



A New Relationship with Schools

The School Improvement Partner's Brief

Advice and Guidance on the role of
the School Improvement Partner

Edition 3

department for
children, schools and families

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1.INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the Government set out its vision for a new relationship with schools, designed to give schools greater freedom and autonomy and thereby release greater local initiative and energy in schools, helping them to raise standards. The school improvement partner programme, introduced as part of this new relationship, aims to provide school leaders with challenge and support that is tailored to their needs and delivered to nationally consistent standards.

The government provides local authorities with additional funding to cover the higher costs of operating the school improvement partner function compared with previous arrangements. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 includes a clause which requires local authorities to appoint school improvement partners.

Every maintained primary, secondary and special school and every academy is being allocated a school improvement partner on a rolling programme between September 2005 and April 2008. Pupil referral units which have the status of schools are included in the programme.

This Brief explains the role of school improvement partners and what is expected of them. It is intended to be a reference document for school improvement partners, head teachers, governors - particularly chairs of governors - and others interested in understanding the role. Detailed guidance on the work of school improvement partners is given in publications from the National Strategies and in material provided by local authorities.

The term "local authority" is used throughout this Brief to indicate the authority that maintains the school with which the school improvement partner works. In the case of academies, the term refers to the DCSF.

2.THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNER

A school improvement partner provides professional challenge and support to the school, helping its leadership to evaluate its performance, identify priorities for improvement, and plan effective change. The full job description is set out at Annex A.

The school improvement partner acts for the local authority and is the main (but not the only) channel for local authority communication about school improvement with the school. The guiding principles of the school improvement partner's work are:

- **focus on pupil progress and attainment across the ability range**, and the many factors which influence it, including pupil well-being, extended services and parental involvement;
- **respect for the school's autonomy** to plan its development, starting from the school's self-evaluation and the needs of the pupils and of other members of the school community;
- **professional challenge and support**, so that the school's practice and performance are improved; and
- **evidence-based assessment** of the school's performance and its strategies for improving teaching and learning.

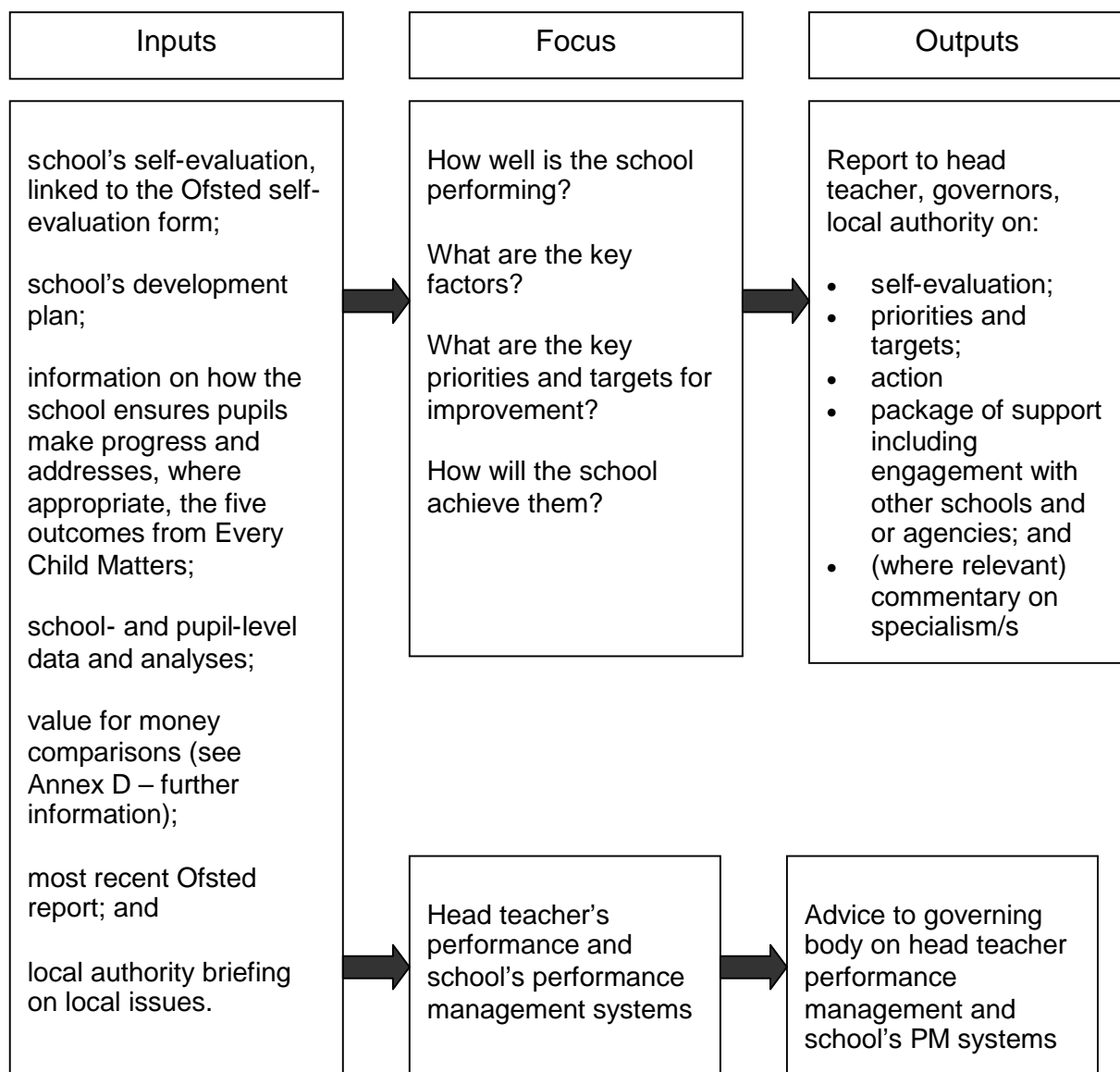
Specific allocations of time for each school are determined by the local authority in the light of the circumstances of the school and the nature of its needs. The core functions, which include advice from the school improvement partner to the school's governing body on the performance management of the head teacher and the school's performance management arrangements, must be undertaken in every school. On average, a school improvement partner should devote five days to a school every year. Generally around 3 days of this takes place in school, whilst preparation - reading and report-writing for example - occurs out of school and accounts for the balance of the time. The order of activities is discussed and agreed between the school improvement partner and head teacher taking into account the school's planning cycle and priorities. Some local authorities will want school improvement partners to undertake more than the core function. Such matters are for local determination.

