

## **Ofsted – BACKGROUND, PREVIOUS, CURRENT, STRENGTHS and WEAKNESSES**

(May 2006)

### **Background**

Ofsted replaced an earlier system of school inspection by HM Inspectorate that had been in place since 1839. HM Inspectorate had inspected schools 'largely on intuitive and connoisseurial criteria and regarded themselves mostly as professional colleagues whose role was to advise local authorities, teachers and the schools rather than enforce national standards.' (Kogan and Maden, 1999, p.15)

The Education Act of 1944 was an attempt to create the structure for the post-war British education system. The act raised the school leaving age to 15 and provided universal free schooling in three different types of secondary schools; grammar, secondary modern and technical. It was hoped that these schools would cater for the different academic levels and other aptitudes of children but in reality this did not occur. Entry to these schools was based on the 11+ examination.

The Education Reform Act of 1988 is regarded as the most important single piece of education legislation since the 1944 Education Act and it was claimed it would shape the nature of the education system for the rest of the 20th century and beyond.

The main provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988 were as follows:

- The national curriculum was established for all state schools from the age of 5 upwards.
- National testing and assessment procedure for students at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16. The National Curriculum was introduced in response to concerns that Local Education Authority (LEA) control of the curriculum and the low expectations of teachers were resulting in declining educational standards.
- Key Stages were introduced. At each key stage a number of educational objectives were to be achieved.
- The Local Management of Schools was introduced. This part of the act allowed all schools to be taken out of the direct financial control of Local Education Authorities. Financial control was handed to the head teacher and governors of a school.
- Grant Maintained Schools were introduced. Primary and Secondary schools under this provision could remove themselves fully from their respective Local Education Authorities and would be completely funded by central government.

### **What is Ofsted?**

Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) is a non ministerial government department that inspects education facilities throughout England. The office was established in 1993 under the Education (Schools) Act 1992. Its major tasks were to oversee and improve the quality of education provided and to confirm that schools conformed to the National Curriculum for schools. It is responsible for inspecting the standards and regulations covering childcare, schools, colleges, children's services, local education authorities, teacher training and youth work in England; it had no statutory authority over independent schools until the 2002 Education Act, Section 162, when independent schools that are not members of the Independent School

Council (ISC) commenced inspections on a six year cycle by Ofsted. ISC schools are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate, which is subject to monitoring by HMI. (Her Majesty's Inspectorate). The main aim of Ofsted is to help improve the quality and standards of education and childcare through independent inspection and regulation. Ofsted is also required to provide independent advice to the United Kingdom government and parliament on matters of policy and to publish an annual report to parliament on the quality of educational provision in England.

In September 2001 Ofsted became responsible for registration and inspection of day care and childminding. This was previously done by one hundred and fifty local authorities, each with different standards. (<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>)

The total Ofsted budget for 2005/2006 was £221m with the education directorate accounting for £74.6m. (Ofsted Business Plan, 2005, p.25). The target is to reduce the Ofsted budget by 20% by March 2008. (Ofsted Departmental Report, 2006, p.28.)

## **Previous (Prior to September 2005)**

### **The Inspection**

Ofsted is an inspectorial model and all inspections took place within an inspection framework, '*Inspecting Schools - Framework for Inspecting Schools*'. Schools were generally inspected every six years, though this could be dependent upon previous Ofsted results.

The inspection system enabled a team of inspectors to visit the school to provide an independent, external evaluation of the effectiveness of the school, standards achieved by students, the quality of education provided by the school and the quality of leadership and management. Inspectors informed the school what it did well and what it needed to do to improve, and how and why they had come to their conclusions. Inspection teams also judged whether or not the school had improved since the last inspection.

In primary schools separate judgements were made on the provision in English (including literacy across the curriculum), mathematics (including numeracy), science, information and communication technology (ICT) and ICT capability across the curriculum and religious education and work seen in other subjects.

Secondary school inspections also include reporting on religious education, at least one vocational course and student work from as many other subjects as possible.

Schools received prior notice of between six to ten weeks of the Ofsted visit, and in some situations up to a year in advance. Before the formal visit the lead inspector visited the school to collect information, meet the staff and students and make arrangements for the inspection. Parents and students were asked to complete questionnaires. The school leadership and management team completed a self evaluative report that focused on school strengths and weaknesses; an Ofsted requirement introduced in 1996, as a contribution to the inspection because the information in the report was a means of ensuring matters of potential significance to the school were covered in the inspection. The self evaluative report was not the focus of the inspection.

