, today's denominational school inspector is generally lay, not clerical; a current or recently retired senior school leader or diocesan adviser, not a parish priest. They inspect against published criteria and their reports are rigorously checked for quality assurance by specialist staff. This is all expected to be carried forward into the new framework which is likely to be implemented across all dioceses.¹³ The present system has certainly ensured that the provisions of Canon 806 have been fulfilled efficiently. Catholic schools will affirm the impact of denominational inspection. The new framework provides the opportunity for greater diocesan and national evaluation of denominational inspection reports that will enable regular summative reviews of schools and of inspections that can inform a realistic appreciation of Catholic denominational education.

Notes

1. *Her (His) Majesty's Inspector*. Their independence from the government of the day is signalled through their distinct status as Crown appointments, approved by the monarch in the Privy Council.
2. "...the principal object of these visitations shall be to lead to sound and orthodox doctrine...and to establish such other things as...shall seem for the profit of the faithful..." (The Council of Trent).
3. With the exception of Mr Howell Blood MA, assistant inspector of schools, Archdiocese of Westminster; died 19 September 1911 (Venn 1922).
4. St Mary's Hammersmith established 1850; Notre Dame, Liverpool established 1856; Sacred Heart, Wandsworth 1874.
5. It is interesting to note that this is nine years after the restoration of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Scotland in 1878 (Tablet 1887).
6. Commentary in the archive of *National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers* (NBRIA) which is the successor to the *Board of Inspectors*. <https://nbria.org.uk/history>.
7. Herbert Vaughan, Bishop of Salford 1872–1892; Archbishop of Westminster 1892–1903; Cardinal 1893–1903.

8. Thomas Williams, Archbishop of Birmingham 1929–1946. In World War One he served in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department and was mentioned in despatches.
9. John Carmel Heenan, Bishop of Leeds 1951–1957, Archbishop of Liverpool 1957–1963, Archbishop of Westminster 1963–1975; Cardinal 1965–1975.
10. The Catholic Church was and remains the only Christian denomination in England to establish Sixth Form Colleges.
11. There are 27 'joint church schools', a collaboration between Catholic and other Christian denominations across 11 of the 22 Catholic dioceses in England (with an additional one in Wales).(CES website).
12. Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) undertakes state inspection in England. A separate state inspection service—Estyn since 1999—inspects in Wales.
13. See Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Autumn 2019 Meeting Resolutions retrieved from <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/the-church/catholic-bishops-conference-of-england-and-wales/plenary-meetings/plenary-november-2019/november-2019-plenary-short-resolutions/> last accessed 21.4.2020.

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