

Scrutiny Review of the School Improvement Service

Report by the Project Board:

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1. Background

- 1.1 Towards the end of 2001 it was acknowledged that the expectations and results from the schools in East Sussex were below those anticipated and that improvements would not come about through the existing in-house service. Coupled to this was the inability of East Sussex County Council (ESCC) to recruit a suitable Head of Service for the School Improvement Service (SIS). It was therefore decided to find a partner to bring about a real change in school improvement.
- 1.2 After a selection process the contract for the provision of the SIS was awarded to the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) in August 2002 for a five year period. Under the initial terms of the contract it is possible for the County Council to extend the contract for a further period of either six months or two years commencing on 1st September 2007.
- 1.3 The principal objectives of the CfBT School Improvement Service in East Sussex, as agreed at the start of the contract were:
- Improve educational standards in East Sussex Schools
 - Provide better support to schools, parents and pupils
 - Achieve effective partnerships
 - Deliver value for money
 - Provide schools with choice
- 1.4 East Sussex and Lincolnshire are the only two authorities that have consciously sought to outsource their SIS and both had chosen CfBT as their provider. Surrey has established an arms-length service with a third party partner (Vosper Thornycroft). In addition there are seven authorities (Islington, Southwark, Bradford, Hackney, Walsall, Swindon and Haringey) who were directed by the Secretary of State to establish an independent educational service.

2. Membership of the review board

- 2.1 The Review Board comprised of Councillors Kathryn Field (Chair), Pat Ost and Francis Whetstone.
- 2.2 The Project Manager was Gillian Rickels (Scrutiny Lead Officer) with logistics and support being provided by Sam White (Scrutiny Support Officer).

3. Objectives and scope of this review

- 3.1 The aim of the review was to examine whether the five objectives laid down at the start of the CfBT SIS contract (as listed at 1.3) had been met and the Board focused its research around these.

4. Evidence considered during the review

- 4.1 The Board considered the following documents:
- Audit Commission – The School Survey 2005
 - East Sussex LEA Data Compendium 2005
 - Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data analysis 2002 to 2005
 - OfSTED Annual Performance Assessment of East Sussex County Council 2005
- 4.2 The Board carried out a consultation with all 193 schools within the county in the form of a questionnaire to head teachers and chairs of governors. A total of 96 responses (50%) from head teachers and 45 responses (23%) from chairs of governors were received.
- 4.3 A focus session with a group of 17 head teachers and chairs of governors took place on 11th January 2006.
- 4.4 The Board met with and took evidence from Regan Delf and Nina Siddall, Joint Heads of School Improvement Service from CfBT and would like to thank them for their help and participation.
- 4.5 The Board met with and took evidence from Matt Dunkley, Director of Children's Services; Councillor Glazier, Lead Member for Children's and Adult Services and Councillor Simmons, Lead Member for Learning and School Effectiveness at East Sussex County Council.
- 4.6 The Board would like to thank the following for their help and participation in this review:
- Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors who took part in the consultation, and particularly those who attended the focus session
 - Sue Hall, PA to Chief Advisor of CfBT (for providing background documents)
 - Nick Jarman from The Benchmarking Club (for providing a cost comparison of School Improvement Services)

5. Findings - Improve Educational Standards in East Sussex Schools

5.1 Overall findings

Having taken into account all the different types of data provided with regard to exam results the Board felt that CfBT had made satisfactory progress since it took over the SIS, although there was still room for improvement.

The Board recognised that in 2004 the exam results across East Sussex schools had been good. East Sussex had been rated as one of the top 20 LEAs with regard to its rate of improvement and almost two thirds of its key stage target results rose more than the national average. Unfortunately this level of improvement had not been sustained in 2005.

The Board acknowledged that it is usual within education to compare results over a three year period but believed that comparisons over a longer period were also required as it took several years for any progress made with pupils at Key Stage 1 to move through the exam stages. It also recognised that the work of the CfBT advisors was only one factor which contributed to improvements. Improvement was also dependent upon the work of teachers in schools and pupils.

5.2 National results

The trend for the majority of the East Sussex Key Stage target results between 2002 and 2005 mirrored those of the national trend, with one result remaining static, 17 increasing and 5 decreasing.

Those East Sussex results that increased during this period tended to be either 1 or 2% ahead of the national average increase or 1 or 2% below it. Those East Sussex results that had decreased since 2002 did so at a slower rate than the national average decrease.

5.3 Comparison against our statistical neighbours

Sixteen East Sussex key stage results were compared with those of its statistical neighbours (a group of ten other county councils) between 2002 and 2005. The position of ESCC in each of the rankings had improved for five key stage results during that period, whilst five others had remained static and six had dropped.