(<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00001641.htm>)

Teachers needed to be fully prepared for the visit and this involved documentation available to the inspectors that covered - timetables, planning, lesson plans, special education needs, assessment and record keeping, curriculum file, class and school

presentation, displays, photos, videos and tape recordings, marking and scrutiny of students' daily work.

A team of inspectors then visited the school during the week of the inspection. Each inspector would be responsible for inspecting different subjects and aspects of learning. The team would include a lead inspector, who may or may not have personal experience in the management or provision of education in schools.

The size of the inspection team and length of time in schools was dependent upon the size of the school. This varied from school to school. eg: In a primary school with 210 students the inspection would consist of three inspectors in the school for three days and a lay inspector for one day, a total of ten person inspection days in all. In a secondary school with 800 students the time in school may involve ten inspectors working in the school for four days, with the lay inspector in school for three days, a total of 43 person inspection days.

During the inspection, inspectors observed lessons, talked to groups of students, scrutinised student work according to the areas outlined previously, met with subject leaders and the head teacher.

The inspectors would meet at the end of each day to discuss judgements and make decisions on areas where the school needed to develop. (<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>)

### **Judgement and Grading System**

Inspectors made a wide range of judgements during an inspection. These were expressed on a seven point scale. The guidance in the handbook for inspecting schools included descriptions of the features that illustrated judgement from very poor to excellent.

<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Excellent	1
Very good	2
Good	3
Satisfactory	4
Unsatisfactory	5
Poor	6
Very poor	7

The findings of the inspection were published in an inspection report of approximately thirty pages which included a summary to inform governors, parents, the school and the wider community about the quality of education and student achievement.

Once the school received the inspection report a summary was sent by the governing body to all parents and carers of students in the school. The full report was made available to members of the public through the Ofsted website.

Sometimes schools were placed on special measures if a poor report was given. Schools placed into special measures received intensive support from local authorities, additional funding and resourcing and frequent reappraisal from Ofsted until the school was no longer deemed to be failing. Furthermore, the senior managers and teaching staff could be dismissed and the school governors were replaced by an appointed executive committee. Other inadequate schools were given a notice to improve.

## **Post Ofsted Action Plan**

Within 40 working days the governing body had to prepare a written statement of the action it proposed to take in response to the inspection report. The plan had to show what action the school would take to bring about improvements in response to the issues identified in the inspection report.

There was the expectation that all teachers would be involved with the development of the Action Plan, taking part in meetings and inservice training when appropriate and supporting any changes that needed to be made. (<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>)

## **Testing in Schools and Data Collection**

School students in England are subjected to extensive testing throughout their school careers under the terms of the National Curriculum. The National Curriculum was aimed at ensuring that all students were following a sufficiently broad and balanced educational program and that attainment was carefully monitored in order to ensure improvements. Under the National Curriculum, students undergo four sets of national tests, corresponding to attainment targets under four “Key Stages”. Testing against Key Stage 1 targets take place at age 7; testing against KS2 targets take place at 11; testing against KS3 targets take place at age 14 and testing against KS4 targets, or equivalent external examinations, take place at age 16, the end of compulsory secondary education. Most students take GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education) or other national qualifications. GCSEs can be taken in over forty five subjects. There are also eight GCSEs in vocational subjects that relate to work in particular vocation areas.

A series of “Levels” of attainment are set within each Key Stage. KS1 comprises testing at Levels 1 to 3 in English and Mathematics. KS2 comprises English, Mathematics and Science testing at Levels 3 to 5 (the three “core subjects” under the National Curriculum). KS3 comprises English testing at Levels 4 – 7, Mathematics testing at Levels 3 - 8 and Science testing at Levels 3 - 7. Students’ attainment is rated at a particular Level for each test depending on their mark score and around 600 000 students in each age range are assessed each year.

Maintaining and developing the National Curriculum, and its assessments, tests and examinations, are the responsibility of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. At Key Stage 1, schools and teachers themselves administer and mark the tests, and compile and register the results for their own students. For Key Stages 2, 3, and 4 marking, compiling and registering the results is conducted externally.

The first nine years of compulsory education sees every child tested three times, sitting eight sets of tests. For most children this will involve taking twenty three separate papers. Primary school teachers spend the equivalent of 4.6 hours per week preparing for the National Curriculum Tests. (McAvoy, 2003, p.2 and 4).

