



Buckinghamshire County Council Select Committee

Education, Skills and Children's Services Select Committee

Report to the Education, Skills and Children's Services Select Committee

Title: The Ofsted inspection framework for LA arrangements for supporting school improvement

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Report signed off by Cabinet Member: Mike Appleyard

Electoral divisions affected: All

Purpose of Agenda Item

This agenda item is for information and will provide an update on the preparations underway to prepare Buckinghamshire County Council for a possible Ofsted Inspection for its arrangements for supporting school improvement.

Background

This agenda has not been previously brought to the Select Committee. However, a recent Member decision (July 2014) was taken to approve Buckinghamshire's School Improvement Strategy and, in devising the Strategy, consideration was taken of the Ofsted Framework. As a result, the School Improvement Strategy reflects the priorities and focus areas within the Ofsted Framework

Summary

The statutory responsibility for school improvement and school standards remains with the County Council, as outlined within the Education and Inspections Act, 2006. The new framework for the inspection of LA arrangements for supporting school improvement came



into force in June 2013. (*Please note that the Framework is under review; see addendum at end of paper*)

The Handbook makes it clear that 'local authorities retain a legal responsibility for performance in the area as a whole, under the 1996 Education Act'.

HMCI may cause an LA to be inspected where one or more of the following apply:

- The proportion of children who attend a good or better maintained school, pupil referral unit (PRU) and/or alternative provision is lower than that found nationally
- There is a higher than average number of schools in an Ofsted formal category of concern and/or there are indicators that progress of such schools is not securing rapid improvement
- There is a higher than average proportion of schools that have not been judged good by Ofsted
- Attainment levels across the LA, or rates of progress relative to starting points, are lower than that found nationally and/or where the trend of improvement is weak
- The volume of complaints to Ofsted about schools is a matter of concern
- The Secretary of State requires an inspection of LA school improvement functions

Inspectors are likely to conduct meetings with:

- Elected Members of the Council, particularly those responsible for education
- The Chief Executive; DCS (or equivalent); head of school improvement (or equivalent)
- Local authority staff, or contracted staff (eg. BLT) who support school improvement
- School improvement data manager(s)
- chair/vice chair of the schools' forum
- other agencies involved in school improvement such as National/Local Leaders of Education/training schools, Teaching Schools and /or other contracted partners
- Headteachers and governors of schools subject to intervention or intensive support
- Headteachers and governors of schools subject to light touch monitoring
- governor support services (or their equivalent) staff
- Other stakeholders as appropriate – eg. BASL, BASH? PEB? BASG?

There are 9 aspects of school improvement which will be inspected.

Handbook for the Inspection of local authorities – effectiveness descriptors

1. The effectiveness of corporate and strategic leadership of school improvement (eg. ambitious vision; coherent and consistent challenge; shared understanding with schools; clearly understood and communicated strategies; credible and trusted senior officers)
2. Clarity and transparency of policy and strategy for supporting schools and other providers' improvement (eg. school improvement priorities are clear and transparent and have been influenced by schools and other providers; plans are integrated with the programme for differentiated LA support and intervention; monitoring and evaluation of impact is regular and robust; LA definitions, processes and criteria for monitoring, challenge, intervention and support are clear, transparent, sharply focused and understood)
3. The LA knows its schools and providers well and tailors support accordingly (eg. data analysis used to determine intervention; comprehensive range of performance

data is used by school leaders to inform strategy and development; data is used as basis for challenge and support)

4. The LA's powers of intervention are used effectively (eg. monitoring progress of individual settings; robust action taken)
5. The impact of LA support and challenge (eg. differentiated, coordinated strategies and intervention; reduction in schools causing concern)
6. LA commissions and brokers a full range of school improvement expertise (eg. best practice known; clarity over what is provided and what is brokered; impact of brokered support is monitored in order to assess impact)
7. Strategies in place to support L&M (eg. expert advice and training; accurate identification of concern with L&M and governance, followed by prompt intervention)
8. Support and challenge for school governance (eg. strategy for recruitment and retention of governors; training' prompt action/intervention when governance a concern)
9. Use of funding must ensure focus on greatest need (eg. consultation so that schools understand deployment of resources; delegated resources monitored)

Resource implications

The School Improvement Strategy and Ofsted preparations will be funded from existing resources. The Council has a grant agreement with the Learning Trust for school improvement services of approximately £3 million pounds. This resource is reducing over the MTP period due to reductions in the Councils Education Support Grant.

Schools also have delegated budgets to purchase support for School Improvement.

The School Improvement Strategy drives the school improvement model delivered by the Learning Trust; other partners – eg. The Teaching Schools – have also committed to the Strategy and their school improvement activity will be designed to meet the priorities agreed within the Strategy.

Next steps

- Preparing relevant BCC services for a possible Ofsted Inspection (Aug – ongoing)
- Preparing and working with schools and academies on a possible Ofsted Inspection
 - ~ Discussion papers to be taken to the Primary learning Hub meetings, to the Primary Executive Board, to the Buckinghamshire association of Secondary Headteachers, to the Buckinghamshire association of School Governors.
- Preparing and working with school improvement partners on a possible Ofsted Inspection
 - ~ Buckinghamshire Association of School Leadership
 - ~ Buckinghamshire Learning Trust

- ~ Teaching Schools
- ~ National Leaders (of Education and Governance) and with Local Leaders
- Implementation of Buckinghamshire County Council Education Board
 - ~ Half-termly meetings, beginning in October 2014
- Completion of Buckinghamshire County Council Self-Evaluation Form (thereafter a 'live' document)
- Member Decision on the completion of the Self Evaluation Form – November 2014

Discussion Question:

Q How could the Select Committee contribute to the Buckinghamshire County Council Self-Evaluation?

Addendum

Ofsted is currently reviewing the methodology for its inspection of local authorities' arrangements for supporting school improvement ('LASI inspections'). The review will also ensure the methodology takes account of the Department for Education's Schools causing concern: statutory guidance, published in May 2014. Ofsted hope to publish the new framework and handbook at the end of October.

Two particular changes are being considered:

The first proposal is to combine the LASI inspection with a focused inspection of schools in the local authority area. A number of school inspections will take place in the first week of the inspection period, followed by direct engagement with the local authority in the second week. It is felt that this approach will provide inspectors with a rich source of direct evidence about the quality and impact of support and challenge. Inspectors will not, however, make their judgement on the focused inspection evidence alone: they will consider the full range of available evidence as they do now.

Ofsted is also considering whether to remove the current effective/ineffective judgement. Their view is that this may help inspectors to make a more nuanced evaluation of the support and challenge provided. The proposed approach is for inspectors to report clearly and unambiguously on what they find, identifying key strengths and weaknesses. Where significant concerns are identified, Ofsted will consider conducting further inspection activity at an appropriate time in the future.