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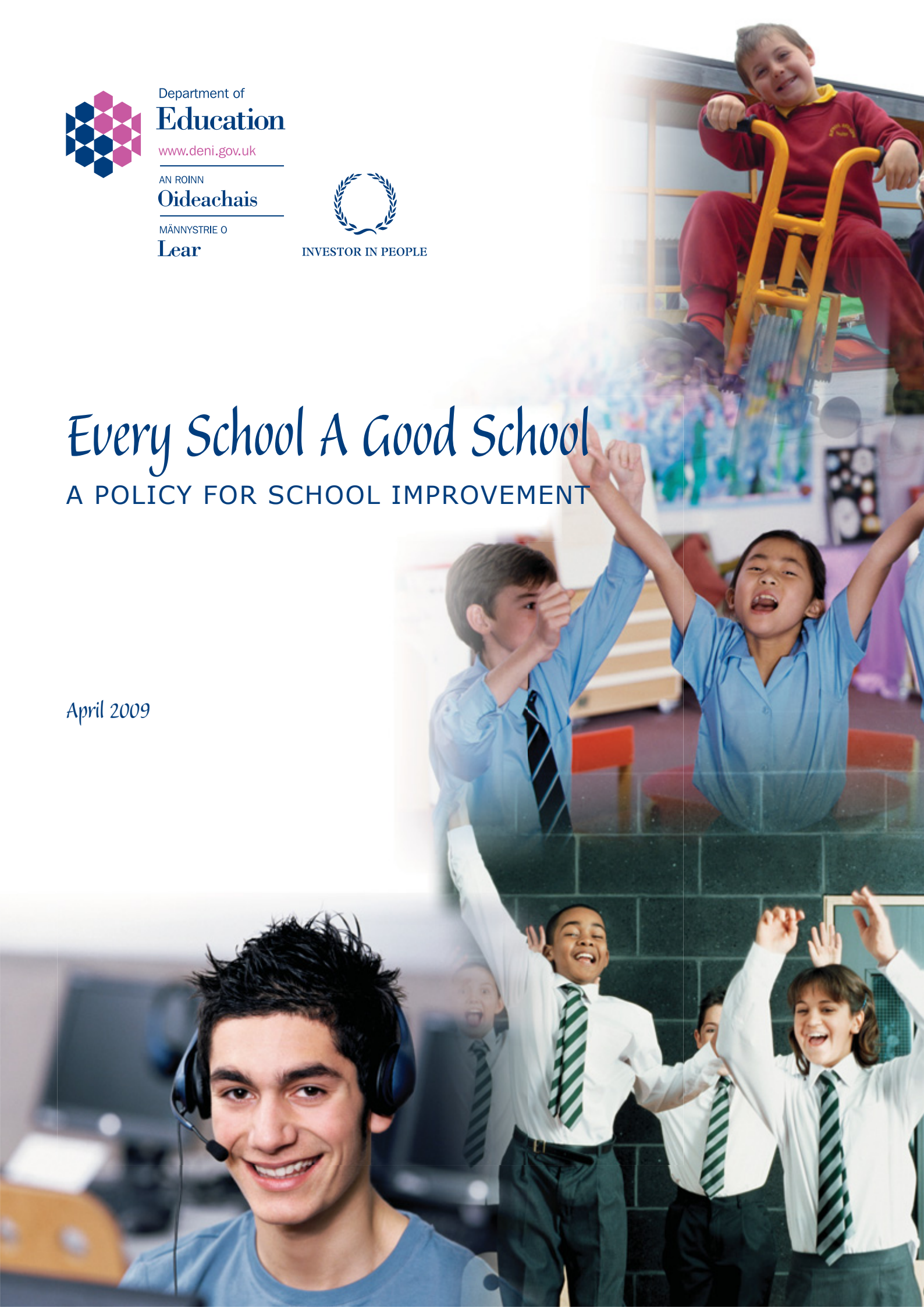**Oideachais**

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Every School A Good School

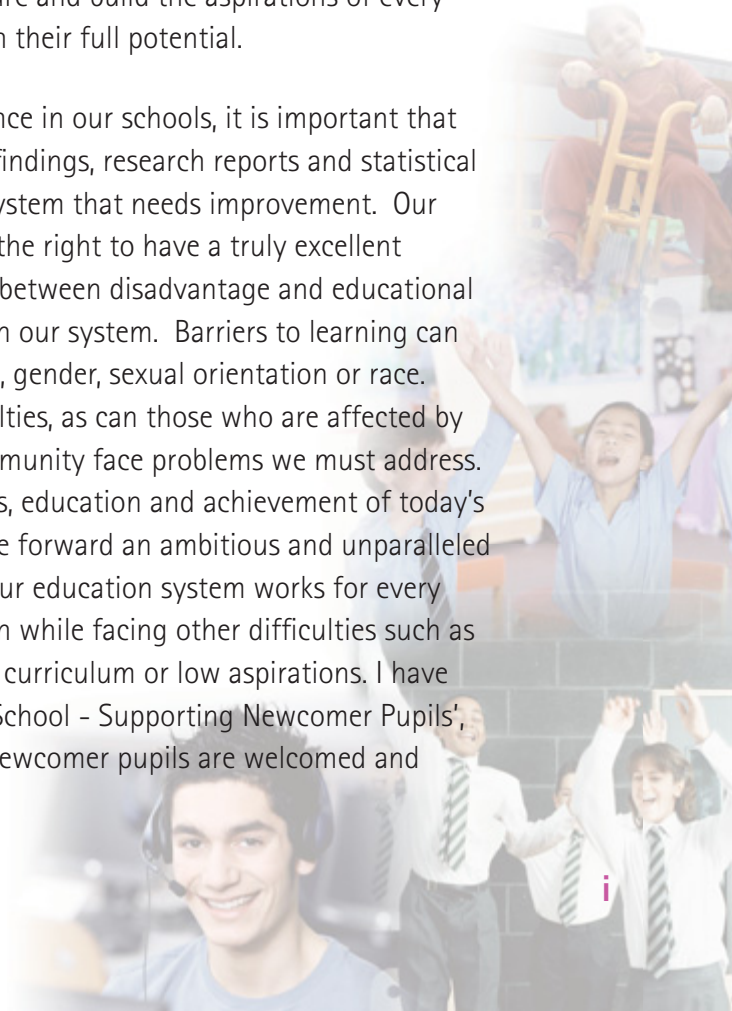## A POLICY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

April 2009

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

The education of our youngest citizens is something we simply must get right if we are to make sure that their future – and ours – is a peaceful, healthy and fulfilling one. I believe that every child has a right to attend a good school and that every parent has a right to expect that the school serving their community is a good school. I want every setting to develop confident, creative, articulate and flexible children and young people.

My vision for the future is one that sees schools as vibrant, self-improving communities of good practice, meeting the needs and aspirations of individual pupils through high quality teaching and learning. This is in a context where there is sound governance, effective leadership and a focus on the needs and outcomes of children and young people.

For many people here that is, of course, not a right that is aspired to but a reality that currently exists. We have a huge degree of confidence already in the work that our schools do and rightly so. Very many of our schools, across all sectors and all geographical areas, are already strongly focused on pupils as individuals and with a real thirst for continuing improvement. I want schools to remain good – although never complacent – and to continue to focus on improvement. I want them to continue to put the needs of their pupils at the heart of everything that they do and to nurture and build the aspirations of every young person in a way that will allow them to reach their full potential.

But while it is right that we have pride and confidence in our schools, it is important that we are not complacent. We know from inspection findings, research reports and statistical evidence that there is much within our education system that needs improvement. Our children move through our schools once, and have the right to have a truly excellent education at every stage. There is too strong a link between disadvantage and educational outcomes and we must do more to achieve equity in our system. Barriers to learning can inhibit young people, arising from their background, gender, sexual orientation or race. Learners with a disability can face additional difficulties, as can those who are affected by domestic violence. Children from the Traveller Community face problems we must address. These factors must not be allowed to affect the lives, education and achievement of today's young people. That is why I am determined to move forward an ambitious and unparalleled programme of reform designed to make sure that our education system works for every child, particularly those who come to school to learn while facing other difficulties such as poverty, the acquisition of a language to access the curriculum or low aspirations. I have recently launched the policy, 'Every School a Good School - Supporting Newcomer Pupils', which is designed to create a framework whereby newcomer pupils are welcomed and

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valued in our schools and have access to the full range of the curriculum. I am also working through the North/South Ministerial Council to tackle educational underachievement, as this is an area of co-operation and concern across this island. Leadership is vital if we are to improve educational outcomes, from politicians, principals and at every level in schools.

There are many children for whom school is not just a place to learn but also a safe haven from a difficult and sometimes dangerous home life. The impact of domestic violence on women and children can be devastating. We are working with Women's Aid in a pilot programme to raise the awareness of designated teachers for child protection of these issues. Domestic and sexual violence can blight lives, and for those in education this can be magnified by contributing to underachievement and consequent life-long disadvantages.

Every School a Good School lies at the centre of my reform agenda and is consistent not only with Articles 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child but also complements the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People.

We know that we will not deliver the changes that are needed if parents and communities do not have confidence that the school that serves their neighbourhood is a good school. Actions to support teachers and schools in improving outcomes for pupils, therefore, must lie at the centre of all our efforts. And, while I hope that such action will rarely be required, our children need us to intervene to deal with schools – and those who support schools – where there is not a clear and enthusiastic focus on improvement. And these expectations will apply to every school – including those that appear to be doing quite well when compared with other schools but which, in fact, could do even more to ensure that every young person reaches her or his full potential.

But we will not succeed if we do not also undertake the structural reforms that are so badly needed in our system – we cannot, in my view, continue with arrangements for transfer from primary to post-primary that fail the vast majority of our children and that consign our secondary sector to carry alone the challenges associated with demographic decline and to deal with the devastating consequences of children being branded as failures at the age of ten or eleven. We need to take action to ensure that transfer is a point at which we celebrate the successes of our primary system and allow young people to choose the school that meets their needs, not the other way around.

I remain committed to ensuring that every child has equal opportunity to go to a good school where their aspirations will be nurtured, their learning needs met and their welfare supported. That is why my Department published its Transfer 2010 Guidance on February 2, 2009. This Guidance confirms that the Department will no longer provide a test for the

purposes of academic selection and recommends strongly that post-primary schools do not provide such a test themselves. The Guidance also strongly recommends that primary schools do not prepare their children for the entrance test of any post-primary school. One of the main aims behind all of these recommendations is to put an end to the distortion of the curriculum in primary schools that has resulted from the practice of academic selection at 11. The other main aim behind the recommendations against academic selection is to make post-primary transfer an equal and fair process and to this end these recommendations are supported by another that seeks to ensure that all schools give a fair level of priority in their admissions to children entitled to Free School Meals.
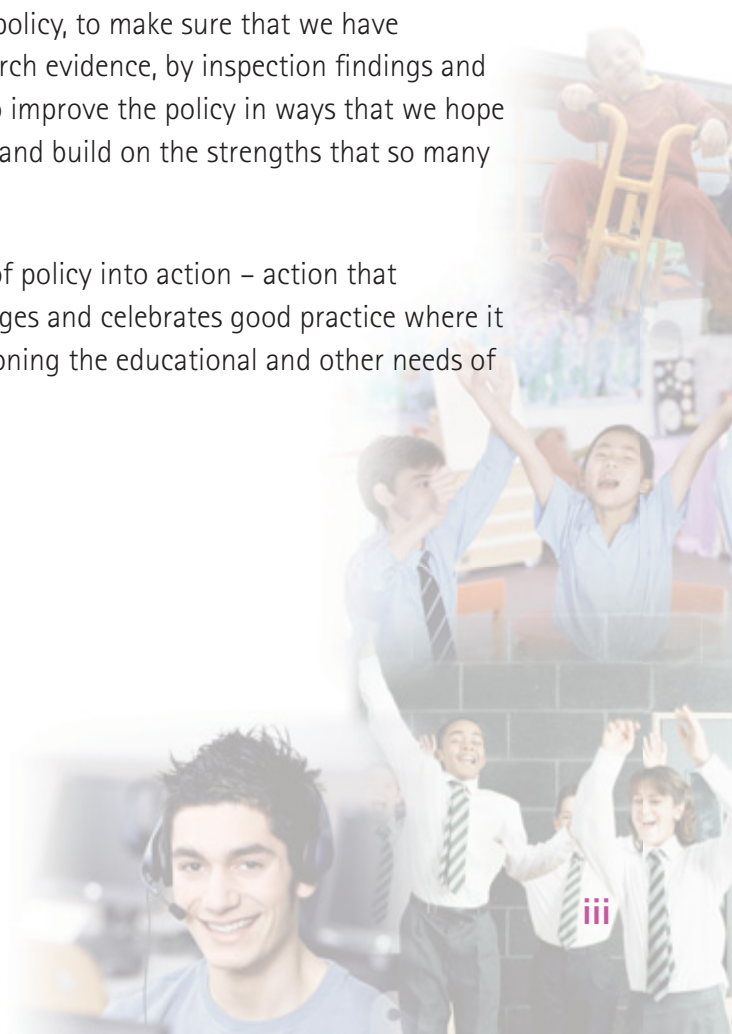
When we issued *Every School a Good School: A policy for school improvement* for consultation we received over two hundred written submissions as well as very many valuable contributions made in the course of discussions and debates that we had with our Assembly Committee and with parents, teachers and others during the consultation period. That level of response shows clearly the importance of our work to raise standards and tackle educational underachievement and I am very grateful to all who participated in the consultation process.