Every school improvement partner sets aside a total of four additional days a year for professional development and for national, regional and local networking. This networking provides opportunities for communicating and sharing information, for example from and with the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or Government Office, who have important contributions to make. Local authorities and the National Strategies school improvement partner team are responsible for coordinating these contributions locally, regionally and nationally.

3.THE WORK OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNER

The school improvement partner has a limited number of exchanges with the school's leadership about how well the school is serving its pupils and how the school needs to improve.

These exchanges vary from school to school, but have a common core:



FOCUS

The following series of questions is intended to give an indication of the school improvement partner's agenda. It is not a checklist and school improvement partners will want to supplement this list from time to time with questions to cover schools' performance in relation to specific government policies and local issues.

How well is the school performing?

- What do the data and documentation on pupils' targets, attainment, well-being and progress say about the ambition of the school?
- Are there significant variations and underperformance, or areas of outstanding strength within the school, including but not limited to those identified by Ofsted/the local authority?
- What evidence is there that the school is addressing the range of outcomes identified in *Every Child Matters*: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being? How good are pupils' attendance and behaviour? How are these affecting standards and achievement?
- How well are different groups of pupils doing? (Children in care, boys, girls, those of different ethnic or socio-economic groups, gifted and talented pupils and those with a disability or special educational need)
- How well is the school helping pupils to make the level of progress expected across each education stage and beyond?
- How well is the school using, for example, its specialism/leading/training status to improve its own and others' performance?
- What evidence is there of pupil, parental and community satisfaction with the school?
- What evidence is there that the school is tailoring its curriculum offer and teaching and learning to the particular needs of individual pupils?

What are the key factors?

- How robust is the school's self-evaluation? Does the school regularly measure pupils' progress and have ambitious targets for and expectations of what each of them will achieve? Has the school interpreted the evidence correctly and are its judgments sound?
- How effective is leadership and management?
- How does the school judge the quality of teaching and learning?
- How effective are the school's core systems and policies? (pupil assessment and target-setting; continuing professional development (CPD) across the school; performance management; behaviour; curriculum; middle-management and leadership)

- To what extent is the school taking account of the priorities, strategies and actions in the local Children and Young People's Plan in its own strategic planning?
- Is the school making the best use of its resources?
- Is the school working effectively with external partners?

What are the priorities and targets for improvement?

- Is the school choosing the right priorities for the next academic year based on an assessment of the progress of different groups and the strengths and weaknesses of the school?
- Are the statutory and other school (e.g. specialist) targets in the next two years based on aspirational expectations of what individual pupils might achieve? Are they realistic yet challenging?
- For specialist schools, is there evidence that objectives and targets in the school's community work are the result of consultation and research?
- What aspects of practice could be shared with others beyond the school so as to contribute to raising attainment and achievement more widely?

How will the school achieve them?

- Has the school the capacity to improve?
 - Are the leadership team and governing body choosing and effectively implementing high-impact, sustainable strategies for school improvement?
 - Does the school's plan set out the strategies which the school is actually using?
 - Is the school's plan deliverable? Is it focused on tackling underperformance and other areas of weakness? Is it monitored and evaluated?
 - What support from outside (including school-to-school networks; the National Strategies; wider children's services) does the school need?
 - Is the school using its specialist status to support learning for its own pupils, pupils in partner schools and groups in the wider community?
- Is the school considering how pupils can benefit from extended services, for example, study support, and encouraging parental and community involvement in children's education?
- How is the leadership team working with other children's services, for example, using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)?

Head teacher's performance

- What progress has the head teacher made towards the previous performance management objectives set by the governing body?
- What would be suitable objectives for governors to set the head teacher for next year?
- How are the school's performance management systems contributing to raising attainment, achievement and pupils' wider well-being?

OUTPUTS

Reports of visits

The school improvement partner reports on his/her dialogue with schools using the local authority's standard reporting requirements and paperwork. This ensures that, for every school, the head teacher, governors and the local authority are all apprised of the school's progress and areas for development.

School improvement partners' reports should avoid reproducing the school's own SEF and equally should avoid being written as if they were Ofsted inspection reports. Guidance on report writing is available from the National Strategies.

Whatever the local authority's other reporting requirements, the school improvement partner needs to provide an annual report on each school, which should include:

- a commentary on the quality and impact of the school's self-evaluation;
- a commentary on the priorities and targets in the school plan and progress on achieving them;
- in the case of a specialist school, a commentary on the impact of the specialism/s and the community focus; and
- a commentary about the action planned by the school, and a recommendation about the external support needed.

In most cases the report will complement the head teacher's reports to the governing body, but the school improvement partner is independent of the school and may make a judgement of the school that is different from the head teacher's. The local authority's system for moderating school improvement partners' judgements allows for schools to challenge what school improvement partners say.

Freedom of Information (FOI) Act

In setting up their systems and advising school improvement partners and schools, local authorities should have regard to the FOI Act. Whilst school improvement partners' reports are prepared primarily for the head teacher, governors and local authority, the potential for wider publication exists. All documentation should, therefore, be prepared on the basis that it might become public, although there are circumstances in which sensitive information within a document can be withheld ("redacted") whilst other parts of the document are released. Further information is available on the SIPs' Knowledge Bank (see Annex D for details).

Targets

Schools set their own targets. These include a target for attendance as well as targets for attainment at the end of the relevant key stage. As well as setting statutory attainment targets for pupils in years 6, 9 and 11, it is good practice for schools additionally to set targets in each year group so that progress towards age-related expectations can be monitored and appropriate interventions planned. The school improvement partner will want to be satisfied that in setting pupils' targets, the school is being appropriately ambitious for the progress of each of its pupils and aiming to maximise the proportion making the equivalent of 2 National Curriculum levels of progress between each key stage; where a school proposes to set unambitious or unrealistic targets, the school improvement partner should challenge the school. Target-setting advice is available on the DCSF website (see Annex D for further details).

Information held by local authorities, the National Strategies and DCSF

During 2007 the National Strategies have been testing a management information system for the SIP programme with a sample of local authorities. The purpose is to establish the value and feasibility of using SIPs' information about individual schools' strengths and priorities to build up information at regional and national levels. A decision about whether to launch the system nationally will be taken once the trial has been evaluated.

Advice to the governing body on the head teacher's objectives

Every school improvement partner is required to provide the governing body with advice on the head teacher's performance management objectives and a report on the school's performance management systems. The light touch validation checklist is under review during autumn 2007.

