

## Chap 6

### The New Local: System Shifts and School Inspection

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#### Introduction

The governing of schooling, and the role of inspection in governing schools, is the focus of the book, and in this chapter, we are concerned with the ebb and flow in the relations between the centre and the locality in our three school systems. The idea of the school, and its place in a system, are shifting, although our cases show different directions and cultures of governing emerging as systems are reconfigured. School inspection reflects this reconfiguration and it is the focus of the change in governing in our three systems.

The idea of the local school seems ubiquitous in the construction and management of education systems. While the idea of schooling is free floating, built on or around national myths and discourses, the practice of schooling has been focused historically on physical buildings, surrounding communities and urban and regional practices of administration. The school 'in place', in the local, is the organizing idea of this chapter. Using Gieryn's (Gieryn 2000) definition, place is viewed as a physical and material compilation of people and objects, it is a unique spot of varying scale, it is interpreted and narrated, it is malleable over time.

In the past, the school to be inspected was particular and situated in a place, it was in a street or a suburb, within a community and with a local workforce. A collective memory of that school was available in the family or through the professionals who worked in it. Its setting isolated it from some areas and choices, and encouraged ~~them in~~ others. The school could be many decades old and have changed its name several times, but it remained solidly in an area. Its material existence, the place of the school, was often distinguishable from other schools, even those close by, through practices derived from national and local government decisions and local politics and practices over time. Old governmental service hierarchies and communications, working with and through local government officers, produced and confirmed a strong sense of place. Each partner knew its position within a hierarchy. The place and meaning of the school had boundaries and stability. While inspectors may have

been more mobile nationally, local officers were frequently travellers around the locality. In one sense schools did not move at all. The discourse of that system was about the duties and responsibilities of the place and actions were directed toward the school. The school was tied into a web, which fixed its relations and actions.

While there is evidence of the topographical fixedness of the school in place, there is also evidence about its movement through its system redefinition, reconstruction or replacement. As the community, the economy and technologies have changed, the school has been re-imagined, and so have its relation to other elements of an education system, and in our case, school inspection. In our different systems, the school has been shifting out of its place in its system hierarchy and has been reordered. Student mobility, data and inspection information, centralisation/decentralization policy and practice, the inter-nationalisation of school data and knowledge, and the dominance of market-based designs for schools and their management, have all created the sense that the school has metamorphosed into a unit of measurement and management. As its place in the topography of a system has been re-imagined, so too has its sense of being a local institution. This development is not present to the same extent across all our cases but this transition is present within them all. In the new configuration of schools— driven by shifts in their evaluation, outputs, and finance and in their relation to other schools and system actors- their position has changed. A new economy of schooling has been constructed by ranking or league table systems: parents in England may exit schools quickly if they do not achieve a good inspection report, and yet popular schools attract parents and so local house prices rise considerably. Private companies managing chains of schools may make policy decisions about their good or unsatisfactory schools, which lead to sudden transfers of pupils, especially in rural areas. The Secretary of State for Education now makes final decisions about local schools and their demise or absorption, and not an elected local authority. So, while still physically situated, schools are related and engaged with others, in the local or at some distance; commercial managers, often at a distance, manage them; they may view themselves as part of a wider, national community.

The apparent erosion of the local or its recreation in new forms of the local, and its situating as part of commercial and international contexts, raises interesting questions about the school and its inspection. Have the older, local, public and democratic contexts of the school altered significantly? Have the local relations of this context – the advisers, inspectors and support services – been displaced? What are the contemporary relations of the school – where are support, information and services now situated? Has the shift from the localizing context

meant a consequent erosion of stable roles, and often static relations with others? The language of the situated school is now contrastive with its past: it is not a reliable local site of government but an active, entrepreneurial organization of change. Inspection on the other hand is trying to fix the school into another set of relations and rankings, and as the older hierarchies are reshaped, this ‘fixing’ has gained importance. The visibility of the school is now achieved not by its physical features but by its inspection grades, which are turned into value: a value for the brand, for the school leaders, and for house values; and value for government policy through comparison. Fixing the school into place and into a set of relations is a major task for inspection.

### Inspection

The implication is that a decline of government and the emergence of governing has changed the positioning of inspection and its places of operation. As we have seen in chapter 5, there is nothing stable or permanent about inspection. It has had to be re-imagined and redesigned in each of our three national contexts. The term ‘inspection’ may appear consistent over time, although its acronyms do alter, but its spatial relations are embedded in new regulations and new accountabilities. Governing has reworked the steady duties of place. The school has been re-imagined as responsible and yet free; autonomous and centrally directed; able to choose but without support. Schools have to imagine their place not as a geographical positioning, a physical context and an accident of history and career, but as the centre of an active set of relations, driven by their need to perform. The school is expected to create movement and actions. It is a space of opportunity and of threat. Data arrive in schools in different ways ~~now~~ but however it arrives, it has a direct power over them. The school can appear to rise or fall, or become visible or invisible, through data and their effects. While data focus on performance and comparison, they displace and destabilise the school, placing it in relation to other producers at great distance, and reshaping careers and choices.