I am pleased that there was very clear support for many of the approaches and interventions we proposed – but I am conscious too that there were many challenges to our consultation document. We have worked hard, in finalising our policy, to make sure that we have retained the elements that were supported by research evidence, by inspection findings and by the views of consultees. We have also worked to improve the policy in ways that we hope deal with the concerns that were pointed out to us and build on the strengths that so many respondents identified.

The challenge now for us is to turn this statement of policy into action – action that supports teachers in the classroom; that acknowledges and celebrates good practice where it exists in our schools; and that is fearless in championing the educational and other needs of young people.

CAITRÍONA RUANE MLA

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Every School a Good School is the title of our new school improvement policy. It is also a statement that sums up the vision that we have for all schools. Society is changing rapidly and we must respond to that change to best meet the needs of our children and young people, who will need the skills to take their place in an increasingly global economy, here or elsewhere. Put simply, the Department of Education needs to be able to reassure parents, tax-payers, our social partners in business and the trade unions, local communities and, most important, young people, that the school that serves them is a good school. And we want to be able to provide that reassurance in relation to all schools, regardless of size, sector, geography or whether it is a nursery, primary, special or post-primary school. We also want the same for every youth setting.

> *Our vision is of schools as vibrant, self-improving, well governed and effectively led communities of good practice, focusing not on institutions but on meeting the needs and aspirations of all pupils through high quality learning, recognising the centrality of the teacher.*

We have a system of education of which we can, and should, be proud. This means that, for very many parents, the school their children attend is already good – and in some cases outstanding. Through implementation of this policy, we want to make sure that schools can maintain their quality and improve even further. We see this happening through promoting the importance of high standards across the school system; supporting schools and their leaders and teachers effectively in their pursuit of excellence; and helping to address better the various barriers to learning faced by children.

School self-evaluation and self-improvement (with support) are at the heart of the policy. We believe that schools themselves, through honest and open engagement in self-evaluation, using effectively the wide range of data and information available to them, are best placed to identify areas for improvement and to implement changes that can bring about better outcomes for pupils.

We also want, through this policy, to make sure that the Department and its education support bodies play a more effective role in ensuring that, within available funding, good schools receive the resources, acknowledgement, support and encouragement necessary to maintain their quality and to continue to improve.

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We know that for some schools the challenge is greater than for others. We recognise, through this policy, that those schools serving disadvantaged communities, and communities where the value placed on education may not be as high as it might be, will need much greater levels of support. We know, too, that teachers often want and need to spend proportionately more time and resources supporting those pupils who are at particular risk of educational underachievement and we want to help them to do this. This means taking action to ensure that training and development services for governors, principals, teachers and support staff are relevant and easily accessible. It also means making sure that the resources delegated to schools reflect the relative needs of schools and the costs they face in delivering a high quality education to all of their pupils.

Many children for a number of reasons face greater barriers to learning and progressing than their peers. The expectation of, and support for, schools and teachers in addressing these additional needs will be set out in other policy documents, but is an integral part of the overall school improvement agenda.

But we also know from inspection findings that there is still considerable room for improvement. In his report for the period 2006-2008, the Education and Training Inspectorate's Chief Inspector commented[1] that *"there remains too significant a variation in the standards of literacy and numeracy attained by children across primary schools"*. His report also observes[2] that there are, *"aspects of provision which are simply not good enough"* and calls for all involved in education to *"have higher expectations of ourselves and of our children and young people"*.

These findings highlight very clearly the need for a new school improvement policy that builds on the work on improvement since 1998 and supports every teacher in every school in helping their pupils to make good progress so that every pupil achieves to their full potential. It also highlights the need for action where those goals are not being delivered.

This policy document recognises the importance of strong and effective governance and leadership within schools in helping to maintain and improve standards. It also recognises the absolute centrality of the role of the classroom or subject teacher. The recent report by McKinsey[3] observed that "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" and highlighted the central importance of ensuring that our teachers are carefully selected, well trained, effectively supported and held accountable for their performance.

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1 Chief Inspector's Report 2006–08, page 33
2 Chief Inspector's Report 2006–08, page 9
3 How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top, McKinsey & Company (September 2007)

It also highlighted the importance of having a teaching profession that was held in high esteem by government and society. That is something that we agree is the key feature of the school improvement policy.

This document sets out the core components of the school improvement policy. It sets a vision for a high quality education system and explains how and where school improvement sits within the wider educational reform agenda. It also explains what the policy proposals mean for those who support, govern, inspect, lead and work in schools and sets clear targets through which the success of the policy can, in future years, be evaluated. Finally, it is accompanied by an implementation plan that will be reviewed regularly, with progress reported to the Education Minister and published on the DE website.

We recognise that new policy approaches and interventions in school improvement must complement and be supported by wider educational policies, particularly those relating to curriculum and assessment; literacy and numeracy; and support for children and young people with additional educational needs. Our vision for school improvement also reflects the Department's wider vision which is:

> *To ensure that every learner fulfils his or her full potential at each stage of her or his development.*

The school improvement policy is, therefore, not the only strand of our focus on raising standards and tackling educational underachievement. Over the coming months, the Department will be bringing forward policy development in areas including: literacy and numeracy; support for special educational needs and wider additional educational needs; support for newcomer pupils; early years; and developing learners' abilities to engage with difference and diversity – and all of these will also have a clear focus on supporting pupils and schools to deliver to their full potential. The Department is also reviewing its funding allocation policy for schools.

The school improvement policy set out in this document has been guided and shaped by many informed contributions, including focus groups with principals and pupils and responses received throughout the consultation period. Annex A contains details of all those who took time to respond formally while Annex B sets out a summary of the key issues raised in consultation.
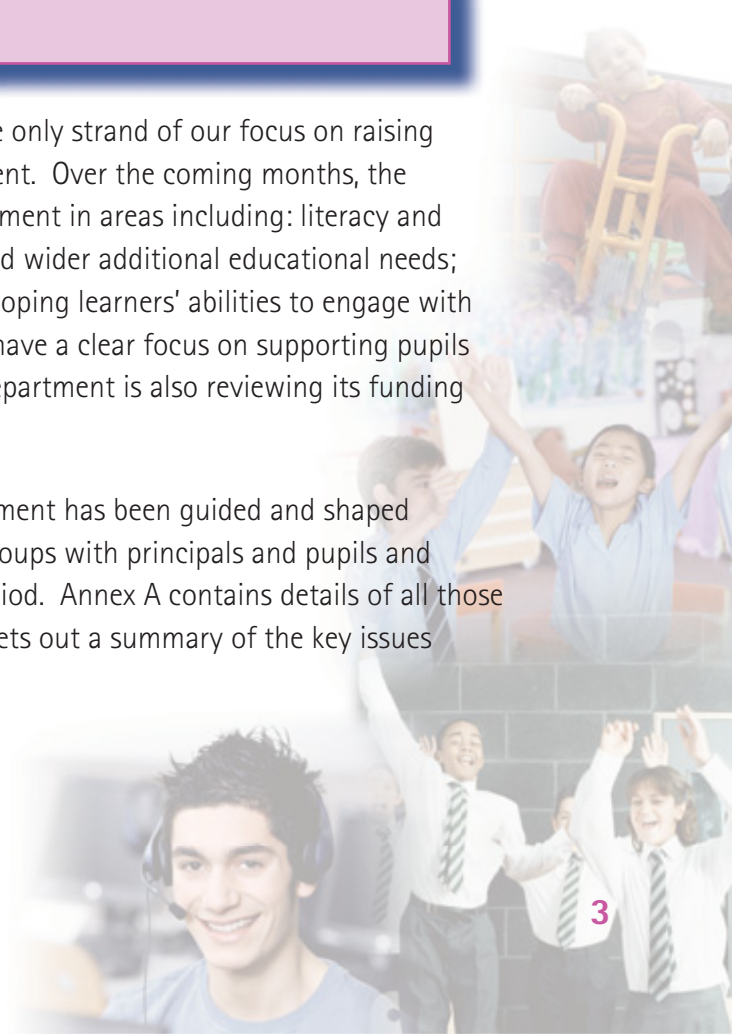
2. KEY PRINCIPLES FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The consultation document set out a list of key principles on which it was proposed that the revised school improvement policy would be based. 73% of respondents agreed with that list of principles. Many respondents commented though that the list was too long and wide-ranging. The list has therefore been shortened and reordered to reflect those views.

Every School a Good School: A policy for school improvement is based upon the following key principles:

Key principles

❑ the interests of pupils rather than institutions must be at the centre of efforts to improve educational achievement and tackle underachievement;

❑ equity of access and equity of provision as well as a continuum of provision for a diversity of need;

❑ an acceptance of the importance of effective leadership – having a clear vision and high expectations for pupils as well as the skills to translate that vision and those expectations into reality;

❑ a recognition that improvement comes first and foremost through high quality teaching from committed and professional teachers whose skills and competence are recognised and respected and their professional development supported;

❑ a recognition that every school is capable of improvement; that the school is best placed to identify particular areas for improvement; and that sustained improvement comes from within the school;

❑ an acceptance that support from their governors and from the education support bodies is vital in ensuring that schools can deliver sustained improvement;

❑ a recognition that there will, at times, be a need for an external view of progress as well as support and, possibly, more active interventions to ensure, in keeping with the pupil-centred focus of the policy, that poor quality educational experiences are not allowed to continue;

❑ a corresponding need for the nature and purpose of any interventions to be clearly explained and fairly applied;

❑ a recognition that, while the Department of Education and its support bodies are accountable for overall standards, it is the school and its Board of Governors that is accountable for the standards achieved by its pupils; and

❑ recognition that the improvement process is a collaborative one, requiring communication and co-operation within the school and between the school and its parents and the wider community that it serves.

3.   THE CASE FOR CHANGE

The current position

It is clear from Inspectorate evidence that the quality of education for many children is high and so too are the expectations that parents, politicians and society in general, have of our school system.

At GCSE and A level, schools here continue to outperform their counterparts in England and Wales (where there are comparable public examinations systems) with the most recently available information showing, for example, that 98% of year 14 pupils achieved 2 or more A levels (or equivalent) at A-E and 52% of year 12 pupils achieved 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C including English and Maths.

While results from public examinations are only one measure of the success of a school, it is widely accepted and understood that achievement of at least five GCSE grades A*-C (or equivalent)[4] is, for the majority of young people, the key that unlocks the door to further and higher education and to well-paid jobs. While the number of schools where fewer than 40% of pupils obtain 5+ GCSEs A*-C has reduced significantly, there are still too many young people finishing their twelve years of compulsory schooling without reaching this level of attainment. In 2006/07, over a third (36%) of pupils did not. When the measure is adapted to focus on 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C including English and Maths, the figure not achieving what is, for many employers and higher education providers, a basic entry requirement was much higher – 47%. While there are young people with learning difficulties who will not achieve at this level such a high percentage is simply unacceptable.

There is also a significant gap in achievement between those most and least economically and socially disadvantaged. For example, when the 52% of young people leaving school with at least 5 GCSEs A*-C including English and Maths is examined it is clear that those from more affluent backgrounds (those not eligible for free school meals) perform much better than those from low income families (who are entitled to receive free school meals) – 60% compared to 27%. These, of course, are average figures and it is worth pointing out that there is much variation across schools with similar characteristics, including similar levels of disadvantage. This demonstrates that school leaders using similar resources, in broadly similar circumstances, can produce significantly different outcomes.

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4   Elsewhere in this document, when we refer to GCSE qualifications, we also include their equivalents at
    Level 2 on the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

Turning to primary schools, the main measure of educational achievement is the outcomes of pupils at Key Stage 2 (Primary 7) in literacy and numeracy. Again, there is much to celebrate – in 2006/07 and based on teacher assessment, 78% of pupils were performing at or above the expected level in literacy and 79.5% were achieving at or above the expected levels in mathematics. Based on these figures, therefore, around one fifth of children do not reach the expected levels in literacy and maths (level 4 or above at Key Stage 2) by the time they are leaving primary school. These young people will experience difficulties in making good progress in their post-primary school. But, again, there are differences in achievement, both within schools and between schools of similar size and characteristics.

There are two notes of caution which must be sounded when forming assessments of quality that are based on Key Stage, GCSE and A level outcomes. The first relates to our tendency to compare ourselves with England and Wales, partly because they have similar school systems. Such comparisons certainly show our education system in a generally positive light – but there is an argument that we should be benchmarking ourselves rather more ambitiously and in an international context. It is after all from across the globe that our young people will have to face challenges and compete in tomorrow's economy.

Along with our counterparts in the south and in England, Scotland and Wales we participate in the Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) study which allows a comparison of our performance with 56 other nations including EU and OECD members (at the age of 15).

The most recent survey results show that our international ranking appears to have slipped in recent years:

❑ in reading we were significantly above the OECD average (in 2003 only three countries had significantly higher scores than us) but, by 2006, we were just at the OECD average, with seven countries having a mean score that was significantly higher than ours;

❑ in maths we were again significantly above the OECD average in 2003 (six countries had significantly higher scores) but, by 2006, we were again just at the average for OECD, with eighteen countries having a mean score that was significantly higher than ours;

❑ in science, we were also significantly above the OECD average in 2003 (just two countries had significantly higher scores). In 2006, we were still significantly above the average for OECD but nine countries were significantly better.