Regulations governing the arrangements for a head teacher's performance management require the governing body to set the head teacher's objectives after seeking external advice on this. Where a school improvement partner has been appointed to a school, the governing body is required to seek that advice from the school improvement partner. The head teacher's planning and review statement is confidential to the head teacher and the governing body.

Brokering support

It is for the school to draw upon whatever external support it needs to achieve its aims (except in the case of schools assessed by the local authority or Ofsted as requiring intervention). The school improvement partner's role is to:

- help the school analyse its priorities and needs;
- help the school identify the range and type of support required to meet those needs;
- work with the school on its choice of sources of support; and
- feed back requests to the local authority where the SIP judges that resources controlled by the local authority are relevant.

Once external support has been engaged, school improvement partners have an important role in helping the school to evaluate the impact that such support has had on the school's improvement plan.

Re-designation of specialist schools

Specialism should be integral to a school's plan and therefore the school's performance as a specialist school should be an integral part of the school improvement partner's dialogue with the school. Since September 2007 the re-designation of a specialist school has been aligned with Ofsted inspection. The criteria for future re-designations including the Higher Performing Specialist School programme will be primarily based on the identified overall Ofsted grading.

All aspects of a school's specialism, including whole-school ethos, setting and achieving challenging targets for whole-school improvement and improvement in their specialist subjects, and delivering a range of community-based activities, should be contained within the school's plan and self-evaluation form as part of normal school planning arrangements. To support the revised re-designation process the school improvement partner's reports of visits should comment on the impact of the specialism/s, as described in more detail in the Focus section on pages 5-6.

Guidance for the new re-designation process is available from the DCSF Standards website: www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/specialistschools An online electronic professional development resource is also being developed. This is to support school improvement partners to take account of the contribution of the school's specialist status to whole-school performance and to raising standards when challenging and supporting schools.

4.WHERE A SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNER HAS CONCERNS

There may be circumstances in which a school improvement partner has concerns about the capacity of a school to improve, and cannot secure agreement on action through professional dialogue with the head teacher and the governors. In such cases, the role of the school improvement partner, having made concerns explicit with the head teacher, is to alert the local authority so that early action can be taken.

Triggers for concern include:

- the school failing to address significant underperformance;
- risks to pupils' safety and well-being;
- significant budget problems without a secure recovery plan;
- the school failing to engage with the self-evaluation process;
- the school lacking the leadership capacity to improve; and
- for a secondary school, the school being at risk of failing to be re-designated for its specialism.

Local authorities have their own triggers, and will make school improvement partners familiar with them through local training and briefing. It is common good practice for an authority to have a published strategy for intervening in schools that cause it concern, determined following consultation. The strategy should cover statutory intervention, and also agreed sets of actions that do not depend on statutory powers. It should set out the criteria for levels of intervention. Intervention should be in inverse proportion to a school's success and its capacity to improve itself. In all cases, clear lines of communication between the school improvement partner and the rest of the authority's organisation are essential. For example, if someone other than the school improvement partner leads the co-ordination and monitoring of support, there should be a system of clear and regular communication with the school improvement partner to ensure that the school receives consistent messages and the barriers to school improvement are removed.

The school improvement partner is responsible for giving the school's local authority a judgement on whether the school should cause concern, and what action is needed. In most cases, the school improvement partner's judgement and the school's will be similar, and the school's own leadership team will be able to lead its own improvement, deploying external support as needed, from any appropriate source. But where the school improvement partner's advice is that the school's own actions will not enable it to improve (which could occur not only in failing or near-failing schools, but also in schools which are underperforming compared to other similar schools) this advice may prompt the authority to intervene in accordance with the local strategy for school intervention. In such cases, the school improvement partner will inform the head teacher and chair of governors that s/he is advising the local authority in this way.

The Education and Inspections Act (2006) includes significant measures which enhance the role of local authorities in tackling underperformance, and supporting schools which are causing them concern, as quickly as possible.

Local authorities are able to issue warning notices to schools that are underperforming or are letting down sizeable groups of their pupils. They also have a duty to consider radical action whenever a maintained school fails an inspection, and must reconsider action if progress is deemed unsatisfactory. To enable local authorities to support school improvement, a new power to force a weak school to federate or take another partner has been added to the other re-enacted intervention powers to take back a school's delegated budget, add additional governors or apply to the Secretary of State to replace the governing body with an interim executive board. Statutory guidance was issued in May 2007 to enable further understanding of the legislative framework. It can be found at <http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/sie/si/SCC/>

Whether in relation to an underperforming or a failing school, the school improvement partner has a key role in supporting and challenging the school to plan and implement the necessary improvements, and reporting to the local authority. The guidance states that local authorities should refrain from issuing warning notices if the school in question is aware of the problem and is working well alongside the school improvement partner to rectify the problem.

5.SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNERS' ACCOUNTABILITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

The school improvement partner works for and on behalf of the local authority, which is responsible for managing the school improvement partner's performance and providing effective CPD to support this. Local authorities' engagement with schools on school improvement is channelled through school improvement partners.

A local authority appoints a nationally accredited school improvement partner to each of the secondary schools (including pupil referral units) that it maintains and each of the primary and special schools that it maintains according to the roll-out schedule agreed with the DCSF. The authority should consult the school, and take account of any reasons a school puts forward for not wanting to accept a particular individual as its school improvement partner, but the final choice is for the authority. A school improvement partner is appointed to a school for up to a maximum of 5 years. A school improvement partner may raise with his/her regional school improvement partner co-ordinator concerns about the local authority's response to reports on a particular school or schools.

The school improvement partner's link to central government will operate through the National Strategies team, who will be responsible for:

- in partnership with local authorities, the assessment, training and accreditation of school improvement partners;
- providing a national framework for continuing support and training for school improvement partners;
- providing a range of CPD conferences on specific themes that school improvement partners may use as part of their CPD portfolio;
- the national co-ordination of local authorities' management of school improvement partners;
- assuring the quality of local authorities' performance management arrangements for school improvement partners; and
- where necessary, removal of individual school improvement partners' accreditation. (For the full procedure see the National Strategies school improvement partners' CPD site, details at Annex D.)

Local authorities monitor the performance of each of their school improvement partners, and where there are concerns about any individual's performance, inform the National Strategies team. This joint approach enables both local authorities and the National Strategies team to maintain the required standard of school improvement partner performance.

