

Handbook for the inspection of local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement

Handbook for inspecting local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement in England under section 136 (1) (b) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 from May 2013

This handbook provides instructions and guidance for inspectors conducting inspections under section 136(1) (b) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It sets out what inspectors must do and what local authorities can expect, and provides guidance for inspectors on making their judgements.

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Introduction

1. This handbook sets out the main activities undertaken by inspectors conducting inspections of local authority functions in relation to supporting school improvement in England under section 135 and section 136(1)(b) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 from May 2013. It also sets out the judgements that inspectors will make and on which they will report.
2. Local authorities subject to inspection are determined by a data set of key indicators where the inspection of schools or other providers, carried out under section 5 or section 8 of the Education Act 2005, raise concerns about the effectiveness of a local authority's functions to support school improvement or where Ofsted becomes aware of other concerns.
3. The handbook has two parts.
 - Part 1 – How local authorities will be inspected: this contains instructions and guidance for inspectors on the preparation for, and conduct of, local authority inspections.
 - Part 2 – The evaluation schedule: this contains guidance for inspectors on judging the effectiveness of school improvement arrangements in a local authority they inspect, and provides an indication of the main types of evidence they collect and analyse.

Part 1: How local authorities will be inspected

Before the inspection

Introduction

4. Inspectors are likely to encounter many different configurations of the way in which local authorities conduct their statutory functions, including formal contractual partnerships for the delivery of school improvement services. It is important that lead inspectors gain an overview of how arrangements are made as early as possible and work with the approach that the local authority is taking. Ofsted has no pre-conceived view on the different configurations of arrangements but inspectors should evaluate how effective they are and evaluate their impact on improving school performance.

Inspectors' planning and preparation

5. The lead inspector must prepare for the inspection by gaining a broad overview of the local authority's recent performance. The outcomes of this preparation must be summarised in the evidence notebook.
6. Inspectors must use all available evidence to develop an initial overview of the local authority's performance as reflected in the local authority dashboard and

local authority RAISEonline. Planning for the inspection should be informed by analysis of:

- data from the local authority RAISEonline
 - the previous inspection report (where LAs may have been subject to a previous inspection)
 - issues raised about, or the findings from, the investigation of any qualifying complaints¹ about schools within the local authority catchment area
 - information from HMI monitoring visits of schools that are in a formal Ofsted category of concern or those schools judged to be requiring improvement
 - information available on the local authority website.
7. The lead inspector should prepare and distribute brief joining instructions to the inspection team. These should include:
- key information about the local authority and the timings for the inspection
 - a brief analysis of the pre-inspection information, including important areas to be followed up
 - an outline of inspection activity, for example planned meetings with elected members, senior officers, school improvement staff, governors, school based staff; this will be finalised once on site.
8. Lead inspectors should deploy their inspection team member as they see fit. All members of the inspection team must contribute to the evaluation of key judgements and come to a collective view about the effectiveness of school improvement arrangements secured by the local authority.
9. The lead inspector should plan sufficient time for holding team meetings and providing feedback to the local authority, where this can be provided during and at the end of the inspection, to ensure that the inspection is concluded on time.

Notification and introduction

10. The lead inspector will normally inform the authority up to five days before the start of the inspection. Lead inspectors should bear in mind that they may not get through to the Director of Children's Services (DCS) (or their equivalent) immediately. They should reserve sufficient time to ensure that they make direct contact.

¹ Ofsted has specific powers (under section 11A-C) of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) to investigate certain complaints known as qualifying complaints. Further guidance is available at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/complaints-ofsted-about-schools-guidance-for-parents>.