Post compulsory education and/ or training occurs in years 12 and 13 for students aged 16 – 19, with learning programs leading to vocationally related (VCE A levels) and occupational qualifications (GCE AS/A levels). A levels can be taken in around eighty subjects, fourteen of which are VCEs. In addition to the GCE, brighter students have the option of taking the Advanced Extension Award.

PANDA (Performance and Assessment) reports were sent to the school annually to assist with the self evaluation, target setting and the development of plans to raise standards. The report is a management tool to help school managers see how effective their school is in comparison with other schools. There are three different types of PANDA report – primary schools, secondary schools and special schools.

Each PANDA report contained basic information about the school ie: the context in which the school works, a summary of key performance data broken down by key stages and comparison with other schools.

Accompanying the PANDA report is the National Summary Data Report (NSDR). The NSDR contains guidance and an extensive range of information collated from the inspection evidence allowing comparisons such as student – teacher ratios, unit costs and patterns of strengths and weaknesses in schools nationally.

The information in the PANDA report showed the data held by the government on schools and what would be available to Ofsted inspectors when an individual school is inspected. The performance data included all students; no adjustment had been made for refugee or asylum seekers. The PANDA report is confidential and not published by Ofsted.

(<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/atoz/o/ofstedpandareports/>)

The Pupil Achievement Trackers (PAT) software was sent to all schools in October 2003. The PAT is a tool to support Assessment for Learning (AFL) because it enables teachers to analyse performance data. It generated information which could be used to: support teaching and learning, raise standards, help identify student's needs and maximise their potential. It was also very useful for target setting. PAT enabled schools to look back at their own performance results and compare them to the results of students in other schools across the country. PAT produced a range of reports including the new Schools Improvement Summary Report.

(<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/afl/PAT/>)

### **School Improvement Advisers**

The capacity of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to support their schools facing challenging circumstances varied and was strengthened by the DfES initiative to establish a network of School Improvement Advisers (SIAs). The Government was determined that every secondary school should meet or surpass a set of floor targets for achievement at GCSE level. The School Improvement Advisor Program launched in April 2003, established or reinforced a function within LEAs that supported schools that were in danger of not meeting floor targets. The role of the SIA was managed by each LEA through its existing management arrangements. The LEA sometimes used its own staff, arranged for secondments or used external private or public sector organisations.

The SIAs worked within their LEAs to devise and implement strategies for schools facing challenging circumstances. Any intervention had to be appropriate to the needs of the individual school with the levels of intervention based on categories of concern, established by an analysis of performance information.

SIAs made use of the expertise within schools and secured LEA support for the leadership group of each school facing challenging circumstances so that they were capable of implementing their Raising Attainment plan. The emphasis was on collaboration to raise student's attainment, to provide a stretching curriculum and to ensure that teaching strategies were matched to students learning needs.

The DfES provided funding for three years (2003 – 2006) for each LEA which had schools in danger of not meeting the GCSE floor targets. The total funding was approximately £21.5 m. (<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/si/SfCC/in/sia/>)

## Current (Post September 2005)

In 2004 *A New Relationship with Schools* (NRwS) document and subsequent NRwS publications, developed jointly between Ofsted and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) were released.

The documents were timely because by the end of July 2004 all schools had been inspected twice under the previous Ofsted system.

The NRwS document acknowledged that times had changed and schools were more likely to have established systems in place for self evaluation, development planning and performance management. The document proposed the establishment of a new relationship between the government and the education profession in primary and secondary schools through:

- Building the capacity of schools
- A rigorous accountability framework and a lighter touch
- Easier access to support for schools
- A streamlined school improvement process
- A unified dialogue to take place between schools and the wider education system.

The NRwS documents describe the importance of and new requirements relating to school self assessment, improvement planning, and the introduction of nationally accredited School Improvement Partners. (SIPs)

To support the NRwS document, Ofsted released the *Strategic Plan 2005 – 2008* in November 2004. Objective 2 of the document outlined the inspection procedure.

Inspection of maintained schools:

Since September 2005, HMCI (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector) publishes all inspection reports. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) are involved in all school inspections and lead most inspections in secondary schools and the majority of inspections in primary school, working with inspection contractors. A program of selection and training has been developed to ensure registered and enrolled inspectors make an appropriate contribution and receive professional development. The views of parents will be pursued.

Quality Assurance:

The quality of inspections and the competence and effectiveness of inspectors whether HMI or independent inspectors; and securing the validity of all reports issued under HMCI is a focus for Ofsted.

