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Improving performance through school self-evaluation and improvement planning

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Further guidance

Further guidance on *Improving performance through school self-evaluation and improvement planning* has been produced jointly by the DfES and Ofsted. The guidance suggests ways to manage the self-evaluation process without adding to the bureaucratic burden on schools. It also includes advice to schools to keep Part A of the self-evaluation form short and to the point.

Of particular interest to:

Schools, local authorities, school improvement partners, inspectors and national bodies.

Age group

All

Published

June 2006

Reference no.

HMI 2646

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Document reference number: HMI 2646

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Contents

Introduction	1
Section 1: the case study schools – features of effective self-evaluation	4
Section 2: guidance on effective self-evaluation and improvement planning	7
Section 3: using the SEF to summarise the outcomes of school self-evaluation and improvement planning	20
Fitting the parts together	21
Appendix A: case studies	26

Introduction

1. This document builds on the joint guidance published in March 2005 by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and Ofsted about the relationship between school self-evaluation (SSE) and school improvement, including the purpose of the self-evaluation form (SEF).¹
2. The March 2005 guidance was an important element in the DfES's launch of the New Relationship with Schools initiative. It focused on the rationale for self-evaluation, what schools should evaluate and how. The guidance made it clear that intelligent accountability is based on a school's own views of how well it serves its learners and suggested that all schools need to be able to answer two key questions: 'How well are we doing?' and 'How can we do better?' The guidance emphasised that thorough and rigorous self-evaluation provides the best means to identify strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. It also recognised that while schools evaluate the impact of everything they do, it would not be practical to evaluate everything at once.
3. In autumn 2005, the DfES commissioned Ofsted to produce further guidance based on inspection evidence. In responding to this challenge, Ofsted has worked with its inspection partners, the Regional Inspection Service Providers (RISPs). Other key bodies such as the New Relationship with Schools' Consultative Group, the Implementation Review Unit and teachers' and headteachers' professional associations have been consulted.²
4. The intended audience for this guidance is primarily schools, although it is envisaged that it will also be of interest to local authorities, school improvement partners (SIPs), inspectors, and national bodies.³
5. This publication provides further guidance about SSE and improvement planning.⁴ It demonstrates how schools can build on existing systems of performance management, assessment, improvement planning, professional development and target setting to evaluate their work effectively. It recognises that school self-review is a well established

¹ *A new relationship with schools: improving performance through school self-evaluation* (DfES 1290-2005DOC-EN), Department for Education and Skills/Ofsted, March 2005 (hereafter DfES 2005). This document is available on the Ofsted website:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=3862>

² Views from a number of key stakeholders were canvassed and taken on board. However, it should not be assumed that as a result of this process these organisations are in a position to endorse this guidance.

³ At the time of the publication (June 2006) not all schools have SIPs.

⁴ Ofsted published a good practice guide *Self-evaluation in schools, colleges and local authorities* (HMI 2533) in the summer of 2006.

process in most schools and that schools have previous experience of recording a summary of the outcomes of their self-review through Ofsted's Form 4.^{5,6} Schools have always used data as part of their self-review and in recent years the range of their data has widened, but some do not use it as effectively as they could.

6. This guidance aims to provide ideas about ways of managing the process of self-evaluation without adding to the bureaucratic burden on schools. It also suggests effective ways of recording the outcomes of schools' self-evaluation in Ofsted's SEF. This is important because the new section 5 school inspection arrangements introduced in September 2005 place the school's self-evaluation at the centre of the process of inspection; this will be even more the case when lighter-touch inspections are introduced for some schools from September 2006. However, the self-evaluation form should not be confused with the process of self-evaluation.
7. From the first term of section 5 inspections, Ofsted has identified examples of good practice in 120 schools, where leaders and managers undertake self-evaluation successfully.^{7,8} The examples are taken from a representative range of schools; inevitably they cannot cover every type of school.
8. The document is arranged in three main sections.
 - **Section 1:** the features of effective self-evaluation, identified in the case study schools.
 - **Section 2:** guidance on the process of self-evaluation and improvement planning, with a few brief cameos to illustrate how some schools have responded to relative weaknesses in their provision.

⁵ Other publications available to support schools in the process of school improvement include: *Self-evaluation: A guide for school leaders* National College for School Leadership (NCSL) www.ncsl.org.uk

⁶ Ofsted's Form 4 was provided for schools' use prior to section 5 inspections.

⁷ Ofsted's research included retrieval from SEFs, pre-inspection briefings, PANDAs and other data, evidence forms, and inspection reports. RISPs also contacted 10 schools each to discuss: the schools' particular contexts and the urgency with which they evaluated the different aspects of the quality of their work and outcomes for learners; how the schools go about diagnosing where strengths and weaknesses lie in relation to the different aspects of their work, and the changes that they need to make; the schools' key priorities and the action needed to bring about improvement; and how they recorded the outcomes of the evaluation and review process in their SEFs.