The role of inspection and inspectors in this new context is to disturb or ‘break’ the old realities and force the school into new relations and a new conceptual order. Inspection visits, templates, documents and regulations aim to mobilise the production of this space. But the organization of the inspectors themselves has also changed. They are not local, in the sense of working for a local authority or a regional base, or ~~as~~ fixed in position and stable in employment. Now they are mobile, flexible, and contractually organised. They are remote and at a distance, appear at a school site for a week’s inspection, and produce their reports at a distance again. They have no relation to the school other than through a visit and a

document, except in England in the case of ‘failing’ schools, or where in Scotland inspection may turn into a development discussion.

Our cases are described here as national cases for the sake of clarity, yet with interesting similarities and differences. The traditional government of place – the regional and local – is being steadily altered, dismantled or reduced. It is not a stable element in the systems any more. Schools may still imagine themselves to be in the same place and area as they always were, but they may not be. Local authorities, their legitimating authorities, have been turned away from past practices or altered to provide new ones, and in some cases, have had their schools taken away from them and given to commercial agents. The local contexts of the school may no longer be in place as providers turn into champions, and paternal overseers into trouble-shooters. Legitimation may come from ownership and support from private companies.

In each of our three nationally-bounded studies, emerging interactions with new actors have changed the older system-based relations. Hierarchies have been flattened, significant vertical or horizontal power re-orientations have materialized, and uneven market relations grown. The outcome-based governmental plan of the Scottish Concordat, the coercive, forced Academy programme in England or the independent schools reform movement in Sweden may look dissimilar but they have consequences for systems. Inspection reorganization is one consequence. School inspection holds systems together, and in a way, confirms that there is a system. Inspectors are working for new purposes.

### Scotland

With the emergence of local authorities for education, and their responsibility for school performance, the idea of the local has come to mean a form of locally-based common endeavour for schooling. In this new relation, local authorities now play a mediating role between the inspectors and the schools. The local is seen as an active relation.

The history of local government in Scotland is one of fluctuating relations between the centre and the authorities. For example, during the highly centralised period of governance from the 1940s to the 1980s, the local authorities, which were numerous, often small and quite weak and looked to the Scottish Office [the administrative unit through which Scotland was governed by the UK Parliament and government at the time] for direction. However a major reorganisation of local government undertaken to produce greater efficiency and reduce costs in the 1970s/80s produced very large-scale local government units, including Strathclyde

Region, which was the largest unit of local government of the time in Europe. This coincided with political opposition in Scotland to the Conservative administrations of Thatcher and her successors, which was expressed in active resistance to UK policy developments such as the community charge (or poll tax). Thatcher ‘solved’ the problem by legislating for the abolition of the Scottish local government regions, replacing them with the much smaller local authorities that exist today.

Thus there are 32 local authorities with responsibility for providing school education in the areas they serve, and these vary very considerably in size and complexity, many of them being very ‘local’ indeed, and thus faced with difficulties in developing sufficient capacity in relation to the new forms of knowledge production and use, that they are currently held responsible for. The Standards in Scotland’s Schools Act 2000 placed on the local authorities the requirement to identify and take action to continuously improve performance in their schools, and gave the Inspectorate a new role in inspecting the education functions of the authorities. As a result of this Act, the authorities have been placed under great pressure to implement the required quality assurance procedures by the threat of adverse inspections by HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) (Cowie and Croxford 2006). However the Scottish Nationalist party government’s shift to outcomes-focused steering after 2007 and its attempted redesign of governance through partnership and persuasion marks a substantial shift in central-local relations, including in education. Although senior central government policy makers acknowledge that this shift, known as the Concordat, is ‘very high risk’, they emphasise their commitment to it:

It’s a high risk strategy but I don’t think it is any more high risk than the previous regime was futile. (Scottish government policy maker, March 2009)

The Concordat, through its construction as a brief text that establishes a relationship between the centre and the localities, rather than a conventional policy text that sets out duties and responsibilities, represents the new relationship that is being attempted. There is a clear signal that monitoring across the system will be reduced, as it is appreciated that local authorities vary in their priorities and their capacities. As our informants suggest, provided progress is demonstrated, and a ‘common purpose’ is established, then different approaches will be tolerated:

