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Learning education policy and inspection. Two Swedish case narratives

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Abstract

Throughout Europe and with the support of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI), school inspection has become one of the more visible means to govern education (Lawn & Grek 2012). This education and inspection policy is mediated, brokered, translated and learned through networked activities where the global/European meet the national/local, giving national and local ‘uptake’ a variety of characteristics (Grek & Ozga 2012, Sassen 2007). In this paper we explore the local features of this ‘uptake’ as processes of policy learning in the interaction between schools and inspectors. Drawing theoretically on Jacobsson’s notion of governing as increasingly done through meditative activities (Jacobsson 2006, 2010), we suggest that school actors learn education policy in the inspection process. Based on a rich and diverse material of observations of inspection visits, interviews with teachers, head teachers and inspectors, and school documents, inspection reports and decisions, we portray how governing education is done through inspection processes in two Swedish schools. The case narratives underscore the importance of local context in these governing and learning processes.

In a policy landscape characterised and highly influenced by international tests like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), deregulation, a governing doctrine based on governing by objectives and outcomes, and management principles brought from the private sector, inspection has become one of the more visible means to govern education (Lawn & Grek 2012). This is particularly visible in Europe where the organisation the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) in the last decades has developed and now support, disseminate and organise learning opportunities like workshops for over 30 school inspectorates in Europe. Education and inspection policy and practice is brokered, mediated, translated and learned through networks of administrators, policy makers, researchers and experts (Lawn & Lingard 2002) where the global/European meet the national/local, giving national and local ‘uptake’ a variety of forms (Grek & Ozga 2013, Sassen 2007).

In the bilateral research project ‘Governing by Inspection: school inspection and education governance in Sweden, England and Scotland’¹ we study the governing of education, policy learning, inspection practice and influence in comprehensive education in the three systems. In this paper we explore the ‘uptake’ or policy learning process in the interaction between two schools and two teams of inspectors. We argue that inspection is now an important part of how education governing is done, and that education policy partly is learned through inspection and the ways inspection influences local policy and practice. Our overarching research question is: How does inspection govern education? In this paper we concentrate on the narrower questions:

- What is learned through the inspection processes?
- What are the reactions to the inspection processes?
- How does this kind of policy learning come about?

¹ This paper draws on data from three projects. The authors acknowledge support from The Swedish Research Council, financing the two projects *Governing by Inspection* (no 2009-5770, Segerholm, Forsberg, Lindgren, Rönnberg) also financed by the *Economic and Social Research Council* (ESRC) in the UK, and *Swedish national school inspections: Introducing centralized instruments for governing in a decentralised context* (no 2007-3579, Rönnberg). The authors further acknowledges Umeå University for financing the project *Inspecting the ‘Market’: Education at the Intersection of Marketisation and Central State Control* (no 223-514-09, Rönnberg, Lindgren)

In our inquiry we emphasise the actions, emotions and views of the school actors in the inspection process, which is a bit akin to the ‘enactment’ approach taken by Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) where they show how ‘schools “do” policy, specifically how policies become “live” and get enacted (or not) in schools.’ (Ball, Maguire & Braun 2012, 1).

In the following we describe our theoretical approach and methodological considerations, then move over to a short presentation of the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (SSI) and the particular inspection processes that we have studied: regular inspection. In two case narratives portraying the inspection processes in two Swedish schools we show what policy is learned and how this is done, and finally discuss our findings and the importance of local context in helping us understand education governing through inspection processes.

Theoretical approach

In this paper we explore education governing as policy learning through school inspection in local contexts. Presently we notice governing tensions in a policy landscape where deregulation, decentralization, governing by objectives and outcomes, pressure on schools and nations of high attainment, and an obsession with different kinds of performance measures (Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm & Simloa 2011). These tensions are visible in different combinations of formal regulations and more persuasive activities that change over time and national and local context (ibid.). Furthermore we understand governing as a processes where several means are applied and used to achieve certain ends (policy), but simultaneously also processes where several instances are involved in brokering, mediating, negotiating, translating, teaching and learning, and acting policy. One way to capture these fluid, complex processes of contemporary governing in a global/European context has been presented by Jacobsson (2006, 2010). His understanding, concepts and interest are directed to nation states and their adaption and responses to external pressures. We nonetheless find it fruitful to work with this theoretical approach albeit aware that we use it on a different setting.

As we understand Jacobsson (2006, 2010) processes of governing are reciprocal or dialectical, and what comes out of governing efforts is context dependent and situational involving several layers and actors in organizations. In the education sector there are attempts to govern or steer in certain directions by governments and organizations, and there are actions in schools and local school organizations (in Sweden municipalities or organisations/companies that run independent schools) that respond, adapt and react to these attempts. However there are also efforts to influence national and local decision makers as well as acts of indifference, resistance and/or innovation. In this paper we have concentrated on inspection influence on the schools. We also recognise that inspectors learn and are influenced by these processes, for example shown in some of the constant changes in the formal inspection procedures. Jacobsson writes about three types of governance activities, through which policy, intentions and change is to come about. These are: regulative activities, inquisitive activities and meditative activities (Jacobsson 2010, 4-6).