11. If the DCS (or their equivalent) is unavailable, the lead inspector should ask to speak to the most senior officer available with responsibility for the improvement of schools. Once the lead inspector has spoken to the local authority and is able to confirm that the inspection will take place, she/he will send formal confirmation to the local authority by email.
12. The purpose of the lead inspector's notification call is to:
 - inform the local authority of the inspection
 - make arrangements for the inspection; this includes an invitation to the DCS (or their equivalent and/or nominee) to participate in main inspection team meetings
 - make arrangements for discussions with key elected members, senior officers and other staff/partners
 - make arrangements for a meeting with the lead elected member for education (or similar) and other officials and/or councillors
 - invite the local authority to share a summary of its self-evaluation (if available) and contextual background on day one of the inspection fieldwork
 - request that relevant documents from the local authority are made available as soon as possible from the start of the inspection
 - provide an opportunity for the local authority to raise any initial questions.
13. The telephone call is an important opportunity to initiate a professional relationship between the lead inspector and the local authority. It should be focused on practical issues. Inspectors should not use this as an opportunity to probe or investigate the local authority's self-evaluation or any other matters.
14. Inspectors should also request that the following information is made available at the start of the inspection:
 - if available, a summary of the local authority's self-evaluation (if not already shared with the lead inspector) regarding arrangements to support school improvement and their impact on improving schools
 - the current local authority strategic plan for education, including details of partnership arrangements, commissioning, brokerage and any evaluation reports and/or reports to elected members
 - documentation about how arrangements for monitoring, challenge, intervention and support are provided, including details of the application of statutory obligations and powers
 - the local authority data sets about school performance and any analysis of it
 - case study material regarding targeted school improvement work and its impact
 - school improvement or similar staff list, where relevant, with roles and responsibilities

- information regarding strategies used to support leadership and management in schools and evidence of its impact
- evidence of the work of governors support services and their impact on improving governance
- evidence to demonstrate how the local authority uses any available funding to effect improvement, particularly how it is focused on areas of greatest need.

Requests for deferral

15. If a local authority requests a deferral of its inspection the lead inspector must notify Ofsted via the appropriate Regional Director as soon as possible. Ofsted will decide whether this request should be granted in accordance with Ofsted's policy on the deferral of inspections. The deferral policy makes clear that the absence of the Chief Executive or DCS (or their equivalent) is not normally a reason for deferring an inspection.

During the inspection

The start of the on-site inspection

16. Inspectors must show their identity badges on arrival and ensure that the Chief Executive and DCS (or equivalent) have been informed of their arrival. Inspectors should ensure that inspection activity starts promptly.
17. The lead inspector should meet briefly with the Chief Executive and/or DCS (or their equivalents or representatives) at the beginning of the inspection to:
 - introduce team inspectors and other attendees
 - make arrangements for a longer meeting on day one to receive the local authority's self-evaluation and contextual briefing and any other relevant matters
 - confirm arrangements for meetings with representatives of the local authority and schools
 - confirm arrangements for providing feedback at the end of each day and at the end of the inspection
 - request information about staff absence and other practical issues
18. A short team meeting should take place to clarify the areas to be explored, inspection activities and individual roles and responsibilities.

Gathering and recording evidence

19. Inspectors must spend as much time as possible gathering and triangulating evidence that will ensure a robust first-hand evidence base against the scope of the inspection in order to arrive at a fair judgement about the effectiveness of the arrangements to support school improvement.

20. Inspectors must record their evidence clearly and legibly in the evidence notebook, ensuring that all relevant sections are completed for all evidence-gathering activities. This includes records of analyses of data and the evidence that underpins key judgements. The notebook should also be used to summarise the main points of discussion when feeding back to senior officers and elected members.
21. Notebooks may be scrutinised for the purposes of retrieval and quality assurance monitoring and in the event of a complaint. It is important that inspectors record accurately the time spent gathering the evidence in the notebook. Inspectors should highlight or identify any information that was provided 'in confidence'.
22. The lead inspector should then coordinate the summary of the evidence and judgements made in the summary notebook. This is used to inform final feedback and the inspection report and is part of the inspection evidence base.

The use of data on inspection

23. Inspectors should use a range of data to inform the evaluation of a local authority's performance, including that found in the local authority RAISEonline, and examination of the local authority's own data sets where available. No single measure or indicator necessarily determines judgements.
24. The data, including that provided by the local authority, should be used to:
 - check the accuracy of the local authority's assessment of school performance, pupils' progress and attainment levels
 - check the robustness and accuracy of the local authority's self-evaluation (where available).