Monitoring Schools Causing Concern:

Schools identified as causing concern are categorised as either special measures or a notice for improvement. ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

Ofsted's role was subsequently supported in the Government's October 2005, White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All*. The principle which underpins the proposals are that every child is special and that all children should have the opportunity and support to develop their skills and ability to achieve their full potential and apply them in a way that is appropriate to a 21<sup>st</sup> century world. From the consultation, recommendations and feedback received the vision for the education

service for the years ahead has been set and is outlined in the *Ofsted Strategic Plan 2005 – 2008* and *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*.

The plan to create a school system shaped by parents includes: enable every school to become self governing; create a new Office of the Schools Commissioner; enable parents to demand new schools; encourage existing schools to expand and to meet demand and to make it easier for independent schools to enter the state system; create new vocational provision for 14 – 19 year olds; give the weakest schools a year to improve or face closure with a stronger role for local authorities in tackling failure and underperformance, and boost the autonomy and performance of all schools with less bureaucracy; lighter touch inspection for high performing schools and continue to promote Academies as a key part of the system.

Academies are a new type of secondary school that brings a distinctive approach to school leadership through drawing on the skills of sponsors and other supporters. Academies are all ability schools established by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups working in partnerships with central government and local education partners. Sponsors and the DfES provide the capital costs for the Academy. Running costs are met in full by the DfES. Most Academies are located in areas of disadvantage. They either replace one or more existing schools facing challenging circumstances or are established where there is a need for additional school places. Academies are innovative in design and built to high environmental standards. ([http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/what\\_are\\_academies/?version=1](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/what_are_academies/?version=1))

### **Self Evaluation and The Inspection**

As outlined by Ofsted (2005) school inspections are required by law and in September 2005 under the Education Act a new system of short notice inspections came into being. In England in 2005, there were 23 054 primary, secondary, nursery and special schools; and pupil referral units. In the autumn term over 2 000 schools were inspected. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) lead a proportion of inspections and also quality assured the work of six regional inspection service providers, two in each of the regions: Northern, Midlands and Southern. (Ofsted Departmental Report, 2006, p.5).

Under the new system schools are required to complete a twenty five page Self Evaluation Form (SEF) on a continuous basis, and at least annually, which requires schools to be aware of strengths and areas of development and to then do something about the improvement and development of the identified areas. The focus is on school self evaluation combined with evidence and strategic policies for development and improvement. Schools develop their own process of self evaluation and fit the completion of the SEF into their core systems as determined by the school.

Self evaluation is central to the new inspection arrangements. For school inspections the SEF serves as the main document when planning the inspection and is crucial in evaluating the quality of leadership and management and the school's capacity to improve. The SEF helps to make the inspection sharper and more helpful while still providing evaluations against a national framework. Blank SEF forms in pdf format are available for primary, secondary and special schools. They can be downloaded in pdf format from <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/schools/sef.cfm>.

Inspection frameworks need to be flexible to incorporate the different learning facilities catering for 0 – 19, covered by inspections. Common characteristics in the inspection frameworks include:

- Same overall architecture
- Same key questions
- Same grading scales
- Same principles of inspection
- Cover the five outcomes set out in *Every Child Matters*
- Share the same terminology
- Reports of approximately the same length and structure
- A focus on outcomes

The school inspection occurs every three years and a school normally receives two to five working days notice of the inspection.

Schools are required to notify parents of the inspection and to include details of how they may inform the inspectors of their views. The letter would include a brief questionnaire for parents to record their views about the school.

The size of the inspection team varies, depending upon the size of the school, from one to five inspectors. The inspection team spends no longer than two days in the school. Inspectors study the schools Self Evaluation Form and use this and the school's Performance and Assessment (PANDA) report and the report from the previous inspection to prepare a pre-inspection briefing about the school.

School inspections cover the six key areas outlined in the Education Act 2005:

- Quality of education provided
- How the education provided by the school meets the learning needs of the range of students at the school
- Educational standards achieved
- Leadership and management
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The contribution made by the school to the well being of the students.

Also covered in the inspection is the school's attention to the five outcomes for children and young people as set out in *Every Child Matters*.

Pre inspection activities and contacts from inspectors with a school aim to ensure:

- Good communication and effective working relationships are established with the school.
- Arrangements for the inspection are agreed.
- Demands on the school are kept to a minimum.
- Pre inspection information has been analysed.
- Issues for the inspection have been established and shared with the school.
- Members of the inspection team have a clear understanding of what the school offers and a shared view of inspection issues and arrangements. The pattern of inspection activities undertaken will depend on the lead inspector's analysis of the issues arising from the school's self evaluation however examination of performance data and assessment records forms an important part of the inspection.