... we agreed concordat details and surrounding national targets but the underlying philosophy is that we will agree on where we are going and we will all get behind

going there and we are not going to obsess too much about how we get there and of the 32 authorities some will make progress there and some will make progress over here but across the piece we are going in the right direction. That to my mind that is not the approach of government in the UK ... But that to my mind is one of the biggest shifts of power in the opposite direction in a very, very long time and it does come back to this idea of aligning all the different elements in society behind a common purpose and trusting people. (Scottish government policy maker, March 2009)

The new responsibilities of the local authorities to secure continuous improvement in their schools has created a new professional group of Quality Improvement Officers (QIO), who replace the former 'Advisers' and whose role is to 'challenge and support' schools for which they have responsibility. They scrutinise statistics on school performance, seek to ensure a robust self-evaluation structure within schools, and identify areas that need to be addressed. They carry out a regular cycle of visits to schools in order to assess the school's progress with its school development plan, discuss improvement issues with management and staff, and support the school's management in making improvements. At the start of the school session the focus in secondary schools is on results in external examinations. Visits in the latter half of each session focus on issues for the school development plans for the following session and the QIO is required to scrutinise and approve development plans to ensure delivery of local and national priorities. Additionally, most authorities conduct Performance Review meetings annually in both primary and secondary schools. These meetings examine the school's progress in terms of attainment data, self-evaluation procedures, and the key points for action in the national and local improvement agendas.

Authorities now also have a statutory obligation to produce and publish, annually, a 'Statement of Improvement Objectives', which must be set in respect of the national priorities with targets for achievement of the performance measures, and to publish an annual report on their success in meeting their improvement objectives. The statement of objectives is intended to give local effect to national priorities and show how the authority will implement each priority taking account of local circumstances and the views of parents, pupils and others with an interest.

Authorities themselves are inspected by HMIE, with special regard to their own self-evaluation and the extent to which they support and challenge their schools. National

Government has effectively maintained control of the measures of ‘success’ in improving schools, but devolved the responsibility for achieving them to Local Government (Cowie and Croxford 2006). In relation to this study, self-evaluation of local authorities has been going through some changes with a more recent version of the policy, namely ‘validated self-evaluation’ (VSE) which we discuss later in this chapter. Actors from specific ‘champion’ authorities have been supportive of the self-evaluation paradigm by proposing changes to the old system themselves and volunteering trials of VSE in their respective authorities. One of our informants explains his view of the role of the local authority:

As I’ve explored elsewhere the local authority is obliged to develop school review procedures and has to ‘review the quality of education which the school provides’ Standards in Scotland’s Schools Act 2000. Many other authorities have gone for a quality assurance procedure, i.e. check the end point. My own philosophy is directly opposed to this point of view, i.e. it’s too late to find out that the widgets coming off the line are faulty – we need to move quality control into the hands of the practitioners – move things ‘upstream’. In such a perspective the judgement of the practitioner is vital in the cycle of improvement – the role of the local authority in such a system becomes self-evident – we need to validate internal judgements. (Ledingham2009)

The director of another ‘champion’ education authority which volunteered for a VSE of its policy and practice, offered his view on the role of the local in policy-making:

I think that specifically what you have is you’ve had a transfer from command and control to devolved and called to account. The role the data plays I think is central to that.... I think there was a realisation that it was no longer reasonable to expect people to do things on the basis of you, an authority or a government knowing better than they did what should be done. In a sense it was reasonable to say to people this is what’s happening as a result of what you are doing, what do you think of that? I think that probably also tied in to the evolution of the self-evaluation culture within Scottish education. (Director of Education, October 2010)

He described self-evaluation as one strand of thinking alongside other developments in education and society in general –interestingly, he describes local initiatives as preceding central government policy:

I think that work measuring school effectiveness that was done in Fife and other places and that whole idea of value-added took us in a different kind of culture in terms of how we thought about progress, how we thought about attainment, how we thought about achievement. And that also catered that demand for data. So, there are four five strands to it. I think it is about managing risk, it is about that move from demand and control to empowering, calling to account , I think it is about self evaluation, the development of self evaluation and the reflective professional, I think it is about the absence of that kind of certainty and the advent of joint dialogue towards progress and improvement. (October 2010)

The role of local authorities, according to the interviewee, is key in the governance of schools:

Discussion is coming back to the role of the local authority almost as the voice of the child. That in a system that is flexible, that is highly devolved then there needs to be a safeguard for the entitlement of the child and that safeguard can't be provided through the national mechanisms that we have on a sufficiently regular basis. So I think there's a clear understanding of the role of the local authority. (October 2010)

According to more recent documents that explicate the role and function of local authorities in school inspections, there is talk about providing 'a suitable blend of support, evaluation and challenge to schools' and also a need to 'develop effective partnership with head teachers and their senior managements teams' (Education Scotland 2007: 3). In terms of inspection of the education authorities themselves, these have stopped 'as part of Education Scotland's contributions to the national drive to reduce scrutiny of council operations and make inspections more proportionate to risk' (Education Scotland 2007: 5).