Meetings with elected members, senior and operational staff, school-based staff and governors and other stakeholders

25. It is important that every opportunity must be taken to discuss the arrangements for supporting school improvement and their impact with the full range of senior and operational staff and stakeholders in the local authority.
26. Inspectors are highly likely to conduct meetings with:
 - elected Members of the Council, particularly those responsible for education
 - the Chief Executive
 - The DCS (or their equivalent)
 - the head of school improvement (or their equivalent)
 - local authority staff, or contracted staff who support school improvement
 - school improvement data manager(s)

- chair/vice chair of the schools' forum
 - other agencies involved in school improvement such as National/Local Leaders of Education/training schools and /or other contracted partners
 - post-16 strategic planning representative
 - headteachers of schools subject to intervention or intensive support
 - headteachers of schools subject to light touch monitoring
 - governors as above
 - governor support services (or their equivalent) staff
 - other stakeholders as appropriate.
27. In drawing on evidence from meetings with staff and other stakeholders, every endeavour must be made not to identify individuals. There may, however, be circumstances in which it is not possible to guarantee the anonymity of the interviewee. Inspectors have a duty to pass on disclosures that raise child protection or safeguarding issues and/or where there are concerns about serious misconduct or criminal activity.

How the Director of Children's Services (or their equivalent) or representative is involved in the inspection

28. The lead inspector should meet the DCS (or their equivalent) or their nominee throughout the inspection to:
- provide an update on emerging issues, and enable further evidence to be provided
 - allow the DCS, their equivalent or nominee to raise concerns, including those related to the conduct of the inspection or of individual inspectors
 - alert the DCS to any serious concerns.
29. The outcomes of all meetings with the DCS (or their equivalent) or nominee should be recorded in the evidence notebook.

Team meetings held during the inspection

30. The inspection team should meet briefly at different points during the course of the inspection to reflect on their respective evidence and discuss emerging findings. Where possible, the DCS, their equivalent or nominee should be invited to attend more formal team meetings where emerging and final judgements are discussed. Inspectors should record such meetings in the evidence notebook.
31. If there is evidence that the local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement may be judged 'ineffective' the lead inspector should alert the Chief Executive and the DCS or their equivalent to this possibility. It must be emphasised that final judgements are not made until the final team meeting

towards the end of the inspection week. In some instances, inspectors may need to consider evidence further after the end of the on-site inspection before arriving at their judgements.

Reaching final judgements

32. The team should ensure that time is set aside to prepare for the final team meeting and the final feedback. There should also be sufficient time planned for the team to meet, to consider the evidence available, and make judgements. The judgement should be recorded and key points for feedback should be identified as the meeting progresses. In advance of the final feedback to the local authority, the lead inspector should contact Ofsted's relevant Regional Director to discuss the findings and the overarching judgement.

Providing feedback to the local authority

33. Following the end of the inspection there must be a brief feedback meeting including the DCS or their equivalent, the lead elected member and Chief Executive where possible. It is for the lead inspector to decide, following discussion with the DCS or equivalent, whether other senior staff should be present. If it is appropriate, representatives from contracted partners for school improvement may also be invited by the DCS.
34. The lead inspector should explain to those present that the purpose of the feedback session is to share the main findings of the inspection and how the local authority can improve further. Those present may seek clarification about the judgements, but discussion should not be lengthy. Any feedback or comments should be in the form of professional and objective language and should not include informal remarks that may be personally damaging to the reputation of a member of staff or to the professionalism of the inspectors. Key points raised at the feedback should be summarised and recorded in the evidence notebook.
35. In the event that the DCS (or their equivalent) has declined or has been unable to take up the opportunities to engage with the inspection team, the lead inspector should prepare a more extended formal feedback meeting. In such circumstances, the lead inspector should inform the DCS (or their equivalent) of the main findings in advance of the extended formal feedback meeting.
36. Before leaving, the lead inspector must ensure that the local authority is clear:
 - about the overarching judgement determining whether the local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement are effective or not unless evidence needs further consideration
 - that any judgement may be subject to change as a result of moderation and should, therefore, be treated as confidential until the local authority receives a copy of the final inspection report

- that the strengths and weaknesses and main findings of the inspection and the main points provided orally in the feedback will be referred to in the text of the report subject to quality assurance and moderation
- about the recommendations for improvement
- about the procedures leading to the publication of the report
- about (where relevant) the implications of the local authority being recommended for re-inspection.