The case for a new policy approach

The response to the consultation on the draft school improvement policy confirmed that there is recognition of the importance of having a clear focus, in all our education policies, on outcomes, on raising standards and on tackling educational underachievement in every school. There is also a recognition, not only within the Department of Education but also among educational stakeholders and other interested groups, that previous interventions to promote and support school improvement, such as the School Improvement Programme and School Support Programme, have had very mixed results.

Perhaps surprisingly, education law does not place clear responsibilities for raising standards and tackling educational underachievement on boards of governors or education organisations. Consequently, there can, at times, be confusion in relation to accountability – both for educational outcomes and for supporting schools as they support the young people in their classrooms.

Statistical evidence and inspection findings show that, while there is much for us to celebrate, there is considerable room for improvement, particularly – although not exclusively - in relation to the gap that currently exists between the highest and lowest achievers, bearing in mind the strong correlation between underachievement and social disadvantage.

While differentials in performance across schools can often be explained by the fact that they have many differing features (for example in terms of intake or social disadvantage) there is also evidence of a worrying gap in achievement between schools with similar levels of social disadvantage.

As recognised above, though, performance as measured by educational attainment is only one indicator of success. It is important to look at other indicators, particularly the findings from inspection, as it focuses much more widely on aspects such as the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom; the effectiveness of leadership and governance; the school's ethos and environment; the treatment of pupils with special needs; any indicators determined by the school through its self-evaluative work; and the quality of pastoral care arrangements. This policy recognises, therefore, the urgency of agreeing more meaningful value-added measures that will assist schools in benchmarking their performance against others with similar characteristics to ensure that parents and others receive more useful information about the true contribution of individual schools in helping young people to reach their full potential. The Department also recognises the importance of inspection evidence in any conclusions reached about the quality and outcomes of the school system.

It is also important that any strategy on school improvement maintains a clear focus on tackling the barriers to learning that many children and young people face and on helping them to achieve to the very best of their ability, in all aspects of school life. Our aim is to produce well-rounded learners, confident and mature socially, able to contribute positively to society and with, at the very least, the basic skills in literacy and numeracy.

Inspection evidence, as reported in the Chief Inspector's report for 2006-2008, provides the following information:

❑   the quality of teaching in nursery and primary schools continues to be generally good – inspectors have commented on the *"very good or outstanding achievements and standards in one-half of the schools they visited; and the very good or outstanding quality of teaching in one-half of the lessons observed."*

❑   worryingly, inspectors reported that, in one-third of primary schools inspected, the quality of provision was not good enough and, in a quarter of primary schools inspected, the quality of the Principal's leadership was an area for improvement.

❑   in post-primary schools inspected, the majority of lessons observed ranged from good to outstanding, an improvement from the 2004-2006 report. However, the Inspectorate found that there was room for improvement in almost one-third of the lessons observed and also concluded that, in over a third of schools, the teachers' planning did not meet adequately the needs of the pupils.

❑   the quality of leadership and management in post-primary schools was found to be very good or outstanding in a significant minority of schools – but in just over a quarter of post-primary schools, it needed to improve. Worryingly, leadership and management were found to be inadequate or unsatisfactory in one out of every ten post-primary schools.

❑   the provision of good support for those pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools is improving but in the majority of schools inspected it is not good enough.

❑   reassuringly, the overall performance in special schools was seen as good, with the Chief Inspector commenting that *"special schools have*

demonstrated their capacity and confidence in sustaining good standards"
and observing that "*almost three-quarters of the schools inspected were good or better and are effective in meeting the academic and social needs of almost all of their pupils".*

The absence of an agreed set of quantitative and contextual value-added measures that would allow more meaningful comparison of performance within, across and between schools is also a weakness in current policy that needs to be addressed. Along with this comes the challenge of explaining to parents, pupils and the wider public the purpose of such measures in a way that brings clarity and makes sure that value-added outcomes cannot be misinterpreted or manipulated inappropriately or distort the work of schools. It is also important to be clear that the development of such measures would not mean a return to published league tables.

It is an obvious point to make – but overall improvements in education outcomes will only be secured through the improvement in outcomes for individual children and young people with the help of individual teachers and school leaders.

The characteristics of a good school

In consulting on the draft school improvement policy, we highlighted specifically the characteristics of a good school, listing several features that would form part of our vision for the successful school of the future. Those characteristics were developed with specific input from young people themselves who, when involved, were very clear about what, for them, made a good school. In responding to this section, 75% of respondents agreed with that list of characteristics. Amendments and additional characteristics were also suggested and we have reviewed again, in light of consultation, the key components that make for a successful school. These are summarised using four overarching headings and are set out in more detail in the table below:

The characteristics of a successful school

- *Child-centred provision*

- *High quality teaching and learning*

- *Effective leadership*

- *A school connected to its local community*

These key characteristics will be used through inspection and by ESA in determining how best to provide support services to schools to help them raise standards. They will also inform the effectiveness of the school improvement policy and will be reflected in guidance and training to support the policy. The indicators of effective performance associated with each characteristic are set out in the table below. There are close similarities with criteria and indicators used to help assess the viability of schools as set out in the Sustainable Schools policy. The quality of the educational experience is core to a school's performance, its success and its long-term viability.

Indicators of effective performance

CHARACTERISTIC	INDICATORS
Child-centred provision	• Decisions on planning, resources, curriculum and pastoral care reflect at all times the needs and aspirations of the pupils within the school. • A clear commitment exists to promoting equality of opportunity, high quality learning, a concern for individual pupils and a respect for diversity. • A school culture of achievement, improvement and ambition exists – with clear expectations that all pupils can and will achieve to the very best of their ability. • Effective interventions and support are in place to meet the additional education and other needs of pupils and to help them overcome barriers to learning. • There is a commitment to involve young people in discussions and decisions on school life that directly affect them and to listen to their views. • A commitment exists to ensuring that all children follow an educational pathway which is appropriate for them in a school or through a collaborative arrangement with another school, FE College or other provider. • The highest standards of pastoral care and child protection are in place. • A commitment exists, through being a healthy school, to supporting healthy children, who are better able to learn and develop.

CHARACTERISTIC	INDICATORS
High Quality teaching and learning	• A broad and relevant curriculum is provided for the pupils, including through the Entitlement Framework for pupils at Key Stage 4 and above. • An emphasis on literacy and numeracy exists across the curriculum. • Teachers are committed and enthusiastic, enjoying a positive relationship with their pupils and with other school-based staff and dedicated to improving learning. • Teachers use adaptable, flexible teaching strategies that respond to the diversity within the classroom. • Assessment and other data is used to effectively inform teaching and learning across the school and in the classroom and to promote improvement. • Rigorous self-evaluation is carried out by teachers and the whole school, using objective data and leading to sustained self-improvement. • Teachers reflect on their own work and the outcomes of individual pupils. • Education outcomes reflect positively on the school and compare well, when benchmarked measurement is undertaken, against the performance of similar schools.

CHARACTERISTIC	INDICATORS
Effective leadership	• An effective school development plan is in place, providing clear and realistic targets for improvement based on a sound vision for the school. • Governors understand their responsibilities and provide clear strategic direction as well as support and challenge to the Principal in carrying forward the process of improvement. • School leaders demonstrate a commitment to providing professional development opportunities for staff, particularly teachers, and promote a readiness to share and learn from best practice. • Teachers are given the opportunity to share in the leadership of the school. • The resources at the disposal of the school are managed properly and effectively, with appropriate arrangements in place for financial management; attendance management; and working relationships. • School leaders monitor and evaluate effectively school outcomes, policies, practices and procedures and the School Development Plan itself.
A school connected to its local community	• Good relationships that facilitate engagement and communication between the school and its parents and the wider community that it serves. • The school and its teachers are held in respect by parents and the local community who in turn actively support the work of the school. • The school uses its involvement in particular programmes (for example Extended Schools or Specialist Schools) effectively in meeting the needs of the community and nearby schools. • Good relationships and clear channels of communication are in place between the school and the education agencies that support it. • The school works closely with other relevant statutory and voluntary agencies whose work impacts on education, especially Health, Social Services, the Public Library Service and, where appropriate, local Neighbourhood Renewal groups.

5. OUR POLICY APPROACH

Policy statement

Our school improvement policy is centred on six key areas:

(i) effective leadership and an ethos of aspiration and high achievement;

(ii) high quality teaching and learning;

(iii) tackling the barriers to learning that many young people face;

(iv) embedding a culture of self-evaluation and self-assessment and of using performance and other information to effect improvement;

(v) focusing clearly on support to help schools improve – with clarity too about the place of more formal interventions where there is a risk that the quality of education offered in a school is not as high as it should be; and

(vi) increasing engagement between schools, parents and families, recognising the powerful influence they and local communities exercise on educational outcomes.

The policy starts from the basis that there are many outstanding schools here that can provide a model for other schools. It also recognises that Inspectorate and other evidence indicates that some schools do not meet the same high standards and that there is a clear need for improvement. While the performance of schools generally corresponds to the esteem in which they are held by parents and the wider community, this is not always the case. There are some schools that enjoy a positive public perception and that are broadly satisfactory, but where outcomes do not reflect sufficiently the potential of the pupils.

The policy approaches, therefore, apply not just to those schools where the percentage of pupils achieving adequate levels of attainment falls well short of expected levels, even when account is taken of issues such as value-added measures and social deprivation. They also apply equally to "under-achieving or coasting schools" that are achieving average or even good results but are capable of much higher quality and better performance, for example on the basis of the quality of their intake.

Policy priorities

To focus on the six key policy areas identified above we will take a strategic approach, which is set out below, along with the actions to be taken.

i) **Supporting effective leadership and an ethos of aspiration**

The consultation responses highlighted the importance of effective governance and leadership in securing improvement, as well as the importance of nurturing and encouraging aspirations and bringing about a culture of high expectation. They also stressed the need for improvement in the level and quality of training and support for school governors and the need to review the provision of training and professional development opportunities for current and aspiring school principals. These responses are supported by inspection and other evidence which point to leadership as a key factor in school improvement. In broad terms, good schools are well led at all levels while, for schools at risk, poor leadership can often be a contributing factor.

Supporting effective governance and leadership is therefore an important pillar in our school improvement policy. In the wider context of encouraging accountable autonomy, we recognise the need to do more to make sure that Boards of Governors are clear about their role and responsibilities and are ready to discharge those responsibilities fully and effectively in the interests of the children and young people in their schools.

We also recognise the importance of supporting school leaders. The McKinsey study[5] highlighted not just the importance of teacher quality but of getting the right teachers to become principals and providing them with the right set of skills to be effective leaders. This means that we need, as part of the implementation of our school improvement policy, to look closely at the route to principalship and at the programmes available to prepare aspiring principals and support existing principals in their leadership role. We need also to look at how we make principalship an attractive career choice especially for those who will be teaching principals.

5 *How the world's best–performing school systems come out on top, McKinsey & Company (September 2007)*

The National Standards for Head Teachers, published by the Department in 2005, recognise the key role that principals play in raising and maintaining levels of attainment in schools. These standards will continue to have a place in the implementation of our school improvement policy, but one that is more closely linked with the Performance Review & Staff Development process as it applies to principals. The standards also need to be communicated, in that context, to Boards of Governors and supported by training and continuing professional development opportunities.

Currently, the main school leadership qualification is the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) which embraces the Standards. The PQH is not mandatory for principals and there was a mixed response from consultees to the proposal that it should become a mandatory requirement. Given the importance of effective leadership, the Department considers that it should ultimately become a requirement for newly appointed principals either to possess a PQH qualification (or other suitable leadership qualification) or to acquire one within a set time. We do not intend to make this a requirement, though, until after there has been a more thorough review of the current PQH qualification that addresses some of the concerns expressed during consultation and ensures that it, and other leadership and management programmes, continue to equip participants for principalship and for other leadership and management roles within schools. The Department will also consider how effective school principals can be encouraged to share experience and expertise with the wider system.

