

When school inspection doesn't deliver:

Highlights from the CAG audit of the Secondary Schools Inspection Programme in Tanzania



1. Introduction

School inspection is an essential instrument of the government, and in particular of the Ministry of Education, which can use it to ensure that performance in schools is improving. Its impact, however, depends on how it is done, and whether the results are used as a tool to drive improvement of school performance. If inspections are not done effectively, if communication and feedback is lacking, if there is no follow up on recommendations, and if there is no way of assessing whether inspections deliver or not, then school inspections can be reduced to a waste of useful public resources and time.

Prompted by persistent massive failure rates among secondary students, especially in vital science and mathematics subjects, the National Audit Office of Tanzania recently (in 2008) conducted a performance audit of the Secondary Schools inspection program¹. The audit, which focused on inspection activities conducted between 2004 and 2006, aimed at assessing whether the school inspectorate programme appropriately fulfils its mission to safeguard good quality of training, and whether it addresses the problem of poorly performing students in secondary schools.

This brief presents the highlights from the audit. It shows that the school inspectorate programme is not functioning properly and therefore fails to safeguard quality of instruction and its improvement by:

- Failing to prioritise the issues of poor performance of students in the inspection cycle,
- Not effectively communicating and following up on implementation of recommendations,
- Failing to monitor the effectiveness of school inspections

The audit therefore recommends that:

¹ The full report can be accessed from www.nao.go.tz



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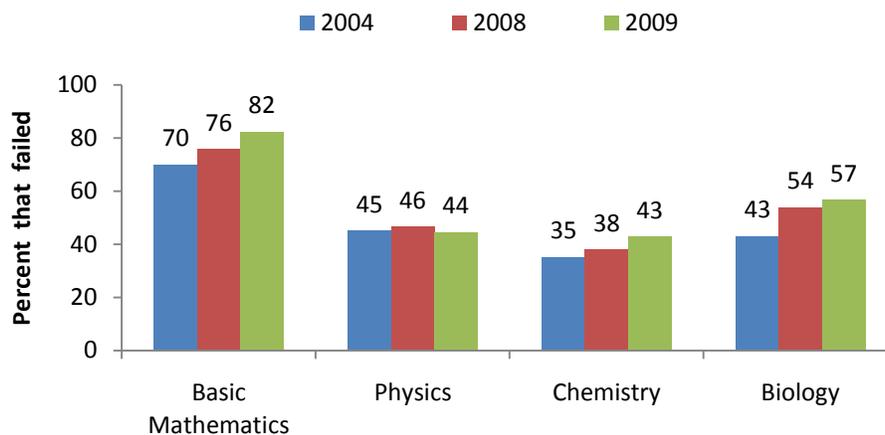
- Schools' and students' performance issues are made a central part of the school inspections;
- inspection results and recommendations are communicated more effectively and widely, including to parents and the general public;
- the inspectorate department in the MOEVT is well equipped and staffed to undertake its mandate, and,
- The MOEVT establishes a mechanism to monitor effectiveness of the school inspection programmes.

2. Where are the shortfalls?

(i) More students are failing in maths and science subjects despite inspections

The Tanzanian education system is facing a major challenge in ensuring quality education to create a competent human resource base. This can be seen from the poor performance of students in examinations, and especially in mathematics and science subjects. According to the Performance Audit of the School inspectorate Programme by the CAG, 70 percent of students who sat for their Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) in 2004 failed the mathematics test. A significant number of failures were also present in other science subjects (**Figure 1**). Such failures represent a loss both for individual students, whose ability to continue with higher education is compromised, and for the nation, whose ability to achieve its developmental goals is negatively affected (both directly and indirectly).