Instead, validated self evaluation is offered to local authorities, which however, is entirely voluntary. It seems that this is the basis of the development of the evolving partnership of inspectors with local authority in recent years. This involves a much closer collaboration and networking, to the extent that local authorities are not completely 'by the side' of the local schools, as was the case before: rather, local authorities play a much more mediating and brokering role as the middle-(wo)men between HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate) and the schools. To a considerable degree, then, local authorities are now at the centre of the inspection and evaluation activity in Scotland, as the diagram below illustrates:

[Diagram 1. Inserted here]

## England

Changes within the English education system which began in 1988 with the Education Reform Act (UK Parliament 1988), and continued to gain pace under the New Labour administration, have continued to increase since the Coalition Government took power in 2010. These changes, in line with a considerable reduction in the role of local government, (see Rhodes 1997), reflected increasing levels of centralisation and a weakening in Local Education Authority control of schools. New financial relations and budgeting arrangements made all schools less responsible to the local authority. Since 2010, new types of schools have been created, usually without any direct relations with the local authority. An increasing number of schools have either chosen or been coerced into Academy status, a status which implies both financial independence and a break away from Local Authority (LEAs) control and support (see Sharp 2002). Numbers of Free schools, created with central government and private grants, which are not bound by local authority admission procedures, have continued to rise encouraging pupil applications out of local catchments, depending upon the particular nature of individual schools, and challenging the definition of what constitutes a local school (DFE 2013).

LEAs have traditionally taken a leading role in the provision of education; providing resources, financial support, inspection services and school improvement support (SIP), for school staff and governors (Lowe 2002). The increased autonomy of schools is not the only reason for a diminution in LEA influence and governing power. In 2012, produced a report linking poor pupil attainment, particularly in areas of high socio-economic deprivation, with local authority performance (Paton 2012). The report was supported and framed by Ofsted's new Data View system, a sophisticated visual data tool which aims to provide parents and school governors with an instant data visualisation of attainment and achievement levels for schools and local authorities (Ofsted 2013). The report, combined with local government expenditure cuts in the context of central government retrenchment following financial crisis, has resulted in further erosion of the role of the role of local government in the governing of education in England, while also increasing central control and the powers of the inspectorate to implement central government policies (Baxter 2013).

The feeling that the day of the local [authority] school is coming to an end is not only reflected in the separation of schools from their education authorities, but also by growth of

academy federations: groups of schools joining together under a single governing body. Academy chains of schools managed by [currently non – profit making] charities have recruited, founded or taken over schools and produced a new middle tier between the school and the centre, a space that was previously occupied by the local authority. These chains are not local, they may involve schools in different parts of the country, but through their management they seek to produce a common purpose and identity. Academy chains comprising a number of schools, many of which are geographically dispersed and commercially managed and supported, are controlled by boards and executive heads whose wide ambit may mean that consideration of local contexts and cultures is impossible. These school groupings are giving rise to new structures of school governance in which local individual governing bodies with (at least theoretically) strong democratic representative structures are replaced by a single governing board whose members may be recruited for their skills and contacts rather than their capacity to democratically represent the community in which their schools are situated (see for further discussion Baxter & Wise 2013). Although individual schools in these structures often have committees comprising local parents from that particular school, they have, in many cases, been deprived of any decision making powers.

Ofsted is exercised by these changes, which are provoking new challenges for the inspection and regulation of groups of schools and schools that are not supported by LEAs. The challenge for the inspectorate is that of inspecting many schools that, as part of a chain or federation, are situated in substantially different contexts, (both culturally and socio-economically), but who share the formulation of policies and procedures (Chapman *et al.* 2011). Ofsted is also challenged by the accusation that it has become too distant from the schools it inspects; a comment often accompanied by comparison with the past practices of HMI, when schools often formed a relationship with regionally located HMI and were supported through periods of difficulty by Local Authority School Improvement Officers (Maclure 2000). The inspectorate's response to these criticisms is reflected in the implementation of a new regional structure, in which Regional Directors ~~will~~ take responsibility for the regional training and development of inspectors, relationships with schools and local media relations (Ofsted 2014). This is designed to 'put in place an organisation that is much closer to the ground and much nearer to schools,' (Mike Claddinbow, Director of Schools, Ofsted: Parliament, 2013: Q66) and 'to create a local presence' for the inspectorate (Ofsted 2014).