Regulative activities are what ‘...we traditionally think of as rule-making, that is, obligatory rules and penalties for their violation.’ (Jacobsson 2010, 4). In our study this incorporates the Education Act and other mandatory rules and regulations that apply for comprehensive education. The particular inspection process this paper concerns can be described as supervision of the fulfilment by schools and principal organizers of the requirements laid down in laws and regulations as they are interpreted by the SSI, and as such the entire process

is regulative. Inquisitive activities are activities that require schools and principal organizers ‘...to “open up” and let others examine and critically judge what they are doing’ (Jacobsson 2010, 5). An example of this in our study is the obligation for schools to respond to and send in material according to templates and lists that are developed by the SSI and ‘open up’ for inspection. Meditative activities finally, are activities that form the basis for the other two activities, but can also be an activity in itself. Meditative activities, writes Jacobsson (2010, 5-6), are about discussing, exchanging experiences, and probing into common areas of concern (ibid.), sometimes in spaces particularly set up for these purposes. Some instances of the inspections, like the feedback seminars with head teachers, local politicians and civil servants, and other responsible principal organizers/owners of independent schools may be examples of this activity in our material.

We are also interested in emotions evoked by the inspection processes since we believe that emotions matter in how the inspection is handled and in learning processes. Perryman (2007) studied the emotional influence provoked by one English inspection process by Ofsted² in one school in a deprived area and found that during a period of more or less constant and recurrent inspection activities (the school was put under ‘special measures’ when failing the in the first inspection) teachers and middle managers felt a lack of control over their professional work situation and guilt towards their families when spending so much extra time living up to the requirements (Perryman 2007, 181-182). They also felt scared when thinking of the upcoming new full inspection. Although a feeling of relief was prominent when they passed, this soon was overtaken by emotions like disappointment, anti-climax and fatigue (Perryman 2007, 184-189). We argue that emotions even negative ones, are connected to actions and reactions. Emotions displayed in inspection processes are probably related to the particular circumstances in each case, but on a more general level also a matter of what is inspected how, and what is at stake.

Methodology

To give a sense of the ‘uptake’ of education policy in inspection processes and thereby what is learned and how in schools, we decided to portray how two schools worked, acted, talked about and handled these processes. We do this by two case narratives where we also incorporate short descriptions of the local contexts, all in line with the motives for doing case study research, that is, to better understand the particular case/es by relation it to its context (Stake 1995, 2006). We have also been inspired by the approach to study education policy applied by Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012). Contrary to much work on policy and implementation that take reform intentions laid down in formal policy processes and decisions as starting points, their enquiry is based on detecting activities at schools that are directed at handling pressures and expectations, and to survive in constant change and with contradictory signals. ‘Enactments are always more than just implementation, they bring together contextual, historic and psychosocial dynamics into a relation with texts and imperatives to produce action and activities that are policy.’ (Ball, Maguire & Braun 2012, 71). We do not however claim to have collected our information or worked so close to the schools as we imagine these scholars do. But, similar to their approach and to case studies, we collected a variety of information from different sources, and pay attention to the local contexts, the kind of municipalities the schools are situated in, the character and type of the schools and catching area, to help us understand what policy is learned (by whom) and how.

² Office for Standards in Education.

The two schools were selected from our total selection of eleven schools to illustrate variation concerning both local context and conditions and different types of schools. Admittedly we also had to select schools based on the range of our data. We therefore selected schools that are quite different, situated in two different municipalities and in which we had collected information of the major part of the inspection process (until the SI 'let go' of the school).

In collecting information we made considerable efforts to cover the inspection process as far as we could in time, but also with respect to the interaction and interplay between the inspectorate/inspectors and the school actors. We performed most of the data collection during spring 2011 and follow-ups in autumn 2011 to spring 2013. It also has to be said that the SSI altered the inspection process during this time, and that it has changed also after first of July 2011 because of the new Education Act decided by the coalition government that also decided on the new inspectorate (SSI) that started to operate in autumn 2008.³

Our data for this paper consists of: inspection reports and decisions from the previous round of inspections and of the inspection described here; material sent in to the SSI by the two schools (description of their work filled out in a template developed by the SSI, a self-evaluation type of material); examples of individual student plans; individual plans for action for students with special needs; statistics from the last five years of national tests and marks where adequate⁴; attainment rates for all students in all school subjects; quality assurance reports; action plans for harassment, bullying, maltreatment and unequal treatment; other school documents showing examples of the schools' work.); SSI templates and interview guides for the inspectors and process descriptions of the inspection; interviews with the inspectors before and after the site visits and follow-ups approximately six months later; observations of the site visits; interviews with four to five teachers and staff at each school after the site visits and follow-ups by e-mail approximately six months later; interviews with head teachers after the site visits and follow-ups by phone six to eighteen months later depending of when the SSI was satisfied with the measures taken by the schools. In the interviews with the school actors we were interested in their general notions about school inspection, and more specifically how the inspection we followed was perceived, preparations for the site visit, how they felt about and reactions to the site visit, the final report and decision, as well as actions taken before, under and after the inspection process.