Figure 1: Percent of students who failed mathematics and science subjects



Source of data: 2004 results by subject: CAG performance Audit of Secondary Schools' Inspectorate Programme, 2008; 2008-2009 results by Subject: National Examination Council of Tanzania, Examination Results Statistics

Although school inspections are done every year, recent statistics released by the National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA) shows that the trend of massive failures is in actual fact getting worse by the day. In 2009 about 82 percent of students who sat for CSEE failed in mathematics; this is 12 percent

higher than the proportion of failures five years ago. More students also failed in 2009 in other science subjects. This trend suggests that it cannot be taken for granted that just doing inspection will lead to better performance from schools and students. The CAG shows that the way inspections are done, what is covered in the inspections, how the inspection results are communicated, and how implementation is followed up and evaluated is equally important. However, there are gaps in all these areas, which may be contributing to the negative trend in pass rates.

(ii) Not all schools are inspected every year as required by regulation

School inspections are done to monitor the delivery of education and to determine whether or not schools adhere to the stipulated curriculum and standards set in order to safeguard quality. There are three kinds of inspections that may be undertaken:

- Whole school inspection: covering all aspects of schools as places of learning based on the school development plan;
- Special inspection: covering a specific problematic aspects, as for example when there are allegations of irregularities in management of resources, misconduct in the schools, or persistent poor performance; and,
- Follow up inspection: done after a whole or special inspection to check what has changed

Whole school inspections are supposed to be done once every year. However, according to the School Inspectorate department in the MOEVT, due to inadequate personnel, lack of transport, office space, equipment and housing, a school is inspected about once in every two years. Accordingly, as table 1 shows, with the exception of 2007/08, very few inspections have been done each year since 2004/05 . In 2008/09 only 9 percent of the existing schools were inspected.

Table 1: Secondary School Inspections 2004/05-2008/09

Year	Existing Schools	Inspected Schools	
		Number	Percent
2004/05	1734	406	23
2005/06	2063	785	38
2006/07	2567	678	26
2007/08	3485	1880	54
2008/09	3798	346	9

Source of data: 2004/05-2006/07 CAG Performance Audit of Secondary School Inspectorate Programme, 2008; 2007/08-2008/09: MOEVT Budget Speeches

(iii) The issue of poor performance of students in vital subjects is not given high priority in planning

The handbook for inspectors establishes how the School Inspectorate should go about planning its inspections and what aspects need to be covered during inspections. According to the handbook, planning ought to set priorities with reference to, for instance, schools with poor performance in final examinations, schools that have not been inspected for a long time, accessibility, inspection requests, existing problems, convenient seasons (as far as geographical location is concerned), examinations, public holidays and other events.

Despite mentioning the importance of covering schools with poor performance in final examinations, the audit finds limited evidence to indicate that this issue is given the importance it deserves both in the handbook and in the planning documents. Based on a review of 148 items that the inspection handbook requires to be covered in the inspections, the audit shows that there aren't any that specifically target poor performance of students, and that the issue is only covered indirectly through 16 items out of the 148 that the handbook requires to be inspected.

Table 2: Issues specifically related to poor performing students in the handbook for school inspection.

Items	Number of issues	Percentage of issues
Specifically targeting issue related to poor performing students	0	0
Items indirectly linked to issues related to poor performing students	16	11
Items not linked to issues related to poor performing students	132	89
Total number of items that the inspectors need to go through during inspection	148	100

Source of data: CAG performance Audit of Secondary Schools' Inspectorate Programme, 2008

Scrutiny of other planning documents by the audit team reveals further that there is limited indication that clear priorities are set in the inspection plans as a whole to genuinely address the problem of poorly performing schools and students in any subject. In most cases operational plans do not show if pedagogical and performance issues will be covered in the school inspections, but only focus instead on the number of schools to be inspected. The audit notes that this shortcoming is evident at all levels (Central and Zonal as well as district) and affects all kinds of inspections (whole, follow up and special school inspections).

(iv) Inspections do not sufficiently address the problem of poor performing students

The effect of this insufficiency in the handbook for inspection is mirrored in the actual conduct of whole as well as special school inspections. For example, based on scrutiny of a sample of 110 whole school inspections carried out between 2004 and 2006, the audit found that none of the reports comprehensively examined the problem of drop outs, pedagogical (instruction) performance and students' performance, and very few mentioned these issues at all. The audit notes for instance that only 6% of the inspections said something about the need for additional training and only 19 percent said something about instruction performance (Table 3).

