

Division(s):

## EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 APRIL 2015

### Changes to the Local Authority Arrangements to Support School Improvement (LAASSI) Inspection Framework and Implications for Scrutiny

Report by Director for Children's Services

#### Introduction

1. The quality of educational support by local authorities (LAs) has not been routinely inspected since 2008 and the focus has been on children's social care. However in January 2013 Ofsted introduced a new inspection framework - '*Local Authority Arrangements for Supporting School Improvement*' (LAASSI) which focused on school improvement functions of LAs and their effectiveness or otherwise in discharging these functions. May and November 2014 saw two sets of revisions to this Framework.
2. LAs still have a significantly active role in school improvement irrespective of the number of academies and free schools in their area. There are at least 13 statutory acts and sets of regulation relating to LA's school improvement functions and their general advocacy and education oversight accountabilities to promote high standards in all schools so that children and young people fulfil their potential. Children's services have a legal responsibility to promote the wellbeing of all local children and Councillors will always have a keen interest in high school standards to improve the educational outcomes and life chances of local children.
3. Oxfordshire County Council retains educational responsibility for 201 schools (79% schools in the County) plus the virtual school for approximately 514 looked after children, and school quality oversight functions for 84 academies (21% schools in the county).

#### Background

4. The current inspection framework is not universally applied to LAs but is risk led based on a series of triggers. The selection of LAs for a LAASSI inspection is determined by regional Ofsted Directors. The process now combines:

**Phase 1** (1 week duration) inspection of selected schools for a focussed inspection with additional questions about the role of the LA in supporting schools.

**Phase 2** (1 week duration) local authority inspection against the nine inspection themes and exploration of the issues raised by schools during Phase 1.

## Risk Assessment

5. There are eight main triggers which form the basis of regional identification of LAs for school improvement inspections. These will change on a termly basis as schools are inspected and their outcomes may improve the LA's position - or increase the risk level.

<b>Criteria/Triggers for Inspection February 2015 Risk Assessment</b>	<b>LA Evaluation (RAG)</b>	<b>Trend Direction</b>	<b>Comment</b>
1. % CYP in G/O schools/ PRUs/ Alternative Provision is lower than nationally	<b>Green</b>	↑	<i>Broadly in line with at Primary. Above at Secondary</i>
2. Higher than average number of schools in an Ofsted category and/or where progress of schools in a category is not rapidly improving	<b>Amber</b>	↑	<i>Broadly in line with at Primary. Slightly below at Secondary</i>
3. % of Good/ Outstanding schools is lower than national average	<b>Amber</b>	↑	<i>Better at secondary than Primary. % Outstanding schools lower than nationally.</i>
4. Attainment Levels are lower than national average and/or improvement trends are weak	<b>Amber</b>	Mixed ↔	<i>EYFSP/ KS1 in line with KS2 – relative position falling KS4 –above national</i>
5. Rates of Progress, relative to starting points, are lower than national average and/or improvement trends are weak	<b>Green</b>	↑	<i>KS 1-2 above national KS 2-4 strongly above national</i>
6. Pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium achieve less well than pupils not eligible for the PP nationally	<b>Red</b>	↓	<i>Pupil premium gaps at both KS2 and KS4 wider than national</i>
7. Qualifying complaints to Ofsted about schools in LA	<b>Green</b>	↔	
8. Where the SoS requires an inspection of LA SI functions	<b>Amber</b>	↔	

## Focus Areas for a School Improvement Inspection

6. There are **four reporting areas** :
1. Corporate Leadership & Strategic Planning
  2. Monitoring, Challenge, Intervention & Support
  3. Support & Challenge For Leadership & Management (Including Governance)

4. Use of Resources

7. There are **nine themes** explored during the inspection process with **87 grade descriptors** (criteria) split across these nine themes:

1. The effectiveness of corporate and strategic leadership of school improvement
2. The clarity and transparency of policy and strategy for supporting school improvement and how clearly the LA has defined its monitoring, challenge, support and intervention roles
3. The extent to which the LA knows schools and other providers, their performance and the standards they achieve and how effectively support is focused on areas of greatest need
4. The effectiveness of the LA's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools, including the use of formal powers available to the LA
5. The impact of the LA support and challenge over time and the rate at which schools and other providers are improving, including the impact of the LA strategy to narrow attainment gaps
6. The extent to which the LA brokers and/or commissions high quality support for maintained schools and other providers
7. The effectiveness of strategies to support highly effective leadership and management in maintained schools and other providers
8. Support and challenge for school governance
9. The way the LA uses any available funding to effect improvement, including how it is focused on areas of greatest need