In focusing on leadership, we recognise the role that school leaders and school governors play in forming and preserving the ethos of individual schools. Evidence suggests that schools that are performing well invariably have a strong ethos and a positive, caring culture, one that drives and motivates not just staff and pupils but also parents and the wider community served by the school. The importance of having a culture of high aspiration and achievement, where every young person is cared for, supported and encouraged to reach his or her full potential and where progress and achievement is acknowledged and celebrated cannot be overstated.
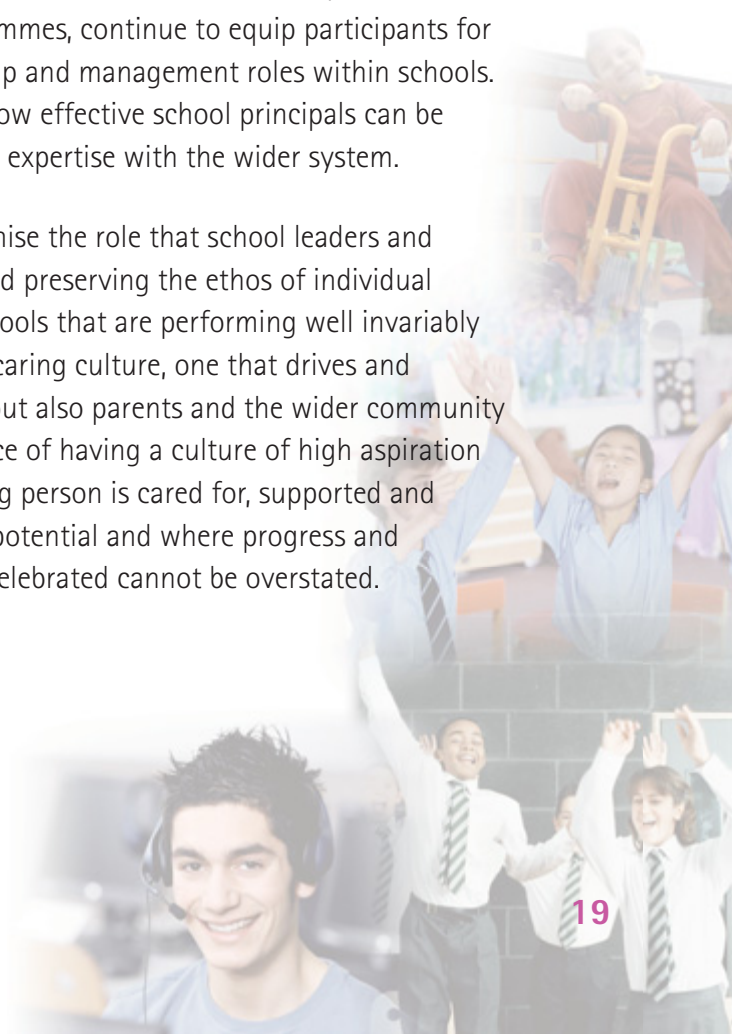
Our goals in relation to leadership

To make school governance an attractive and rewarding experience and an opportunity for the community to play its part in helping all young people achieve their full potential.

To make school principalship an attractive career option and support aspiring leaders and existing leaders to fulfil the role effectively.

In pursuit of these goals we will:

- set out clearly in legislation the duties of school governors in relation to school improvement;

- through ESA, work closely with governors to analyse training and support needs and to provide training and other services to meet those needs;

- prepare a new handbook for governors setting out guidance on their role and signposting resources to help governors perform their role more effectively;

- conduct a formal review of existing leadership programmes including, in particular, PQH;

- ensure that new leadership programmes have a particular focus on getting the best out of people;

- develop leadership and management training for persons other than principals;

- introduce coaching and mentoring arrangements for all newly appointed principals; and

- enable effective principals to contribute to improved performance across the wider system.

ii) Supporting and facilitating high quality teaching and learning

As noted above, we recognise that individual classroom and subject teachers are at the heart of any efforts to raise standards and to tackle educational underachievement. It is through their professionalism and expertise that individual pupils are encouraged and supported to learn and to succeed. Through the school improvement policy, we want to make it easier for schools to secure high-quality training and professional development for their teachers, with help from ESA where that is necessary. We also want to make sure that the support and training provided is relevant to improvement, responsive to the needs of schools and of the highest quality. This will involve both a top-down approach, where training and other needs are identified by ESA, by the ETI or by school management and a bottom-up approach with teachers themselves encouraged and supported to identify their own training and wider professional development needs and involved in decisions on how best to meet them.

The talents and expertise of the best teachers will be used more effectively – with greater opportunity for benchmarking and learning from best practice within individual schools and between schools. The creation of communities of best practice, where teachers themselves are willing to share what has worked well (and what has not) with their colleagues and with other schools must be an important outcome from the school improvement policy. Dissemination of good practice is the key to improvement and will be a central focus of ESA's policy on professional development.

We are fortunate already in that we attract very high calibre young people into our initial teacher education programmes and we want to make sure that they have the opportunity to succeed and to inspire as they go through their career. We will therefore ensure that there are more effective links between initial teacher education, induction, early professional development and continuing professional development. We will also look for new ways of involving our best teachers in supporting the learning both of beginning teachers and of their more experienced counterparts.

In all aspects of teacher development, there will need to be close linkages to the existing teacher competence framework. It is likely that aspects of teachers' professional development will involve courses mapped against any competences that a teacher might need to strengthen. The Teacher

Education Review, which is nearing completion, recognises the importance of this and will bring forward proposals designed to bring greater coherence to the provision of learning and development at every stage in a teacher's career.

We expect that schools and teachers themselves (including principals) will generally identify their own training and support needs as part of the process of self-evaluation, self-assessment and capacity building, in line with the teacher competence framework drawn up by the General Teaching Council, 'Teaching: the Reflective Profession'. There may also be occasions, for example through inspection, that development needs are identified by others to ensure that all pupils receive high quality teaching. In these cases, ESA will work closely with the governors of the school to agree how best to fulfil that need and to ensure that all teachers have the skills they need to stimulate high achievement and a love for learning in the classroom.

> *Our goal in relation to quality teaching*
>
> *To work with teachers, those who support teachers and those who represent their interests to ensure that our teaching profession is equipped and empowered to deliver the highest quality teaching that helps every young person to reach her or his full potential.*

In pursuit of this goal we will:

- extend, for at least the next five years, the provision that has allowed schools to take up to 5 school development days to be used for self-evaluation and continuing professional development in the pursuit of improvement and raising standards;

- bring forward proposals for teacher education in a consultation document produced jointly with the Department for Employment and Learning;

- work with the General Teaching Council, Teacher Representatives and the Education and Skills Authority to develop effective arrangements

which ensure that the teaching workforce continues to be of the highest quality;

- issue guidance to school leaders on the importance of ensuring that every teacher has agreed a plan to facilitate her or his professional development; that the plan is implemented; and that professional development needs are reviewed on at least an annual basis; and

- ensure that the professional development model of ESA is based on improvement, raising standards, disseminating good practice and effectively building expertise.

iii) Maintaining a particular focus on tackling the barriers to learning that many young people face

Consultation responses and our own inspection findings and wider research point to the importance of ensuring that our school improvement strategy includes a particular focus on closing the gap in achievement that exists. We know that among those at greatest risk of educational underachievement there are many who face barriers to learning. Those barriers may be related to: family circumstances such as Looked After Children or Traveller Children; a new learning environment where there is a lack of aspiration or where newcomer children do not have the language of instruction; social or emotional circumstances such as poverty, or events causing short-term or long-term emotional impacts; or a broad range of special educational needs.

These barriers are not divorced from the influence of parents, the wider community and government – they require joint working and collaborative effort on behalf of everyone. Schools cannot be expected to tackle them single-handedly and we will work to ensure that schools receive the support they need from other agencies. As part of that work, we will put in place co-ordinated strategies not just in relation to the curriculum, to quality teaching and leadership or to assessment and qualifications but also in relation to supporting those children who have special educational needs or who face other barriers to learning and we will work with other departments to ensure that their efforts are designed, wherever possible, in ways that support schools.

We will also ensure that strategies designed to address some of the key barriers to learning are an integral part of the school improvement policy. They will share the overall objective of raising standards and have a clear focus on providing support for young people in ways that will help them enjoy school and achieve to their full potential, in particular in relation to achieving competence and confidence in literacy and numeracy.

The Department also recognises the need to develop a coherent set of qualifications for young people who, because of the barriers they face, may not be able to achieve at GCSE grades A*-C. We want to make sure that all achievements are recognised and rewarded and to provide, for these young people, a stepping stone to higher level qualifications, either during their time at school or later in life.

> *Our goal in relation to tackling barriers to learning*
>
> *To make sure that our strategies, policies and programmes to support children and young people who have special needs or who face particular barriers to learning are developed in a way that maintains a clear focus on raising standards and on allowing every young person to reach his or her full potential.*

In pursuit of this goal we will:

- bring forward revised policies on special educational needs, newcomer children, Traveller children and alternative education provision that are based on a whole-school recognition of the diversity of pupils within their population, with schools accepting responsibility for the educational outcomes for all their pupils;

- continue to support work through the developing pupils' emotional health and well being programme and the counselling provision in schools in order to build pupils' resilience to deal with the challenges in their lives and improve their readiness to learn; and

- as part of wider work to develop qualifications that meet the needs of our young people, ensure that there is scope to recognise and reward

progress for those pupils who, because of the barriers they face, may not achieve at GCSE grades A*-C.

iv) Embedding a culture of self-evaluation and self-assessment and using performance and other information to effect improvement

Our school improvement policy is based on the recognition that very many schools are already performing well and have a strong focus on improvement. We believe that sustained improvement within these schools will best be achieved in a context where they are supported and trusted to devise their own school improvement strategies and to identify themselves what support they need in implementing them. This is a key aspect of our wider policy of accountable autonomy – giving schools more flexibility and freedom to take decisions and to manage their own affairs but within a context where they are accountable for their outcomes and where the degree of autonomy that they have is directly related to their ability to demonstrate that they have produced the best possible outcomes for their pupils.

Self-evaluation leading to sustained self-improvement is therefore at the core of the new policy. Self-evaluation is of course not an end in itself. Its value lies in the positive actions which flow from it and these should all have a direct link to improved educational outcomes and experiences for pupils. It is a reflective process, involving all the staff (and, in best practice, pupils, parents and the community) in a rigorous and professional process to identify those aspects of school life which are successful or excellent and those where improvement is required. The process must be supported by objective data and other evidence indicating trends, including comparative and benchmarked information and research reports relating to developments generally which may be relevant to the school.

While self-evaluation across the whole school is of fundamental importance, it is also important that individual departments (or Key Stage groups in primary schools) and individual teachers conduct their own self-evaluation and reflect on their performance. We are fortunate in that the profession already has in place a comprehensive set of competence statements for teachers[6] which is accompanied by guidance from both the General Teaching

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Council and the Education and Training Inspectorate on how teachers can, individually and collectively within their schools, review and reflect on their practice in the context of self-evaluation.

Self-evaluation and self-assessment relies, at least in part, on access to data and other information on how any school compares with its counterparts. We need therefore to make sure that this information includes an agreed set of benchmarked and value-added indicators that allow for meaningful comparison between schools. We will develop these indicators but we also need to recognise that there is already a significant volume of information at the disposal of school leaders.

In implementing this policy we will need to make sure that data are easily accessible to schools and provided on a timely basis, and that schools are supported in making the most effective use of data to monitor the performance and progression of individual pupils and classes. Schools already have access to comprehensive information on their own performance through the C2k Management Information System; and from September 2009 the new e-Schools data warehouse will supply monthly reports to schools, boards and the Department. These reports will enable schools to benchmark their performance against other schools with similar characteristics such as size and FSM entitlement.

It is critical, however, that these measures are managed carefully to ensure that they provide appropriate contextual information to the school system. Data needs to be balanced to include measures other than those relating to end of Key Stage and GCSE/A level performance and it needs to be used judiciously to inform teaching and learning and to identify where additional support and assistance (or, more rarely, more formal interventions) might be needed.

If we are serious about wanting to engage parents and others more fully in the education of their children and the life and work of the school, we also need to recognise the importance of sharing information on these measures with parents. We believe that parents should have ready access to information on the performance of their children and on the overall performance of the school and we are making changes to reporting arrangements to ensure that the outcomes of diagnostic assessments such as InCAS and end of Key Stage assessments are reported to parents.

Through the proposed benchmarking and value-added measures, we also intend that parents should be able to receive information on how their school compares with other similar schools. We believe that it is possible to provide that information to parents in a meaningful way but we do not intend to return to the publication of school league tables as, even with the addition of value-added measures, these can too often lead to ill-informed judgments being reached, see point (vi) below.

> *Our goal in relation to self-evaluation and the use of performance and other information*
>
> *To provide the support systems needed to help all schools to engage positively in robust self-evaluation and to use the findings from self-assessment and performance and other data to determine priorities and to plan for continuing improvement.*

In pursuit of this goal we will:

- update and re-issue guidance to schools on self-evaluation and self-assessment;

- clarify the expectation of outcomes in literacy and numeracy at each Key Stage in the context of the revised curriculum and the assessment arrangements to support these, to enable schools to plan and track progress better;

- introduce a contextual value-added measure to be used alongside other performance data in assessing the performance of schools;

- introduce the e-schools system which will allow schools to make better use of information, particularly that which benchmarks aspects of performance and context against schools of a similar type;

- require the Education and Skills Authority to develop and deliver a training programme for governors, principals and teachers in

the effective use of data, including benchmarking and the new value-added measure; and

- review the current requirements for School Development Planning and produce revised guidance material on self-evaluation and school development planning.

v) Focusing clearly on support to help schools improve and on the place of more-formal interventions

As noted above, the school improvement policy is founded on the basis that the vast majority of schools will be self-evaluating, self-improving schools. They will continue to be subject to inspection, and their performance in respect of quality indicators will also be monitored by ESA, which will provide support for schools to maintain and improve standards and help schools in identifying early indicators of potential difficulties and in taking steps to ensure that these are addressed.

In cases where there is evidence that pupils are not receiving a high-quality education that allows them to reach their full potential, there will be a need for intervention. This intervention is likely to be rare but is an important aspect of the school improvement policy. Education is simply too fundamental to a child's life chances for poor quality outcomes to be accepted. It is therefore important that we make the arrangements for dealing with these occasions clear to all involved, including parents, schools and the wider community.