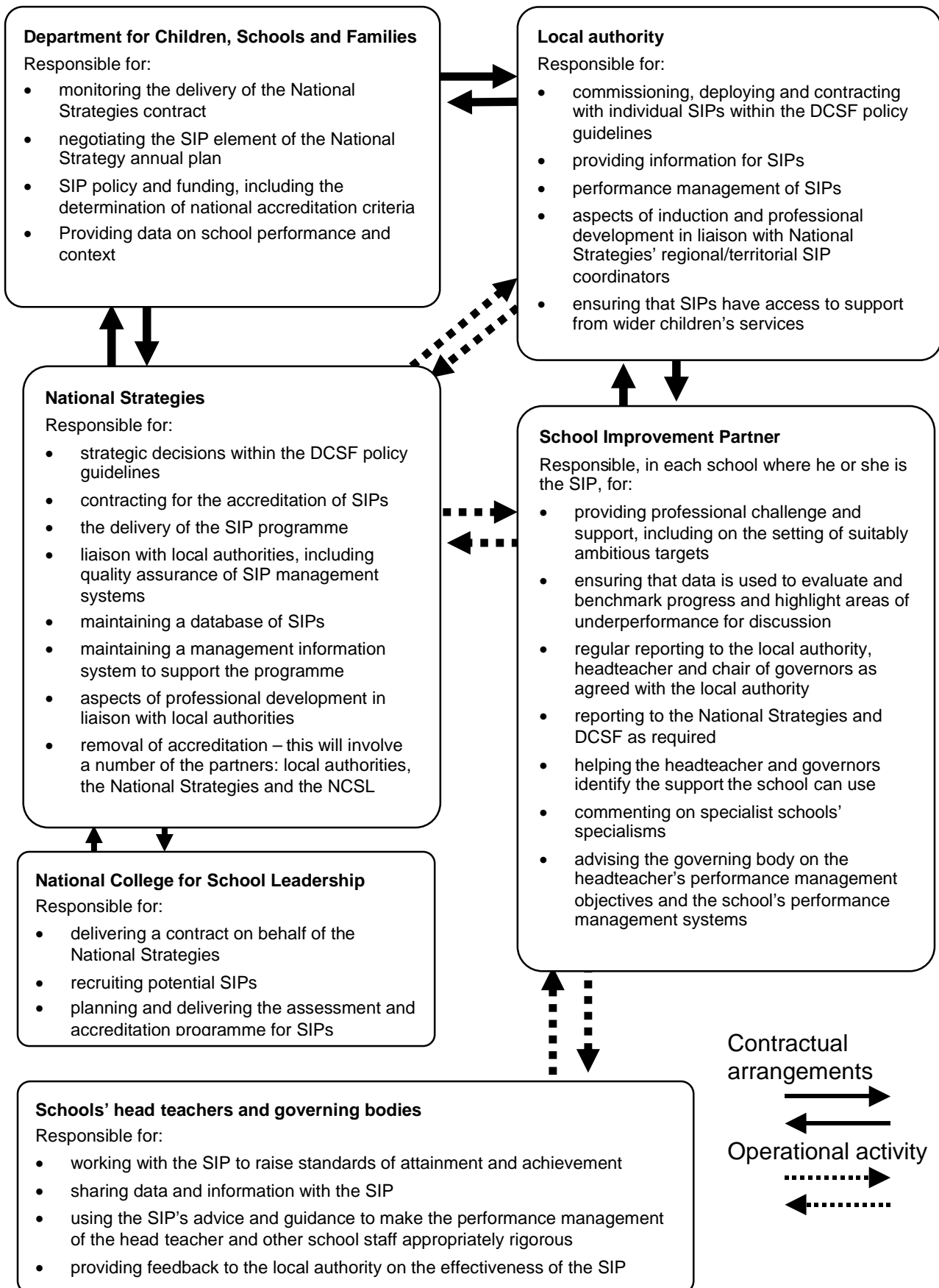
Since a school's governing body is responsible for the strategic direction of the school, the school improvement partner needs to interact with the governing body as well as the head teacher. The school improvement partner's reports offers the governing body a professional view on the overall direction of the school. S/he also has specific responsibility for advising governors on the head teacher's performance management objectives and the school's performance management arrangements. The range of meetings and other contacts between the school improvement partner and governors for this work is for local determination, and includes face-to-face contact between the school improvement partner and representatives of the governing body every year.

The relationship between the school improvement partner and Ofsted inspectors is as follows:

- school improvement partners may be inspectors of schools. However, they must neither inspect nor be directly involved in the inspection of schools for which they are school improvement partners. If the school improvement partner attends feedback following an inspection, it is as an observer, at the request of the local authority or the school. On monitoring inspections of schools subject, for example, to special measures, inspectors will often need to interview school improvement partners, given their pivotal role on behalf of the local authority in co-ordinating support for the school;
- schools should make school improvement partners' reports available to inspection teams on request. Such reports are not provided to inspectors prior to inspection;
- inspectors must not give any information to school improvement partners about the inspection of schools that could prejudice the inspection, for example, prior notice of an inspection; school improvement partners must not seek to secure such information nor divulge it to schools if they become aware of it; and
- school improvement partners' reports will form the basis for local authorities' discussions with local managing inspectors.

There may be occasions when a school's improvement partner and Ofsted inspector reach different conclusions on the same issue. Ofsted grades should generally be regarded as benchmark grades for the time that the inspection took place, but schools change over time. If schools are dissatisfied with the work of inspectors or school improvement partners, they can make use of Ofsted's or the local authority's complaints procedures.

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR DELIVERING THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNER PROGRAMME



6. PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNERS

School improvement partners have strengths in three areas:

- the ability to interact well with local authority staff and with leaders in a variety of schools, tailoring their challenge and support to the circumstances and characteristics of schools;
- the ability to analyse a school's strengths and areas for improvement, including the use of data; and
- judgement about a wide range of effective strategies for school improvement and planning how to use them.

These strengths are tested in a formal assessment process and only people who meet the required standard in the assessments are accredited as school improvement partners.

The local authority and the National Strategies team each provide CPD and support for school improvement partners. From April 2008, school improvement partners will have responsibility for ensuring they take part in at least 25 hours per year of CPD (to include performance management and local networking and briefings). School improvement partners are expected to discuss and agree with their local authority school improvement partner managers their personal CPD plan for the year. Local authorities should ensure that each school improvement partner has a CPD plan that covers national, local and school level priorities and comprises a mix of briefings, network meetings, face-to-face CPD and attendance at National Strategies school improvement partner theme conferences.