The school's SEF is used as the basis for discussion between the lead inspector and the senior team and where possible the governors of the school.

Inspectors report on:

- Description of the school
- Overall effectiveness of the school
- Achievement and standards
- Quality of provision
- Leadership and management
- The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy
- The extent to which providers ensure that they stay safe – (Behaviour and Attendance)
- The extent to which learners make a positive contribution

The pattern of inspection activities undertaken will depend on the lead inspector's analysis of the issues arising from the school's self evaluation however examination of performance data and assessment records forms an important part of the inspection.

At the start of the inspection the school provides to the inspector a copy of the school improvement plan, school timetable and plan of the school.

During the course of the inspection evidence is collected through:

- Direct observation
- Talking to staff, students and others in the school.
- Tracking school processes eg: evaluation and performance management.
- Analysing samples of student work.
- Joining meetings such as school council.
- Analysing records relating to students with special needs including individual educational plans and review.
- Tracking case studies of students with learning difficulties and disabilities; and children in care.

Evidence forms are used by inspectors to record their observations and discussions about the evidence during the course of the inspection.

Inspectors provide feedback throughout the inspection. At the end of the inspection, the lead inspector briefly outlines the inspection findings to the head teacher. The overall judgement made about a school represents the view of the whole inspection team.

The format of the inspection report is prescribed however the content and wording reflects the findings about the school by the inspectors. Reports have moved to approximately six pages with a focus on key outcomes and clearer recommendations for improvement.

The draft report is available to the school the next day. The school's senior team and governing body have the opportunity to then check the draft report prior to publication of the report three weeks after the inspection. One working day is allocated to the school to comment on the draft, unless the school is placed in a category of concern.

For schools placed in either of these categories the judgement is subject to moderation by senior HMI. The law requires that HMCI personally authorises a report which states that special measures are required. When a draft report includes either of these judgements, special measures or a notice to improve, the governing body must be given five days notice to comment on the draft before the report is finalised.

Parents are the main audience of the report. A brief letter to students giving the main findings of the inspection is provided. Blank inspection report templates in Word and pdf formats can be downloaded from <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=3854>)

A copy of the report is sent to the LEA or appropriate governing body. The governing body must send a copy of the report to all parents and carers of the school within five working days of receiving it. A copy of the report must be made available on request to members of the public.

Ofsted has moved from a seven point to a four point judgement and grading scale.

### **Judgement and Grading System**

<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Outstanding	1
Good	2
Satisfactory	3
Inadequate	4

As from September 2005, if a school's overall effectiveness is judged inadequate, the school is categorised as a School Causing Concern (SCC) and inspectors must decide whether it requires special measures or a notice to improve.

Schools require special measures when they are failing to give learners an acceptable standard of education and when the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Schools that aren't performing as well as they should but demonstrate a capacity to improve receive a notice to improve.

The progress of schools requiring special measures or served with a notice to improve is monitored by HMI. Schools requiring special measures receive their first visit six to eight months after designation. HMI is able to publish a report at any time either imposing or removing the imposed categories.

Schools that remain subject to special measures two years after designation are re-inspected and a new report is published either renewing or removing the category.

Schools served with a notice to improve are re-inspected after one year, when the category is removed or renewed, or the school is made subject to special measures.

In addition to regular monitoring visits from Ofsted, the DfES provide additional support depending on the needs of each school. The options may involve strengthening the leadership of a school or providing extra support for teaching and learning. For serious cases there may be a Fresh Start, a collaborative restart with a stronger school or the appointment of an Interim Executive Board, which has the power to replace the governing body of a weak or failing school, while the school is turned around if the governing board is a part of the problem. The new approach to inspections is not intended to reduce the opportunities for governors to be involved.

A Fresh Start school is a new maintained school which is designed to replace a closing school (or schools) requiring special measures or significant improvement, subject to a formal warning or for secondary schools with less than 25% of its

students gaining at least five A\* - C grades at the GCSE level. Schools must be approved by Ministers for acceptance into the Fresh Start program.

A Fresh Start school will:

- Establish a clear commitment with its LEA and senior management to provide all students with the right learning environment to enable them to achieve their full potential.
- After a review of the staff and governance ensure that the school has the right people in place for the learning environment.
- Have clear, well planned and financially secure strategies in place for tackling the weaknesses and building on the strengths of the closing school especially in relation to teaching and learning, curriculum and staff development, behaviour and attendance, leadership and management, staff appointments, and responsiveness to the needs of the local community and other local schools.
- Have a raising attainment plan for implementing these strategies, agreed with its LEA, Ofsted and DfES, including an explicit commitment that both the school and the LEA will work closely with Ofsted and the DfES in doing so.

