

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 objectives 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 project
- 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, 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:

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

Writing the plan

The following sections should be included in the plan:

- The school's vision
- Information about the school's context including aids and barriers to raising performance
- Areas for improvement identified by self-evaluation, Ofsted or any external review
- Targets for attainment
- Targets for the quality of teaching
- Objectives and actions for improvement with success criteria and practice indicators for each objective
- 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 the plan 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 trialled. The plan is divided into sections. Whether a school uses the East Sussex pro forma or their own pro forma, the sections as follows 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 development. 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 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.

Areas for improvement identified by Ofsted or any external review

This section of the East Sussex pro forma helps to ensure that the areas for improvement identified in any recent Ofsted inspection or local authority review, as well as the school's self-evaluation, are used to inform the key issues and objectives that follow 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 list the Ofsted areas for improvement and this part of the East Sussex pro forma can be omitted.

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.

Schools should also set end-of-year targets for pupils' attainment in each year group and 'milestones' or short-term targets. Milestones enable school leaders and governors to monitor the school's progress towards the end-of-year targets and spot any emerging areas of concern quickly.

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 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.

These pages of the East Sussex pro forma have space for schools to record the Fischer Family Trust Aspire targets for each cohort and the past 'historic' performance of each cohort in previous years in reading, writing and mathematics.

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 reviews of pupil progress data should inform the school's judgements of the quality of teaching in each class.

Key issues and Objectives

The East Sussex pro forma enables schools to identify both their key issues and their objectives for each section of the Ofsted inspection framework. Those writing the plan should ensure that the objectives reflect the areas for improvement identified earlier in the plan and will enable the targets for attainment and progress to be met.

Success criteria and practice indicators

After the objectives have been identified, it is important to focus on the success criteria and practice indicators that will demonstrate that the objective has been met.

Indicators of success provide schools with standards against which they can measure their progress towards their improvement goals. Meeting the end-of-year attainment targets is the ultimate indicator of success, but school leaders should also develop practice indicators and success criteria that act as benchmarks or milestones along the way. Milestones should be dated so that the governing body and external evaluators such as the local authority adviser can judge the school's progress.

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

- > If we carry out all of our strategies, how will we know that we have met our objective?
- > What will be different for pupils?
- > What will teachers and/or pupils do differently that will tell us we have been successful?

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 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** 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 milestone rigorously, regularly reporting this progress to governors and planning and taking further action in the light of this.
- > **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 show clearly who will carry out the activities, when they will be done and what specific activity will be carried out.

Monitoring	Evaluation
October 2015 book scrutiny, classroom observations in targeted classes (SLT)	November 2015: HT report to GB on impact of initiatives to improve teaching
October 2015 LA adviser visit to observe the teaching of writing across the school	December 2015: Assessment leader report to governors on improvements seen in writing

November 2015 Data analysis and pupil progress meetings (SLT and assessment leader)	
December 2015 Pupil survey on attitudes to writing (governing body)	

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 the EIP 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 are 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.