

SCHOOL SELF EVALUATION AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Improving performance through school self-evaluation and improvement planning

A Summary of Ofsted Guidance - Ref. HMI 2646, June 2006

Introduction

This guidance builds on *A new relationship with schools: improving performance through school self-evaluation* (DfES/Ofsted, March 2005), [*DSS Summary, April 2005*]. Ofsted has worked with a number of partners including teachers' and headteachers' professional associations, and has identified examples of good practice in 120 schools from the first term of the new section 5 school inspections introduced in September 2005 which places school self-evaluation (SSE) at the centre of the inspection process. The guidance aims to provide ideas about ways of managing the process of self-evaluation without adding to the bureaucratic burden on schools, and also suggests effective ways of recording the outcomes of schools' self-evaluation in Ofsted's self-evaluation form (SEF). The three main sections of the document cover:

- the features of effective self-evaluation, identified in the case study schools;
- guidance on the process of self-evaluation and improvement planning, with a few brief cameos to illustrate how some schools have responded to relative weaknesses in their provision;
- guidance on completion of the SEF and how to fit its sections together into a coherent whole.

Features of effective self-evaluation

The key features shared by the case study schools' self-evaluation and improvement planning are:

- **Pupils' achievement** - the standards that they reach and their progress - is always at the heart of self-evaluation. It is a key element of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda.
- The **schools are outward looking** and seek to analyse the value they add to their pupils' education by comparing the impact of their work with that of other schools.
- The **approach to review and improvement planning is systematic and structured**, ensuring that it is well paced throughout the school year and integral to the schools' management systems.
- The schools' management systems allow a **good range of telling evidence** to be collected, analysed and evaluated. This enables the schools to identify what steps they need to take to meet the needs of individuals, groups and cohorts of pupils.
- **Consultation** helps schools to evaluate the impact of their provision against what it was intended to achieve. The schools seek the views of their SIPs (School Improvement Partners) and, where relevant, stakeholders, advisory staff from the National Strategies and other external agencies but not all at once.
- **Areas for improvement are prioritised** on the basis of their **impact on the outcomes identified by the ECM agenda**.

Steps leading to effective self-evaluation

The guidance offers the following steps which, on the evidence gathered by inspectors, lead to effective self-evaluation. Each of these is exemplified by brief 'cameos' showing how some of the case study schools have addressed relative weaknesses in their provision.

- **Identify the schools' context.**
This includes: looking at whether the school's population and pupils' needs have changed; how well it is accommodating changes; new circumstances; staffing responsibilities; the impact of working towards specialist status on whole school improvement; work with partner schools and the wider community.
- **Using data to measure, monitor and compare performance.**
This includes: gathering, analysing and interpreting data and comparing it with national data to provide a clear picture of how well individual pupils and groups of pupils are doing at:
 - whole-school level
 - key stage level
 - subject level
 - pupil group level (e.g. pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds; gifted and talented pupils)
 - pupil level (e.g. comparing standards actually reached with those anticipated; interventions to prevent under-achievement or exclusion; target setting for children with learning difficulties and disabilities)
- **Observing and evaluating teaching and learning.**
This includes: leaders and managers engaging in first-hand observations, 'seeing provision as it is'; peer observations; feedback and reflection; using observations to identify and provide for the professional development needs of staff; linking performance management with school self-review rather than establishing separate systems.
- **Consulting parents, pupils, staff and the school's partners.**
This includes: gathering pupils' views through formal structures such as a student council but also informally in other ways; canvassing different groups for specific purposes; ensuring that all views, ideas and concerns are caught.
- **Evaluating all key aspects of provision.**
The guidance endorses the value of schools evaluating all that they do, 'but not necessarily all at once'. It says, 'By combining the different steps or stages of self-evaluation, schools are able to evaluate all the key aspects of their provision over time, as informed by their analysis of the data and what they know about pupils' achievement, their personal development and well-being'.

Using the findings of self-evaluation to plan for improvement.

This includes: setting priorities within a single, integrated improvement plan.

Improvement plans need to be:

- **based on the school's evaluation of the outcomes achieved by pupils**, and relevant aspects of its provision, remembering that a school should evaluate everything it does but not all at the same time
 - **focused** on a few, short-term, operational priorities
 - **presented with a clear timeline** with manageable steps, which take account on the capacity of staff in the areas concerned to improve
 - **linked to the school's longer-term strategic aims** and designed to have the greatest impact on pupils' achievement (some priorities apply across more than one year)
 - **explicit**, identifying precisely what needs to be done, how and why, setting goals or targets for improvement
 - **systematic**, in identifying through performance management where good practice already exists and the support needed by groups of staff (for example, year groups, departments, key stages) in order to meet their performance objectives/improvement priorities
 - **clear**, indicating who is responsible for what action and the resources needed
 - **constructed in consultation** with staff, governors, parents, pupils and other key stakeholders, and disseminated widely
 - **monitored and adjusted** to take account of successful action and if necessary the timescale and pace of change modified
 - **evaluated regularly**, so that staff know how well developments are progressing and that the managers leading them are well supported in their work.
- **Developing the capacity of staff to deliver school improvement.**
This may include: re-assessing staffing structures and responsibilities; staff training and professional development; identifying priorities for action; building capacity by identifying and sharing good practice.

Completing the self-evaluation form (SEF)

Section 3 of the document provides guidance on completing the various parts and sections of the SEF. The general advice before updating Part A of a SEF is:

- **mull over the key messages** from the school's self-evaluation;
- **browse the SEF website** and read Ofsted's guidance;
- **evaluate** - it is easy to describe what the school is like and what it does, but that is not what is needed; the SEF should be evaluative and the judgements about outcomes for pupils and the quality of its provision, leadership and management clear and unequivocal;
- **avoid repetition** - if the school has recently received awards, such as the Charter Mark or Investors in People, it may want to draw attention to the impact of its work in related areas without repeating what is already documented elsewhere;
- **be precise** - schools should base judgements on evidence and not what might happen;
- **explain impact** - when judging the quality of provision and leadership and management it is

important to link them to impact;

- **be transparent and specific** - a school's SEF should be recognisable by staff, governors and other stakeholders;
- **keep Part A of the SEF short** and to the point. The length will vary according to a school's individual circumstances but if Part A is more than 20 pages long, a school is probably describing what it does rather than the impact of its work;
- **reflect stakeholders' views.**

Paragraphs 57 - 72 of the guidance then make detailed suggestions about how a school's leaders might summarise the areas of the school's work that they want to improve and the problems they want to solve, fitting together the different sections of the SEF into a coherent whole.

Case studies

The guidance concludes with 6 case studies illustrating some of the ways in which the schools in Ofsted's sample have approached self-evaluation and improvement planning.

The full document can be viewed/downloaded at:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=4213>