The Department is accountable to Ministers and the Assembly for the level of quality and standards being achieved in schools. Where a school's performance is assessed through inspection as being less than satisfactory, the Department will require appropriate and effective actions from the school and ESA to raise performance. The process for such intervention will be transparent.

The need for intervention will, as noted above, be determined largely as a result of inspection findings and intervention will be targeted on the weaknesses identified by ETI. Inspection arrangements will continue to result in the overall effectiveness of a school being reported to the Board of Governors, notified to ESA and the Department and published. Where that

report indicates a less than satisfactory level of provision the school will enter a formal school improvement process supported by ESA and designed to ensure that effective action is taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning and where necessary, leadership.

Where a need for significant improvement has been identified and ESA considers that the school is not capable of implementing the necessary programme of change, on a graduated basis ESA will be empowered to:

- write a letter of concern to the Chair of the Board of Governors, copied to the Principal and the Department, setting out its concern and the package of support it will make available to the school to support improvement;

- provide a set of tailored support interventions;

- set up a partnership link with a high performing school;

- request an inspection or re-inspection by the ETI;

- vary the level of delegated autonomy;

- remove the school from any special initiatives or programmes for which ESA has responsibility, or request removal from any Departmentally managed programmes;

- appoint additional Governors, whose focus will be on improvement;

- appoint, if necessary, a new Chair of the Board of Governors; and

- remove any number of Governors or replace the Board of Governors.

Fuller details of how this process will work are set out in Annex C.

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Our goals in relation to support and intervention

To target support on helping schools to improve and to ensure that self-improving schools will be the norm.

To explain the more-formal intervention processes and how these will be applied when inspection evidence indicates that the quality of teaching and learning and the educational outcomes in a school are poor.

In pursuit of these goals we will:

- require ESA to identify high quality support to schools, particularly in relation to training and resources that help governors, principals and teachers to take forward improvement;

- ensure that the inspection process is rigorous, consistent and transparent and focuses on the characteristics outlined above that we believe make a school a good school because it will be on the basis of inspection findings that interventions will be determined;

- ensure, in the event that there is evidence of less than satisfactory provision in a school, that the procedures for intervention are clear and applied fairly and consistently;

- ensure that the quality of ESA's support services to schools will also be subject to inspection; and

- require schools and ESA to take action to remedy weaknesses identified by ETI.

vi) Increasing engagement between schools and the parents, families and communities they serve

We are fortunate in already having some excellent examples of partnership between schools, homes and communities and recognise the importance of such partnerships. We know from research and other evidence that schools generally cannot improve educational outcomes for pupils unless they have support from parents as well as from pupils themselves.

As part of our school improvement policy we want to see a greater focus on engagement within schools – particularly with pupils – and between schools and the families and communities they serve.

Within schools, we want to encourage positive engagement between school governors and school principals and the wider school staff. We also want to see more schools following the example set by many, involving pupils more directly in decisions on the running of the school. This is consistent with Article 12 of the UNCRC and the right of the young person to have their voice heard on issues that affect them. School Councils offer an important model to support engagement; however the focus has to be on delivering genuine engagement. We do not wish to prescribe the means but rather we want to encourage all schools to find meaningful ways of giving their pupils a voice – and of listening and responding to the views of young people.

We want schools to make it easier for parents to become involved in supporting their children's education – by making sure that the school is a welcoming place for parents; that it provides regular feedback to parents on their children's progress; and that it sets out how parents can help support the work of the school and the education of their children. Research evidence, including from focus groups carried out for us by the Parenting Forum, shows very clearly that parents want to support their children's learning – but sometimes lack the skills or the knowledge to do so.

We recognise that the Department of Education and the Education and Skills Authority have an important role to play in communicating much more clearly to parents the characteristics that make for a good school, including the curriculum and assessment arrangements. We know too that more needs to be done, particularly in the early years of a child's life, to provide parents with support and ideas that can help them prepare their children for school.

We also want to see the excellent links that many schools have built with their local communities over many years supported and strengthened. The Extended Schools Programme currently provides support to over 400 schools that serve our most disadvantaged communities. It has a clear focus on improvement; on ensuring that the children in those schools have access to services and support that helps remove barriers to learning; and on supporting pupils to reach their full potential. Additionally, we are currently piloting the *full service extended school concept* in three Belfast schools, exploring new ways in which schools can link with other statutory and voluntary agencies, particularly those involved in health and social care, youth justice and adult education, to ensure that support for young people and their families is provided in a more cohesive and joined up manner.

Approximately 200 schools have been recognised as Health Promoting Schools. This means they have adopted a process of self-evaluation and action planning against a set of internationally recognised quality criteria which aim to improve school health and wellbeing in three key elements of work: ethos and environment, quality of learning and teaching, and quality of management. One of the criteria for a healthy school is to develop good liaisons with parents, other schools and the local community on a range of health-related initiatives. Evidence demonstrates that healthy children learn well.

We are conscious too, particularly given the recent level of investment in new school buildings, that school premises are a resource that could be better used by local communities and that providing for increased community use of school premises can be an effective way of building links between schools and their local communities. Legislation already provides for schools to make their premises available to outside groups and we want to encourage more community use of school premises.

Our goal in relation to promoting engagement between schools and pupils, parents, families and communities

To work with schools to ensure that their pupils are given a voice in the running of the school and that there are strong and effective links between every school and the parents, families and local communities it serves.

In pursuit of this goal we will:

- bring forward new arrangements for reporting pupils' progress to their parents, particularly at the end of each Key Stage;

- provide a resource to support school councils and to encourage all schools to set up councils or other forums to ensure that pupils have a voice in decisions on the running of the school;

- through the Extended Schools Programme, continue to ensure that those schools serving the most disadvantaged communities receive additional support to provide activities outside of normal school hours that reflect and respond to the needs of their pupils and the local community;

- review the Full Service Extended School pilot and use the findings to publish a strategy for further development of this concept; and

- identify and disseminate good practice with a particular focus on community use of schools to help schools in building stronger links with their parents and local communities.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

School Improvement involves the pursuit of a higher quality of education and better standards of achievement for all pupils in all schools, particularly those pupils most at risk of underachievement. The improvement journey involves a number of key participants.

Clearly, **pupils and their parents** have a responsibility to make best use of the opportunities provided by 12 years of compulsory education. Schools too need the participation and active support of parents and the community to ensure that children attend school, approach their studies in a diligent fashion, co-operate with their teachers and other staff, complete their homework assignments and prepare adequately for school-based and external examinations.

School leaders – and by this we mean the Principal and the management team working with the Board of Governors - have the primary responsibility for ensuring that their school's ethos; the expectations it has for its pupils; its pastoral care arrangements; and its teaching and curricular provision support and motivate the pupils and provide them with opportunities to succeed. School leaders are also responsible for making sure that emphasis is placed on the pupils achieving at an appropriate level across all areas of the curriculum, especially in literacy and numeracy. The Board of Governors of a school has the responsibility for ensuring that the Principal, and the staff, put in place all the necessary arrangements and mechanisms to help each pupil to succeed and to achieve to her or his full potential.

Teachers as reflective professionals

The competences developed by the GTCNI underpin high-quality teaching and provide a sense of professional identity for classroom practitioners. They also provide a common framework and language that will assist teachers in the process of personal reflection and in the identification of their professional development needs. In addition, whole school development and improvement planning can be based around the competences as outlined in the GTCNI publication *'Teaching: the Reflective Profession'.*

The Education and Skills Authority (ESA)

Following the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), the Principal and the Board of Governors will be accountable to ESA for the quality of provision and the standards attained by their pupils and will be under a duty to co-operate with ESA in the exercise of its improvement functions.

ESA will be responsible for monitoring the performance of individual schools, particularly the standards of attainment; for challenging schools about their performance where it is clearly declining or where the ETI identifies weaknesses; for providing the necessary support to schools seeking to improve; and for taking the actions required to deliver and sustain improved performance in those schools where provision and progress is deemed unsatisfactory.

ESA will be accountable to the Department of Education for the effectiveness of the discharge of these responsibilities. It will prepare and publish an overarching School Improvement Plan and submit this to the Department for approval at the start of each financial year. The plan will place a particular focus on literacy and numeracy and will set out:

- details of overall performance and progress against key targets;

- ESA's assessment of the current position and its proposed actions; and

- measurable outcomes for these actions, linking these to the key performance data.

ESA will also be required to publish an Annual Report commenting on progress against its Plan and analysing aspects of performance from which lessons can be learned. This report, taken alongside other evidence such as the Chief Inspector's Report, research outcomes and performance statistics, will be the basis of the regular and ongoing review of the Department's school improvement policy. It will also inform school support and all aspects of teacher education.

The current education support bodies

Until January 2010 when the Education and Skills Authority will be established, the Education and Library Boards will continue to be accountable for the effective use of resources made available for schools and related services. In exercising this role, each Board, working with CCMS, CnaG or NICIE where appropriate, will be expected to monitor the performance of schools in its area and provide support to schools to ensure a sustained focus on improvement.

Boards will also be expected to challenge and intervene where deemed necessary to ensure that pupils receive a high quality education.

Where the school is a voluntary grammar or grant-maintained integrated school, the Board will consult with the Department before initiating any action, reflecting the fact that the Department is currently accountable for the funding made available to these schools. It will be a matter for each Board how it chooses to organise and manage this function. Boards and other education support bodies will be able to write to the Department requesting that a school be inspected.

The Education and Training Inspectorate

The Education and Training Inspectorate is responsible for promoting improvement through the inspection programme and through reporting the outcomes of school inspections to the Department, the principal and teachers, the Board of Governors, ESA, parents and others who need to know.

The mission statement of the Inspectorate is 'Promoting Improvement in the interests of all learners' and all of the work of the Inspectorate therefore underpins the promotion of improvement at all levels of our education system.

The Department of Education

The Department will: determine the nature of the school improvement policy within the context of its strategic priorities; monitor and report on the performance of the overall school system; and hold the Chief Executive of ESA accountable for the performance of the Authority in relation to school improvement.

The Department will also ensure that its school improvement policy and its other education policies are clearly and effectively communicated to schools and other key stakeholders. It will have a key role to play in ensuring coherence among and between the different strands of its responsibilities, making sure for example that policy and spending decisions are closely aligned and that priority is given to releasing more resources to schools to manage directly, in line with its commitment to accountable autonomy.

7. KEY TARGETS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

How will we know the strategy is working?

Chapter 5 sets out key areas for this school improvement policy, along with the actions and interventions that we will take to deliver the desired improvements. As with any policy, there need to be arrangements to determine whether the policy interventions are having the intended effect – in this case improving the quality of provision in schools, raising standards overall and reducing the gap in achievement that exists, particularly between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more affluent counterparts.

The arrangements for monitoring and evaluating progress will focus on four key strands:

i)   the delivery of the Department's Public Service Agreement targets and other high-level educational outcome targets;

ii) evidence from ETI inspections on the overall quality of provision and the particular improvements made in the areas of leadership; high quality teaching and learning; tackling the barriers to learning; self-evaluation and the effective use of performance data; and links between schools and their local communities;

iii) the delivery of progress by ESA against the targets in its annual School Improvement Plan on a year-on-year basis; and

iv) through an Implementation Plan, the timely and effective delivery of the commitments and actions set out in this document, and summarised below.

(i) Public Service Agreements

The Department has already agreed challenging and important Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets focused on the performance of school leavers in public examinations.

The targets are an important indicator of progress in implementing our school improvement policy. They reflect the focus in this document and elsewhere on both raising standards overall and, particularly, on closing the gap in achievement that exists, particularly between the least and most affluent.

Progress against these targets will be reviewed by the DE Board and the DE Audit and Risk Management Committee and annual reports on progress will be published via the DE website.

Key PSA targets for raising attainment 2008–2011

- By 2011, 90% of school leavers achieving GCSE A* - G (or equivalent) in English and Maths.

- By 2011, 68% of students gaining at least 5+ GCSEs A*-C (or equivalent) by the time they leave school.

- By 2011, 55% of students gaining 5+ GCSEs A*-C (or equivalent) including English and Maths by the time they leave school.

- By 2011, reduce percentage of year 12 pupils with no qualification at GSCE A*-G level or equivalent to 1.5%.

- By 2011, 65% of A level students gaining 3+ A levels at Grades A-C or equivalent in Year 14.

- By 2011, increase the participation rate of 16-17 year olds in full-time education or vocational training to 95%.

Key PSA targets for closing the gap in attainment 2008–2011

- By 2011, at least 30% of students entitled to free school meals achieving 5+ GCSE A*-C (or equivalent) including English and Maths by the time they leave school.

- By 2011, bring the attainment levels of primary schools identified as having 51% or more pupils living at a postcode within a Neighbourhood Renewal Area, up to within 5 percentage points of the NI average at Key Stage 2.

- By 2011, bring the attainment levels of post primary schools identified as having 51% or more pupils living at a postcode within a Neighbourhood Renewal Area, up to within 3 percentage points of the NI average at GCSE.

- By 2011, reduce the number of pupils achieving no GCSEs attending schools identified as having 51% or more of their pupils living at a postcode within a Neighbourhood Renewal Area, to within 1 percentage point of the NI average.

