

As you will be aware from recent correspondence from Education Scotland, HMIE is inviting schools to opt in to 'recovery visits' that they plan to undertake between now and the end of the academic year.

EIS lobbying on behalf of members

The EIS lobbied against the earlier decision to resume scrutiny activity and welcomed the change of tack announced early in December 2021.

We have since stressed to Education Scotland that the visits must be supportive; sensitive to the strain that schools continue to be under; sensitive to the wellbeing impact of the pandemic on staff, including senior leaders; and aimed at identifying what further resources schools require to continue education recovery.

The EIS also successfully argued that visits should be on an opt-in basis, with schools inviting HMIE staff to visit them if suitable, rather than this being an imposition.

We have been clear, also, that the visits must lead to additional resource being made available to schools for education recovery.

Purpose of the visits

The stated purpose of the recovery visits is to 'support the education system during the pandemic' through:

- hearing from schools/settings about their current priorities for recovery or improvement
- learning what is working well, the challenges faced and solutions found
- identifying and sharing examples of effective practice
- identifying where further support would be helpful to aid education recovery.

The visits will also feature discussion of approaches to safeguarding in the current context.

Format of the visits

Education Scotland has indicated that they plan for the recovery visits to:

- be hybrid in nature- a combination of online and in-person meetings and discussion
- take place over two days within a week
- be co-constructed with headteachers and their teams
- facilitate professional discussion about school priorities as reflected in current recovery/improvement plans
- involve a small number of observations of learning activities, by agreement

- be followed up with a note from ES to inform ongoing recovery/improvement progress.

The visits **will not:**

- require the creation/ submission of documentation in advance- **with this in mind, there should be no additional workload for any staff member**
- evaluate any quality indicators
- receive any gradings
- involve publication of the report arising from the visit.

Opting in

The EIS advises that in considering the correspondence from Education Scotland towards reaching a decision as to whether to take part in recovery visits, **that HT and DHT members engage in collegiate dialogue with the EIS Rep and staff in the school**, to ascertain whether:

1. there is capacity to support such a visit in terms of current staffing levels and staff wellbeing
2. the Working Time Agreement could support such a visit
3. health and safety would be compromised (a risk assessment should determine this)
4. it is in the overall interests of the school to invite HMIE staff to visit.

If following such collegiate discussion, it is decided that such a visit could go ahead and would be beneficial to the school, then the Headteacher should discuss this with the local authority, with a view to enlisting the support of centre staff around the visit.

The EIS would advise that schools only participate in recovery visits with the full support of their local authority throughout the process.

Co-creating the visits

In the event that a school's invitation to HMIE for a recovery visit is accepted, it will be important for HT and DHT members to involve school staff through collegiate discussion in any co-creation of the shape of the visits.

With regards to HMIE's wish to join a small number of learning activities, how this might be accommodated within a school visit should be with the agreement of individual class teachers following collegiate discussion.

Health and Safety Considerations

The EIS would expect that any planned Education Scotland visit to a school or other setting will be subject to a risk assessment, with HMIE staff acting in full

accordance with the outcomes of any risk assessments either for the whole establishment or for individual staff members or learners who have bespoke risk assessments in place.

This could mean, for example, that it might not be possible for HMIE staff to visit certain classrooms where ventilation issues would prevent it, or that face coverings would require to be worn where individual staff members and/or young people have particular vulnerabilities.

The EIS would also expect that Education Scotland staff in visiting any establishment would contribute to efforts towards supporting the mental health and wellbeing of staff, this being a stated priority within all Scottish Government and Education Scotland recovery guidance.

EIS monitoring of recovery visits

As would usually happen with HMIE inspections, the EIS will seek feedback from School Reps on recovery visits, with a view to feeding back any issues to Education Scotland.

In the meantime, if HT members are concerned in any way about engagements with Education Scotland and/ or the local authority and have been unable to resolve these through discussion, the matter should be raised with the School Rep and/or the Local Association Secretary as appropriate.