

RAISING ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN DEVON SCHOOLS

**Devon County Council and
Schools Working Together**

Updated July 2007



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WORKING TOGETHER TO RAISE ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS IN DEVON SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

This document first produced in 2002 by a group which included representatives of Devon Association of Governors, Headteacher and Teacher Associations and representatives of the Local Authority [LA], sets out guidance and information about the way in which the LA and schools will work together in a common endeavour to raise achievement and standards, and support school self-improvement within Devon. It was updated in 2007 to reflect the statutory duties of the LA as set out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and to include how Devon will determine levels of support for schools. It sets out guidance for the Local Authority, governing bodies and headteachers on how they can work together effectively to raise standards.

“Raising Achievement and Standards in Devon Schools” addresses the way in which the LA and schools work collaboratively and should not be viewed in isolation as it is intended to sit alongside the LA’s priorities for raising achievement as set out in the Children and Young Peoples’ Plan [CYPP]. It should also be read in the light of other strategic plans produced by the LA such as the Raising Achievement Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Section 1

lays out the guiding principles for the working relationship between the County Council and schools in terms of school improvement activity. It sets out the commitment which the County Council and schools are making.

Section 2

sets out the respective roles of schools, which is sub-divided into the governing body and headteachers, and the LA. It is largely drawn from the Education and Inspections Act and the principles within the DfES New Relationship with Schools 2005.

Section 3

defines the key processes of monitoring, challenge, support and intervention. This section defines the terms using key central government documents.

Section 4

outlines the provision of challenge, support and intervention.

1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In working together the County Council and schools recognise the fundamental importance of raising achievement and standards for all pupils for whom the County Council has a responsibility. There is a shared commitment to the principles of inclusion and the recognition that each child irrespective of age, ability, gender or ethnic origin is of equal worth.

In working together the County Council and schools will seek to develop an honest and rigorous professional dialogue which is characterised by transparency whilst maintaining confidentiality where this is appropriate.

The County Council for its part will:

- recognise that in formulating and implementing policies it can affect a school's ability to raise achievement and standards
- seek to provide or procure high quality services which have rigorous quality assurance processes
- provide schools with performance data which will enable them to evaluate their own performance and set targets for improvement
- intervene in inverse proportion to success
- recognise the wide diversity and therefore differing needs of individual schools
- seek to facilitate partnerships between schools
- seek to recognise, celebrate and disseminate best practice across schools
- maintain confidentiality in all matters relating to monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools within the constraints of the Freedom of Information Act.

Schools for their part will:

- take responsibility for the raising of achievement and standards for all pupils
- apply the principles of self-evaluation to inform improvement planning
- work in partnerships to raise achievement and standards
- work with the County Council to identify and disseminate best practice across schools.

The County Council and schools together will:

- recognise the paramount importance of school self-evaluation. Sustained school improvement is best achieved where a culture of continuous improvement is fostered and developed through the questioning and evaluation of current practice.
- seek to reduce the administrative burdens of bureaucracy by producing clear documentation written in plain English and by responding efficiently to requests from one another.

2. CONTEXT, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This document explains how the County Council and its schools will seek to work together in order to ensure that schools receive effective support and challenge without being subject to unnecessary intervention. This document should not be seen in isolation nor does it cover the whole range of contacts between the County Council and its schools. Separate procedures, which it is recognised might have an impact on standards, exist for example, for admissions, specific legal requirements and the identification and assessment of special educational needs.

This document does however provide:

- background information for County Councillors, officers, advisers, school improvement partners, school governors, headteachers and other school staff
- the focus for securing the right balance of powers and responsibilities for establishing the County Council's function of leadership, support and intervention and the school's responsibility for raising achievement and standards.

Schools

are responsible for their own performance and the achievement of their pupils. They must plan for continuous improvement and need maximum freedom to make decisions and manage resources. Freedom does not imply acting in isolation as schools work best when they recognise the value of working together in partnership either locally or nationally.

The governing body

sets the broad strategy for its school's improvement through the school's aims and planning cycle. It is responsible for setting and monitoring the school's budget. In general the governing body looks to the headteacher to provide professional advice and to lead and manage the school within the broad strategy so as to achieve improved performance. The headteacher works in accordance with the school improvement plan which is approved by the governing body. It will usually be the headteacher and senior staff who liaise with the County Council.