Through its briefing and CPD for school improvement partners, the local authority provides:

- information about the local authority and its schools;
- guidance about its expectations for school improvement and the progress pupils should make;
- local criteria and processes for schools causing concern;
- performance management and tailored support for individuals;
- quality assurance of the support and challenge to each school provided by the school improvement partner; and
- a named contact to deal with problems and queries by phone or email.

The National Strategies provides:

- quality assurance of local authorities' management of the school improvement partner programme for their schools;
- a range of CPD conferences on specific themes that school improvement partners may use as part of their CPD portfolio;
- on-line professional development modules;
- a web portal that is the main source of information, online CPD resources and materials for SIPs; and
- e-mail contacts for the National Strategies:

primarysips@nationalstrategies.co.uk

secondariesips@nationalstrategies.co.uk

specialschoolsips@nationalstrategies.co.uk

7. DATA CHECKLIST

Core data needed by a school improvement partner

School-generated documentation, such as:

- the school's self-evaluation documentation and SEF;
- the school development plan;
- the school's own data analysis, including analyses generated by the school from RAISEonline¹ and, in primary, information in the Foundation Stage Profile;
- the head teacher's report to governing body;
- performance management policy and arrangements; and
- information related to staff professional development.

Local authority-generated data, such as:

- local school performance analysis, most recent reports of the previous school improvement partner (or link adviser if school improvement partners are newly introduced) or consultant, data on attendance and exclusions, local LSC data and reports;
- analyses generated by RAISEonline;
- Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data analyses for the school;
- the degree of success in meeting targets;
- history of support to the school;
- data on pupil well-being, including local youth crime, local drugs/alcohol abuse, obesity, teenage pregnancy rates; and
- the local Children and Young People's Plan.

The school improvement partner's own pack of data:

- pupil attainment, progress and targets data from RAISEonline;
- Value Added (VA) and Distance Travelled (DT) charts and data for 16-19 learners, from

¹ RAISEonline is a web-based interactive tool providing a single point of access to school- and pupil-level data and analyses. See Annex D for further information.

the Learner Achievement Tracker (LAT)²;

- value for money benchmarks from the DCSF benchmarking website which can be found at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/atoz/f/financialbenchmarking/>
- latest Ofsted report from <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports>

Other data, available from the school, which might be of help to a school improvement partner

- school budget;
- school curriculum plan;
- staffing and staff absence;
- school organisational and structure plan;
- specialist school application/re-designation documentation;
- the school profile;
- school-level self-assessment documentation, for example, the Quality Standards in Gifted and Talented Education³;
- any other information the school feels is important in defining its character;
- community and extra-curricular activities; and
- strategic issues affecting the locality.

² See Annex D for further information about the LAT and how to access it

³ See Annex D for websites

ANNEX A

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNER JOB DESCRIPTION AND PERSON SPECIFICATION

JOB DESCRIPTION

Purpose

A school improvement partner provides professional challenge and support to a number of schools maintained by one or more authorities by:

- acting as a critical professional friend to the schools, helping their leadership to evaluate their schools' performance, identify priorities for improvement and plan effective change;
- helping build the schools' capacity to improve pupils' achievement and to realise other key outcomes for pupils that bear on achievement;
- contributing to whole-school improvement in the schools, including effective contribution to the Every Child Matters outcomes;
- providing challenge and support for the senior leadership team in the schools; and
- providing information to governing bodies on their schools' performance and development.

Reports to

The school's local authority.

Key Contacts

- Head teachers and senior managers of school improvement partner's schools;
- chairs of governors of school improvement partner's schools;
- local authority manager of school improvement partners; and
- regional school improvement partner co-ordinator.

Main Accountabilities

- Discuss and assess a school's self-evaluation and school improvement plan against available evidence including the Ofsted report, and comment on the effectiveness of these;
- Provide an objective review of the school's performance data by considering its most recent national test results, trends over time and data on other pupils' achievement and well-being, and analysing the evidence for the school's improvement;
- Identify areas of strength and weakness and scrutinise the progress made by different groups of pupils to ensure that success for some does not hide failure of others;
- Discuss the school's targets and priorities for the coming year, based on the analysis of the data above, to ensure that they are ambitious but realistic and focused on all pupils making the expected progress and fulfilling their potential;
- Advise the school on resources and strategies which fit priorities;
- Challenge the school where necessary, particularly on its capacity to improve and whether it is focusing on the most important priorities for improvement and development;
- Discuss a package of support and challenge for the school (provided by the local authority and/or external sources) and ensure that this is appropriately managed;
- Report the outcomes of the dialogue with the school to the school's governing body, the head teacher, the school's local authority and the National Strategies according to the cycle and format determined by the local authority;
- Provide advice and guidance to the governing body to inform the performance management of the head teacher; and
- Contribute to the effective development of the school improvement partner programme.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Introduction

School improvement partners will have a range of essential skills, knowledge, experience and expertise and personal qualities. Some skills and knowledge might have been acquired through training and development rather than as a consequence of experience at work. Some gaps in knowledge are likely to be readily filled by training, but a person should demonstrate the underlying and essential knowledge for the role before working as a school improvement partner.

Skills

Analytical ability

School improvement partners need to:

- understand the construction and use of leading indicators of performance;
- interpret complex and detailed quantitative and qualitative data accurately and quickly;
- pursue challenging and rigorous questions, probe explanations of root causes and apparent inconsistencies;
- identify key issues accurately; and
- give accurate feedback, both oral and written.

Judgement

School improvement partners should be able to:

- develop arguments and consistently make sound judgements on the basis of evidence, qualitative and quantitative information and rigorous analysis about performance and potential;
- adapt judgements to circumstances and be able to make accurate, consistent and proportional judgements of performance in different instances (i.e. treat schools in similar circumstances similarly and make proportionate allowances for differences in different circumstances);
- be consistent in the assessment of a school leadership's record in evaluating its own improvement actions; its capability to deliver improvement and evaluate the impact of actions; and its record in delivering improvement;

- make judgements against a background of high expectations for all pupils and an awareness of the complex issues which surround the achievement of different groups of pupils, for example children in care, boys, girls, those of different ethnic or socio-economic groups and those with a disability or special educational need;
- acknowledge a full range of options and their pros and cons and demonstrate aspirational, yet realistic expectations, providing challenge that stretches professional practice; and
- explain how judgements are made and be able to justify them in the face of opposition or challenge.

ICT

School improvement partners should:

- use information and communications technology, including maintaining up-to-date records and making use of materials held on databases.