**The National Picture**

8. There are some worrying national trends relating to LAASSI inspections. Of the 17 LAs (which include five counties) subject to LAASSI inspections to date only two (Bournemouth and Peterborough) have been judged to be 'effective'. Prior to the November 2014 Ofsted Framework revisions there were only 2 possible outcomes to inspection – 'effective' or 'ineffective'. Under the current Framework Ofsted now only make a set of recommendations.
9. Based on 2013-14 national school Ofsted inspections 39% of the schools judged to be 'outstanding' or 'good' declined at their next inspection with 15% of them declining two grades to 'requiring improvement' or 'inadequate'. In many LAs the focus for support, and the deployment of the decreased resource, has been on the 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' schools rather than the good or outstanding schools. Governor support services were generally a strength, but few LAs made effective governance provision beyond this. More than half of the inspected LAs *'did not understand the overall quality of governance and had not made clear their governance improvement strategy'*.

10. Nationally a number of common weaknesses for ineffective LAs have been identified across the four reporting areas. Overall the most common areas of weakness were (in order of incidence):

- *The use of timely performance data*
- *Self-evaluation of LA work*
- *Collaborative and partnership working*
- *Support and challenge for governance*
- *Use of formal procedures*

<p><b>Corporate Leadership And Strategic Planning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Weak corporate leadership and failure to develop and communicate a shared strategy/vision for school improvement.</li> <li>▪ Schools not fully consulted and engaged in planning or developing the strategy.</li> <li>▪ Poor relationship building with broader group of stakeholders – system leaders, school networks and other partners.</li> <li>▪ Poor understanding of schools’ performance, contributing to weak strategic planning and unambitious/ineffective targets for improvement.</li> <li>▪ Intervention driven by ‘crisis management’ rather than an analysis of need across all schools.</li> <li>▪ Schools uncertain about how concerns and levels of support are identified.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Monitoring And Challenge</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ LA staff of variable quality. Records of visits not evaluative.</li> <li>▪ Lack of rigour and transparency in benchmarking of performance data, school effectiveness and risk assessment</li> <li>▪ Weak LA quality assurance arrangements.</li> <li>▪ Ineffective work with weak/inadequate schools, including poor use of formal or informal powers of intervention.</li> <li>▪ Poor use of good or outstanding schools to support weaker providers, or a lack of capacity to meet the demand for help.</li> <li>▪ A limited understanding of schools’ performance and individual strength and weaknesses beyond ‘headline’ data.</li> <li>▪ Evaluations of schools’ effectiveness not grounded in a thorough understanding of strengths and weaknesses – particularly of teaching.</li> <li>▪ Ineffective action taken to identify and address local issues e.g. outcomes for particular group of pupils.</li> <li>▪ A too-reactive approach, focusing on failing schools, and too remote from others, including academies.</li> </ul>
<p><b>School Leadership And Governance</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Failure to identify and address weak school leadership.</li> <li>▪ Perceived and often proven inconsistency in the quality of work of individual LA school improvement staff.</li> <li>▪ Poor capacity building for school-to-school support, including weaknesses in supporting/working with school networks and</li> </ul>

## ESC6

	<p>National, Local and Specialist Leaders of Education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Poor understanding of the quality of governance in individual schools.</li> <li>▪ Ineffective steps taken to strengthen the quality of governance, including through use of experienced governors, National Leaders of Governances or through establishing Interim Executive Boards (IEBs)</li> <li>▪ Limited understanding of how 'best practice' can be used or brokered.</li> <li>▪ Lack of engagement with system leaders and school networks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Use Of Resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Poor evaluation of the impact of school improvement work.</li> <li>▪ Inability to demonstrate whether strategies are working or provide value for money.</li> <li>▪ Weak or ineffective systems to support these financial processes and quality assurance with schools.</li> <li>▪ Accountability – various levels</li> </ul>

11. Nationally, a number of common successes for LAs have been identified. The most common areas of strength were:

- *Rigorous and clear challenge*
- *Good school performance data available*
- *Effective work with system leaders and networks*
- *Effective support and challenge for governance*