The gap between ESCC and the top county council at each key stage result tended to increase or remain static over the three year period (seven increased, four remained the same and five decreased).

In several cases the gap between the top performing county council and ESCC was just 3 or 4%, but all the top performing county councils were above the national average for each key stage result in both 2002 and 2005.

5.4 Fischer Family Trust

Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data allows for better comparisons between East Sussex and the national average results as it compares 'like with like'. It does so using two different models:

Prior Attainment (PA) = compares each pupil's performance with that of other pupils nationally with the same levels of prior attainment.

Socio-Economic (SE) = adjustment of the prior attainment results to include a large number of socio-economic factors at school level

A comparison between Key Stage 1 and 2 results revealed that there had been steady improvement in East Sussex at both level 4 and 5 since 2002 in terms of the prior attainment and socio-economic data. All results at both levels were now either in line with or ahead of the national average.

A comparison between Key Stage 2 and 4 results revealed that in terms of the prior attainment and socio-economic data there has been little or no improvement on the results since 2002, with the majority of figures remaining just above or below the national average. The prior attainment figure for 5+ A*-C grades was 1.8 ahead of the national average in 2005, but this was a 0.6 drop from the result in 2002.

Since completing the review the Board was made aware of the fact that contextual value added information was now available from the FFT. Unfortunately the Board did not have time to consider this or include it in the final report.

5.5 Questionnaire

72% of head teachers (69 out of 96) and 76% of chairs of governors (34 of 45) who responded to the Board's questionnaire agreed that CfBT had helped improve educational standards in East Sussex Schools. They felt that work to improve targets, focused visits, good quality data, the Moderated School Self Review (MSSR) process, training and a focus on standards had helped in this.

8 head teachers and 1 chair of governors (12% overall) did not support this view and a further 2 head teachers and 3 chairs of governors (4% overall) found it difficult to measure the level of contribution that the SIS had made.

5.6 Audit Commission School Survey 2005

The Board considered the Audit Commission Survey as part of its evidence but had reservations about it. There had only been a 36% response rate from East Sussex schools (71 out of 198) in 2005, which was a 10% drop on the year before and the Board had concerns as to whether the survey data was robust.

The Board considered that two questions from the survey related to improving educational standards. These were 'the quality of CfBT's strategic planning for school improvement' and 'their effectiveness in challenging schools to perform better'.

In both cases schools in East Sussex viewed CfBT as being between satisfactory and good. Both results were in line with, or just below, the national average for these questions.

The Audit Commission, when comparing the East Sussex schools comments from 2005 with those from 2004 for 'effectiveness in challenging schools to perform better', stated that the 2005 view was 'statistically significantly worse' than that of the previous year.

5.7 Best Value Performance Indicators

Quarter two performance monitoring information revealed that those Best Value Performance Indicator targets under the heading of 'raise educational standards' (also listed under Key Performance Indicator 5) were not currently on track to meet their targets at the end of 2005/06 academic year.

6. Findings - Provide Better Support to Schools, Parents and Pupils

6.1 Overall findings

The Board considered that CfBT provided a good level of support to all schools and it had a good balance between the level of support it gave to schools considered to be 'failing' (those within MSSR category 5/OfSTED category) as compared to those schools considered to be successful (those within MSSR categories 1 and 2).

The Board recognised that CfBT had concentrated its efforts on 'failing' schools and that this had a great impact on reducing the number that were in MSSR category 5 by December 2005. The rise of schools in MSSR categories 1 and 2 showed that 'coasting' schools were now being challenged and were beginning to show signs of improvement.

The CfBT's MSSR system was recognised by the Board as being a useful tool for schools and had meant that they were well prepared for the new SEF process (Self Evaluation Form) that was being introduced by OfSTED.

The Board concluded that there were some areas of support that needed to be monitored to ensure improvements were made in the future. These are outlined in its recommendation.

6.2 Questionnaire and Focus Session

63% of head teachers (65 out of 96) and 67% of chairs of governors (30 out of 45) who responded to the Board's questionnaire agreed that CfBT provided better support to schools, parents and pupils than the previous in-house service. They highlighted the high level of support offered by CfBT when schools were in special measures and the support offered by individual advisors.

71% of chairs of governors (32 out of 45) stated that there was an improved level of support available to governor services. They felt that their governing bodies had been strengthened and had become more effective and confident as a result.

A main area of concern, amongst both head teachers and chair of governors, was the fact that some contact advisors did not remain with the school for any reasonable length of time. This meant that there was a lack of continuity and at some schools the advisors had only just become familiar with the school when they were replaced.