Knowledge

School improvement partners should have knowledge of:

- the range of approaches to leadership and management in schools in the phase in which the school improvement partner is to work, and understand how to tackle underperformance in different contexts and at all levels;
- funding for schools in the phase in which the school improvement partner is to work;
- school improvement strategies for schools in the phase in which the school improvement partner is to work - national, regional and local dimensions;
- the application of ICT in schools;
- government and local authority education policies and strategies and their implementation, including children's trust arrangements, the rights of the child and extended schools;
- the types and sources of services available to help schools, including the capabilities of providers;
- collaborative approaches between schools;
- principles and practice of quality assurance systems, including school self-evaluation and performance management; and
- equal opportunities legislation and the issues surrounding the achievement of different groups of pupils, for example children in care, boys, girls, those of different ethnic or socio-

economic groups and those with a disability or special educational need.

Experience and expertise

School improvement partners should be able to demonstrate the following:

- membership of school leadership team or experience of senior local authority advisory work and/or related areas of work relevant to the phase of the school improvement partner's work;
- recent first-hand experience of successful performance improvement in practice;
- evidence of sustained performance improvement as a result of own actions;
- experience of a range of performance improvement approaches and their application in different circumstances;
- significant senior experience in complex organisations undergoing change;
- record of successful organisational and people management and financial planning and control; and
- experience of school improvement techniques and approaches and of using self-evaluation to identify priorities for action.

Personal qualities

School improvement partners should:

- be highly motivated, enthusiastic, strategic leaders;
- be credible, commanding respect in a wide range of circumstances;
- be committed to lifelong learning and up-to-date with the educational agenda;
- be able to collaborate with colleagues and work within the National Strategies and local authority structures;
- be committed to valuing diversity and demonstrate sensitivity to the needs and rights of different ethnic and religious groups, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people and those with disabilities;
- be open-minded, active listeners;
- initiate and deal with challenge and manage conflict;
- be creative in problem solving;
- communicate persuasively, articulate in speech and in writing and adapt appropriately to

different audiences, use influencing skills effectively;

- receive and act on feedback about own performance;
- promote and manage change; and
- interpret complex and detailed quantitative and qualitative data accurately and quickly.

Integrity and behaviour

School improvement partners should:

- recognise where private, personal, political and financial interests may conflict with work as a school improvement partner and take steps to avoid any such conflict;
- avoid using their position as school improvement partners to advance any private, personal, political or financial interests and where appropriate declare any such interests to the school's governing body and local authority; and
- report financial or other irregularities to the local authority.

ANNEX B

NATIONAL STRATEGIES SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNERS

Since April 2005 the National Strategies have been organised regionally in line with government office regions. Each region is led by a Senior Regional Director who has the responsibility for management and deployment of the regional National Strategies team and for providing each local authority with challenge and support at senior levels. Within the senior management team of each region there are regional school improvement partner co-ordinators for both the primary and secondary phases and for special schools who act across groups of regions.

The National Strategies have responsibility for overall delivery of the school improvement partner programme. This includes:

- strategic decisions within DCSF policy;
- monitoring the contract with the NCSL;
- liaison with local authorities including quality assurance of the school improvement partner programme;
- maintaining a management information system and database of school improvement partners to support the programme; and
- professional development of school improvement partners in partnership with local authorities.

The regional school improvement partner co-ordinators have responsibility for working with local authorities to provide support and challenge for their implementation of the school improvement partner programme, and in particular, to quality assure the school improvement partner function across the region. Quality assurance is carried out according to the quality management framework available on the school improvement partners' Knowledge Bank, and supplements the local authority's own QA processes. Quality assurance is carried out across the key dimensions of the programme:

- the assessment and accreditation process;
- local authority processes;
 - management of school improvement partners;
 - continuing support and professional development for school improvement partners;

- school interactions;
 - school improvement partners' challenge and support;
 - target setting;
 - brokering support;
 - school improvement partners' reports; and
 - advice to governors on the performance management of head teachers.

In order to carry out quality assurance, regional school improvement partner co-ordinators:

- meet regularly with local authority school improvement partners' managers to discuss the local authority's systems for managing school improvement partners;
- talk to school improvement partners about their experiences of working within particular local authorities;
- talk to head teachers about their perceptions of the process and the quality that they are experiencing;
- evaluate a sample of school improvement partners' reports, including triangulation with school data to ensure that relevant issues are being addressed by school improvement partners; and
- shadow a sample of school improvement partners; and
- feedback the findings of these activities to school improvement partners' managers.

In the normal course of events this will be the extent of the exchanges between the National Strategies and local authorities on their implementation of the school improvement partner function. However, where the regional school improvement partners' co-ordinator has concerns about a local authority, and has shared these with the local authority's school improvement partners' manager, then these will be raised with the Senior Regional Director who will wish to discuss such concerns with the Director of Children's Services.

There may be rare occasions where school improvement partners feel that legitimate concerns they have about some aspect of the school improvement partner function within a local authority are not being given due regard. On such occasions they may raise their concerns with the regional school improvement partners' co-ordinator directly. Contact details for regional school improvement partners' co-ordinators are on the SIPs' Knowledge Bank.

ANNEX C

PROCEDURE FOR REMOVAL OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNER ACCREDITATION

Criteria for de-accreditation

The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) assesses the competence of candidates to become school improvement partners. Those who are successful are automatically entered on the register of those approved to work with schools, held and maintained by the National Strategies on behalf of the DCSF. At this point a school improvement partner is accredited. Once accredited, a school improvement partner is liable to lose his or her accreditation under one or more of the following circumstances:

- the person has not worked as a school improvement partner for three years (the lapsed criterion);
- the person conducts himself or herself in a manner inappropriate for a school improvement partner (the conduct criterion);
- the person shows himself or herself to be incompetent as a school improvement partner by falling short of the requirements of the person specification and job description (the competence criterion);
- the person has behaved in a way, probably outside his or her work as a school improvement partner, that raises concerns regarding child safety, social, community, commercial or political conduct or bad publicity that would make attendance at a school improper or unwise or unacceptable because it brings his or her accreditation into disrepute (the public confidence criterion).

The lapsed criterion

Without some level of recent and relevant experience of working as a school improvement partner, the currency of a person's accreditation will decline over time. So, if a person who is assessed as competent to be a school improvement partner does not practice as a school improvement partner for a period of three years, accreditation will automatically lapse and the name of the person will be removed from the register.