(<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/si/SCC/sifreshstart/sifdefinition/>)

School Improvement Partnership Boards have been set up in some local authorities to oversee school improvement in one or more schools. In some cases a failing school may be replaced by an academy.

In September 2006 Ofsted introduced a more proportionate approach to school inspection. Ofsted introduced lighter touch inspections for high performing schools. Schools where self evaluation is good and there is a successful track record in inspections will have a one day inspection, usually conducted by one inspector. In 2006/ 2007 this system will be introduced in 20% of higher achieving schools, with a view to extending the arrangement over the next two years.

Ofsted will also be carrying out trials of monitoring visits for a small proportion of satisfactory (Grade 3) schools where there are some areas of underachievement. (<http://www.gnn.gov.uk/Content/Detail.asp?ReleaseID=220934&NewsAreaID=2>)

HMIs quality assure inspections and assess the quality of inspections and reports, the effectiveness of additional inspectors and the regional contractors own quality assurance arrangements.

All schools are invited to take part in a post inspection survey. This feedback contributes to the ongoing evaluation of the inspection process.

Since 1997, over 1400 failing schools which required special measures have been turned around and a further 200 have been closed. Fifty of the schools closed have been given a Fresh Start, which means the school is closed and reopened on the same site under the normal school reorganisation procedure.

Since the commencement of the new Ofsted inspection arrangements there have been a larger than usual number of schools going into special measures however, there has also been a similar increase in the number of schools coming out. At the end of July 2006, the number of schools in special measures was 225. Turn around times have also improved with both primary and secondary schools spending less time in special measures. (<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/si/SCC/>)

## Testing in Schools and Data Collection

Since September 2005, testing in schools has remained the same as pre September 2005, however it is proposed for 2008 that changes will be made with diplomas introduced for training and a revision of the A levels.

RAISEonline (Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through School self Evaluation) a single source of school data and analysis, is a web based interactive tool developed by Ofsted to replace the Performance and Assessment (PANDA) report and the Pupil Achievement Tracker (PAT).

RAISEonline provides users with a wide range of analytical information to support the review of performance data in greater depth as part of self evaluation and target setting. Users will also be able to “drill – down” from the school level performance information in the current PANDA to see how individual students have contributed to this performance.

(<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/schools/dataandinformationsystems.cfm>)

It is not mandatory for schools to use this product however inspectors will be using the analysis and data provided to raise their own hypotheses and act as a starting point for discussions with schools. RAISEonline will provide the opportunity to look at contextual value added (CVA) progress to Key Stages 2, 3 and 4.

([http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/schools/fag\\_page.cfm](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/schools/fag_page.cfm)) RAISEonline will be officially launched in the autumn term 2006.

## School Improvement Partners

In 2005 the document titled “A New Relationship with Schools: Next Steps” was developed in conjunction with Ofsted and DfES. The document outlines the reshaping of the relationship between schools; and central and local government in order to help raise standards further. One of the strategies to be implemented is the external support from nationally accredited School Improvement Partners (SIP) working to LEAs. In September 2006 all secondary schools will have School Improvement Partners and 30 – 40 LEAs will have introduced SIP’s in primary schools. In September 2007 all primary schools will have SIP’s. The guiding principles of the work SIP’s will undertake include:

- Respect for the school’s autonomy
- Focus on student achievement
- Professional challenge and support
- Evidence based assessment and strategies
- Coherence from external agencies

A SIP will be accredited to national standards. Each School’s Improvement Partner will be accountable to the school’s maintaining authority through a contract which is managed by the National Strategies contractor. SIPs will be assessed for:

- Their ability to analyse a school’s strengths and areas for improvement
- Their judgement of effective strategies for school improvement
- Their ability to interact effectively with school leaders in a variety of circumstances.

SIPs will be selected from experienced head teachers, serving head teachers and experienced link advisers who support leadership and management of schools.