The County Council will work with governing bodies to secure for them, such information and guidance as they consider appropriate in connection with the discharge of their functions.

The Headteacher

with other senior staff is responsible for the leadership, direction and management of the school within the strategic framework set by the governing body. His/her functions are determined partly by statute, partly by the provisions of the pay and conditions of service documents and partly by any powers delegated by the governing body.

The LA

the highest priority for the LA is to promote high standards of education for all pupils. It has an explicit duty to promote high standards of education underpinned by specific powers to act rapidly where a school is giving cause for concern. The LA's leadership role does not rely solely on legal powers; it is also about developing a culture whereby schools want to work in partnership with the local authority because they trust its judgement even when their own performance is being challenged. Whilst the LA will need to monitor all schools, its energies and resources will be focused on schools which monitoring information suggests need further challenge or intervention to secure improvement. The LA will also seek to identify and disseminate best practice such that schools will be encouraged to work in partnership to share expertise.

Devon LA seeks to establish a constructive relationship with its schools and one which is valued by both parties. It will work with local Governor Associations, Diocesan Authorities and many others to facilitate partnerships within the County which are committed to continuous improvement.

In line with the DfES New Relationship with Schools 2005, all schools will have with a discussion with a school improvement partner to review school self-evaluation, target setting and to provide advice to the governing body on headteacher performance management.

The LA has a central role in managing and supporting the implementation of the national strategies and will ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms operating to support schools and monitor the impact of this work.

3. DEFINITION OF KEY PROCESSES

The LA is committed to ensuring that achievement and standards in all its schools are improving. Working together with schools is central to the achievement of this aim such that we can jointly meet the targets which schools and the LA have set in the CYPP and also provide a rich and diverse education for all pupils and students in Devon.

Central to this strategy is the belief that schools will improve best through their own efforts; this means that the LA must have a sound basis for distinguishing between highly effective schools and those that would benefit from additional support from the LA. The LA's aim is to provide or procure for the great majority of schools which are self improving, a framework of support which can be purchased or delivered through the Raising Achievement Plan. At the same time the LA must also be able to intervene in those schools that from the evidence available are unlikely to achieve necessary rapid improvements through their own efforts based on current performance.

The LA will work with schools through the following four processes, monitoring, challenge, intervention and support, which lie at the heart of the LA's role in school improvement. These terms are defined as follows:

Monitoring

The LA will monitor its schools through the systematic and routine collection of information relating to school and pupil performance and statutory compliance. This will involve the scrutiny of:

Quantitative data:

e.g. pupil performance, attendance, exclusions

Qualitative data:

e.g. parental, pupil and governing body comments, Educational Psychologist and Educational Welfare Officer visit reports, monitoring of the CYPP priorities

Key documents:

e.g. OfSTED inspection report, Audit report, SIP reports.

In order to fulfil its function to monitor schools, the LA will need to gather information about schools' and their pupils' performance and also statutory compliance. The monitoring process informs the school improvement partners' dialogue with schools and the agreement of levels of support.

Challenge

Challenge will take the form of a regular professional dialogue by school improvement partners with all schools to promote continuous school improvement. The focus of this dialogue is school self-evaluation, the priorities and targets for improvement and the capacity and means to achieve these.

Discussions may also include statutory non-compliance, particularly on issues relating to school improvement. Other officers within the LA, for example personnel and finance officers will also discuss matters relating to statutory non-compliance.

The responsibility and protocols of the work of school improvement partners is outlined in the Devon School Improvement Partner Handbooks.

Support

The County Council recognises that, as part of their normal improvement work, access to high quality support other than that provided by the school improvement partner is required by all schools from time to time. Schools will use their own resources to purchase this support from providers such as the County Council, unless it is delivered as part of a defined responsibility, within the CYPP and Raising Achievement Plan.

Schools can, and frequently do, use providers other than the County Council for a wide range of school improvement services. As part of its commitment to Best Value principles the County Council has a brokerage role in terms of providing schools with information about a range of providers through the Alternative Portfolio of Services.

Intervention

Intervention is the deployment of County Council resources in schools lacking the capacity to secure necessary rapid improvement.