These targets focus on educational outcomes as measured by formal assessment and public examination results in the short to medium-term and, particularly, on outcomes at GCSE level. During consultation, there was a recognition of this and also a clear call to set more ambitious, longer-term targets that contain clear milestones from primary school right through to GCSE level and beyond. In response to that call, we have set targets for the period to 2020 that will be reflected in future Public Service Agreements, in the ESA business plans for the years ahead and, of course, in school development plans, to take account of the individual performance and characteristics of every school.

Longer term targets for improving educational outcomes

LEVEL	ACTUAL PERFORMANCE		MILESTONE TARGET	LONGER TERM TARGETS
	2005–06	2006–07	2011–12	2020
Key Stage 2 Literacy[7] (% pupils at expected levels)	78.0%	78.0%	80%	85%
Key Stage 2 Maths (% pupils at expected levels)	80.0%	79.5%	82%	86%
Key Stage 3 Literacy (% pupils at expected levels)	76.6%	78.2%	80%	85%
Key Stage 3 Maths (% pupils at expected levels)	72.9%	74.4%	76%	85%
% pupils achieving 5 good GCSEs A*-C including English and Maths	52.6%	53%	55%	70%
% FSME[8] pupils achieving 5 good GCSEs A*-C including English and Maths	26.4%	27.1%	30%	65%

7 Literacy means the skills of communication as assessed through English or, in Irish medium schools, Irish.

8 Pupils entitled to free school meals.

The Literacy and Numeracy consultation document published in June 2008 committed to setting up a group to review the literacy and numeracy needs of the Irish-medium sector separately. The work of this group is underway and it is expected to report shortly, including views on appropriate literacy and numeracy targets for the Irish-medium sector.

(ii) and (iii) Monitoring and reporting of progress by ETI and ESA

There will be regular and ongoing monitoring and reporting of progress by the ETI and by ESA, which will be carefully assessed by DE.

Reporting of progress will take place as follows:

AREA	REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS
Evidence from inspection	In individual inspection reports, including in relation to inspection of services provided by ESA, and in the bi-annual Chief Inspector's Report.
Delivery by ESA	In an annual report published by ESA on progress in implementing its annual School Improvement Plan.

(iv) Implementation plan: actions and commitments in Every School a Good School

Progress on the implementation plan set out below will be monitored regularly and progress reports will be published annually on the DE website.

Implementation Plan

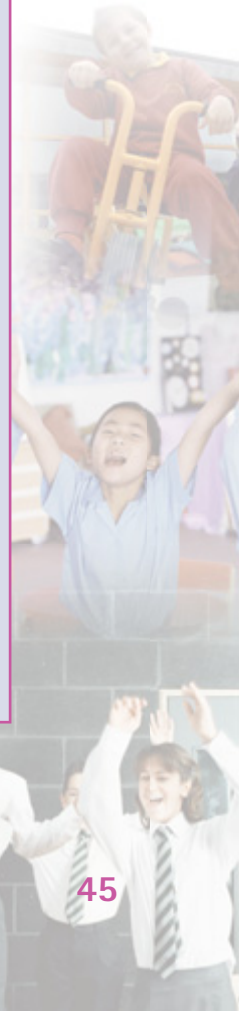| PRIORITY AREA	ACTION	TIMESCALE
Leadership and Ethos	Set out clearly in legislation the duties of school governors and of the principal in relation to school improvement.	New Education Bill passed into law by the end of 2009, in time for the establishment of ESA.
	Through ESA, work closely with governors to analyse training and support needs and to provide training and other services to meet those needs.	First training needs analysis for school governors and associated implementation plan prepared by ESA by the end of the 2010–11 financial year.
	Introduce coaching and mentoring arrangements for all newly appointed principals.	Arrangements in place via ESA for all principals appointed after September 2010.
	Prepare a new handbook for governors setting out guidance on their role and signposting resources to help governors perform their role more effectively.	New handbook prepared and published by 2009/10.
	Conduct a formal review of existing leadership programmes including, in particular, PQH.	DE to have completed review by April 2011.
	Ensure that new leadership programmes have a particular focus on getting the best out of people.	ESA to factor people management into new leadership programmes from April 2010.

PRIORITY AREA	ACTION	TIMESCALE
Leadership and Ethos	Develop leadership and management training for persons other than principals.	ESA to have training programme in place by April 2011.
	Enable effective principals to contribute to improved performance across the wider education system.	DE to have completed review of existing leadership programmes by April 2011.
High-quality teaching and learning	Extend, for at least the next five years, the provision that has allowed schools to take up to 5 school development days to be used for self-evaluation and continuing professional development in the pursuit of improvement and raising standards.	DE to issue circular confirming arrangements by end of the 2009-10 financial year.
	Bring forward proposals for teacher education in a consultation document produced jointly with the Department for Employment and Learning.	Teacher Education Review proposals to be published for consultation by summer 2009.
	Work with the General Teaching Council, Teacher Representatives and the Education and Skills Authority to develop effective arrangements which ensure that the teaching workforce continues to be of the highest quality.	DE to have a workforce development plan in place by 2010.
	Issue guidance to school leaders on the importance of ensuring that every teacher has agreed a plan to facilitate her or his professional development; that the plan is implemented; and that professional development needs are reviewed on at least an annual basis.	DE to issue guidance by the end of 2009.

PRIORITY AREA	ACTION	TIMESCALE
High-quality teaching and learning	Ensure that the professional development model of ESA is based on improvement, raising standards, disseminating good practice and effectively building expertise.	DE to have completed review of existing leadership programmes by April 2011. Arrangements in place via ESA for all principals appointed after September 2010. ESA to have leadership and management training programme in place for persons other than principals by April 2011.
Tackling the barriers to learning	Bring forward revised policies on special educational needs and inclusion, newcomer children, Traveller and Roma children and alternative education provision that are based on a whole school recognition of the diversity of pupils within their population with schools accepting responsibility for the educational outcomes for all their pupils.	Revised policies to be completed with implementation underway as follows: • Newcomer pupils – policy issued April 2009. • The Taskforce on Traveller Education are to produce input to an action plan by 2010. • Special Educational Needs and Inclusion – Consultation to issue in 2009/10. • Alternative Education Provision – Consultation to issue in 2009/10.

PRIORITY AREA	ACTION	TIMESCALE
Tackling the barriers to learning	Continue to support work through the developing pupils' emotional health and well being programme and the counselling provision in schools in order to build pupils' resilience to the challenges in their lives and improve their readiness to learn.	Ongoing.
	As part of wider work to develop qualifications that meet the needs of our young people, ensure that there is scope to recognise and reward progress for those pupils who, because of the barriers they face, may not achieve at GCSE Grades A*-C.	Ongoing.
	Update and re-issue guidance to schools on self-evaluation and self-assessment.	DE to update and re-issue guidance by end 2009.
	Clarify the expectation of outcomes in literacy and numeracy at each Key Stage and the assessment arrangements to support these to enable schools to plan and track progress more effectively.	DE to consult on and confirm new assessment arrangements for literacy and numeracy to support the revised curriculum by the end of the 2009-10 financial year.
	Introduce a contextual value-added measure to be used alongside other performance data in assessing the performance of schools.	Contextual value added measure to be in place to coincide with new assessment arrangements from 2010.

PRIORITY AREA	ACTION	TIMESCALE
Self-evaluation and the use of performance and other information	Introduce the e-schools system which will allow schools to make better use of information and, particularly, which benchmarks aspects of performance and context against schools of a similar type.	Contract signed and system in place by September 2009.
	Require ESA to develop and deliver a training programme for governors, principals and teachers in the effective use of data, including benchmarking and the new value-added measure.	ESA to have developed a training programme and begun delivery by end 2010.
	Review the current requirements for School Development Planning and produce revised guidance material on self-evaluation and school development planning.	DE to complete review and produce revised guidance by early 2010.
Support and intervention	Require ESA to identify high quality support to schools, particularly in relation to training and resources that help governors, principals and teachers to take forward improvement.	Targets to be set from ESA's first operational plan for the 2010-11 financial year.
	Ensure that the inspection process is rigorous, consistent and transparent and focuses on the characteristics of a successful school because it will be on the basis of inspection findings that interventions will be determined.	Review and publish the performance indicators as outlined in Together Towards Improvement in line with ESaGS.

Consult with schools on any revisions to models of inspection as a result of ESaGS.

Develop further the involvement of Associate Assessors in the work of ETI. |

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PRIORITY AREA	ACTION	TIMESCALE
Support and intervention	Ensure, in the rare situation where there is evidence of poor quality education in a school, that the procedures for intervention are set out clearly and applied fairly and consistently.	DE to communicate procedures to all schools immediately following issue of Every School a Good School and monitor their application on an ongoing basis to ensure fairness and consistency.
	Ensure that the quality of ESA's support services to schools will also be subject to inspection.	New Education Bill containing this provision passed into law by the end of 2009, in time for the establishment of ESA.
	Require the school and ESA to take action to remedy weaknesses identified by ETI.	To be monitored on an ongoing basis if the need arises.
Links with pupils, parents and communities	Bring forward new arrangements for reporting of pupils' progress to their parents, particularly at the end of each Key Stage.	Regulations governing reporting to parents consulted on and implemented by summer 2009.
	Provide a resource to support school councils and to encourage all schools to set up councils or other forums to ensure that pupils have a voice in decisions on the running of the school.	Resource for school councils to be commissioned and completed by end 2010.
	Through the Extended Schools Programme, continue to ensure that those schools serving the most disadvantaged communities receive additional support to provide activities outside of normal school hours that reflect and respond to the needs of their pupils and the local community.	Extended Schools Programme in place and building on successes on an ongoing basis.

PRIORITY AREA	ACTION	TIMESCALE
Links with pupils, parents and communities	Review the Full Service Extended School pilot and use the findings to publish a strategy for further development of this concept.	Review completed and published by end 2010.
	Identify and disseminate good practice with a particular focus on community use of schools to help schools in building stronger links with their parents and local communities.	Group established to consider by summer 2009, with report back by end 2009-10 financial year.

Annex A

RESPONDENTS TO ESAGS CONSULTATION

Depts, ELBs & CCMS, Teacher Unions, Managing Authorities, Statutory Bodies and Business Organisations

1. Association of Teachers and Lectures (ATL)
2. BELB (Gerry McGuiness)
3. CCMS (Jim Clarke)
4. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)
5. Community Relations Council
6. Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)
7. Department for Social Development (DSD)
8. General Teaching Council NI (GTCNI)
9. Governing Bodies Association (GBA)
10. INTO (Carrickfergus/Newtownabbey/Larne Branch)
11. INTO (District Committee 1)
12. INTO (Frank Bunting)
13. Institute of Directors (IoD)
14. Invest Northern Ireland
15. Labour Relations Agency
16. National Association of Head Teachers NI (NAHT)
17. National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)
18. NEELB (Gordon Topping)
19. NI Assembly Education Committee
20. Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY)
21. NIPSA
22. SEELB (Alice Lennon)
23. The Association of Principals of Integrated Schools (APTIS)
24. Transfer Representatives Council (TRC)
25. Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU)
26. WELB/SELB (Paddy Mackey)

Special Schools

27.   Ceara Special School 531-6521
28.   Donard Special School 531-6520
29.   Kilronan Special School 331-6570
30.   Roddensvale Special School 331-6514
31.   Tor Bank Special School 431-6517

Nursery Schools

32.   Convent of Mercy Nursery School 413-6212 (now St Patrick's Convent)
33.   The Academy Nursery School 211-6023

Primary Schools

34.   Anahilt PS 401-1608
35.   Armstrong PS 501-1115
36.   Ballinderry PS 401-6202
37.   Ballycraigy PS 301-3331
38.   Ballylifford PS 503-2208
39.   Ballynure PS 301-0802
40.   Blessed Patrick O'Loughran PS 503-2463
41.   Bocombra PS 501-6138
42.   Bunscoil Cholmcille, Doire 203-6574
43.   Bunscoil an Iúir, Newry 504-6597
44.   Bush PS 501-6391
45.   Carr PS 401-1584
46.   Carrick PS 503-1609
47.   Christ the Redeemer 403-6618
48.   Clea PS 503-1108
49.   Cooley PS 201-6663
50.   Donacloney 501-6178
51.   Dundonald PS 401-1587
52.   Dromara PS 401-1619
53.   Drumadonnell PS 501-6616