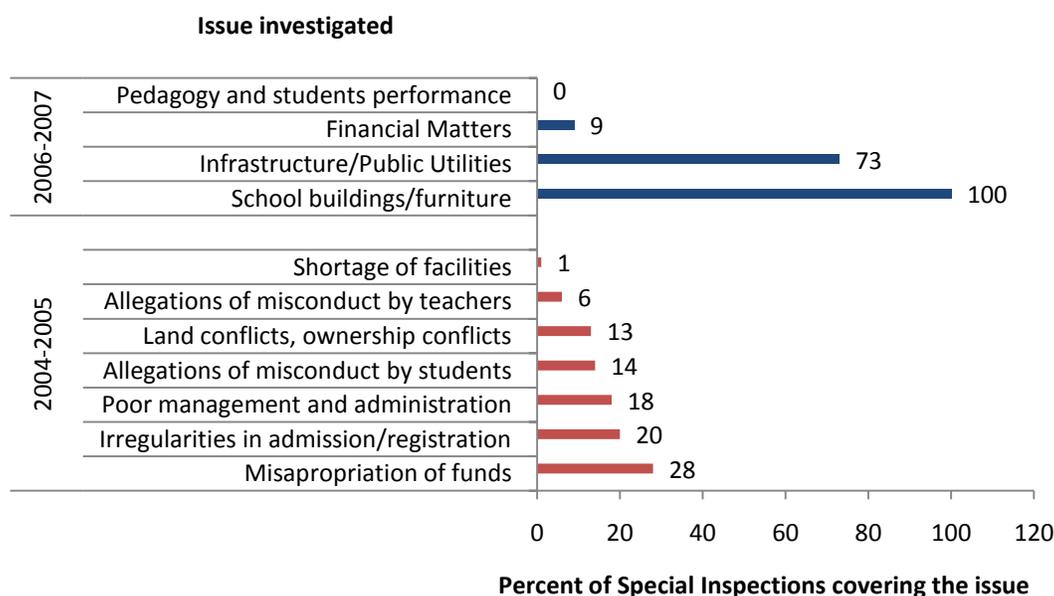
Table 3: The extent to which vital aspects of poor performing students are targeted in whole school inspections (% of inspections covering the issue)

	Comprehensively examined	Examined to some extent	Mentioned	Not highlighted at all
Combating drop outs	0	2	3	95
Pedagogical (instruction) performance	0	19	2	79
additional training	0	6	1	93
Students' performance	0	15	11	74

Source of data: CAG Performance Audit of Secondary Schools' Inspectorate Programme, 2008

The audit finds this limitation in special and follow up inspections carried out between 2004 and 2007 as well. Between 2004 and 2005, the department undertook 428 special inspections and about 2600 more investigations were carried out between 2006 and 2007. None of the special inspections that were done between 2004 and 2005 included the issue of poor performance of students as a focus of investigation. Similarly, examination of a sample of 91 inspection reports from the investigations carried out between 2006 and 2007 did not provide any evidence indicating that learning and students' poor performance featured as a subject of the special investigations.

Figure 2: Issues Covered by special Investigations 2004-2007



It appears that the large number of special investigations during this time was prompted by allegations of irregularities in use of resources, need to check construction of buildings and related utilities, and allegations of misconduct by teachers and/or students.

(v) Information from the inspections is not effectively communicated

School inspections generate important information about general and situation-specific challenges affecting instruction and effective learning in schools. How this information is communicated and used as a tool for change and development is therefore very crucial. According to the audit of the inspectorate programme, the inspectorate is not restricted from going public with its findings. In fact, the policy favours publicity.

Based on this fact, it would be expected that the inspectorate would communicate its findings from the investigations not only to government officials² but also to head teachers of the inspected schools, school boards and to parents through the boards. The information should also be made available to the public through print media, for example booklets, and electronically, for example through the MOEVT web page.