The County Council's view is that the formal intervention powers defined by the Education and Inspections Act 2006 are those of last resort, intended to apply only in a small minority of schools where standards are unacceptably low or there has been a serious breakdown in the way the school is managed or governed.

They include:

- issuing a formal warning
- appointing additional LA governors
- suspending a governing body's right to a delegated budget,
- requiring a school to collaborate with a school, college or other organisation or join a federation and
- appointing, with consent of the Secretary of State, an Interim Executive Board

Information on intervention management and strategies is detailed in the Devon Intervention Handbook

www.devon.gov.uk/raisingstandardsintervention.pdf

5. PROVISION OF CHALLENGE, SUPPORT AND INTERVENTION

Determining levels of support:

The school improvement partner will have a key role in determining the level of ongoing challenge and support appropriate to each school.

The level of support will be determined through a professional dialogue between school leaders, including representatives of the governing body, and the school improvement partner, considering indicators such as:

Support Level 1:

Schools with:

contextual value added data significantly above the national average as shown by Fischer Family Trust or DCSF/OfSTED data;
rapidly improving contextual value-added data over the last three years;
secure and accurate self-evaluation processes, as demonstrated through the self-evaluation form (SEF);
good capacity to improve as shown through the impact of school improvement planning or any recent OfSTED report with majority of key judgements 'outstanding' and 'good'.

Support Level 2:

Schools with:

contextual value added data broadly in line with the national average as shown by Fischer Family Trust or DCSF/OfSTED data;
consistent contextual value-added data over the last three years with no evidence of a significant decline;
sound range of and mostly accurate self-evaluation processes, as demonstrated through the self-evaluation form (SEF);
some strengths in capacity to improve as shown through the impact of school improvement planning or any recent OfSTED report with the majority of key judgments being 'satisfactory'.

Support Level 3:

Schools with:

contextual value added data significantly below the national average as shown by Fischer Family Trust or DCSF/OfSTED data;
rapidly declining contextual value-added data over the last three years
insufficient or inaccurate self-evaluation processes, as demonstrated through the self-evaluation form (SEF)
insecure capacity to improve as shown through the impact of school improvement planning or any recent OfSTED report judging the school to require special measures or a notice to improve.

Differentiated levels of support:

The school improvement partners' brief includes:

- headteacher performance management
- analysis of school performance
- target setting
- progress on priorities
- annual report to headteacher and governing body

Levels of support will be used to determine school improvement partner deployment over time and other support available to schools.

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| Support Level 1: | School improvement partner visits : 3.5 days. (This includes preparation/writing time and is not 3.5 days on site). Core entitlement from the National Strategies e.g. Primary new framework briefings; Secondary intervention funding. |
| Support Level 2: | School improvement partner visits : 5 days. (This includes preparation/writing time and is not 5 days on site). Core entitlement from the National Strategies e.g. Primary new framework briefings; Secondary intervention funding. Within this level, some identified schools will receive additional support funded by the LA or National Strategies such as: phase adviser support for new/acting headteachers; prioritised invitation to participate in support from the National Strategies e.g. Secondary Strategy Support; Intensifying Support Programme; phase adviser support as part of a school's exit strategy from schools causing concern. |
| Support Level 3: | School improvement partner visits : 5 days. (This includes preparation/writing time and is not 5 days on site). Core entitlement from the National Strategies e.g. Primary new framework briefings; Secondary intervention funding. This level of support will trigger intervention through the schools causing concern* process which may also include targeted support through the National Strategies. |

* Schools causing concern are subdivided into:

- schools identified by OfSTED inspection. Within this there will be categories of schools requiring special measures and schools served with a notice to improve.
- schools identified by the LA. Within this there will be categories of schools facing critical incidents and schools with low performance.
 - Schools with low performance will be:
 - schools with low attainment, in terms of standards compared with similar schools;
 - schools with low progress i.e. significant groups of pupils make less progress than is expected in comparison with similar schools;
 - schools with low improvement i.e. trends over time have been below those of similar schools.

Other issues

Full details and operating procedures are included in:

- The Devon Intervention Handbook, which details improvement strategies for schools causing concern.
- The Devon Primary School Improvement Partner Handbook
- The Devon Secondary School Improvement Partner Handbook

The latter two handbooks provide guidance on the role and responsibilities of school improvement partners.

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