Guidance on writing effective school improvement plans

Introduction

Improvement planning is a process through which schools determine their strategic direction and priorities, set goals for themselves and make decisions about how and when these goals will be achieved. The ultimate objectives of the process are to improve the quality of learning and teaching in order to improve outcomes for pupils.

A school improvement plan should also be the mechanism through which the governing body holds school leaders to account and through which the impact of the school’s strategies to secure improvement can be evaluated. It should be a living document which every member of staff uses routinely as a reference point for how they plan, carry out and develop their own work and areas of responsibility.

The planning process

To write an effective improvement plan school leaders, including governors, must make a judgement about the school’s overall effectiveness; they must know where things are going well - and less well. In particular, they must understand the impact that teaching over time has on pupils’ learning. Such rigorous self-evaluation enables a school to set its priorities for the next steps in its development. East Sussex Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service (SLES) provides separate guidance for schools on writing self-evaluation documentation.

School leaders should also review the previous school improvement plan. Some priorities may have been fully completed: For example, the planned review of a key policy may have taken place and changes may now be embedded. However, issues around the quality of teaching or pupils’ progress in a particular subject may not have been completely resolved and school leaders will need to consider the next stage in the process of development.

The selection of areas for improvement may also be driven by:

- changes to the intake and the families served by the school
- changes to statutory requirements, such as to the National Curriculum or Ofsted frameworks for inspection
- the key issues identified in the last Ofsted inspection report or a local authority review.

Areas for improvement need to be prioritised: Too many new initiatives could lead to overload for staff, so when finalising priorities for the plan, school leaders need to

- consider which things will have the biggest impact on outcomes for pupils
- take account of the school’s financial position and the resources required for each priority
- decide which issues are common to other providers in the locality, and therefore what actions might be better undertaken collaboratively within Education Improvement Partnerships (EIPs).

EIPs receive funding from the local authority to plan projects and activities to meet the needs of local schools. These may include: developing support programmes, undertaking joint reviews of schools and developing future generations of school leaders.
The headteacher is ultimately responsible for improvement planning, but governors, other leaders, school staff and other stakeholders should be actively involved in all stages of the process: planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating progress.

The following table provides a suggested timeline for the planning process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Person/s responsible</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terms 1-4</td>
<td>Monitor the quality of teaching according to the agreed monitoring schedule and track pupils’ progress. Update summary of self-evaluation.</td>
<td>Senior leaders and subject leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Set dates for stakeholder meeting in June to involve staff, governors and parent representatives.</td>
<td>Headteacher and Chair of Governors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Evaluate outcomes of current school plan Prepare self-evaluation paperwork and documentation for stakeholder meeting.</td>
<td>Senior leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Carry out survey of parents and pupils.</td>
<td>Governing Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Hold stakeholder meeting to set future priorities.</td>
<td>Staff, governors, parent representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>Review outcomes for pupils in SATs Analyse in-school data and further update of self-evaluation.</td>
<td>Governing body, senior leaders and subject leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By end of Term 6</td>
<td>Draft new school plan.</td>
<td>Senior leaders and governor representatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Present new plan to staff and governors.</td>
<td>Senior leaders</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Begin staff appraisals based on targets from the new school improvement plan.</td>
<td>Senior leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write more detailed subject/aspect/phase action plans based on main improvement plan.</td>
<td>Middle leaders</td>
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**Writing the plan**

The following sections should be included in the plan:

- The school’s vision
- Information about the school’s context
- Priorities for improvement identified by self-evaluation, Ofsted or any external review
- Targets for attainment
- Targets for the quality of teaching
• Targets for attendance
• Actions for each priority with success criteria and practice indicators for each priority
• Finite timescales for actions with a named person responsible for leading each improvement priority
• A list of the resources required to complete the actions
• An explanation of how each the sections of the plan (set out according to the sections of the Ofsted Framework) will be monitored and evaluated.

