

## Ofsted – the New Inspection Framework

At a well-attended Area meeting held on March 11<sup>th</sup> members heard from Sue Barkway HMI, Regional Manager for Ofsted's North Region and a former HeadTeacher within the Borough of Dudley. Sue had been asked to talk about the New Inspection Framework which was due for implementation as from September 2009.

She spoke firstly about the reasons for the changes leading to Ofsted's fourth Inspection Framework since their inception. She commented on:-

- The changes in the educational context and the new educational initiatives. Five years was a long time in the process.
- The end of the current cycle. Pilot schemes were being tested, some in Dudley. One member of the audience commented that the new approach was rather more user-friendly.
- Proportionality – the idea that “better” schools might not require inspections so frequently as others, thus Ofsted were also addressing issues of the intervals between inspections.
- Having greater impact, giving schools more encouragement to improve.
- The focus on under-achievement *at all levels*. This included those able students and successful schools where they failed to reach their full potential. Clearly there was a need to narrow the gap between underachievers and others.
- Improved self-evaluation – greater use of a (new version of) the SEF.
- A greater emphasis on user views, the schools contribution to the well-being of the whole community.

A question was then raised from the floor “A major problem of previous inspections and the general trend of Ofsted is that, as a body, Ofsted has lost interest in its work with Governing Bodies, preferring data and SEFs rather than talking with governors. How can Ofsted improve the way it conducts its visits and its face-to-face dealings with governors?”

Sue responded by saying that this issue was being given active consideration within the consultation process associated with the introduction of the new framework.

A comment from the floor suggested that it was human nature to produce ‘optimistic’ SEFs and another did indicate that more consultation with governors really was required.

### The Project and the Developments So Far

The speaker then elaborated on the meetings held with a wide range of stakeholders and the consultation paper on the new Framework. The paper itself had been well-publicized and created much interest. There was also a commitment to extensive piloting of the proposals with the co-operation of Local Authorities. The greatest levels of support arose for the following five proposals contained within the consultation:-

- That Inspectors’ recommendations should be far more specifically focused on the actions needed to enable schools to improve.

A questioner from the floor asked “As CVA (Contextual Value Added) is now embedded, are we really comparing like with like”. Sue responded by stating that there would be greater emphasis upon *achievement* rather than upon *attainment*.

- That inspection should take more account of the capacity of the school to improve.
- That the Senior Management Team of the school should play a greater role in the inspection by shadowing the inspectors.
- The proposals to target “satisfactory” and “inadequate” schools were agreed.
- That Ofsted should put in place a survey to capture the views of school staff.

As far as negative comments were concerned, the most significant was in the context of unannounced inspections.

As a result of the consultation, Ofsted has:-

- Developed proposals for the inspection of “good” and “outstanding” schools, probably involving a five year interval between inspections.
- Consulted on a form of ‘Risk Assessment’ health-check for “outstanding” schools, acknowledging that a category could change rapidly if circumstances changed, such as the loss of some key staff.
- Agreed to develop proposals for monitoring schools deemed to be “satisfactory” under the new arrangements.
- Agreed to retain the current arrangements for the monitoring of “inadequate” schools.
- Agreed to keep under review the impact of increased monitoring of “satisfactory” schools for 2009.
- Decided to trial unannounced inspections [*subsequently a TES report has reported on one HeadTeacher having been quite satisfied with this form of inspection when it took place at her school*]
- Started to develop proposals for pupil, parent and staff surveys.
- Decided to have a greater focus on the achievement of different groups of pupils.
- Started to develop criteria, descriptors and guidance in order to be able to judge a school’s capacity to improve.
- Agreed to continue to use Contextual Value Added indicators.
- Determined to develop, trial and consult on Ofsted’s early work to define minimum standards.
- Determined to develop and trial a methodology for inspecting partnership activity.
- Agreed to explore the use of more specific, focused recommendations.
- Agreed to redevelop the structure and format of the report.

In the discussions a number of questions were asked by members of the audience:-

Q. What about the volume of classroom observations? Is that likely to change?

A. There will be more classroom observations but the process will involve following round individual students for inspectors to get a better “feel” for the experiences that the student gets during the teaching day and how the process impacts upon them.

Q. Reports are written more for staff as opposed to parents. Do we need a parent-targeted report as well?

A. Probably, yes. This is being discussed and should be settled by September 2009.

Q. Can you tell us more about PIBs (Pre-Inspection Briefings)?

A. Yes, PIBs look at data, objectives and the main issues discussed with HeadTeachers ( *a comment was made from the floor to the effect that PIBs were found to be quite helpful*)

Q. As far as “main issues” go, surely these should be discussed with governors as this is one of their key functions?

A. In well-functioning schools, these discussions should already have been instigated.

Sue Barkway continued to discuss these actions, including more guides for governors and meetings with School Improvement Partners.

Q. In these “short turn-around” inspections surely there should be more up-to-date involvement with governors?

A. Agreed.

Q. There will be a need to be able to contact governors and parents at very short notice.

A. Agreed. The Inspectorate must make sure that sufficient notice is given so as to enable responsible and accountable feed-back for an optimum inspection.