In the two case narratives we briefly portray each municipality and school and thereafter describe the inspection process in chronological order as well as possible. Before we do that we need to say something about the SSI and the inspection process in general to let the reader get a sense of how it is carried out.

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate⁵

Since autumn 2008 when the new inspection agency, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate started to operate, inspection activities have increased dramatically, the SSI now visiting thousands of schools annually (Skolinspektionen n.d. a). The Inspectorate is commissioned by the government to carry out: a) regular supervision of all schools and principal organizers (municipalities and operators of independent schools), and b) quality audits where a sample of schools are audited thematically, e.g. one school subject, or a particular area of interest like

³ This political process is thoroughly described and analysed by Rönnerberg (2012a, b).

⁴ Marks were at the time given in grades 8 and 9. Now marks should be given in grades 6-9.

⁵ This is a description we use with some variations, in several texts within the project.

assessment in the lower grades (Regeringen Utbildningsdepartementet 2010, 2011, Skolinspektionen n.d. b). The SSI also handles c) complaints from individuals (e.g. concerning bullying) and d) licences for independent schools. The basis for all activities are the agency's interpretations of the Education Act and Ordinance, and other national formal documents that have to be adhered to by all schools. These laws, rules and regulations are particularly important in regular supervisions (Regeringen Utbildningsdepartementet 2010, 2011, Skolinspektionen n.d. b). The Inspectorate is organized in five regional departments. Persons with a background in education (teachers, head teachers and local administrators), persons with a general competence to investigate, and persons with a background in law have been recruited as inspectors in order to get an inspectorate with mixed competences and knowledge (Skolinspektionen n.d. a, 51). More than half of the economical resources are used for regular supervision - a steady increase over the years (Skolinspektionen n.d. a, 43).

Regular supervision (henceforth called inspection) can be performed differently depending on an assessment of how the school is doing based on previous inspection results, and other documentation and information about the school, like complaints.⁶ The SSI nevertheless strongly stresses the importance of equivalence in the inspections. When we conducted our data collection three levels of inspection were used: basic, widened and extended. Resources for each inspection process were planned in advance at the SSI, meaning that it was difficult to change level should the inspectors realise at site that this was called for. The process starts with a notification that the school will be inspected (and the principal organizer), and the school is to send in an account of its work filled in a special template along with a range of other materials (see above in our description of our data). Questionnaires to all parents/custodians, students and teachers are to be administered, the responses used by the inspectors as background material before their site visit. An introductory meeting is held with the principal organizers informing them of the aim and procedure of the inspection. The inspectors, often two, occasionally three when a new is to be introduced to the work, prepare their visit by reading and discussing the materials sent in by the schools. They decide what areas to probe more in depth into from the preset manual with inspection areas and criteria. The areas at the time were: i) Attainments and results ii) Pedagogical leadership and development iii) Environment for learning, and iv) Individual pupils' rights. They also decide who is to do what during the visit although one is always assigned to lead and take main responsibility for the entire process.

Site visits can include at a minimum an interview with the head teacher (basic inspection). The most common level of inspection is the widened level where teachers, students and the head teacher are interviewed. The inspectors generally also ask to start the visit with a tour around the school sometimes carried out by a group of students. The interviews concentrate on the areas of inspection, and particularly on weak performance by the school as presented in the school's material. Classroom visits are also performed. In extended inspection interviews with the school nurse, counsellor, special needs teacher/pedagogue, parents/custodians as well as classroom observations can be carried out depending on what the inspectors find particularly problematic.

In writing the report and decision there is a process called quality assurance of the report when a lawyer at the SSI, the head of the unit and the inspectors discuss the basis for the

⁶ This description is a summary based on internal SSI materials, interviews with inspectors and responsible persons at the SSI for developing inspection processes. See also Lindgren 2013 for an elaborated study of how the inspectors handle these processes.

decision and how the report is formulated, all to make sure that the decisions are made on solid evidence and thoroughly based on their interpretation of the Education Act and other regulatory documents (for a comprehensive description and analysis of how these assessments are made see Lindgren accepted). Decisions and reports in regular supervision are made for individual schools and principal organizers focusing deviances from what is required. When all schools in a municipality are inspected, get the inspection decision, and the municipality as a whole receive the decision, the SSI organises a feedback seminar often involving responsible politicians, civil servants and head teachers. This step was not in operation in the beginning at the Inspectorate but developed during our study. Within three months a response from the schools and the principal organizer with a plan of how to comply with the SSI decisions has then to be sent to the SSI/inspectors. The SSI assesses if they can accept the response and planned actions and informs the organizer of their decision. If the plan is accepted by the SSI/inspectors, all is well until the next round of inspection. If not the Inspectorate follows-up and communicates with the school until they have delivered what is required. From the first of July 2011 the SSI may make use of penalties according to the new Education Act. Fines can be imposed, or for independent schools the license to operate may be withdrawn if the principal organizer does not correct what is wrong. Both types of penalties have been used albeit only in a few cases so far. With this description in mind we now proceed to the case narratives.