The National Strategies will warn any school improvement partner likely to be de-accredited because of not having practiced, six months ahead of his or her removal from the school improvement partner register. Any person whose school improvement partner accreditation lapses will be notified by the National Strategies when this occurs, at which point the person may draw attention to any errors in the information upon which the decision was based. If the records held were erroneous and the person can provide evidence that she or he has practiced as a school improvement partner within the period specified, then the national director for school improvement partners will restore the accreditation of the individual concerned.

Where an individual's accreditation has lapsed, she or he may submit himself or herself for re-assessment through the same procedure as is used for people who have never been school improvement partners.

The conduct criterion

School improvement partners need to operate to a high standard of professionalism in their work within local authorities and in schools. They are expected to treat others with courtesy and respect, to be transparent in their dealing with schools and they should at all times behave in accordance with the law of the land. They should understand and respect the forms of communication schools will require of them and should always recognise the boundaries of their role in their dealings with staff, governors and others in schools and in the local authority. School improvement partners should ensure that they make all the required visits to schools and that they attend these punctually.

The application form for assessment to be a school improvement partner and the pen portrait supplied to the National Strategies are key documents in the appointment of school improvement partners. Withholding or misrepresenting any information on either document, in such a way that it materially affects decisions taken to appoint a school improvement partner, will be taken as misconduct and will result in removal of accreditation.

School improvement partners have an obligation to take part in the equivalent of four days of professional development each year. A record will be kept of participation in CPD, and continuous non-participation may be regarded as misconduct and therefore be taken as a reason for removal of accreditation.

We expect school improvement partners to conduct themselves in a professional manner with the commitments they make to work for a local authority. Any short notice withdrawal from a commitment to a school or a local authority without good cause may be regarded as misconduct and could result in removal of accreditation.

The competence criterion

Evidence of incompetence will usually come from evidence collected through local authorities' performance management procedures. These procedures need to identify standards of performance against the national person specification and job description for school improvement partners. The procedures also need to include swift action in response to performance that falls short of national requirements: action to secure rapid improvements in performance, and initiation of the removal of accreditation in cases where the necessary improvements are not rapidly evident. The National Strategies will work with local authorities to ensure that local procedures can and do achieve this.

The public confidence criterion

School improvement partners are expected to uphold high standards of conduct in public life and to uphold the law of the land. Where a school improvement partner is involved in behaviour, most likely outside his or her work as a school improvement partner, which calls into question his or her integrity or probity, then his or her accreditation may be removed. Examples could include being charged with a criminal offence or concerns in relation to child protection issues, or where the school improvement partner's social, community, commercial or political conduct or bad publicity would make attendance at a school improper, unwise or unacceptable because it brings the school improvement partner's accreditation into disrepute.

The procedure for removal of accreditation

The body that holds the register of accredited school improvement partners is the National Strategies on behalf of the DCSF and it is therefore the National Strategies that has responsibility for de-accreditation of school improvement partners. The National Strategies works closely with the NCSL and DCSF through the school improvement partner Assessment and Accreditation Steering Group (to be known as "the Steering Group"). This body is established within the governance arrangements for the contract between NCSL and the National Strategies and is charged with strategic responsibility and oversight of all matters relating to school improvement partner assessment and accreditation. Its membership comprises representatives of NCSL, the National Strategies and DCSF. Given its over-arching responsibility for professional standards for school improvement partners, this is an appropriate body to hear cases for de-accreditation based on the conduct, competence or public confidence criteria. At the end of the process, the steering group will decide whether or not the allegations presented to it are true based upon the **balance of probability**. Should the steering group so find, then it will go on to determine whether or not de-accreditation is a proportionate response to the misconduct or incompetence that has been determined. Should this be the case then it will advise the National Strategies to remove the school improvement partner from the register, thus resulting in the de-accreditation of the school improvement partner.

Any costs incurred by a school improvement partner in preparing for or attending any meetings, as part of this procedure, are to be borne by the school improvement partner. There can be no claim for reimbursement of such costs from any party involved in the process irrespective of the outcome. If a school improvement partner has any special needs or disabilities that the steering group needs to be made aware of in pursuance of the procedure, then s/he should ensure the steering group is aware of these so that reasonable adjustments can be made to the process and venues for any meetings held as part of the procedure.

ANNEX D

FURTHER INFORMATION

Audit Commission sites

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/>

<http://www.schools.audit-commission.gov.uk/>

DCSF

Gifted and talented website:

<http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/giftedandtalented>

G&T portal:

<http://www2.teachernet.gov.uk/gat/>

Financial benchmarking site:

<https://sfb.teachernet.gov.uk/Login.aspx>

RAISEonline:

<http://www.raiseonline.org/>

– for usernames and passwords to the site, contact your local authority

Standards site:

<http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/>

Target-setting guidance:

<http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/ts>

– for usernames and passwords to the site, contact your local authority or

<mailto:financial.benchmarking@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk>

Learner Achievement Tracker

The LAT can be used to access VA and DT information at qualification/subject level for schools with sixth forms and provides a comparison of school performance compared against national performance at subject and qualification level. The LAT is hosted on the LSC's Provider Gateway <https://gateway.lsc.gov.uk/providergateway/> and access to the Gateway (and the LAT) can be granted by user approvers which have been set up in each school and local authority.

Further information can be found via the following links:

The LAT Handbook link:

[http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/Value Added and Distance Travelled section_of_hand.pdf](http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/Value%20Added%20and%20Distance%20Travelled%20section_of_hand.pdf)

The LAT Tutorial link:

[http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/Learner Achievement Tracker \(LAT\) tutorial 010807.ppt](http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/Learner%20Achievement%20Tracker%20(LAT)%20tutorial%20010807.ppt)

National Strategies

School improvement partners' helpline **0845 850 1444**

Email helpdesks

PrimarySips@nationalstrategies.co.uk

SecondarySips@nationalstrategies.co.uk

SpecialschoolSips@nationalstrategies.co.uk

School improvement partners' CPD site

(School improvement partners' Knowledge Bank)

<http://www.nationalstrategiescpd.org.uk/>

The enrolment key is "improve"

NCSL

Website <http://www.ncsl.org.uk/sips>

School improvement partners' helpline **0845 601 3032**

Email helpdesk

<mailto:sips@ncsl.org.uk>

ANNEX E

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

During the autumn term 2005 the first wave of the roll-out of school improvement partners to secondary schools and the extended pilot in primary schools commenced. During that period the National Strategies school improvement partner co-ordination team collated many of the questions raised by local authorities, heads teachers and governors about the process. Those questions have been summarised here.

