

Cabinet

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Local Authority Inspections: School Improvement



Report of Corporate Management Team

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1. Purpose of the Report

This report summarises the new inspection regime for Local Authority arrangements for supporting School improvement draws on available published Ofsted local authority inspection reports in order to identify areas of priority or concern for Durham and it highlights lessons that Durham L.A. may learn from the experiences of other local authorities.

2. Background

Since February 2013, Ofsted has published reports on 10 focused inspections and 8 full inspections conducted under its **Framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement**.

Full inspection:	judgement	Focused inspection:
Blackpool	<i>(ineffective)</i>	Bristol
Bournemouth	<i>(effective)</i>	Coventry
Isle of Wight	<i>(ineffective)</i>	Cumbria
Middlesbrough	<i>(ineffective)</i>	Derby
Norfolk	<i>(ineffective)</i>	East Riding of Yorkshire
Peterborough	<i>(effective)</i>	Medway
Suffolk	<i>(ineffective)</i>	Norfolk
Wakefield	<i>(ineffective)</i>	Northumberland
		Suffolk
		Thurrock

3. Full inspection - description

One week's notice; involves formal interviews with senior and operational local authority staff including elected members, contracted partners and selected schools (head teacher and governor interviews).

A wide range of documents, including self-evaluation forms, strategic plans, meeting agendas, financial reports and data, are scrutinised. The inspection lasts approximately one week.

A report is published carrying a judgement of either 'effective' or 'ineffective'. To date all but two inspected authorities have been deemed ineffective.

4. Focused inspection - description

In a local authority where national data shows a significant number of underperforming schools, a focused inspection determines whether sufficient support and challenge is being provided.

A sample of around 10% of schools is selected for inspection, with a broadly similar number of good and outstanding schools approached for telephone interviews. In Durham this would be approximately 25-30 schools inspected, and 25-30 schools interviewed.

The report generated by a focused inspection is a narrative summary based on findings, with both areas of strength and areas of development described; it makes no explicit judgement.

Three key questions are asked of schools and governors:

- How well does the local authority know your school, your performance and the standards your pupils achieve?
- What measures are in place to support and challenge your school and how do these meet the needs of your school?
- What is the impact of the local authority support and challenge over time to help your school improve?

An additional question is used in telephone interviews with schools:

- How well is the local authority making use of your school's strengths to help others improve?

Where a focused inspection has raised concerns, and does not result in swift and decisive improvements, it is likely to be escalated to a full inspection.

5. Durham County Council - readiness

A detailed self-evaluation document covering all key areas of the Ofsted inspection framework (para. 2, above) has been prepared.

Substantial quantitative evidence (including data) and qualitative evidence (contract evaluations and head teacher endorsements, for instance) indicate that these aspects are positive for County Durham.

Data used is critical, with a focus on KS2, KS4 and numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), and there are clearly lessons to be learned from the content of inspection reports so far published.

6. Positive characteristics of inspected Councils:

Information from published reports indicates that local authorities will be judged as effective if performance data is well-used and schools enjoy positive and strong working relationships with Council Officers.

In these cases schools would demonstrate that they know the strategy for improvement and head teachers and governors will typically have high regard for the work of school improvement officers.

Where training for governors is well-received and good clerking services are provided, and there is evidence of effective school-to-school support brokered by the local authority, judgements are likely to be positive.

In summary: where local authorities “know their schools well” and share positive and effective working relationships, school improvement functions will in all probability be deemed effective.

7. Areas for further development:

While school improvement functions in Durham are robust and effective when measured against the Ofsted inspection criteria, there remain a number of areas for consideration:

- Ensuring that Council Leaders, Senior Officers and elected members are clear around the local authority’s strategy for school improvement.
- The Education service must continue to ensure fully developed arrangements for evaluation and quality assurance of its work (identifying influence and impact over time), so that effectiveness of actions and interventions can be accurately judged.
- The education service will review its use of formal powers of intervention, including use of formal warning notices, so that this becomes a clearer and more consistent part of the response to schools causing concern.
- A task and finish group is to be deployed to identify and make further use of the strengths of good and better schools.

9. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to note the implications of this report for elected members and council officers.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance n/a

Staffing n/a

Risk - Potential reputational issues if recommendations not actioned

Equality and Diversity/Public Sector Equality Duty n/a

Accommodation n/a

Crime and Disorder n/a

Human Rights n/a

Consultation - external consultation with schools included in recommendations

Procurement n/a

Disability Issues n/a

Legal Implications n/a