The East Sussex pro forma

A pro forma has been developed by the local authority in consultation with schools and has been trialed. The plan is divided into sections. Whether a school uses the East Sussex pro forma or their own pro forma, the following sections are essential:

Vision

Vision statements provide a collective understanding of 'why we are here', often stating fundamental beliefs about education, the school's values and its aims for its community of learners. For example,

'We believe that good teamwork and positive partnerships with individual children, the whole class, our colleagues, with governors, parents and the wider community will lead to effective teaching, high standards and successful learning.'

Context

It is important that the plan sets out any changes to the circumstances of the school that have had an impact on its priorities for improvement. This may, for example, include a rise in the number of pupils on the school roll, turnover in staffing or operational changes necessary to meet new statutory requirements.

This section may include how the school has responded to the last Ofsted inspection and addressed the issues identified.

This section should also describe changes in the school that have increased its capacity to improve as well as any significant challenges that the school faces. For example, the appointment of an experienced assessment leader may have increased the school's capacity to develop effective assessment systems and analyse data. However, the recruitment of five newly qualified teachers may present a challenge for the school to manage and support their induction and development effectively.

Priorities for school Improvement from school's self evaluation

This section of the East Sussex pro forma, set out as a quadrant according to the sections of the Ofsted framework, helps to record the priorities for improvement identified in any recent Ofsted inspection or local authority review, as well as the school's self-evaluation, and to ensure they are used to determine the key actions that are identified in the later sections of the strategic plan.

Where a school has not been inspected for more than three years, the areas for improvement identified at the last full Ofsted inspection may no longer be relevant because these will have been addressed by previous plans. In this case, there is no need to identify or include them.
Targets for attainment

Schools should set end-of-key-stage targets for pupils’ attainment based on the proportion of pupils expected to reach and exceed the Expected Standard.

Schools should use the ‘Fischer Family Trust Aspire’ benchmarks to set challenging end-of-key-stage targets for reading, writing and mathematics for each year group. These should be based on the average (50) or high (20) level of challenge: it is expected that targets would usually be set according to the higher level of challenge.

Schools should also set end-of-year targets for pupils’ attainment in each year group.

The targets for attainment for disadvantaged pupils are expected to be the same as for all pupils. Schools should then compare the attainment of disadvantaged pupils with non-disadvantaged pupils to monitor whether any gaps in attainment are closing.

In relation to pupils with SEN, it is also expected that the school will compare their attainment and progress with that of other pupils.

Schools should also track progress and gaps for any other group of pupils that are at risk of underachievement.

Schools with high pupil mobility may wish to track the achievement of ‘late joiners’.

Similarly, schools should analyse attendance data to set overall targets for pupils’ attendance. Targets for groups such as those eligible for support from the Pupil Premium should be set as necessary.

Separate pro formas are available for reporting pupils’ attainment and progress throughout the year.

Targets for the quality of teaching

Schools should set realistic annual targets for improvement in the overall quality of teaching and track progress towards these three times each year. Information from a wide range of monitoring activities, including regular book scrutinies and reviews of pupil progress data should inform the school’s judgements of the quality of teaching in each class.

Priorities in each section of the Ofsted Framework

The East Sussex pro forma enables schools to identify the priorities for improvement for each section of the Ofsted Inspection Framework. The priorities in each section should be consistent with those in the quadrant in Section 2 of the plan.

Success criteria and practice indicators

For each priority it is important to identify precise success criteria and practice indicators that will demonstrate that the priority has been addressed. In the main, practice indicators should describe what practice teachers and leaders will be engaged in if the necessary improvement is secured e.g. “Teachers planning will be informed by their ongoing assessment of individual children’s learning”, “Subject leaders will moderate teachers’ assessments of pupils’ work”, “Teachers will implement the revised marking and feedback policy consistently”. Success criteria will usually be measurable e.g. “Pupils attendance will be in line with the national average”, “Pupils in Key Stage 2 will make accelerated progress in writing”.