Where an LA is judged ineffective in its arrangements for supporting school improvement

37. Inspectors will consider whether or not the local authority requires re-inspection within nine to 12 months.
38. Where an LA inspection of arrangements to support school improvement is judged to be ineffective, the timescale for publication of the report is extended so that the judgements can be moderated and confirmed by HMCI.

After the inspection

Arrangements for publication of the report

39. The report will be forwarded to the DCS (or their equivalent) for a factual accuracy check shortly after the end of the inspection. The local authority will have three working days to respond. The lead inspector will respond to the comments about factual accuracy.
40. Local authorities judged as 'effective' will normally receive an electronic version of the final report within 20 working days of the end of the on-site inspection.
41. Once a local authority has received its final report, it is required to take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that stakeholders receive a copy of the report within five working days. After that time, the report will be published on Ofsted's website. Local authorities will be required to respond with a written statement setting out what action it proposes to take in light of the report of inspection findings and setting out a timetable for those actions. The local authority must publish the letter report and action plan.

Quality assurance and complaints

How are inspections quality assured?

42. Responsibility for assuring the quality of the inspection and the subsequent report lies with Ofsted. The lead inspector is expected to set clear expectations for the team and ensure that those expectations are met. The lead inspector must ensure that all judgements are supported by evidence and that the way in which the inspection is conducted meets the expected standard.

43. Some inspections are subject to quality assurance by HMI and/or Senior HMI. When an external quality assurance visit is scheduled, the lead inspector should explain clearly the purpose and likely format of the visit during the initial telephone conversation with the local authority.

What happens if a local authority has a concern or complaint during the inspection?

44. If a local authority raises a concern or complaint during the course of an inspection, the lead inspector should seek to resolve it directly. It is often easier to resolve issues on the spot and this helps to avoid formal complaints later.

Review and evaluation

45. This handbook, the accompanying framework for inspection and other inspection instruments will be evaluated and reviewed at the end of 2013 as set out in Ofsted's consultation report. The instruments will also be reviewed to ensure that the inspection process and methodology are aligned to any wider accountability systems.

Part 2: The evaluation schedule – how local authorities will be judged

46. The evaluation schedule sets out the sources of evidence and grade descriptors that guide inspectors in judging the effectiveness of school improvement arrangements provided by the local authorities they inspect. The schedule is not exhaustive and does not replace the professional judgement of inspectors.
47. The evaluation schedule must be used in conjunction with the guidance set out in Part 1 of this document – How local authorities will be inspected. Inspectors must interpret the effectiveness descriptors in relation to the context of each local authority.

Judging the effectiveness of arrangements to support school improvement

48. Inspectors must judge the extent to which the local authority's arrangements for supporting school improvement are effective or ineffective. This is the overarching judgement.
49. In order to make a judgement about the effectiveness of arrangements to support school improvement, inspectors must take into account the following aspects:
 - the effectiveness of corporate and strategic leadership of school improvement
 - the clarity and transparency of policy and strategy for supporting schools' and other providers' improvement, and how clearly the local authority has defined its monitoring, challenge, support and intervention roles
 - the extent to which the local authority knows schools and other providers, their performance and the standards they achieve and how effectively support is focused on areas of greatest need
 - the effectiveness of the local authority's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools, including the use of formal powers available to the local authority
 - the impact of local authority support and challenge over time and the rate at which schools and other providers are improving
 - the extent to which the local authority brokers support for schools and other providers
 - the effectiveness of strategies to support highly effective leadership and management in schools and other providers
 - support and challenge for school governance, where applicable

- the way the local authority uses any available funding to effect improvement, including how it is focused on areas of greatest need.
50. Inspection is primarily about evaluating how well the arrangements for supporting school improvement are working and whether they are having sufficient impact in improving standards, progress and the quality of provision in schools and other providers.
 51. In making their judgements, inspectors draw on the available evidence, use their professional knowledge and consider the guidance in this document and, in particular, the effectiveness descriptors for the aspects of inspection.