54.   Gaelscoil Ui Dhochartaigh, Strabane 204-6638

55.   Glencraig Integrated PS 405-3020

56.   Glenwood PS 101-6485

57.   Grange Park PS, 401-3045

58.   Greenwood PS 101-0304

59.   Holy Cross Boys' PS 103-0194

60.   Holy Family PS, Downpatrick 403-3012

61.   Holy Family PS, Derry 203-6472

62.   Holy Trinity PS, Cookstown 503-6567

63.   Lisbellaw PS 201-6218

64.   Maralin Village PS 501-1687

65.   Nettlefield PS 101-0267

66.   Olderfleet PS 301-0646

67.   Orritor PS 501-6221

68.   Our Lady Queen of Peace PS, Belfast 403-6591

69.   Recarson PS 203-2704

70.   St Anthony's PS, Larne 303-0900

71.   St Brendan's PS, Craigavon 503-6101

72.   St Brigid's PS, Downpatrick 403-3040

73.   St Bronagh's PS, Rostrevor 503-6673

74.   St Caolan's PS, Ballynahinch 403-1485

75.   St Clare's Convent PS, Newry 503-1213

76.   St Colmcille's PS, Downpatrick 403-6182

77.   St Colman's Bann PS, Craigavon 503-6400

78.   St Colman's PS, Banbridge 503-6061

79.   St Dallan's PS, Warrenpoint 503-6583

80.   St Dympna's PS, Dromore 203-6186

81.   St Joseph's PS, Belfast 103-6246

82.   St Joseph's PS, Crumlin 303-6026

83.   St Joseph's PS, Ballymena 303-6243

84.   St Kieran's PS, Belfast 403-6480

85.   St Malachy's PS, Coleraine 303-2297

86.   St Malachy's PS, Dungannon 503-2306

87.   St Mary's PS, Claudy 203-2294

88.   St Mary's PS, Dunsford 403-1673

89.   St Mary's PS, Granmore 503-1172

90.   St Mary's PS, Tempo 203-6356

91.   St Nicholas' PS, Ardglass 403-6113

92.   St Patrick's PS, Donaghmore 503-2678

93.   St Patrick's PS, Mayobridge 503-1697

94.   St Patrick's PS, Ballynahinch 403-1665

95.   St Teresa's PS, Lurgan 503-1160

96.   Tandragee PS 501-1116

97.   Templepatrick PS, 301-6014

98.   The Cope PS 501-6079

99.   Victoria PS 301-3330

Non-selective post-primary schools

100.   Aughnacloy College 521-0153

101.   Brownlow Integrated College 525-0216

102.   Castle HS 121-0258

103.   City of Armagh HS 521-0121

104.   Clounagh Junior HS, Portadown 521-0043

105.   Cookstown HS 521-0230

106.   Crumlin Integrated College 325-0149

107.   Donaghadee HS 421-0031

108.   Dromore HS 521-0064

109.   Drumglass HS, Dungannon 521-0231

110.   Dunclug College 321-0208

111.   Dunmurry HS 421-0194

112.   Fort Hill College 425-0072

113.   Glengormley HS 321-0202

114.   Integrated College Dungannon 526-0286

115.   Killicomaine Junior HS, Portadown 521-0054

116.   Larne HS 321-0038

117.   Limavady HS 221-0302

118.   Little Flower Girls' School 123-0089

119.   Newry HS 521-0186

120.   Oakgrove Integrated College 226-0276

121.   Omagh HS 221-0125

122.   Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School, Belfast 123-0104

123.   Priory Integrated College 425-0024

124.   St Benedicts College, Randalstown 323-0308

125.   St Brigids HS, Armagh 523-0160

126.   St Colmcille's HS 423-0102

127.   St Columban's College, Kilkeel 523-0059

128.   St Comhghall's College, Lisnaskea 223-0190

129.   St Gemma's HS, Belfast 123-0173

130.   St Joseph's Boys' School, Derry 223-0131

131.   St Joseph's Boys' HS, Newry 523-0056

132.   St Joseph's Boys' HS, Newry 523-0056 – additional response

133.   St Mark's HS, Warrenpoint 523-0135

134.   St Mary's HS, Downpatrick 423-0023

135.   St Mary's HS, Derry 223-0081

136.   St Mary's HS, Newry 523-0108

137.   St Peter's HS, Derry 223-0181

138.   St Paul's Junior HS, Lurgan 523-088
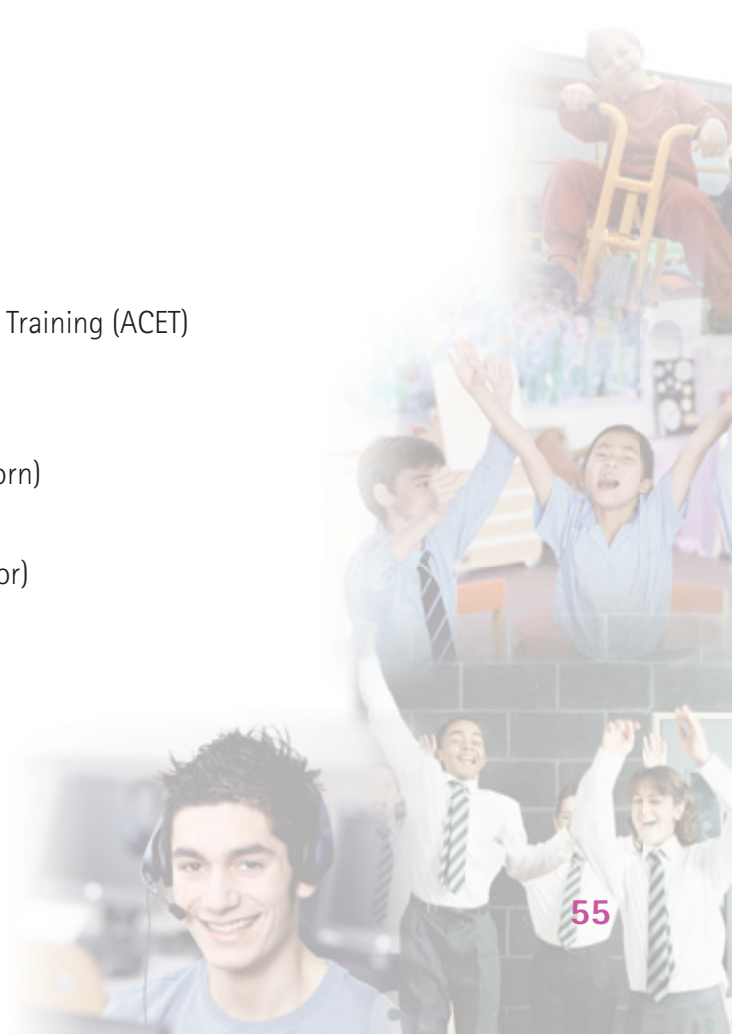
Grammar Schools

139.   Abbey Christian Brothers GS 542-0059

140.   Aquinas Diocesan GS 142-0277

141.   Antrim GS 341-0209

142.   Banbridge Academy 541-0013

143.   Cambridge House GS 341-0297

144.   Cambridge House GS 341-0297 - additional response

145.   Down HS 441-0085

District Councils and others

174.   Craigavon Borough Council

175.   Disability Action

176.   Down District Council

177.   Down District Council – additional response

178.   Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI)

179.   Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

180.   Fermanagh Principals Group - (Mr F Murphy, chairperson)

181.   Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland (HPA)

182.   Help the Aged

183.   Holy Family Parish Social Justice Committee

184.   Institute of Public Health in Ireland

185.   Limavady Borough Council

186.   Lisburn City Council

187.   National Deaf Children's Society

188.   Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)

189.   Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC)

190.   NSPCC

191.   Regional Training Union (RTU)

192.   Save The Children

193.   SELB Post-primary Principals Association Steering Group (David Mehaffey, Chair)

194.   Sir Robert Salisbury – Chair of Literacy & Numeracy Taskforce

195.   Strabane District Council

196.   Stranmillis University College

197.   The British Psychological Society

198.   University of Ulster

Personal Responses

199.   Florence Brunt

200.   SE Douglas

201.   Prof Tony Gallagher - School of Education, Queens University

202.   Robert Gilmore

203.   Dr Ana M Kerr

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Introduction

The draft school improvement policy¸ *Every School a Good School*, was published for consultation on 21 January 2008. The consultation period closed on 31 March 2008.

The policy proposals contained within *'Every School a Good School'* were originally informed by discussions with professionals, policy-makers and young people and by responses received to the initial paper on school improvement circulated as part of a suite of papers setting out the policy direction of the education aspects of the Review of Public Administration.

The formal consultation exercise sought to engage as wide a range of interested parties as possible, including teachers, governors, parents and business leaders. The views of young people were also given particular importance, with schools encouraged to obtain the views of their pupils on the policy proposals and to reflect those views in their responses.

The publication of the draft policy document triggered considerable interest and responses were received from over 200 organisations and individuals. A full list of respondents is provided at Annex A. You can view a summary of the consultation responses on the DE website at

http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/03-schools_impvt_prog_pg/03-every_school_a_good_school_a_policy_for_school_improvement.htm.

The Department is very grateful to all those who took time to express their views and to put forward suggestions for improvements to the policy development process.

Overview of Consultation Responses

In general, responses were broadly supportive of the aims of the policy. However, some common concerns clearly emerged from the consultation responses, including: the extent of the responsibilities of school governors; the importance of high quality leadership; the need to ensure that school performance data was used – but not abused – in raising standards;

and the central importance of parental and community involvement in the life and work of schools.

Role of Governors

There was general (but not universal) agreement that school governors could play an important role in taking forward improvements within individual schools – but with that agreement came real concerns about the range of responsibilities that now fall to school governors (in relation to standards; financial management; staffing and many other areas) and about whether it was indeed reasonable to expect governors, as volunteers, to carry out the role now envisaged for them.

While many respondents acknowledged the role of governors in ensuring a focus on standards and improvement within their school, many also considered that there was a risk that those responsibilities could prove too onerous for many governors unless they were matched with greater support and guidance and improved opportunities for training and networking. There also needed to be greater clarity about the responsibilities associated with being a school governor – with prospective governors being given this information before they signed up – and a more co-ordinated effort was needed to recruit governors who had both an earnest interest in education and the skills needed to carry out their responsibilities. In that regard, the willingness to be more involved in school governance that was in evidence in the responses from the business community was very welcome. The challenge role which governors are expected to exercise, not just in relation to financial management and other areas, but also in relation to the (standards of) attainment of pupils in schools cannot be underestimated.

Leadership

The majority of respondents agreed that high quality leadership in terms of self-evaluation/ self-reflection was of fundamental importance. However, it was felt that, at times, the pace of change in education can seem so rapid that quality time to reflect on leadership style is at a premium, especially for teaching principals.

It was suggested that the definition of leadership and the exemplification of it within the school context needs to be explored and agreed. Collaboration is central to the process of improvement – principals who have demonstrated the necessary qualities of leadership should be able to support the development of their colleagues or perhaps, work with schools that required a higher level of support.

There was uncertainty as to whether requiring principals to have a leadership/management qualification in itself would solve the problem. Some respondents therefore proposed that a full review of the scope and content of all existing leadership and management programmes should be carried out to inform decisions on leadership development. Many respondents also made the point that leadership was not the sole preserve of the governors and principal – all teachers have an important leadership role to play and training in this regard should begin within initial teacher education programmes and should be a feature within continuing professional development.

School Performance Data

There was widespread recognition of the importance of having to hand accurate information on how schools are performing as well as the skills necessary to analyse such information and to make proper use of it. However, there were also concerns expressed about too much focus on quantitative performance data at the expense of more qualitative data and about the risks that came with any approach that drove school improvement purely through examination results.

Disappointment was expressed at the fact that qualitative characteristics seemed to be underdeveloped/overlooked in the document, with the view being expressed that value-added measure should be developed as a matter of urgency. The point was also frequently made that data needed to be contextualised to the school and not used in isolation from the factors that influenced it.

In order for schools to effectively deal with the data requirements outlined, there were clear calls for better support and training for governors, principals and teachers to help them evaluate performance, identify areas for improvement and set realistic targets for improvement.

Parents/Community Involvement

The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that the involvement of parents and the community in supporting the life of the school is very important. However, many regarded that this section of the document was rather light on detail. Concerns were also raised that it can, in some cases, be very difficult for schools to engage parents and the wider community.

Every School A Good School
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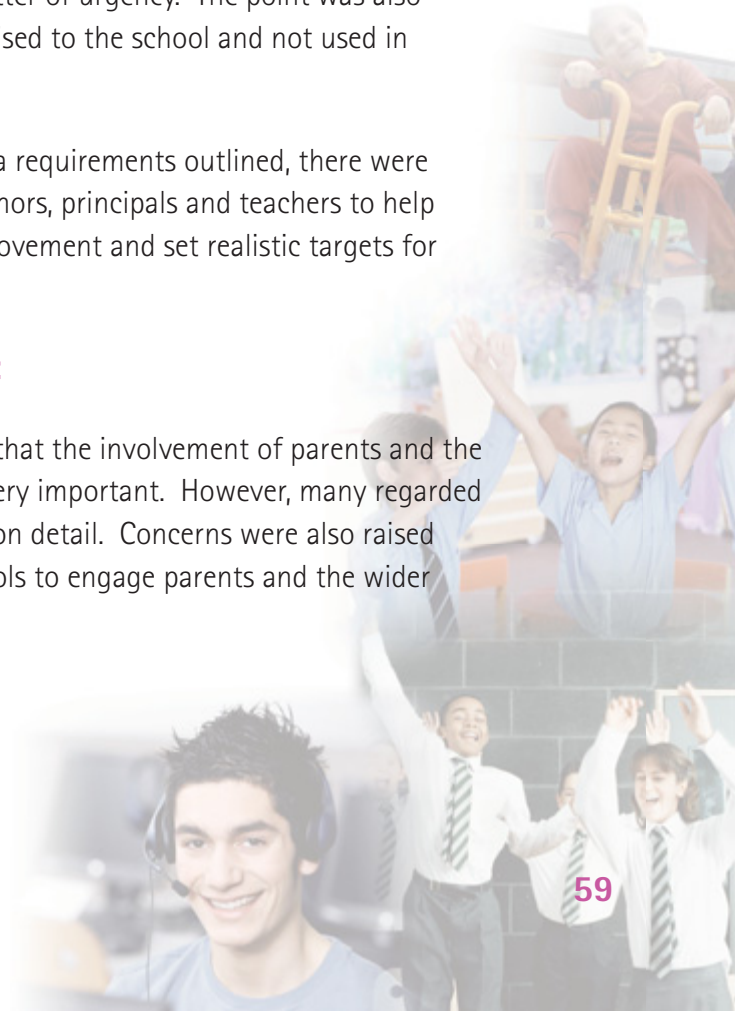
Concerns were raised that there were no proposals to empower parents as a collective body. It was suggested that the establishment of a parents' forum might be a possible way of redressing this imbalance.