**Effective LAs have:**

- Successfully negotiated an open and co-operative culture across all schools, focused on LA-wide outcomes.
- Re-designed approaches to meet local needs and changing resources.
- A strategy for encouraging stronger schools to support weaker schools which was transparent, consistently applied, and understood by elected members, headteachers and governors.
- Developed collaborative partnerships of schools and groups of schools, and commissioned or brokered support from teaching schools, local alliances and trusts, and NLEs/LLES (National/Local Leaders of Education)
- Good knowledge of their schools, had a good understanding of performance and contextual information, and ensured decision-making processes were tied to regular data collections.
- Credible staff who succeeded in 'striking the right balance' between challenge and support.
- Ensured intervention in underperforming schools swift and proportionate, including through 'in-house' approaches or use of statutory intervention powers.
- Reported significant concerns about academies to DfE/RSC (Department for Education/Regional Schools Commissioner) promptly.
- Taken robust action taken where governance was weak.

- Provided support and training that was valued by schools and carefully linked to identified needs.

### **Preparatory Actions taken by Officers**

12. A LAASSI Forum chaired by the Deputy Director for Education and Learning has been established which meets regularly and oversees the preparation and evidence collection. Its work to date has included :
  - a. Data Reports have been reconfigured to reflect the focus areas.
  - b. Lead officers and challenge partners have been identified for each of the nine themes.
  - c. Self-evaluation position statements are being scoped for each of the nine themes.
  - d. An evidence and impact library - cross referenced to the inspection framework criteria - is being collated.
  - e. Key policy and practice documentation is being reviewed and revised where necessary to reflect the emphasis required from the LAASSI inspection process.
  - f. The Education Strategy is being refocused for 2015-17.
  - g. Case Studies of effective practice are being scoped
  - h. The work and deployment of the Schools and Learning Service (S&LS) is being refocused to clarify the Core Offer (statutory) functions and the Core Offer Plus (strategic) functions for schools.
  - i. Developed commissioning specifications with Oxfordshire Teaching Schools Alliance on key areas for schools to school support (S2SS).
  - j. A new partnership commissioning model is being consulted upon for school led sector wide improvement.
  - k. A designated officer has been allocated for school leadership and management – a significant gap for the County.
  - l. Learning from inspected LAs has been undertaken.
  - m. A collective presentation detailing the context of the LA and its approach to supporting school improvement is being compiled as part of staff, schools and inspectorate briefing.
  - n. The designated school improvement spend has been identified as £30 per maintained pupil (3-16) compared with the national average of £29-£32. The challenge now is to ensure that this spend delivers improved performance compared with our statistical neighbours and puts Oxfordshire in the top quartile across **all** school improvement measures and indicators.

### **Implications for Education Scrutiny Committee**

13. Members of Education Scrutiny Committee will be interviewed by HMI as part of the LAASSI inspection process with particular emphasis on reporting areas 1 and 2. Minutes and Forward Plans from Education Scrutiny Committee will be reviewed as part of the evidence base to ensure Scrutiny Committee is performing their due diligence function in the inspection focus areas. Scrutiny Committee members will be expected to be aware of the key strands of

education policy, service delivery programmes and how the Council's statutory accountabilities and strategic objectives are being secured.

14. Scrutiny Committee may find it helpful to review their readiness for potential LAASSI inspection by addressing the following key questions:
  - a. **Does our Forward Plan include sufficient education items to cover the range of LAASSI reporting themes?**
  - b. **Are we sufficiently clear about the LA strategy for education and how well we are doing?**
  - c. **How successfully have we scrutinised the use of resources for education? What is it telling us about recommendations for future deployment?**
  - d. **How close are we to our maintained schools and academies and the impact they are having on learners we are accountable for?**

## **Conclusion**

15. The County will only get five days' notice of an inspection under the LAASSI framework and as much preparatory work as possible needs to be covered in case we are inspected.
16. The preparatory work is valuable not just for potential inspection but because it serves as a driver for necessary changes to our policies and practices to secure the transformational step changes for Oxfordshire to take its legitimate place in the statistical neighbour top quartiles of league tables for local authorities. In this way inspection can become a valid and valuable force for change.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**The Committee is RECOMMENDED to note this report and consider how their forward work plan enables them to ensure appropriate Scrutiny coverage of the nine inspection themes**

### **JIM LEIVERS**

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