Local authorities and academies

Inspectors should note that local authorities have no specific powers of intervention in relation to academy schools. Local authority powers of intervention as set out under part 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 **do not** apply to academy schools, which are state-funded independent schools. In terms of standards in academies, and holding sponsors to account for this, the lead responsibility lies with the Department for Education and the Schools Commissioner.

The form of relationship between academies and local authorities is largely for the academies to determine. There is no statutory requirement for them to establish such a relationship beyond that which is required for the delivery of local authority statutory duties, such as the making and reviewing of special educational needs statements, securing sufficient education in an area and provision of home-to-school transport for eligible children.

Despite this, local authorities retain a legal responsibility for performance in the area as a whole, under the 1996 Education Act.² In addition, the Secretary of State has made clear the expectation for local authorities to act as strategic commissioners for **all** schools. Where the local authority has concerns about the performance of an academy, inspectors should explore whether the local authority has, within the confines of its responsibilities, taken reasonable steps to discuss this with the individual establishment, the executive leadership and governance of the chain, and/or the Department for Education, where appropriate.

The effectiveness of arrangements for supporting school improvement

52. When reporting on the effectiveness of arrangements, inspectors must evaluate evidence for each of the nine key aspects above and identify pertinent strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors will then judge the extent to which the

² For further information, see:

www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/la/a00205173/local-authorities-faqs#faq6.

arrangements are having sufficient impact and making the important contribution to school improvement. Irrespective of how the arrangements in the local authority are configured, inspectors must consider the impact of the local authority in improving standards and the quality of education in schools.

53. In judging the overall effectiveness of the local authority's arrangements for supporting school improvement, inspectors consider whether:
- the local authority is **effective** in its arrangements to support school improvement
 - the local authority is **ineffective** in its arrangements to support school improvement. A local authority will be ineffective because the arrangements for supporting school improvement are not having the required impact as reflected in the effectiveness descriptors.

Effectiveness descriptors –the arrangements for supporting school improvement

Note: These descriptors should not be used as a checklist. They must be applied adopting a ‘best fit’ approach which relies on the professional judgement of the inspection team and taking into account the context of the local authority.

| Aspect | Descriptors for effective arrangements to support school improvement. |
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| | Corporate leadership and strategic planning |
| 1. The effectiveness of corporate and strategic leadership of school improvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Elected members and senior officers have an ambitious vision for improving schools, which is clearly demonstrated in public documents. Elected members articulate the local authority's (LAs) strategic role, and enhance schools' ability to self-manage. Accountability is transparent and efficiently monitored in a systematic way. Members' challenge of officers is well informed by high quality information and data. ■ There is coherent and consistent challenge to schools and other providers to ensure that high proportions of children and young people have access to a good quality education. ■ Communications and consultation are transparent and lead to a shared understanding with schools. Schools respect and trust credible senior officers, who listen and respond to their views and advice. ■ Senior officers ensure that strategies for school improvement are understood clearly by schools, other providers and stakeholders. There is tangible evidence that the strategy is effective in preventing failure, securing higher proportions of schools 'getting to good' and eroding inequality in different areas of the LA. ■ Elected members and senior officers exercise their duties in relation to securing sufficient suitable provision for all 16-19 year olds and in respect of raising the participation age (RPA) requirements. |
| 2. The clarity and transparency of policy and strategy for supporting schools and other providers' improvement, and how clearly the LA has defined its | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Priorities in the LA's plans for school improvement (including commissioning plans) are clearly articulated and reflect both national priorities and local circumstances. ■ Schools and other providers and stakeholders have been fully consulted and agree the strategy and priorities for school improvement. ■ Plans for school improvement demonstrate close |