## Perceived Strengths (Pre and Post 2005)

- Schools may know up to a year in advance that an inspection may occur.
- Inspectors report available to the education facility eg: school within a given time frame.
- Reporting is completed against the same framework.
- Response to the report from the education facility eg: school to be completed within a given time frame.
- Follow up within a given time frame by Ofsted for education facilities eg: schools rated as performing inadequately.
- “Ofsted provides parents and the local community with up to date information about their local schools to reassure them of the quality of schools and to reveal the weaknesses”. (Ofsted, Annual Report 2004/5). Action is taken if education facilities eg: schools are not performing well.
- “In 1997 a third of children left primary school without having mastered the basics in English and maths. Now three-quarters achieve in maths and even more in English”. (Higher Standards, Better Schools For All More choice for parents and pupil, 2005, p.7). School improvement has been helped by the reforms introduced as well as the publishing of data and inspection reports.
- “Ofsted reports the proportion of good or excellent teaching in primary school rising from 45% in 1997 to 74% in 2004/5, and from 59% to 78% in secondary schools”. (Higher Standards, Better Schools For All More choice for parents and pupils, 2005, p.2)
- “2004/5 data revealed fewer schools were in special measures, 1%, compared with 1.5% in 2003/4”. (Ofsted, Annual Report, 2004/5).
- There has been a steady improvement in the quality of educational out put of English state – maintained secondary schools over the middle and late 1990’s. Possible causes for this success include the Ofsted inspection system since 1993, poor teachers forced to leave the profession, badly taught lessons have halved and the improvement in school procedures and delivery of education.
- “Due to the reforms 96 000 more children start secondary school able to do basic maths well and 84 000 have done well in English. Since the introduction of the Key Stage 3 strategies in 2001, 50 000 more 14 year olds reach the expected standards in English and maths”.(Higher Standards, Better Schools For All, More choice for parents and pupils, 2005, p.2).
- Against the indicators measured, the whole range of educational monitoring which includes the National Curriculum, testing the work of Ofsted and other interventions has caused performance to improve since the late 1980’s. (McAvoy, 2003, p.3).
- The league tables have been revised in recent years to include value added indicators, taking into account local socio-economic circumstances.

## New Strengths

- Notice given to schools for impending inspections has been cut to reduce the preparation time and effort expended by the school. (2 – 5 working days).
- Focus on self evaluation and education facilities being in the best position to make improvement and development according to their findings.
- Including self evaluation by education facilities as central to the new inspection arrangements. The head teacher is responsible for ensuring the self evaluation includes all key stakeholders: leadership team, middle leaders, teachers, support staff, learners, governing body, parents and community.
- Lighter touch for higher performing education facilities. eg: schools. From September 2006 the intention is to develop an inspection system for maintained schools that is more proportionate to risk. This can reduce the

burden of inspection on schools that are achieving very well and will focus resources on those schools where there is underachievement. (Smith, 2006, p.4).

- Shorter inspection time, two days, in education facilities eg: schools. The shorter inspections means Ofsted can see schools as they really are. Feedback received from 2000 new style inspections indicated positiveness about the short notice and nearly all head teachers thought the judgement made was fair and accurate. (Land, 2006, p.2).
- “Parents – Satisfaction with Schools” survey indicates most parents are satisfied with their children’s school. Primary and special schools rate highly.
- The letter to students advises students directly about the outcome of the inspection of their school because students are at the heart of education and therefore it is important to report the findings and gain their feedback.
- Ofsted constantly keeps its inspection under review to reflect society’s expectation that standards of care and education should improve.
- Data showing improvement in school leadership under the inspection regime reveals ten years ago 15% of leaders were judged as excellent or good and now in the first term of the new inspection regime 60% of leaders are rated as excellent or good. (Smith, 2006, p.2).
- Redirection of resources to frontline service delivery with a saving of £40 m by the end of 2007/2008.
- Rebuilding trust in schools.

### **Perceived Weaknesses (Pre and Post 2005)**

- Head teacher recruitment crisis. Hence the publication of books such as *“Head Teacher in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”* which includes ideas on how to manage the curriculum and Ofsted process.
- “Ofsted inspectors are part of teams operated by private contractors. When they find a school to be ‘failing’, the school can be closed by the Secretary of State for Education and then taken over, often by the same contractors that failed the school. Contractors then charge fees for consultancy and tendering out of the school services”. (Kent, 2000, p.2).
- “The implementation of tasks in the school’s action plans did not necessarily produce changes that were in line with Ofsted’s recommendations for the school”. (Lowe, 2002, p.10).
- Public accountability and scrutiny including the publishing of school rankings.
- Schooling reduced to accommodate the requirements outlined in the Handbook eg: during the Ofsted period of about 12 months the focus for the school was on benchmarks, comparison, models of performance and targets.
- Much of schooling becomes an exercise in preparing for tests, rather than the wider educational experience happening. (McAvoy, 2003, p.3).
- Ofsted visits seem to have adverse effects on the standards of exam performance achieved by schools in the year of the Ofsted inspection. Perhaps this could be attributed to efforts required by teaching staff to respond to the demands of the school inspection system are great enough to divert resources from teaching so as to affect adversely student achievement in the year of the visit.
- “School inspections have an indirect effect on student performance because they are far too removed from the daily experiences of teachers and students”. (Lowe, 2002, p.10).
- Under an inspectorial model there is little opportunity for instructional leadership. This style of leadership creates synergy between teaching and learning and the education facilities eg: schools capacity to improve continuously.
- The data reported on needs to be widened.