New school structures and the demise the Education support function of many local authorities have combined to place increasing pressure on both Ofsted and school governors to not only regulate schools but also to take a far greater role in school improvement. This pressure to aid school improvement places school governors, who are volunteers with often no background in education, in the difficult position of challenging senior leadership teams on matters pertaining to teaching and learning (see Ofsted 2012a). School governors may not be particularly well equipped to support post-inspection improvement as this head teacher explained to us:

We've got a good set of governors here; good in the sense that they are committed, but they are not professionals that can hold a head to account really. The problem is with the new framework, is that the majority of governors – well they are all volunteers, not all from professional backgrounds – they'll be driven away under this new framework 'cos they haven't the skillset or the time to do the job. You can tell by the questions that are being asked; my school improvement partner asks a damn sight better questions than governors, they don't understand it or are intimidated.

(Headteacher, March 2012)

Since the inception of Ofsted, the local context has challenged the agency in two particular areas: the first focuses upon the way in which inspection judgements consider local context, the second centres upon the impact of inspection judgements on the local school community. Attempts to contextualise inspection and to consider context and intake in inspection judgements in schools in areas of high deprivation and those in leafy suburbs have resulted in alterations to both the inspection frameworks and the algorithms within the statistical evidence-base of data used by inspectors to inform their judgements. But weighting data to 'level the playing field' in socio-economic terms has recently become politically difficult. This is largely due to the UK coalition government's opposition to deprivation as an explanatory factor in low pupil attainment, and this perspective is supported by case studies of schools in areas of high deprivation in which pupil attainment is high (see for example Matthews 2009). Contextual value added data has become discredited in some quarters, viewed as an excuse for the poor performance of schools in deprived areas (Paton 2012), and is no longer used within inspection judgements (Ray 2006). The current inspection framework (Ofsted 2012b), does encourage inspectors to 'tell the story of the school', however the exclusion of consideration of contextual value added statistical data does create challenges for inspectors and school leaders alike. As one inspector told us:

It's too simple to say 12 Outstanding Schools [Mathews 2009] is an inspiration because you can't just transplant that into another school: they have quite different challenges: maybe staffing issues. I have worked a lot in London schools, they have high deprivation; but then coastal schools have a different type of deprivation. And you have to understand. ...transient communities; village deprivation; urban deprivation; language skills. (Lead Inspector, June 2011)

As in Scotland and Sweden, inspection has traditionally exerted a profound effect on local communities (see for example Ferguson *et al.*, 2000; Ozga 2005; Rönnerberg *et al.* 2012). Relationships between school and local community may have been established over many years and a change in judgement can have a devastating effect, not only on parental perceptions and confidence in the school, but also on socio-economic factors within the local area – for example house prices (Charles 2009). As one head teacher reports:

I wouldn't say that it will have an impact on morale in the school, I think it goes much further than that in terms of the impact it will have on school community. Although we may not be in that category – smack bang in the middle of good – the community feel the drive. So much that we have gone to 330 [pupils] in year 7. Then we get a title that says 'requires improvement'-why would you want to go to a school that requires improvement? So immediately my school community would have a negative knock on effect. I understand the terminology. Of course we need improvement but you are damning us and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. (Headteacher, September 2012)

Recent changes to the inspection framework resulting in a far tougher regime (see chapter 4), have created tensions in local communities: a number of schools that were previously judged to be outstanding have been downgraded to 'good' in many cases due to their inability to achieve an outstanding judgement in teaching and learning, (now mandatory in order to receive an outstanding grade overall). This lead inspector told us how this impacts on the local school community:

You see the school that was outstanding, and which came down to a 2 [good], the reception there was worse. So I had the head and two governors in a meeting because they had been given an Outstanding and it was such a big thing locally: every one had celebrated, it seemed quite devastating to lose that. You see it was quite a small town in xxx and it will go into the press and it will be reported as having been an

outstanding school and is so no longer. Well it's still a good school, but people tend to forget that.

(Lead Inspector, March 2012).

In order to combat what are perceived to be increasing levels of centralised control and regulation, a number of local organisations have been set up. In one such organisation, school leaders have joined together to create a regional network, described as a strategic voice and allied to universities and local commerce in the areas. It describes itself as a powerful voice regionally and nationally, and claims that by working collaboratively and creatively... head teachers develop expertise, shape policy and drive change.