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| monitoring, challenge, support and intervention roles | <p>integration with the programme for differentiated LA support and intervention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reliable and valid measures are used to monitor progress of the school improvement strategy. Evaluation of its impact is comprehensive and regular and its effect on standards and effectiveness of schools and other providers is identified. ■ The rationale for support is explicit, flexible, tailored to need and endorsed by schools and other providers. Every effort is made to coordinate partnership arrangements and expertise residing within schools. ■ The LA promotes the effective participation of all 16- and 17-year-olds in education and training and makes arrangements identify young people who are not participating. ■ The LA's definitions, arrangements, procedures and criteria for monitoring, challenge, intervention and support are clear, sharply focused, comprehensive and understood by school leaders and governors. |
| | Monitoring, challenge, intervention and support |
| 3. The extent to which the LA knows its schools and other providers, their performance and the standards they achieve and how effectively support is focused on areas of greatest need | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Senior officers and schools make intelligent use of pertinent performance data and management information to review and/or revise strategies for school improvement. ■ The LA systematically and rigorously uses data and other information effectively to identify schools which are underperforming. It uses this information consistently to channel its support to areas of greatest need, resulting in interventions and challenge that lead to improved outcomes in schools and other providers. ■ The LA provides a comprehensive range of performance data, including data about the local performance of different pupil groups, local benchmarking and post-16 destinations comparative data. Schools and other providers have high regard for this, which is influential in helping them to identify school based performance priorities. ■ School improvement staff are well equipped to use data and to challenge and support schools. |
| 4. The effectiveness of the LA's identification of, and | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Where appropriate, the LA deploys its formal powers of intervention promptly and decisively. ■ Weaknesses are typically identified early and |

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| <p>intervention in, underperforming schools, including the use of formal powers available to the LA</p> | <p>tackled promptly and incisively. Headteachers, staff and governors in all schools causing concern to Ofsted and the LA, and those schools requiring improvement to become good, receive well planned, co-ordinated support, differentiated according to their needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The LA engages systems leaders to support and challenge those in need and actively promotes sector led improvement. ■ Progress of schools and other providers is monitored regularly and to a planned programme. Reports to headteachers and governing bodies are fit for purpose. The work of the LA with its underperforming schools and providers results in sustained improvements in standards and provision. ■ The progress of schools causing concern is kept under continuous review by senior officers and scrutinised by elected members frequently and regularly. Robust action is taken where progress is judged to be insufficient. |
| <p>5. The impact of LA support and challenge over time and the rate at which schools and other providers are improving</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Timely, differentiated intervention and coordinated strategies to support school leadership contribute to the improvement of school performance. All services recognise and actively support the autonomy of schools. ■ Support services, either provided or procured, are well coordinated and accurately focused to make a sustainable improvement to overall educational standards and performance. ■ The number of schools on the LA's own list of schools causing concern is reducing rapidly. Inequalities in the quality of education in schools and other providers in different areas of the LA are minimal and reducing. ■ The support and challenge of the LA to its providers is rigorous, sharply focused on areas of greatest need, and results in sustained improvements in standards and provision. ■ With very few exceptions, schools are either at least good or improving rapidly. |
| <p>6. The extent to which the LA commissions and brokers support for schools and other providers</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Schools and other providers are clear about what is provided by the LA or brokered or commissioned from other sources. Support brokered (and monitored) by the LA leads to sustained improvement. ■ The LA has comprehensive knowledge of best practice within and beyond the LA that is drawn from wide sources of information and routinely |

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| | shared with schools. Local networks and collaborative work between schools are well established and linked to an identified strategy, with evidence of sustained improvement. There are well developed links with partners, including further education, vocational providers and higher education. |
| | Support and challenge for leadership and management (including governance) |
| 7. The effectiveness of strategies to support highly effective leadership and management in schools and other providers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The LA provides or secures expert advice and differentiated training for headteachers, governors and middle managers. This support and training is improving the capacity of schools and other providers to develop accurate self-evaluation and secure continuous improvement. ■ The LA identifies accurately all schools that need support or intervention for leadership and management and governance, including the prompt application of statutory powers when necessary. ■ The LA brokers or commissions effective school-to-school or other support for leadership and management in weaker schools. |
| 8. Support and challenge for school governance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Where school performance and effectiveness is a cause for concern, the LA acts promptly to remedy concerns, including applying its powers of intervention, with demonstrable evidence of rapid and sustained improvement. ■ The LA has a successful strategy for managing governor recruitment and retention of high quality governors. The LA has access to experienced governors who are prepared to be deployed to, or support, governing bodies of schools causing concern or those schools not yet good. ■ Governors are deployed where they are needed and any weaknesses in governance are being acted on. ■ Training programmes for new governors and chairs are of good quality, well attended and highly valued, utilising a range of modes of delivery. |
| | Use of resources |
| 9. The way the LA uses any available funding to effect improvement, including how it is | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Resourcing decisions are based on an accurate analysis of the needs of schools. ■ The LA undertakes regular and thorough reviews of the cost-effectiveness of any resource allocation and acts decisively and |