- “The inspection procedure gives an incomplete picture of teaching at the level of the individual”. (Lowe, 2002, p.13).
- The validity of inspection judgements.
- The specificity of the questions asked eg: quality of school meals, type of school furniture, and areas reported upon eg: help students to become faster in making mental math mathematical calculations, especially with facts.
- The quality of the inspector.
- “No genuine examination of the particular problems facing schools such as overcrowding, allocation of finance and resources to increase staff levels and meet children’s needs, especially those from poor and deprived backgrounds”. (Kent, 2000, p.2).
- With the notice given to the school of an impending inspection they can often quickly organise themselves in order to appear better than at other times when not being watched. In some instances a “range of tactical measures were put in place including decoration and cosmetic face lifts, rehearsing and coaching students, re running successful lessons, borrowing teachers from other schools and sending troublesome students off to external courses”. (MacBeath, 1999, p.2).
- The usefulness of the National Curriculum tests has been raised with test validity, the fact the tests change from year to year and therefore objective judgements about whether standards of achievement have really changed overtime cannot be made and the claim that tests have been administered creatively to improve results. These concerns leave people to believe the league tables are educationally misleading and divisive. (Woodhead, 1999, p.1).
- Students are constantly in the spotlight of testing and examining which leads to the issue of examination and test overload over the last fifteen years.
- The construction of the tests. ie: For testing reliability assessments need to have many items included. For young children long assessments are not desirable, however an assessment of just a few questions can lead to less able students receiving an inflated result.
- Cost of Ofsted ie: “£197 m per year” (Guardian, 2003, p.5) and an overall total estimate at some secondary schools of £60 000 per inspection.
- “No evidence that the occurrence of an Ofsted inspection has beneficial effects on school quality following the visit. In fact evidence suggests the Ofsted visit had detrimental effects on the performance of students”. (Rosenthal, 2001, p.3).
- Much of schooling becomes an exercise in preparing for tests, rather than the being exposed to a wider educational experience.
- Young people leaving school need to take with them the process of learning more than its measured outcomes. The process of learning is embedded in a more learner-centred, needs-centred approach.
- The parent factor – “draining schools of those parents most likely to be supportive of their children also erodes the social capital of the school”. (Mac Beath, 1999, p.3). eg: schools in special measures.
- Cost of testing.
- Testing is a concern. “The system encourages teaching to the test”. (McAvoy, 2003, p.4).
- Some educational psychologists and teachers also claim that the pressure put on children by parents in relation to testing is damaging their welfare. (McAvoy, 2003, p.3).
- Against the indicators measured, the whole range of educational monitoring which includes the National Curriculum, testing, the work of Ofsted and other interventions has caused performance to improve since the late 1980’s. However, whether the indicators the regime employs are correct or meaningful can be disputed. (McAvoy, 2003, p.3).

## New Weaknesses

- “Reforms introduced without sufficient thought and resourcing”. (Garner, 2006, p.1).
- Amount of preparation required by education leaders prior to the visit. ie: completion of SEF. eg: Primary schools - 25 very detailed pages. The head teacher is responsible for ensuring the self evaluation includes all key stakeholders: leadership team, middle leaders, teachers, support staff learners, governing body, parents and community.
- With the inspection reduced to two days this places a burden on schools and requires inspectors to make an instant judgement. The new sharper emphasis seems to reflect a policy which has narrowed the curriculum and minimised important aspects of school life ie: the child and their learning.
- Shortened notice time regarding the Ofsted visit has caused difficulties with the organisation of parent meetings.
- Increased frequency of the inspections by Ofsted.
- Against the indicators measured, the whole range of educational monitoring which includes the National Curriculum, testing, the work of Ofsted and other interventions has caused performance to improve since the late 1980's. However, whether the indicators the regime employs are correct or meaningful can be disputed. (McAvoy, 2003, p.3).

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