Separate pro formas are available for reporting pupils’ attainment and progress throughout the year.
Success criteria and practice indicators should be dated so that the governing body and external evaluators such as the local authority adviser can monitor and evaluate the school’s progress.

Leadership teams should answer the following questions to arrive at success criteria and practice indicators:

> What will be different for pupils in terms of provision?
> What will teachers and/or pupils do differently that will tell us we have been successful?
> What will leaders be doing differently?

**Actions to be taken**

After the success criteria and practice indicators have been identified, school leaders should then decide on the actions they will take to enable those practice indicators and success criteria to be met.

The actions are the steps that need to be taken to effect the improvement. It may be helpful when writing actions to start each one with an **active verb**.

For example:

**Review and revise** current marking and feedback policy.

**Introduce** new assessment programme to track and monitor pupil progress towards targets termly.

**Set** targets for the most significant groups of underachieving pupils across the school, including boys and those in receipt of the pupil premium.

**Track** and evaluate the progress of these groups of pupils against targets and milestones rigorously, regularly reporting this progress to governors and planning and taking further action in the light of this.

**Train** teachers on Talk for Writing through a staff meeting.

**Coach** middle leaders to develop their leadership skills.

**Timescales**

School leaders should consider each action and determine the most suitable time to begin work on that action, as well as the duration of the work. Timescales may need to be adjusted if, for example, too many new strategies are due to be introduced in one term.

To enable governors to hold school leaders to account for the progress of the school improvement plan, ‘on-going’ timescales should be avoided.

**Person responsible/ Led by**

School leaders should select and name appropriate staff to provide leadership for the implementation of each action in the plan. It is important to ensure that responsibility for actions in the plan is distributed between members of the senior leadership team so that individuals are not overloaded.

**Resources**

The resources needed to deliver the plan may not just be financial. Time will also be needed, for example, staff meeting time or leadership time. Partner schools would also be regarded as a resource to support delivery of the plan, as would support from a SLES consultant.
Monitoring and evaluation

It is important for school leaders to be clear about the difference between monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring asks, *what is happening and is it going according to plan?* In short, it’s “checking up”. Evaluation judges the impact of the plan—*did it work? What were the unintended consequences? Could we have done it better?*

In the East Sussex pro forma, these sections of the improvement plan should cross reference to the school’s monitoring and evaluation schedule and include adviser visits and reports to the governing body. It should clearly show who will carry out the activities, when they will be done and what specific activity will be carried out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monitoring</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 2018 book scrutiny, classroom observations in targeted classes (SLT)</td>
<td>November 2018: HT report to GB on impact of initiatives to improve teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2018 LA adviser visit to observe the teaching of writing across the school</td>
<td>December 2018: Assessment leader report to governors on improvements seen in monitoring progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2018 Data analysis and pupil progress meetings (SLT and assessment leader)</td>
<td>December 2018 report on pupil progress and attainment to GB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2018 Pupil survey on attitudes to writing (governing body)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A monitoring and evaluation schedule is included in the appendices of the East Sussex school improvement plan pro forma. There is a termly schedule that enables schools to plan monitoring and evaluation activities for school leaders, governors, subject leaders, the school’s adviser and other personnel across the year. A clear termly plan enables schools to check that monitoring and evaluation activities are spread out so that staff are not overloaded. It also enables school leaders to check that a range of activities is carried out and that governors and leaders at all levels are involved in this work. The pro forma has space for schools to record both the activity to be carried out and the focus of the activity.

For example, the activity may be a scrutiny of pupils’ books, but in one case the focus might be on monitoring the implementation of the marking policy, and in another case the focus could be to evaluate pupils’ progress in writing. It is important the monitoring and evaluation schedule links directly with the priorities for improvement in the plan and it is helpful to cross reference the focus of activities to these priorities.