Birch school in Big East Municipality⁷

The school is situated in a village outside a middle range sized town with a history in industry but nowadays more emphasis on services. The village is primarily a sleeper town for the bigger city, but it also harbours quite a number small to medium sized businesses and the school is rather big with almost 500 students from school year six to nine. According to the director of education in the municipality, the whole area is pervaded by a lack of high expectations concerning educational success from parents and maybe also from school staff. The school has had a successful cooperation with local enterprises but in later years less. Head teacher and teachers also mentioned changes in student population such as recently an expansion to now taking care of all sixth graders in the village, an increasing share of students with other first languages than Swedish and that social problems and drug addiction has increased in the village.

During 2011 the municipal council has engaged a university department to tutor the municipal authorities and responsible politicians on their responsibility and obligations concerning running the municipality schools and also on which are the head teachers' commitments. This also included seminars about school inspection and how to understand their reports and to analyse and prioritise.

In the middle of December 2010 the SSI arranged an information meeting with the municipality representatives and head teachers from Big East. They were informed of the inspection process, preliminary schedule for school visit, requested documents to be submitted both from the secretariat and the schools and questionnaires to be distributed to students, parents and teachers. The director describes it in the interview one year later as a huge amount of documents to administer, which called for thorough logistics and time consuming work for both head teachers and clerks. *Next inspection*, he says, *we will arrange*

⁷ We use pseudonyms for the names of the schools and municipalities.

it so the clerks will do most of the gathering of documents so head teachers and teachers can focus on the school work they are intended to do.

Required documents were gathered, submitted and then scrutinised by inspectors and in May 2011 two inspectors (both former teachers) visited Birch school for two days. It was a widened inspection including interviews with head teacher, student health team, two groups of teachers and two groups of students and some quick visits into a couple of classrooms. The inspection was scheduled to start with a tour around the school but the head teacher first of all wanted to inform the inspectors of some circumstances leading to the present situation. In so doing he reveals problems the school had been facing, among other things; expansion and reorganisation because they now have to admit all the six graders in the area; a water leak that made one of the buildings impossible to use; the other head teacher on sick leave; recurring fights among some of the students and their gangs, forcing the head teacher to be in constant contact with social welfare and police. One and a half years ago there was a big fight on the schoolyard involving also former students, which called for police intervention with police dogs. This way of voluntary “open up” and letting others critically judge is according to Jacobsson (2010, 207) part of inquisitive activities and can also with Power’s (1996) terminology express the process of making things (schools) auditable (see also Ek, 2012).

In the following interview the inspectors asked questions, preferentially based on insufficiencies that they had discovered studying the schools’ document and statistics. To a great deal they focused on the low level of student performance to which the head teacher did accede; *Yes, frightening low, we are really working on trying to change this.* On the inspector question of why parents and students should choose this school, head teacher replied with the schools’ work on safety, where the slogan “small schools in the big school” imply two rather autonomous departments that students and parents above all are connected to.

All of the interviews started with the inspectors describing the inspection process comparing it with the Swedish Motor Vehicle Inspection. Next interview on the agenda were the student health team including teachers for special needs education, school nurse, welfare officer and study and careers advisor. When talking about what’s positive about the school they foremost talked about the premises, they have an indoor swimming pool, sport hall, library and nice surroundings. In this interview the autonomy between the departments in the school is given another more negative significance- a worry about equity for the students and a loss of common ambition and vision for the school, since they practice rather different pedagogical ideas. A lot of decisions have been devolved to the teams so the school leadership to a great deal has lost control over them. This group of inspectees are critical of the absence of pedagogical dialog at the school and they also are agreed on, with the inspectors, that there are a lot of areas that need bettering.

In the two interviews with teachers (six teachers in each group) the question of why one, as student and parent, should choose this school rendered different answers. For one group of teachers it was the smaller departments possibility of knowing all students and the autonomy of organisation that was argued as positive. *We can practise the pedagogy that we think is working*, as one of the teachers said. The other group mentioned both the competent and engaged teachers and also the premises like the above health team. Especially in the former groups, the criticism of lack of pedagogical leadership was heavy (somewhat paradoxical since they also expressed their appreciation of the autonomy). Lack of long-term planning and follow up, ambiguous information and routines and constant changes and reorganisations were some of the critique mentioned by both groups. This way of trying to “take the

inspection in one's own hands" has earlier been elaborated in Rönnerberg (2012) and can also be related to 'enactment' as argued by Ball et.al (2012).