1. Is there a legal requirement to employ school improvement partners?

Yes. The Education and Inspections Act (2006) requires local authorities to deploy an accredited school improvement partner to each of its primary, secondary and special schools according to the roll-out schedule agreed with the DCSF.

2. Is there an agreed national rate of pay for school improvement partners? If not, why not?

No. As is the case for many other roles, it is for each authority to determine the rates it is prepared to pay.

3. What is the position on payment of travel costs and payment for attendance at CPD events?

School improvement partners would expect to be reimbursed for travel costs and for the four days per year they allocate to CPD. It is for local authorities to choose how to do this. One way is for school improvement partners to be specifically reimbursed for these costs. Alternatively, a school improvement partner's daily rate for time working with schools can be set at a level high enough to cover these costs.

4. Who manages the performance of school improvement partners?

School improvement partners work under contract to local authorities; so local authorities have the responsibility for school improvement partners' performance management. There is advice and guidance on this, as on many other aspects of the work of local authorities with school improvement partners, in the National Strategies' Advice and Guidance for Local Authorities document distributed to all designated staff in local authorities.

5. What is the role of the National Strategies regional SIP co-ordinators?

Regional school improvement partners' co-ordinators provide assistance to local authorities in developing their school improvement partner function, act as the key National Strategies' contacts on policy matters relating to school improvement partners and undertake quality assurance of the school improvement partner function across the region.

6. Is there a national position on the reporting mechanism for school improvement partners?

Local authorities are responsible for determining the reporting format used by school improvement partners. National guidance for local authorities on the format and content of school improvement partner reports is available from the National Strategies.

7. Can we put in place our own recruitment process? How can we be sure that head teachers who have been moved on by local authorities are not getting through the screening process?

Local authorities' recruitment processes are an essential part of ensuring that the correct school improvement partners are matched to the correct schools. We recommend taking up references and interviewing as you would for any appointment.

8. How will school improvement partners' conversations support the outcomes of the priorities meetings? How will school improvement partners understand the multi-agency approach that has been taken by the local authority?

Every local authority will need to ensure that its school improvement partners are fully aware of local authority priorities before they start working with schools, and that they are kept informed of those priorities throughout their time with the local authority. Similarly the local authority will wish to ensure that school improvement partners are fully aware of the way Children's Services are joined up within the local authority.

9. What are the funding arrangements for school improvement partners?

The additional funding for local authorities to implement the school improvement partner function is currently £2,000 per secondary school and £770 per primary school, paid direct to the authority. This contribution is intended to support all aspects of the school improvement partner function, including the local authority's management of them. Funding from 2008-09 onwards is currently being reviewed. From 2008-09, SIP funding will be part of the Area-Based grant to local authorities.

10. What is the relationship with Ofsted?

It is the local authority that has a relationship with Ofsted, not the school improvement partner. Local authorities will engage in regular dialogue with local managing inspectors from Ofsted about the performance of their schools. Local authorities will draw upon the information from their school improvement partners to inform these discussions. Protocols are provided on page 13.

11. If the school improvement partner and Ofsted reach different conclusions, who is right?

School improvement partners and Ofsted have different functions, and as a result, their reports are different in scope. Nonetheless, from time to time, a school's improvement

partner and Ofsted inspector will reach different conclusions on the same issue. Since their conclusions always include elements of judgement, there can be no expectation that school improvement partners and Ofsted will always agree, any more than there can be an expectation that two school improvement partners, or two Ofsted teams will always agree. If schools are dissatisfied with the work of inspectors or school improvement partners, they can make use of Ofsted's or the local authority's complaints procedures.

12. If a school ignores a school improvement partner's advice, can the school improvement partner do anything about it?

The general presumption is that the school's decision should prevail. But if the disagreement warrants action, because the school is failing to tackle adequately an issue that needs serious action, it may be appropriate for the local authority to intervene in the school; in every case, the situation should be discussed with the local authority's school improvement partners' manager.

13. What should the school improvement partner do if a school rates itself higher in its SEF than the school improvement partner judges appropriate?

The core function of the school improvement partner is to challenge and support the school. Where a school's self-evaluation is unrealistic - in either direction - the school improvement partner must challenge this and try to persuade the school to register a more realistic evaluation and grade. If the disagreement between the school and the school improvement partner is not resolved, the school improvement partner should record his or her own judgements in his or her report on the school.

14. Can someone work as a school improvement partner even if their own governing body refuses permission?

Any serving teacher needs their school governors' support in order to apply to be a school improvement partner. To secure that support, the prospective school improvement partner should be satisfied that the school's systems are sufficiently robust to allow their release. They should be able to show the governing body how the school will function in their absence, using the fee for the school improvement partner work. Experience so far shows that school improvement partners' own schools benefit significantly from their school improvement partner work outside the school. However, governors would be right to be sceptical about releasing their head teacher for this work if there were serious issues that required attention in the donor school, for example if it were a school causing concern.

15. If a school goes into Special Measures or requires significant improvement, what is the responsibility/accountability of the school improvement partner?

If a school is fragile and in danger of being judged to require special measures or significant improvement, then the job of the school improvement partner is to discuss this with the leadership of the school and raise the concerns with the local authority. If the school improvement partner has not realised the fragility of the school and as a consequence is surprised that the school is found to require special measures or significant improvement, then the employing authority will undoubtedly wish to have a conversation with the school improvement partner as to how this has come about. However, the school is accountable for the position it finds itself in.

16. What say will schools have in the allocation of school improvement partners to take account of the school's faith?

A school has the right to be consulted over the choice of its school improvement partner and may request a school improvement partner sympathetic to the school's faith affiliation. But the final decision on school improvement partner allocation is for the school's local authority. It is a key expectation of school improvement partners that they should be able to respond to the ethos and context of schools of any type. Link advisers have not in the past been allocated to faith schools on the basis of their faith: we would not expect it to be any different with the deployment of school improvement partners.

17. Does the role of the school improvement partner necessarily change if a school goes into special measures or requires significant improvement?

Where a school is in special measures or requires significant improvement then it has follow-up section 8 inspections. The framework for section 8 inspections requires Ofsted to comment upon the support a school is receiving from the local authority. The school improvement partner will have a key role in this support, but others will also make significant contributions.

18. If a school improvement partner has concerns about the local authority's response to reports on a school, what should he or she do?

The school improvement partner should contact the regional school improvement partners' co-ordinator.