Priding itself on its 'distinctive culture', it has created a space in which schools can join together and it challenges the notion of imposed power by attempting to privilege local forms of school knowledge: knowledge created in context and based upon local rather than national needs. This creation of local knowledge founded on concerns about national education policy is also creating a space for the local interpretation of national discourses on education. One key governing discourse is that of failure, and in areas where there are high levels of socio-economic deprivation there is concern about what one head teacher termed 'a national discourse of failure' (Headteacher, March 2012), a discourse established and perpetuated by media reporting of inspections in the area, and by the changes to the framework and data used in inspection and discussed earlier. Collaboration is also evident in the Cooperative Schools Movement, which has established a number of Academies and Free schools, and also supports a number of schools nationally in a free association, which is distinct from a semi commercial chain.

Inspection in England has had to manage the quite significant developments since 2010, especially in the growth of structural variation, which may obscure the lines of management and organization of 'chains' of schools and yet inspectors have also had to develop some forms of local knowledge and relations in the growing absence of local education systems of control and knowledge gathering. The absence of old system controls following financial independence and performance responsibilities moving to schools has not meant the absence of collaboration and community in some areas. Those with strong historically-rooted identities, for example, have created a professionally organized and networked space in which schools aid each other and even resist individual inspectors (Brown 2012)

## Sweden

After the Second World War the Swedish education system was governed by central regulations decided primarily by the parliament (national curriculum, grading system) and government (more specific rules and regulations). This was supervised by the national authority, the National Education Board, which also administered national tests, checked content in textbooks, and so on. Teachers were also employed by the state and salaries negotiated accordingly. Municipalities supplied school premises with state subsidies and administered admissions and regulated the catchment areas for pupils. The term municipalities in Sweden denotes a political as well as geographical unit, that raises local taxes and also provides for elderly and social care, education, leisure and cultural infrastructure and events, along with local material infrastructure. Municipalities have representative local parliaments and political boards responsible for different policy areas, including education.

School inspection was organized through the National Board of Education and the regional state organization i.e. the counties and their locally recruited boards (Nilsson 2011). County inspectors performed hands-on-inspections and the distance between inspector and inspected was short. A rather personal relation to the schools was developed, presumably based on the inspectors' expertise and advice and the often 'high expectations from teachers and heads, particularly in remote areas where the staff looked forward to interesting discussions about pedagogy and school policy' (Nilsson 2011: 3).

From the middle of the 1970s, the national centralised doctrine of governing by rules and regulations was incrementally dissolving into what has been characterised as one of the most decentralised school systems globally. This move was introduced by the Liberal government in office at the time and continued by a Social Democratic one three years later. A regionally organised national school inspection worked with school development support with municipalities and schools. At the beginning of the 1990s and spurred by the economic crises, there were increasing criticisms of an expanding welfare state and a rigid central governance insensitive to local variety and needs developed. In the middle of the 1970s the economic allocation system was altered giving more discretion to the school boards in the municipalities (Lundgren 2004).

A new National curriculum was decided in 1980 emphasising professional autonomy and responsibility by reducing some of the detailed regulation. The trend of decentralising

responsibilities for economy, organisation, leadership and teaching to a larger extent to municipalities, schools, head teachers and teachers continued (Segerholm 2009). In the elections in 1991 the Social Democrats were defeated again and a Conservative, Liberal, Centre and Christian Democratic coalition took office, but decentralisation efforts were strengthened. A new goal-oriented national curriculum that handed over responsibility to the schools to decide how to reach the goals was implemented as was a new criterion-related grading system, along with a new economic allocation system where lump sums were allocated to the municipalities for them to decide on formulas for distribution. Also, the national authority was closed and a new National Agency for Education (NAE) was created with a mission to support school development, ~~and~~ to evaluate and supervise education nationwide, and safeguard the principle of equivalence. Municipalities and schools were to continue to be responsible for local plans, setting local goals and adapting national curriculum goals to into more context-specific ones. The regionally organised school inspection was terminated leaving responsibility for evaluating and assessing schools to the municipalities (i.e. the school boards) and to the head teachers by specifying this responsibility in the national curriculum. The local at this time was clearly hierarchical, geographically and politically based on local parliamentary democracy, and included several levels of responsible functions and actors, specified in the Education Act and Ordinance, in the national curriculum, and in other statutes.