Students were interviewed in two groups, six graders in one and nine graders in one. In both groups they were angry because of unjust treatment and variations in the way they are assessed and treated in the two departments. The inspectors also asked about their knowledge of goals in various subjects, discussed student influence and student safety with them.

At the end of the second day the two inspectors met the head teacher once again to give him their impressions and some notice of what will appear in the report. First of all there will be critique on the low share of students reaching the goals: *A lot to work with there!*, one of the inspectors concluded. Among other things they also pointed out that the differences in demands on students between the two departments is not acceptable, even though, as head teacher said, they were already formed when he undertook his employment. *It's a matter of leadership*, was a comment that the inspectors used a lot throughout this meeting and they also gave examples of how he could execute it. The head teacher was aware that teachers would be critical of the pedagogical leadership and also that this will appear in the inspection report.

The report was published in June after a check up by the head teacher for factual errors and a quality assurance meeting at the inspectorate. The meeting involved one lawyer; the inspector responsible for the inspection of the whole municipality and one of the inspectors who performed the inspection and they ventilated if the critique was related to the Education Act and tried also to get the wording so that it would be understandable and persuasive. The twenty-two pages long report lists twenty insufficiencies with reference to the current part of the Ed. Act or other steering document and also with motivations to why they are regarded as insufficiencies. Most of the listed problems refer to lack of head teacher responsibility and some of them also mention the teachers. The school then had three months after the report for the whole municipality is published, before they have to answer to the SSI how they are going to deal with all problems. After the municipality report, which came in September, the SSI arranged a feedback seminar in the municipality with all head teachers, local politicians and civil servants to clarify the report and discuss possible ways to deal with problems listed in the report. The chair of the local board of education expressed his respect for this SSI's way of organising their work:

When it comes to the feedback seminar I'm actually a bit impressed, they have organised the process so that they both have written the reports and also helpfully arranged group work with school leaders to work through their reports. So far they have topped my expectations.

In November the answer from the head teacher was submitted including which steps to take for each of the twenty points. Both on municipal and school level (head teacher) the inspectees express great appreciation for the way they had been able to ask advice from the inspectorate in writing their answer.

When talking about the inspection and the SSI report after the inspection the head teacher told us he think of it as a positive support for change and a possibility to push through modifications that would be tougher to present to the teachers without the SI critique. The submitted document serves as an important steering document in this work. The critique for not being a pedagogical leader will help to create possibilities to be one, and after conferring

with the school director he changes the school leadership to include one of the teachers and one of the special needs teachers in order to get more time for the pedagogical leadership. In retrospect, the positive view of the two departments as small schools in the big school is played down and he has reorganised so that the teachers from different departments meet more often to discuss assessment and teaching in each subject. The head teacher also declared a change in perspective concerning student progress and their own responsibility with the support from the whole school organisation. In this matter the school director and the chair of the municipal board for education also expressed that the SI report served as an eye-opener, concerning some schools' lack of high expectations on student performance. Another change in how they perceived things was caused by SSI's remark on the large number of special instructional groups where students with different problems are gathered (only allowed as a temporary solution). The school director puts it this way:

...it's exiting, not only this with low expectations on students' possibility to reach goals, but also that we are quite excluding in our approach in this municipality.

Besides these changes in perspective the inspectees on the municipal level also declare that they have reorganised their way of evaluating schools. The chair of the municipal board expresses his disappointment when he learnt that a lot of the current insufficiencies also were on the agenda after the last inspection five years ago:

What's important is that we carry through, that we do things. That's, to my big frustration and disappointment wasn't the case after the report we got from the inspectorate for five years ago. There's a lot from that inspection that still is on the agenda /.../ there's a big responsibility on the politicians, to follow up and control.

When we talked to the teachers about the inspection no changes due to the inspection in their educational practices nor in the way they perceive their work were reported. Emotionally they were very pleased with having the possibility to express their frustration with the lack of pedagogical leadership. The teachers were all positive to the inspection, both as a way to do something to the things they hoped to change in Birch school but also in the wider perspective of lack of equity for students among schools in Sweden.

Both teachers and head teacher expressed some disappointment over the fact that SSI-reports only include critique. *If they also could tell what's working fine, it would be easier to take on the critique*, as one of the teachers said. Although the emotions expressed by teachers in Perryman (2007) is far from what the teachers in this school experienced, it is a sign of the significance of emotions in these processes.

The inspection process for Big East municipality turned out to be a lengthy process. During autumn 2011 the municipality and schools⁸ worked with adjusting the criticised points and in the beginning of 2012 the SSI made a follow up visit at Birch school and after that complementary documents from the municipality were sent in. Later in spring 2012 a new decision for Big East stated that there are still things to deal with. In autumn 2012 the representatives from the local board and administration were summoned to the SSI department and had to account for what had been done. The last decision from SSI where they finally approved of the missions taken by the municipality and schools came spring 2013. However for the head teacher at Birch school the trials were not over, in our last contact with

⁸ There were also other schools in the municipality that received rather heavy criticism in the SSI reports.

him late spring 2013 he just learnt that he was going to be removed from the school. Where to he did not yet know.