Other key points

Some respondents were of the view that the overall tone of the consultation document was too negative, arguing that the proposals represented a significant shift in the relationship between the Department of Education and schools with too much of a focus on measurement, labelling and ultimate threat of closure.

It was also suggested that, despite its assertion that it was a child-focused-policy, the draft policy document quickly lost its 'strong focus on pupils as individuals'.

In many of the responses, there was reference to the level of change and the number of "initiatives" currently being taken forward by schools. Some commented that this created a 'swamp effect' which was not conducive to clear thinking or planning in schools. Others pointed to the difficulty in implementing a new school improvement policy in advance of the establishment of the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) and called for implementation to be postponed to coincide with the setting up of ESA as this would result in a single change for schools.

Finally, many respondents highlighted the need for realism, expressing concern that the school could not be held solely responsible for the achievements of its pupils and pointing to the central importance of the earliest years in a child's life (before he or she reaches statutory school age) in helping form their readiness to learn and their attitude to learning.

Summary of responses to the consultation questions

The table below provides a summary of responses to the ten consultation questions posed in the original policy document.

No	Question	% strongly agree or agree	% don't know	% strongly disagree or disagree
	CONSULTATION RESPONSE OVERVIEW			
1	Do you agree that the list represents the key characteristics of a successful school (p12)	75	3	22
2	Do you agree with the list of key issues to be addressed? (p20)	65	0	35
3	Do you agree with the list of key principles upon which the policy will be based? (p22)	73	0	27
4	Do you agree with the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities proposed for the new school improvement policy? (p25)	61	0	39
5	Do you agree that the actions identified to facilitate self-evaluation and school development planning are appropriate and/or necessary? (p28)	79	0	21
6	Do you agree that the actions identified to improve leadership in schools are appropriate and/or necessary? (p31)	73	0	27
7	Do you agree that the actions identified to improve the involvement of parents and the community are appropriate and/or necessary? (p33)	75	0	25

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	CONSULTATION RESPONSE OVERVIEW			
No	Question	% strongly agree or agree	% don't know	% strongly disagree or disagree
8	Do you agree with the actions intended to be taken to improve the use of data in schools? (p37)	71	0	29
9	Do you agree that there should be a common set of indicators of performance and context for each school? (p38)	75	0	25
10	Do you agree with the initial set of indicators for primary and post-primary schools? (p38)	64	0	36

THE FORMAL INTERVENTION PROCESS

In circumstances where inspection finds that the quality of education in a school is less than satisfactory, the Department will, within two weeks of the completion of the inspection, issue a letter to ESA, copied to the school, referring to the ETI findings (findings which the school and ESA will already have received orally). This letter will require ESA to consult with the school to determine a Management Response from the school to the main criticisms and recommendations in the report, together with an indication of the actions which the school intends to take to address the weaknesses or failings. This management response should be submitted to ESA within 30 working days from receipt of the Department's letter.

Within a further 30 working days the school will submit a detailed action plan to ESA, to cover the period up to the follow-up inspection, in a format prescribed by ESA detailing the various measures being put in place by the school to effect improvement. ESA will have to make sure that it is content that the actions proposed are capable of addressing effectively the weaknesses identified and will then forward the finalised action plan to the Department. Funding to assist the implementation of the action plan will be drawn from a School Development Fund, to be made available to ESA. The fund will comprise related strands of funding which can be used to support school improvement processes, including those which will be taken forward by the school itself.

The school will be expected to start the programme of improvement immediately. It will involve the Principal and, in larger schools, the senior management team, participating in a Leadership Programme, as well as additional training for the Board of Governors.

ETI will conduct one or more monitoring visits in the period between inspections. The purpose of these visits will be to assess the appropriateness of the actions being taken and to assess progress against the plan. A written note of each visit will be produced for the organisation setting out the basis of the report (i.e. discussion with senior management team, classroom observation etc). A copy of the note will be forwarded to the Department. These are not formal inspections as such but nevertheless are important in terms of documenting the trajectory and status of each organisation. Where a child protection issue was identified in the original report, ETI will report formally on measures to address the weakness in the arrangements. ESA will also have the power to direct a grant-aided school to address child protection issues.

Given their particular importance to the wellbeing of pupils, ETI will follow up on any child protection issues within six weeks of the inspection and where there is satisfactory evidence of progress, the school's arrangements for child protection will then form part of the ongoing monitoring and follow-up inspection arrangements. Where progress has been less than satisfactory, the ETI will raise this immediately with ESA and with DE to ensure that action is taken to safeguard the wellbeing of pupils.

Within 12-18 months of the original inspection, the ETI will carry out a follow-up inspection, directly related to the outcomes of the first inspection and to the school's own self-evaluation and action plan. The inspection will make clear the direction of travel that has been achieved and the potential for further improvement. Within 20 days of receipt of this report the Department, in consultation with ESA, will reach a decision on whether there has been sufficient improvement to allow the school to exit the process. That decision will be communicated to the school.

Within a year of the first follow-up inspection ETI will carry out a second follow-up for those schools still in the process, relating to the outcomes of the original inspection and the first follow-up, again taking account of the school's self evaluation and action plan. ETI will report again to the Department and ESA. The report must again make clear the exact response of the school to the identified failings or weaknesses.

Schools that are successful in implementing a programme of improvement will, if the performance is sustained, have this acknowledged and celebrated in a variety of ways including through Ministerial letters of recognition; access to an innovation fund to develop further and to disseminate good practice; participation in a major annual school improvement conference to show-case and disseminate good practice. This will also apply to schools which are identified by inspection as having excellent practice and outcomes.

There needs to be an exit strategy for each school entering the process. The expectation is that most schools will address the weaknesses identified and achieve the desired level of improvement within two years. Consultation responses highlighted the need to make sure, in line with the child-centred nature of the programme, that the time between significant weaknesses being identified and the school returning to a position where it was providing high quality education needed to be as short as possible.

It is hard to envisage a situation where a school has not been successful in addressing the significant weaknesses in provision within a two year period – but it is nonetheless important to have in place a protocol which covers this situation. Where, after two inspections, performance is found to remain unsatisfactory or where a school had been

subject to the formal process, achieved a measure of improvement, but has since regressed, further action will be needed to safeguard the education of children and young people.
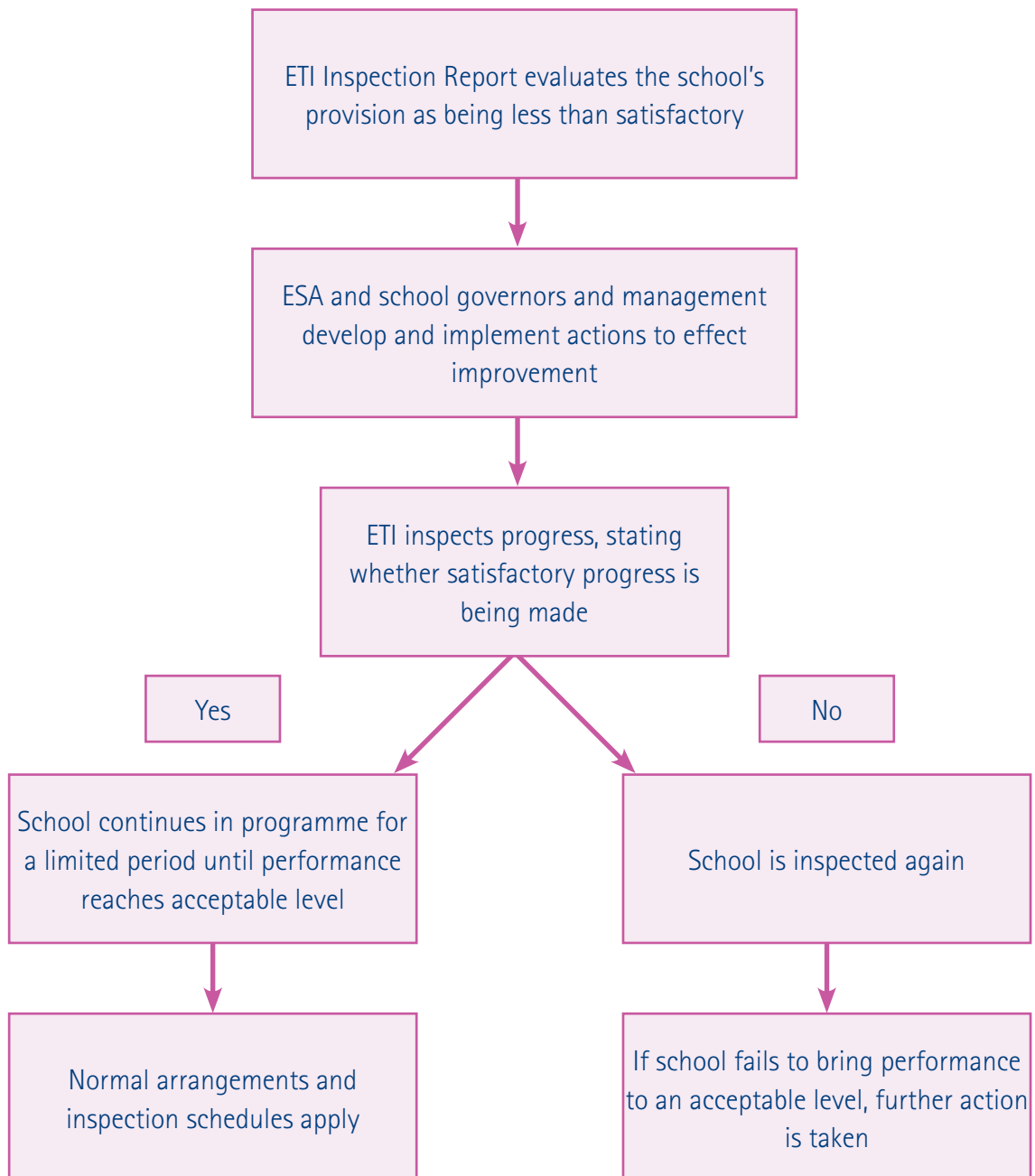
In these circumstances the Department will meet with ESA, ETI and the Board of Governors to discuss alternative approaches and to take action. In such circumstances the Department will also consult with the relevant sectoral body. The nature of the action taken will depend upon the circumstances of the individual school but might include:

❑　　restructuring of the governance, leadership and management within the school;

❑　　merging the school with a neighbouring school;

❑　　closing the school and re-opening after a period with a new management team – "fresh start"; or

❑　　closure of the school, with pupils transferring to other nearby suitable schools.

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The following diagrams outline the procedures (for both the Formal and Self-Improvement Processes) to illustrate the Department's approach to monitoring performance within the context of the new school improvement policy.

The Formal Intervention Process

ETI Inspection Report evaluates the school's provision as being less than satisfactory

ESA and school governors and management develop and implement actions to effect improvement

ETI inspects progress, stating whether satisfactory progress is being made

Yes

No

School continues in programme for a limited period until performance reaches acceptable level

School is inspected again

Normal arrangements and inspection schedules apply

If school fails to bring performance to an acceptable level, further action is taken

Note: An inspection may be sought by the school, by ESA or as a normal part of the inspection cycle

SELF IMPROVEMENT (school takes initiative)	SELF IMPROVEMENT (ESA stimulates action)	FORMAL IMPROVEMENT PROCESS
In this case the school identifies the area for improvement and provides an action plan. The action plan is then evaluated by ESA. Resources or support is provided as required to address the issue. The school provides a report at the end of the period to demonstrate the improvement achieved.	In this case ESA identifies a school where, for example: • standards are well below what might be expected of a school of this type, even when value-added measures have been considered; • there is a very large turnover of staff or pupils; • there have been numerous complaints about standards from parents; • attendance figures are very poor; • the school is "coasting"; • there are concerns raised by inspection. ESA then works with the school to identify the areas for improvement and will provide support. An action plan is developed by the school and ESA to address the issues. Resources or support is provided according to the action plan. Regular monitoring of progress by ESA ensures that the necessary improvement is being achieved.	In this case the need for improvement is identified through an inspection by ETI where the school's provision has been evaluated as less than satisfactory. The Department writes formally to ESA and the school indicating that improvement must be made. ESA works closely with the school in the development and implementation of actions to bring about improvement according to the formal intervention process set out at Annex C. ETI monitors progress and reports to the Department and ESA. Schools will be expected to achieve acceptable levels of performance within a maximum of 2 years. Failure to do so will result in the Department, ETI and ESA considering other strategies – see Annex C.

Every School A Good School

A POLICY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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