But since 1992, and the so called 'independent schools reform', the local has changed character. Independent schools were allowed and have increasingly been organised and owned by private companies, corporate groups and international venture capitalists shifting the idea of responsibility and accountability to also include company boards as the responsible owners of these schools. Democratic transparency and processes do not exist for many of the independent schools. Instead company boards are scrutinised through other channels such as annual economic reports to shareholders. During the period from the beginning of the 1990s to the time of writing, several new reforms have been launched both by the Social Democratic government in office from autumn 1994 to autumn 2006, but with increased velocity under the Conservative, Liberal, Centre and Christian Democratic coalition. Simultaneously severe criticisms have been voiced about the failing results in national tests like the PISA, the most recent in autumn 2013. Professional responsibility was supposed to have developed during the period of decentralised responsibility for local development, evaluation and assessment, teachers' employment, and so on that was noted

earlier. However criticism was now also raised concerning the lack of national control, the inability of the municipalities to shoulder the control and evaluation responsibilities, and concerning the general demise of Swedish (particularly compulsory) schooling (Rönnerberg 2012a, b).

A new national school inspection was installed in 2003, organised by the NAE, and in 2008 the latest revision of national authorities took place, commissioning school inspections to a new agency, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (SSI, Skolinspektionen). The independent schools organised in company chains are dispersed throughout the country, but often have a central board as the legally responsible provider, leading to a sense of the local as more attached to a private enterprise organisation than to a geographical and political unit. In turn this has also led the Inspectorate to start organising their inspections (i.e. regular supervisions) so that all schools within a company or a corporate group are inspected as a group (The Swedish Schools Inspectorate no date). Previously independent schools inspections were organised as part of the inspections of public schools where the basis for the inspections were the municipalities. For both public and independent schools the provider (principal organizer) is also inspected, not only the individual schools. The increase in independent schools means that there is a quasi-market in municipalities of some size. Small rural municipalities have neither the economic capacity nor the population required for such a market to function, and in some there is no political interest in such a development. Local politicians have therefore tried to block the establishment of independent schools. In areas where these market conditions occur, there are two logics of the local: one more politically and hierarchically-oriented and based on the organisation of a municipality, one more market, consumer and horizontally-oriented, based on the organisation of independent schools and their ownership. For independent schools there is also a national organisation, (Friskolornas Riksförbund, the Swedish Association of Independent Schools) working to voice their common interest vis-à-vis the state and other public providers (most often the municipalities). Likewise, public providers are nationally organised in Sveriges kommuner och landsting (the Swedish Association for Local Authorities and Regions). It is also common for municipalities to organise in networks where civil servants/central administrative officers and politicians meet and discuss and find joint solutions to common problems for example secondary education provision.

School inspection, and in the Swedish case we mean regular supervision, as it is now performed, takes as its starting point the Education Act and Ordinance and other statutes.

These documents clearly point out certain responsibilities for specific functions. Providers are by law obliged to take general responsibility and account for their obligation that the education they provide follows the national requirements. Head teachers are obliged to take responsibility and account for certain school areas specified for example in the recent national curriculum. School inspection controls compliance with these obligations and in so doing also stresses local hierarchy, strengthening both the local education authority (the municipal school board) and the power of the head teachers (Novak 2013, 43-45). In one of the small rural municipalities the chairman of the education board explained how they assume control by attending more seriously to what is said in the inspection reports and:

...the director of education has meetings with the head teachers, so they have a network where it is further disseminated, and I have actually done some samples and asked them (the head teachers) if the inspection report has been presented in one of our schools so that the school has taken part of that information. (December, 2011)

The newly implemented organisation of inspection of companies and corporate groups as providers of education in independent schools also points to the inspectorate as an active co-creator of the parallel notion of the local as geographically dispersed and horizontal. Such providers organise their work based on a market logic, and often develop a company-specific pedagogy, code of conduct, and other branding activities. From 2011 and the new Education Act (Ministry of Education and Research, 2010) the SSI can use sanctions like fines, or in severe cases decide that a school has to shut down. This means that pupils enrolled in such schools have to move to other schools. The geographically local, or the particular school as the sense of the local for the pupils, is becoming unstable, and can change, both geographically and socially. Pupils with particular interests may choose a school with a high profile in music, for example, concentrating pupils of particular social strata in those schools. Schools are nowadays occasionally ~~also~~ housed in buildings originally made for other activities, examples being office buildings. Without further notice independent schools have also shut down due to bankruptcy. Pupils are left to accept hasty, unplanned placements at some public school, since it is ultimately the final responsibility of the municipality to provide schooling.

Since municipalities in Sweden are of very different size and consequently have different resources, school inspection may also expand the sense of the local geographically, as was

the case in one small rural municipality where village schools were shut down by the municipal school board after the inspection:

Director of education: I do not think that the school organisation is good. In my latest investigation in 2009, I suggested that the small village schools should be closed. With the increased stress in the statutes on hiring teachers with particular competence, in 2015 we have to have certified teachers in all units and that will put an enormous strain...