Pine School in Little East Municipality

This small public school is situated in a rural municipality where there is a small central town and 26 dispersed villages, and around 5-6000 persons live there. The geographical area is rather large and the distance from many of the villages to the central town can be 50-70 kilometres. Pine School is one of the four village schools and had 50 pupils enrolled in grades K-6 and teachers were not at the time of inspection allowed to give marks according to the regulations. Several pupils need provision of school bus to get to this school since they live some distance away. There are no independent schools in this municipality and no upper secondary education (gymnasium in Swedish), so these pupils are commonly enrolled in some of the neighbouring municipalities, preferably the one with university, one hour drive away. The director of education described the municipality as industrial in forestry technique and an effort to inspire pupils to work with local companies have been made as well as working with entrepreneurship education. The unemployment rate is relatively low compared to other municipalities in the region, but there are constant problems with the steady decrease in the population which is somewhat balanced by the responsibility to receive refugees.

The largest school in the municipality suffered from major problems with mould at the time of the inspection (and still is) something that occupied the director of education and the board. A reorganisation of education was also prepared during this period where pupils in grade six at Pine School should be moved to the large school in the central town. Parallel to these processes the director moved to a new position in another municipality. A new director, the head teacher at Pine School was appointed leading to problems of recruiting a new head teacher to this school.

The SSI announced the municipalities to be inspected during 2011 at their homepage in 2010, making the inspection schedule public in advance. In our interviews with inspectors they said that persons and time resources are allocated in advance meaning that decisions on what type of inspection (base, widened or extended) each school was to go through normally was rather set independent of what they experienced at the site visits. Pine School was scheduled for a widened inspection. Direct contact with the municipality and the schools was made in January 2011 when a meeting with the chairman of the school board, the director of education and the head teachers was arranged by the Inspectorate to inform them of the inspection process. The chairman, the director and the head teacher at Pine School described this as very good and perceived the inspections as helpful. The chairman said:

We had an excellent dialogue./--/ It was a very good meeting./--It is a good way for us to get to know how we are doing -that we have a third part looking at our work. (Chair, 6)

Similar to Birch school this is an example where the school and the municipality is 'opening up' (Jacobsson 2010) and Pine school already seemed to be auditable (Power 1996). In this sense there is certainly a reciprocity required in the inspection.

From the the introductory meeting actors in high positions got a picture of the process and what to expect, like dates for school visits and what information they were requested to collect and send to the SSI. At that meeting the director asked the SSI to come to one of the regular network meetings held by directors in neighbouring municipalities to talk about what

SSI had learned and experienced that could be useful for municipalities in this region. The director of the SSI regional department also did this. Ball et al. (2012) write about policy enactment at schools. Here we understand the director's action as something similar but at another level in the local school organization.

Both the director and Pine School's head teacher said in the interviews that they spent some time to collect the required documents. The teachers and the head teacher checked all individual development plans⁹ together to see that they were in order and examples were included in the requested documents. For the head teacher the preparations also included to administer a questionnaire to pupils, parents/custodians and teachers about the school's work. The director described the material as an overfull cardboard box with all schools' documents along with the municipality's overarching documents that she transported directly to the SSI office. From observation from a preparatory meeting and interviews with the inspectors we learned that the two inspectors (one with a master in the social sciences and the other with teacher education and a PhD in the humanities) examined the school documents and discussed critical areas before they visited the school in the beginning of February 2011.

When arriving at the school, the inspectors were invited to the staff room where one of the older teachers asked:

Well, who are you then, and what is your background, are you perhaps such academics that do not know much about school? And are you from the area? (Observation protocol, 1)

This indicates that the teacher felt quite safe having the inspectors there, something rather opposite to the feelings described by Perryman (2007). The inspectors were then guided around by a group of pupils who were representatives for the student council, meticulously showing them most of the premises and also insisted that the inspectors should see the garbage room and snow caves. The next point on the programme for the day was an interview with a group of pupils where the pupils were asked their opinions on what was best and worst with going to school, how a good lesson should look like, if they met the teachers to talk about their development in relation to the objectives, if fees are charged for an reason, if they feel safe in school, and on pupils' influence on the school's and their own work. The inspectors had lunch cooked at the school in the dining-hall, and after lunch the visit continued with an interview with the head teacher.