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| focused on areas of greatest need | <p>effectively on its findings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The LA's budget-setting process is based on a thorough and detailed review of spending needs and is both timely and transparent. Consultation on the budget ensures that the deployment of LA resources are well understood by schools and other providers. ■ The LA rigorously monitors and challenges the sufficiency and use of resources and those delegated to schools. |
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Guidance for inspectors

All nine key aspects of a local authority's arrangements for supporting school improvement should be evaluated. For reporting purposes, the nine aspects have been aligned into four reporting areas, as follows:

- corporate leadership and strategic planning
- monitoring, challenge, intervention and support
- support and challenge for leadership and management (including governance)
- use of resources

As previously stated, inspectors are likely to encounter significant diversity in the way in which local authorities configure their arrangements for supporting school improvement. Professional judgement should be applied at all times when evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the arrangements on school improvement.

Inspectors should note that the framework for inspection is focused on school improvement and what the local authority does to effect improvement. It is very likely that other important services have a part to play in supporting school improvement, such as human resources, early years services, admissions and school place planning, pupil and student services for those with additional needs. Inspectors should take care to ensure that these services, where encountered, are not inspected discretely, as they fall beyond the remit of this inspection framework. However, where such services are making a significant contribution to coordinated strategies for improvement, or otherwise, reference may be made to this when evaluating the strengths and weaknesses and arriving at the overarching judgement about effectiveness.

Corporate leadership and strategic planning

Inspection must examine the impact of corporate and operational leadership and evaluate how efficiently and effectively the local authority school improvement arrangements are led and managed.

Inspectors should consider:

- the local authority's vision for better education and how strategic planning has matched the delivery of those changes
- the quality of its decision making, including the effectiveness of its consultation with schools and other parties
- the commitment of members and senior officers to school improvement
- the degree to which schools understand the strategy and the priorities for school improvement.

Monitoring, challenge, intervention and support

Inspection must examine the impact of the arrangements for monitoring, challenge, intervention and support.

Inspectors should consider:

- how effectively, or otherwise, the local authority uses pertinent data and management information to inform actions within the area
- the effectiveness and responsiveness of its monitoring of schools
- the form, nature and particularly the impact of its challenge to schools
- how swiftly, robustly and effectively the local authority has intervened, particularly in schools causing concern
- the quality of the support that the local authority has led, brokered and commissioned (and monitored) to enable schools to improve standards and outcomes for children and young people
- the use and effectiveness of formal powers of intervention
- how effectively the local authority engages systems leaders, National and Local Leaders of Education or training schools in promoting sector-led improvement
- the extent to which any significant regional variation in school performance in the local authority area has been tackled successfully.

Support and challenge for leadership and management (including governance)

Inspection must examine how effectively the local authority arrangements promote and support highly effectively leadership, management and governance in schools.

Inspectors should consider:

- the effectiveness of the local authority's support for senior and middle managers across its schools, from those graded outstanding to those in categories of concern

- the precision with which support or intervention is identified, including the prompt application of statutory powers where appropriate
- strategies for the recruitment and training of senior managers and governors
- how effectively the local authority arrangements are promoting autonomy and utilising systems and sector-led resources
- the support and challenge of the local authority for governing bodies; this should take account of the effectiveness of any brokered or in-house training aimed at improving governors' ability to challenge the senior leadership team and to interrogate and question schools on their data and information. Lead inspectors should also take account of any training the local authority has sponsored on the use of such aspects as the School data dashboard.

Use of resources

Inspection must examine how any available funding/resources are deployed to effect improvement.

Inspectors should consider:

- how well the local authority has used any resources (such as staffing, local authority's training courses, funding) and their sufficiency to support schools to achieve best value for money
- how resourcing decisions are made and understood by schools
- how delegated resources to schools are monitored and challenged where appropriate.