

MONITORING OF SCHOOLS

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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1. Purpose of the Report

1.1. This item was requested by Ivor Ambrose for possible scrutiny by the Committee. The report provides Members of the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of how we monitor the work of schools and the process through which improvements are being made to the way schools are supported.

2. Summary

2.1. This report describes:

- the current means of LEA monitoring of schools;
- development work taking place to extend preventative approaches.

3. Conclusion

3.1. Hertfordshire seeks the highest level of achievement for all pupils in its schools. It further expects all schools to be on an improvement trend and those with lower levels of achievement to be making even more rapid progress. The Children, Schools and Families Service supports improvement in a number of ways; a key one is through the implementation of a rigorous system of monitoring.

4. Background

- 4.1. A programme of targeted support is in place to assure quality education is provided in all Hertfordshire schools and to diagnose where improvement should be made. This programme is delivered largely by advisers from the School Improvement and Advisory Service. In line with the Codes of Practice of both Hertfordshire and the DfES, intervention is in inverse proportion to success. As a consequence, those schools who are successful (judged by their performance data and other objective information) are subject only to statutory and light touch monitoring visits whereas those with the most significant needs will receive more. The level of monitoring is determined by the school's position in the nine-cell matrix as follows:

Cells 1, 2 and 3 Self-improving Schools

Three visits per year:

- Attainment Review/Target setting;
- Annual Review, focused on teaching and learning;
- Leadership and Management Review.

All visits focus upon the evidence from the school's own self-evaluation processes. A framework for school self-evaluation is in place against which all monitoring is conducted.

Cells 4, 5 and 6 Need some support to become self-improving

The three visits (see above) and up to three additional days.

Cells 7, 8 and 9

Up to thirty days for the most serious schools, but on average twelve days.

- 4.2. Within the LEA – School Relations: Code of Practice, significant detail is given about how the nine-cell matrix operates. A copy of this document is being despatched with this paper for background reading. It also clarifies further categorisation of schools by the LEA: Schools Causing Concern. This includes all schools which are judged by advisers to have problems including those in an OfSTED category. Strict protocols apply when a school is placed on the Schools Causing Concern register with the aim of quickly addressing the causes of concern.
- 4.3. Since February 2002 a 'high risk' programme has been established. For those schools judged to be manifesting significant problems, a programme of measures is put in place.
- a detailed action plan is constructed;
 - the school is visited weekly by its adviser;
 - a focused programme of coaching is provided for any weak, new or temporary teachers;

- support is provided for the headteachers, governors, and other curriculum leaders;
- 4.4. Since the introduction of this 'high risk' programme, there has been significant rapid improvement in these schools. For example, eleven schools (9 primary and 2 secondary), known to have problems, particularly from teacher shortages, have, through the 'high risk' support programme, come through recent OfSTED inspections successfully.

5. Development

- 5.1. Clearly the overall objective of support programmes is to ensure all schools are self-improving and have the capacity to manage their own development, including scrutiny under OfSTED inspection. A range of other strategies is in place to deliver this.
- 5.2. In the short and medium term, a targeted programme of support is needed to assist those schools who, for a range of reasons, remain in the lower cells of the nine-cell matrix. The 'high risk' strategy described above is one such support mechanism.
- 5.3. Following the recent Best Value Review of the School Improvement and Advisory Service a more preventative approach to school capacity building work has begun.
- 5.4. One recommendation in respect of earlier intervention is being translated into a detailed set of proposals for policy development, and will be reported to the Achievement Panel at its next meeting.

The proposals revolve around:

- re-allocation of the team of School Development Advisers reflecting the need for earlier support;
- one, small, team will provide the extensive support required to ensure that those schools in OfSTED categories and with acute problems are helped to make the rapid improvements required;
- the other, larger, team will continue to provide the basic programme of monitoring, but will extend their programme of support to include a new package of measures, introduced at the mid-way point between inspections. There is evidence to show that this is an optimum time to bring new external focus to the school's own self-evaluation;
- in those schools where latent difficulties are identified a series of interventions will be introduced to ensure rapid improvement.

Further development of this will be considered by the Achievement Panel on 4 July 2002.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1. Our pupils have one opportunity to experience school and achieve. Hertfordshire must ensure all our schools are providing a first class education. In order to promote school improvement and be assured progress is being made, strategies for school monitoring are being strengthened and extended.

Background information referred to by the author whilst compiling this report

- LEA-School Relations: Code of Practice in Hertfordshire, HCC Children, Schools and Families, July 2001
- Code of Practice: LEA-School Reactions, DfES, 1999

If you would like to know more about the issues referred to in this report please contact Les Craggs, Tel: 01582 830364