The head teacher interview started with information about the assessment areas and that the report would bring forward negative deviations in relation to the Education Act and other regulations. The inspectors asked about things like attainment, the procedure for measures taken for children with special needs or who needed special education and about failing test results and the head teacher had to explain the reasons for this. He was also asked how he had implemented the new Education Act. Now and then the questions were posed more like in a conversation compared to more interrogative questions, and using Jacobsson's (2010) concepts this rather inquisitive set up for the interview also demonstrate meditative elements. One example is this dialogue (I for inspector and HT for head teacher):

⁹ Individual development plans are obligatory. There should be one for each pupil and for all school subjects tracking the students relation to the goals set in the national curriculum and course plans and specifying what the school provides for the pupil in order to reach the goals. It is now proposed by the minister that they should be abandoned.

I: *Talking about the written assessments¹⁰ and how to write them, what is your view?*

HT: *I brought this up with the teachers. I have seen them write: “continue to work like this”*

I: *They get written assessments from when they are 7 years and then it is of course important to write so that everyone understands. Are the teachers good at this?*

HT: *For the most part it is good, but to write “a good boy” is not that good. It has to be some incitement for a continuation of the process and to evaluate it. (Observation protocol, 5)*

As a preparation for the school visit this head teacher contacted a colleague to inquire about the interview. The head teacher also used the interview to inquire about how a good action plans for pupils with special needs should look like, seeking advice and support from the inspectors who responded with a description of what the SSI expects to see. The inspectors' comments after this interview indicated that a basic inspection would have sufficed since the school seemed to have few problems. Structural deficiencies may not matter in small schools because there are few pupils, they said. A number of times the head teacher talked about the importance of doing things “right” (in relation to the statutes), something that also turned up in our interview with him after the visit. Overall he expressed a very positive opinion and feeling about the interview: *...it felt like a conversation about pedagogy. We talked about things that actually strengthened us in our work. (Head teacher, 22)*

Four female teachers shared the head teacher's opinion about the interview with the inspectors. Some of them said in our interview with them that they found the inspectors competent and nice, that the inspectors playing with pupils in the snow was appreciated, and that it was a good atmosphere. Although questions about the decreased test scores, the written pupil assessments and what measures were taken to secure good attainment for the pupils were posed, all teachers we interviewed (four) said that they think inspection is necessary and this one did not at all feel like a control. Some of them also mentioned that they felt slightly anxious before the visit. Overall they expressed positive feelings about the inspectors' visit but also felt some disappointment that they did not get to know how they were supposed to work to develop weaknesses and that the inspectors did not see their classroom work. Relief was another feeling expressed in our interviews, particularly when they realised that their impression that the inspectors had formed a negative opinion based on the pupil questionnaire was not warranted. Instead the inspectors said that they found the school to be better than expected during the visit.

At the very end of March the SSI published their report and decision. This report is very short: four pages of a general description of the two schools inspected¹¹, one page for Pine School with tick boxes for the four inspection areas, and slightly more than one page for motivations of the decisions. This school got two points of criticism they had to attend to. They had to improve the individual development plans so that it was clear what the school should provide in order to get the pupils to reach the goals. In the decisions to provide special measures for pupils with special needs, they should also clarify how follow-ups were to be conducted. These two types of criticism are very common and most schools suffer from these deviances according the SSI. Here the regulative activity is clearly visible (Jacobsson 2010).

¹⁰ Written assessments have to be delivered to pupils and parents/legal custodians for each pupil and all school subjects each term.

¹¹ Decisions for two village schools were reported in the same publication.

In their response to the SSI, Little East Municipality compiled answers and plans from all schools. This had to be done within three months. Their answer is dated to the third week in April, meaning that all schools including Pine School, had delivered their material within three weeks. The director of education then composed the full report including general actions taken for all schools and actions for each individual school. Since the two points Pine School was criticised for were shared with other schools, the central administration of Little East should develop manuals for how these obligatory documents should be written. The inspectors told us in our follow-up with them after six months that they were satisfied with the response and that no further actions were necessary on their part. Only a small note in the local newspaper observed the results so there was no pressure put on the school from that direction which is fairly common and also feared by many schools (see Rönnerberg et al. 2012).

In our follow-up contacts with the teachers and the head teacher at Pine School, also approximately six months after the school visit, things seemed to be like business as usual. The report was presented at one of the regular meetings for teachers and staff at the school. The teachers said that they felt rather positive about it and that nothing in particular had happened at the schools as a consequence of the inspection as far as they could see. Measures were to be taken by the central administration in Little East to improve the skill to write individual development plans and follow-ups of decisions for special measures. What concerned these teachers were rather different things like the lack of head teacher since their own had changed position to become director of education in the municipality. This is a quite different experience of school inspection compared to how the teachers and head teacher at Birch school experienced and felt about the inspection and to feelings reported by Perryman (2007).