At the focus session held by the Board many of the comments from the questionnaires were reiterated. It was also stated that CfBT had provided a good level of assistance for smaller primary schools. Those from what were considered 'successful' schools acknowledged that CfBT had given them an external perspective and helped share good practice, but felt that it could not always provide the level of expertise that the school needed. Concern was also raised at the level of support received in a number of curriculum areas such as languages and science. There was also a view that the support/mentoring offered to new head teachers could sometimes be lacking.

6.3 MSSR Categories

A comparison between the number of schools in MSSR categories 4 and 5 in both 2004 and 2005 showed that there had been a significant reduction of schools in these categories.

6.4 Audit Commission School Survey 2005

Eighteen questions from the survey related directly to providing support. These were across a wide range of areas such as supporting the raising of attainment, supporting management within schools and supporting the needs of minority groups within the schools (such as gifted and talented children or children from minority ethnic groups)

An overall view of the results showed that CfBT was considered by schools to provide a satisfactory to good level of support across all the areas covered. The majority of results were in line with the national average.

7. Findings - Achieve Effective Partnerships

7.1 Overall findings

The Board concluded that CfBT did make an effort to identify where there was a need for partnership working and then develop one. A good example of this was the joint visits by members of CfBT and the Children's Services Authority (CSA) to schools to focus on raising achievements of vulnerable children. It was also noted that the work of the East Sussex Primary Strategy Learning Network was rated as exemplary by the DfES.

The Board considered the partnership between CfBT and ESCC to be good and mutually beneficial for both parties.

7.2 Questionnaire and Focus Session

65% of head teachers (62 out of 96) and 62% of chairs of governors (28 out of 45) who responded to the questionnaire agreed that CfBT achieved effective partnerships. At the focus session the importance of partnership between local schools was recognised and supported. But concerns were raised about the fact that there were many different partnerships in existence and that this could detract from their effectiveness.

7.3 Audit Commission School Survey 2005

Two questions that were asked in the survey related to achieving effective partnerships. These were 'CfBT's effectiveness in working in partnerships with other local authority departments' and 'external agencies and their effectiveness in encouraging schools to work together'. Those schools that had responded viewed CfBT as being between satisfactory and good in both of these areas. The Audit Commission, when comparing the East Sussex schools comments from 2005 with those from 2004, found that both questions scored 'statistically significantly better' than those from the previous year's survey.

8. Findings - Deliver Value for Money

8.1 Overall findings

The Board felt that, although the SIS contract with CfBT was more expensive than pre-contract costs and average national costs, the extra expenditure was not excessive when compared with the work it had done.

8.2 Contract costs

The original budget provision for the SIS in 2002/03 (pre-CfBT contract) had been £1,230,000.

Costs for each year of the contract so far have been:

Year	Cost	Additional cost above original budget provision for 2002/03
2002/03	£1,278,209 + £60,000*	£108,209
2003/04	£1,322,573	£92,573
2004/05	£1,363,193	£133,193

* = further £60,000 to create a post with the county council to overview the contract

It should be noted that if the SIS had remained in-house the budget provision each year since 2002/03 would have been increased in line with inflation.

8.3 Cost comparison of the SIS for ESCC and its statistical neighbours

	Cost/pupil (£)	SIS staffing levels
Devon	27*	39*
Dorset	29*	22*
E. Riding	31	14
Somerset	34	44
West Sussex	38*	46*
Leicestershire	39	50
ESCC	41	44
Cornwall	43	38
Beds	43	51
N. Somerset	45	16
Worcestershire	50	38
<i>Group Average</i>	<i>38</i>	
<i>National Average</i>	<i>37</i>	
<i>Unitary Authority Average</i>	<i>35</i>	
<i>Lincolnshire</i>	<i>27</i>	

** Full costs and number of staff actually greater than stated. Additional costs and staff met from income generated directly from schools.*

A comparison between the cost of the SIS in East Sussex with that of its statistical neighbours shows that East Sussex spends more per pupil than both the national average and the statistical neighbour group average (£41 per pupil compared to £38 per pupil).

The Board recognised that local authorities who had less pupils on their roll or had schools spread across a more rural area were likely to have higher costs per pupil due to a lack of opportunities for economies of scale and geographical spread. These high costs were therefore not unjustified, provided they were matched by acceptable rates of improvement in schools.

A further comparison between the cost of the SIS for each statistical neighbour and their ranking in each of the 16 key stage target results revealed that a higher spend did not guarantee better results.

8.3 Questionnaire and Focus Session

Views from head teachers and chair of governors as to whether or not the SIS delivered value for money were mixed. Only 50% of head teachers (47 out of 96) and 49% of chairs of governors (22 out of 45) believed that it was.