Inspector: Your own investigation has actually shown this! Why are they still here then, in 2011?

Director: Because the politicians listened at the opinions of the voters. And it is not always parents, because some of them think that the schools are too small – some have already moved their children to larger schools. (Observation notes from the inspectors' interview with the director of Education, September, 2011)

Even though it may not be possible to develop a school market in small municipalities, market mechanisms may enter the local in other ways as a consequence of inspection. The education board and municipal administration do, for example, use private consultants to help remedy deficiencies the inspection decisions identify:

But in fact, the investigators did use, it was the XX consultant that did this investigation, the latest in a number of four. And they have used the school inspection decision to a high degree to describe the status of our schools (as a basis for their recommendations, author's clarification). (Director of Education, April 2012)

The local as defined by a school building close by is no longer the only possibility. The local is not stable but is expanding as pupils now navigate in a market based on school choice. School inspection operates in a governing landscape where ~~their~~ inspections legitimise and also support a movement where the local is no longer the closest school, but extends to other geographical areas, or pedagogical philosophies where schools can be situated far away and offer particular programmes and profiles, be they operated by municipalities or corporate groups. In the oscillating process over time between central and decentralized governing where the state was the director and the municipalities the orchestra, all following a partly internationally scripted score (Jacobsson 2010), but the shifts seem to have increased in velocity. As late as 1997, a public investigation still stressed the need for a continuation of

the decentralization process (SOU 1997:121) started in the 1980s. Already in 2003, the state reinstated school inspection, a rather radical change in the relations between the local and the central.

### Concluding Points

As the school has been re-imagined, in diverse ways, and its political and administrative contexts redesigned, the purpose and practices of inspection have been reworked to promote the changed and changing situations schools now find themselves in. Inspection deals with the immediate present and the forecasted future, and to do this, inspection has to figuratively remove the school from its place. The place is saturated with a past that impedes change. Governing the school requires the inspector, with a range of templates and tools, to move the school into a new space, in which the local is replaced by centralized agencies, or commercial command and influence, by new local responsibilities, and even by local networks of professionals.

The idea that schools are just more or less mobile sites of provision and performance is a view which has to constantly exclude the evidence of years in which schools have acted as places of ‘civic engagement’ (Pollitt 2012: 200). Inspection has been reworked to deal with the former view in the main [and not uniformly in our studies] but the consequences of this disembedding are not clear. For example, is it clear today when an inspector is a state employee, a public servant or hired employee of a contracted company? What new views of teachers and schools are now embedded in system discourses? And how do inspectors see themselves and how are they seen by these unitised schools and their performing teachers?

At the time of writing, governing models in our three countries view the school and its place differently. Each model contains within it a view of the school and its relations and purposes. In Scotland, a relation between inspectors and schools built over the last decade focuses on school self-evaluation, and this has been developed further by a move to change the inspection role, with the opportunity to move into development. While the demand on the school to improve is as powerful as elsewhere, the building blocks of the local are still in place. They are affected by the political context, by democratic influence, shifts in accountability mechanisms and data, but a trust relation (or a discourse of trust) has left the school in place. The inspectors mediate between the centre, the local authority and the school. Sweden emerged from a system that had resembled Scotland’s but the shocks of neo-liberalism, reflected in the creation of a private sector inside public education, a period of

deregulation and decentralisation, partial and abrupt withdrawals of support, and a shift of direction, have led to a heightened focus on the role of inspectors and their reports. The school may still be local but the pupils may be on the move, attracted by new choices and sites. ~~It~~ England is an outlier in its governing model. It manages schools at a distance, creates new schools and supports private companies, and relies on tight regulation, punitive actions and choreographed inspection. Although instances of consultation can be found, there is much more likelihood of identifying opportunistic actions and managerial decision-making. ~~It~~ ~~is~~ Commerce and not democracy shapes the system. The local still exists for communities and more rarely for local authorities, but the school is in a fluid position; pupils have to be attracted and held; inspection has to be managed and gradings/rankings maintained or improved; companies may place them in an entirely new relation, not bound by topographical relations; communication may be direct from the centre.

The relation between inspection and the local is one of tension, as it reflects its governing model. Professionals have to be motivated and also disciplined, either by self-motivation or fear. They have to be effective and efficient, and yet also trust the system they are in. Performance indicators have to improve and also have the confidence of the professional and the public. The problem for inspection, which is met differently in our countries, is that they both represent and have to solve these tensions, and leave the school in place and while changing it (Mulgan 2012).

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