Discussion

Returning to our research questions we find that what is learned is to keep plans of various types in order, to keep records of pupil attainment and marks in order, and generally put, to learn the juridical ramifications. This is perhaps not surprising since this kind of inspection (regular supervision) takes as its starting point the Education Act and other regulatory statutes. The slightly anxious feeling exposed by the head teacher at Pine school of doing things “right” compared to doing the right things, however directs our attention to learning that also concerns deeper value issues. Apart from learning how to fix plans and documents this learning involves developing a view of education as a juridical practice in which compliance stands out as important. To put it bluntly, is there a risk that eagerness to comply overtakes educational and pedagogical considerations, i.e. the ethical basis for the teaching profession? As we have discussed elsewhere (Lindgren, Hult, Segerholm & Rönnerberg 2012) this seems to be one way inspection influences educational practice at schools, that so to speak risks becoming policy in schools’ every day life. It is also a shift in the Swedish context in the way teaching and learning is understood, what a pupil and a teacher are and what schooling is all about, what Dahler-Larsen (2012) calls constitutive effects:

...it points to the processual, contested and socially constructed/constructive nature of the effects of testing. (Dahler-Larsen 2012, 181)

Other things that are learned are how to handle negative emotions, like the disappointment among teachers for different reasons like the negative reporting style by the SSI at Birch school, and that they could not show their classroom work at Pine school. Our two cases do

not show any extreme emotional distress, as did the teachers and other persons in Perryman's (2007) case. Nevertheless, the inspection is an intervention that evokes feelings and actions. We find it interesting that the head teacher at Birch school who got a lot of criticism tried to turn this into something positive to motivate improvements. Overall we also conclude from our cases that teachers did not learn as much policy or acted as much as the head teachers and principal organizers. We base this on our observation that the teachers were not particularly involved or affected by the inspection. On the other hand the head teachers were, and are also the ones who are directly responsible for correcting what is wrong or insufficient, often along with the principal organizers who took general action at municipal level. The reactions varied but in comparison with what is reported from England (Lefstein 2012, Perryman 2006, Thrupp 1998), school actors in Sweden were very positive to inspection as an external examination at this time as the two cases also show. This may however change as indicated by Novak (2013) in an interview study with head teachers after the new Education Act was implemented giving the SSI the means to impose penalties. She found these head teachers to be more critical to the entire inspection exercise.

We have used Jacobsson's (2006, 2010) concepts to portray and understand the ways this policy learning comes about. As already noted the entire inspection process is framed as a regulative activity heavily relying on the SSI's interpretation of the Education Act and Ordinance as well as a number of other regulations. This is even more evident after we had collected the materials used in this paper, since the new Education Act empowers the SSI with punitive means. More is at stake for schools now and particularly for principal organizers since they are the ones ultimately accountable and responsible for corrections and handling penalties. Even though the inspection exercises have this strong regulative framing, there are several instances of both inquisitive and meditative activities within them. The requirement to supply materials before the site visits are good examples of inquisitive activities along with the interviews with head teachers, teachers and others. However and on a more theoretical note, our cases show that there are ample examples of meditative activities despite the rather strong regulative and inquisitive framings. We therefore suggest that Jacobsson's three governing activities are activities both in their own, and that they are interrelated so that the regulative activities engulf the inquisitive that in turn encompass the meditative.

Although the interviews are good examples of inquisitive activities, the way inspectors and inspectees interact can make them more meditative. Particular actors' behaviours matter as shown in both our cases. The willingness to learn shown by the head teachers and municipal representatives in the meditative activities suggests that such activities have substantive governing potential, particularly with the strong regulative framing that characterise the Swedish regular supervision (inspection). Other governing activities, although effective in changing plans etc. to uphold legal requirements seem to lead to more artificial change (comp Novak 2013). The SSI's transparency in informing of how the inspections are carried out and the areas for inspection and other materials available on their website also sustains learning as compliance, cue-seeking, and do not foster professional knowledge and discretion. Instead we find that such learning takes place when the reciprocal interaction between inspectors and school actors are meditative.

Our selection of these two cases was based on a wish to mirror local variety but also based on our materials. In our overall sample of eleven schools these two schools are not extremes. This said, we find it important to point to the differences in inspection processes connected to local conditions. The fact that the two municipalities are totally different in size, number of schools and distance between the central administration and political board means that they

are treated differently in the inspection processes, and also handled the process differently. The two schools are also different: one that did not give marks to the pupils, and the another with that obligation. This is something that is reflected in the inspection processes so that stronger emphasis was given to marking and pupil results in Birch school. The two inspectors way of talking about Pine school also indicated a possible positive attitude towards small village schools in general based on the view that they more readily can manage problems thanks to their closer interpersonal relations. Considering the SSI's strong emphasis on equivalent inspections and their efforts to obtain that through standardised processes based on detailed instructions of how every step of the procedure is to be carried out, our cases show the futility of these ambitions and efforts. Local conditions will make this impossible along with the fact that it is human beings that are involved in carrying out these processes in which the interpersonal quality of the meeting between inspectors and inspectees is crucial. Inspection can not be a matter of applying the same techniques in an instrumental way. It is always based on human practice and values (Schwandt 2002).

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