9. Findings - Provide Schools with Choice

9.1 Overall findings

The Board recognised that the SIS contract's primary role was to allow the Local Authority to fulfil its statutory duty towards monitoring and impacting on school standards. It also provided training and services, under Service Level Agreements, to individual schools, through the trading services arm of the organisation.

The Board felt that schools were limited when it came to choosing the type of service they wanted from the SIS. They could either buy into one of the set Service Level Agreements that CfBT offered or chose to purchase a service from another provider. The Board recognised that the charging structure for the two difference agreements on offer did reflect the size of the school but felt that the agreements needed to be more flexible so that they could be tailored to meet the particular needs of each school.

In 2005/06 12 primary schools, 5 secondary schools and 1 special school chose not to buy into the SIS, although some of these schools did buy into the service on a 'buy as you go' basis. The Board considered that this number could increase in the future with a move to school federations, which would give them greater buying power and might see them buying in their own advisors.

9.2 Questionnaire and Focus Session

Only 33% of head teachers (32 out of 96) and 33% of chairs of governors (15 out of 45) who responded to the Board's questionnaire agreed that CfBT provided schools with choice. Seven respondents did not complete this question and stated that they were unclear as to what was meant by choice in this context.

At the focus session one view was that schools should be offered more choice in the type of packages CfBT offered as some can be expensive or offered more

than a school wanted. There was also a difference in need between successful and unsuccessful schools, and the packages should reflect this. In some school improvement plans a need for services had been identified but CfBT did not provide particular access to specialist advisers in that area.

It was acknowledged that CfBT now offer a rolling programme of courses, but there were concerns that the courses could be expensive for those schools with a limited budget, such as small primary schools.

10. Recommendation

Recommendation

That ESCC should consider extending its contractual arrangements with CfBT for the School Improvement Service for a further 2 years (until August 2009).

The Board would wish to see the following 'enhancements' in any extension of the contract:

- a) Delivery of a programme to encourage, mentor, and identify potential candidates for headship within our schools.***
- b) An increase in the capacity to provide additional support and mentoring for newly appointed head teachers.***
- c) An action plan developed to lift East Sussex Schools significantly above the 'National Average' on Key Stage targets.***
- d) An increase in the supply of specialist teaching support in specific subject areas, especially for the secondary sector.***
- f) A strategy developed to enable intensive support to be phased out when a school leaves an OfSTED category, rather than ending abruptly.***

The Board expects that as part of the re-procurement process in 2009 ESCC will carry out consultation with schools to ascertain the type of service they would wish to see in the future.

The Board concluded that:

1. CfBT is committed to improving schools in East Sussex and, having put down the foundations for improvement, should now have an opportunity to demonstrate its ability to build upon this.
2. Since CfBT took over the SIS it has promoted a spirit of greater openness, improved data evidence, increased confidence in both the service and in schools and encouraged schools to have higher expectations.
3. The contract was a long term process and not a short term fix. Any improvements made at a primary level will take time to filter through the school system and ultimately impact on GCSE results.
4. The Children's Services Authority is now in a better position to know what is happening in its schools and the contract has enabled it to fulfil its statutory duty of monitoring and impacting on school standards.

The Board believed that there was considerable uncertainty as to the impact of the forthcoming Education & Inspections Bill 2006 on local authorities and the School

Improvement Service. It therefore believes that there is no reason for ESCC not to extend its current contract with CfBT for the SIS, subject to other commercial considerations and competitive processes. There is a need for ESCC to keep some continuity with the SIS at least until it is clear what form these changes will take and allow it time to decide the sort of service which is needed in the future.

The Board was concerned that CfBT is not paying enough attention to building leadership capacity within its own organisation. It would wish them to address this issue in the near future.

During its consultation with schools the Board found that overall most schools were happy with the service that they received from CfBT. In some schools however there was a feeling that CfBT had done what it set out to do and a different type of service was now needed.

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11. Action Plan

No.	Recommendation	Timescale	Actions/responsibility
SIS contract			
1	ESCC considers extending its contractual arrangements with CfBT for the School Improvement Service for a further 2 years (until August 2009).		
Enhancements to an extended contract			
2	Delivery of a programme to encourage, mentor, and identify potential candidates for headship within our schools.		
3	An increase in the capacity to provide additional support and mentoring for newly appointed head teachers.		
4	An action plan developed to lift East Sussex Schools significantly above the 'National Average' on Key Stage targets.		
5	An increase in the supply of specialist teaching support in specific subject areas, especially for the secondary sector.		
6	A strategy developed to enable intensive support to be phased out when a school leaves an OfSTED category, rather than ending abruptly.		
Consultation			
7	Consultation with schools, as part of the re-procurement process in 2009, to ascertain the type of service they would wish to see in the future.		