Q. Will the parents or carers of vulnerable children be targeted?

A. Yes. This may be achieved by the use of a parental questionnaire moving towards an annual questionnaire.

Q. Contacting parents has, in the past, proved to be an almost insurmountable problem. How is this going to be improved?

Q. What about questionnaires being sent by e-mail?

A. Ofsted is investigating a number of different options.

### The Pilot Inspections

In Summer 2008 there were just eight pilot inspections, but their results were not published. In the Autumn of 2008 a further 60 took place, with 50 more per region in the Spring of 2009. A further 70 inspections are planned for each region during Summer 2009.

During the inspections there were never more than two days on-site (as with Section 5 inspections) and questionnaires were used with parents, staff and pupils. Discussions did take place with staff, governors, local community partners, parents and pupils. A greater number of classroom observations took place, with the focus on the achievements of different groups of pupils and upon the breadth of the curriculum. The observations were of varying length but did involve feedback to staff.

The inspection process was quite similar to that used in the current Section 5 inspections, involving the scrutiny of pupils’ work and of their records, together with all the school documentation. There was close working with senior staff, dual observations and the attendance of inspectors as observers at staff/team meetings. The inspectors and senior staff worked through the recommendations together. At

the end of the inspection the feedback was rather shorter than in Section 5 cases, because the HeadTeacher already had knowledge of the team's discussions. The reports were broken down into short sections with grades interspersed.

Sue indicated that the new inspection arrangements could contribute to school improvement in a number of ways:-

- By building on the strengths of existing Section 5 and Light Touch inspections.
- By confirming the importance of self-evaluation, using a new streamlined format so as to ensure an even more secure measure of evaluation.
- By involving the Senior Management Team more, so adding greater credibility to the inspection and to its findings.
- By maintaining an emphasis on achievement but also giving more overt value to the other Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes.
- By further developing the notion that the effectiveness of a school is underpinned by its success with the most vulnerable.
- By renewed emphasis on the quality of learning and upon actual classroom observation, with less risk of there being any (perceived) over-dependence on data, in order to reach judgements.
- By increasing the weight given to pupils' experience of school (the full picture).
- By focusing on a school's capacity to improve, with the emphasis being on whether the school actually *is* improving, or is simply standing still ('coasting' schools).
- By having higher expectations, and greater scrutiny, of 'satisfactory' schools.

Amongst the outcomes of the pilot inspections so far:-

- A new style SEF is to be created, with HeadTeachers invited to work with HMI on its production.
- The views of staff, of parents and of pupils from a number of these same pilot sites is being sought and considered by a number of focus groups.
- An Evaluation Conference is to be held on July 13<sup>th</sup> with invitations to attend going to pilot schools and Local Authorities.

### The New SEF

The speaker picked up on the reference to the new SEF, to explain both the rationale behind it and its make-up. She said that the process of self-evaluation was valued by schools and that it would certainly figure prominently within the new arrangements. Clearly, as these new arrangements and the revised inspection framework get bedded in, so the SEF will need to change in order to reflect the requirements of that framework. At the same time, it presents an opportunity to deal with adverse comments previously made about the current version of the SEF in order to improve it. Comments that had been made included the unnecessary use of jargon, a degree of repetition, the number of prompts contained in the "old" SEF, uncertainty about the level of detail that was required and difficulties encountered in aligning it with the schools development plans.

The new Part A of the SEF was intended to encourage concise evaluation, and to mirror the judgements made within the evaluation schedule. Importantly it is to have only one question for each element within the evaluation schedule, for example:-

	1	2	3	4
The quality of teaching and its impact on learning				

Briefly list your major reasons for deciding on this grade. If you judge that the school is close to a grade boundary, briefly say why you did not select the other grade.

A number of questions were then raised from the floor:-

Q. Judgements on Special Schools will deny them other than an “Inadequate” grade for Attainment. Whilst this, in the strict sense, is understandable, it seems unfair to penalize their good work in so many other aspects.

A. Whilst this is a valid point, they can gain on Achievement and there is nothing to prevent them being awarded an “Outstanding” overall.

Q. Why are school web-sites not assessed?

A. That is a good point. We will look into it.

Q. How do you choose which schools to select for lightning inspections?

A. Quite often as the result of them having exhibited safeguarding issues or if they are marginal in respect of Health and Safety issues.

Q. There have been concerns expressed with regard to the ‘farming out’ of inspections to private firms with respect to the quality of inspections and to cost effectiveness, so why are they used?

A. The amount of inspection work is so great that outsourcing really is necessary and it has been confirmed already as being cost effective.

Q. Who inspects the inspectors?

A. We have a system of checks and balances in place for that.

Q. Some of the inspections in Dudley concluded that governors were not sufficiently challenging. Can we please have the expectations for governors made more explicit?

A. This will be forthcoming.

Q. Are there not issues regarding the data security of reports?

A. No, since we are required to encrypt everything.

Comments were also voiced about the need for governors to be involved in all discussions and feedback from inspections and also involved in the design of the format for the new SEF.

In his closing remarks, the Chair expressed the thanks of everyone present to Sue Barkway both for giving up her time to come and speak to us but also for the quality of the presentation and the sympathetic way she had dealt with questions raised. He went on to say that meetings such as this were of immense value to governors and to Ofsted alike and he hoped that there would be many more both locally and elsewhere on a more regular basis. This was echoed by those present.

Jim Conway – Ridgewood High School  
Brian Patterson – Lutley Primary School