The audit however finds that although the inspection reports are distributed to Government representatives as well as local authorities and stakeholders, the way it is done does not promote efficient and effective communication and use of the results of the inspection. For example:

- There is no routine of sending the school inspection's reports to the administrative district level,
- Whereas the inspectorate is required to keep record of signed minutes concerning discussions done with school management, such minutes could not be produced to the auditors to show that this actually happens.
- There is limited transparency: the information concerning audits is not published implying that it is not accessible to the media and the general public. And,
- No evaluations are conducted to inform on whether and to what extent information from school inspectorates is appropriately used and its aims achieved.

(vi) Recommendations in the school inspection reports are not appropriately addressed

School inspections ought to support and promote good performance among schools and students. For this to happen, they are expected to provide head teachers and or school management with useful and practical recommendations that can be used to drive change. However, the audit finds, from scrutiny of the kind of advice issued to school management, that most of the recommendations do not meet this criteria and hence may not be useful to school administrations in supporting better performance. Some of the problems noted in the recommendations are that:

- Very few recommendations targeted the issue of poorly performing students, how to address dropout rates, and how to improve learning and instruction and/or training gaps in the schools

² Chief inspection officer; permanent secretary in the MOEVT; local authorities responsible for the schools (District administrative officer, and district education officers and regional administrative secretariats)

- The advice given tends to be generic from school to school and repetitive over time in a rather routine manner without showing arguments to back up such recommendations.
- In some cases recommendations from inspections are often unrealistic and or require additional resources that may not be possible for school administrations to raise

The Audit notes further that in most cases the recommendations are in practice aimed at the Ministry of Education even if this is not clearly stated, as they go beyond capacity of school administrations to deliver. For example, in nearly 70 percent of the inspections, the schools were advised to get more teachers; in 50 percent there was advice to ensure availability of more books; and in 65 percent there was advice to construct or renovate school buildings.

(vii) A mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of inspections does not exist

The School Inspectorate needs to know if and to what extent its efforts and recommendations have contributed to its objective of facilitating good performance in schools. School inspections have therefore to be monitored and evaluated as a part and parcel of the learning process about what works or doesn't and for improvement of future inspections. Although some form of follow up appear to be taking place, the audit finds that the kind of activities that are involved do not in any way constitute genuine evaluations.

There is as a consequence limited evidence to indicate that the recommendations provided by the School Inspectorate are actually implemented, and if so, what their impact might be. The audit team notes for instance that they could not find any compilations of School Inspectorate's recommendations and indications of whether they have been implemented, nor was the inspectorate able to provide the National Audit Office with more comprehensive evaluations of:

- Stakeholders' assessments of the recommendations provided, and
- Impacts of actions taken

3. Conclusion and recommendations

The Audit of the Inspectorate Programme for Secondary Schools shows that there are several shortfalls that limit its ability to effectively safeguard the quality of learning and performance in schools. Specifically, the audit shows that:

- The issue of poor performing students is not sufficiently prioritised in the handbooks, school inspectorate plans and in inspection activities;
- Recommendations are often not appropriately targeted to the relevant individuals and are too costly to implement, hence unrealistic;
- The communication and feedback mechanism is not functioning effectively

- Concealment of inspection reports from public and media scrutiny means that the general public's opinion and contribution in driving positive change is not solicited; and,
- Absence of an effective mechanism to monitor effectiveness of the inspections means that not much learning is taking place.

All this implies that the ability of the School Inspectorate in assisting the government's work in developing policies and measures to address students' poor performance is limited. But this can be addressed. The audit thus recommends for the School Inspectorate to start working on correcting the identified shortfalls, and for the MoEVT to ensure that the Inspectorate is well staffed and equipped to carry out its mandate effectively.

Reference

URT (2008), A Performance Audit Report on School Inspection Programme for Secondary Schools in Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, National Audit Office of Tanzania

URT (2007, 2008), Budget Speech of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training