⁸ This publication refers to schools' leaders and managers and the reference applies to leaders and managers at all levels. The term leaders refers to those who provide the direction and drive for raising achievement, including subject leaders, key stage and department leaders and school governors. Managers are those members of staff who have responsibility for making the best use of the school's resources and processes to raise achievement. Management includes monitoring of the provision and outcomes for pupils, effective evaluation, planning, review, performance management and staff development.

- **Section 3:** guidance on completion of the SEF and how to fit its sections together into a coherent whole.
9. There is also an appendix with further case studies which relate to self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Section 1: the case study schools – features of effective self-evaluation

10. Self-evaluation is a continuous process, governed by the needs of the institution rather than the requirements of external bodies. Nevertheless, schools are accountable to their stakeholders; they need to be in a position to provide convincing evidence of their success and a clear plan of action to demonstrate how improvements will be made. The case study schools provide examples of how this can be done. They all have a positive and reflective ethos and are determined to improve.
11. The process of self-evaluation used by the case study schools reflects the six questions posed in the March 2005 guidance: i) Does the self-evaluation identify how well our school serves its learners? ii) How does our school compare with the best schools and the best comparable schools? iii) Is the self-evaluation integral to our key management systems? iv) Is our school's self-evaluation based on a good range of telling evidence? v) Does our self-evaluation and planning involve key people in the school and seek the views of parents, learners and external advisers and agencies? vi) Does our self-evaluation lead to action to achieve the school's longer-term goals for development?⁹
12. These six questions have helped the case study schools to focus rigorously on the process of self-evaluation and the outcomes which arise from it. Their senior staff are able to evaluate precisely the impact that the school's provision and its leadership and management have had in raising standards and improving the personal development and well-being of pupils. They know well their school's strengths and weaknesses and act on them decisively, thereby demonstrating a good capacity to achieve further improvement.
13. The remaining paragraphs of this section identify the case study schools' shared features of self-evaluation and improvement planning. Key points are emboldened.

⁹ DfES, 2005, pp 7–10.

14. **Pupils' achievement – the standards that they reach and their progress – is always at the heart of self-evaluation. It is a key element of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda.**¹⁰ The schools understand how well their pupils are doing because they rigorously track the personal development and academic progress of individuals, particular groups and cohorts of pupils. In this way they identify potential problems at an early stage and act upon them swiftly to counteract underachievement, poor behaviour and unsatisfactory attitudes to learning.
15. **The schools are outward looking and seek to analyse the value they add to their pupils' education by comparing the impact of their work with that of other schools.** They identify other successful schools in comparable circumstances and look carefully at their practice in order to provide a benchmark for what they are doing.
16. **The approach to review and improvement planning is systematic and structured, ensuring that it is well paced throughout the school year and integral to the schools' management systems.** The schools have simple day-to-day processes in place which are not overly bureaucratic. These processes allow them to integrate – within the cycle of school improvement planning and review – performance management, planning for professional development, and assessment and target setting for pupils' academic and personal development. They value a third-party view of the school's strengths, weaknesses and key priorities for improvement.
17. **The schools' management systems allow a good range of telling evidence to be collected, analysed and evaluated. This enables the schools to identify what steps they need to take to meet the needs of individuals, groups and cohorts of pupils.** The schools routinely monitor not just pupils' academic standards, progress and personal development, but also teaching, learning and other aspects of their provision to evaluate the extent to which they are adding to pupils' education, well-being and care. The monitoring is linked to evaluation and the identification of priorities for improvement. All staff contribute to the school's monitoring in different ways and this helps them to have a good understanding of where and why there has been a need for improvement. The schools' leaders and managers have a key role to play in examining what does or does not seem to be going well. They also have a thorough look at any new initiatives to make sure they are bedding down and having the expected effects. These processes have helped the schools to maintain high standards and to identify further potential strengths and areas for improvement.

¹⁰ The five ECM outcomes for children and young people are: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and achieving economic well-being.

18. **Consultation helps schools to evaluate the impact of their provision against what it was intended to achieve. The schools seek the views of their SIPs and, where relevant, stakeholders, advisory staff from the National Strategies and other external agencies but not all at once.** It is up to schools' staff and governors to decide who to consult, why, and when they would gain most from gathering others' perspectives.
19. **Areas for improvement are prioritised on the basis of their impact on the outcomes identified by the ECM agenda.¹¹** The schools have long-term strategic aims whilst focusing on a few short-term, annual, operational priorities. But they keep a careful eye on the impact the actions they take have on both long and short-term priorities. Initiatives are limited in number; this allows time for them to become thoroughly established and for change to be managed effectively. Leaders know why particular initiatives have been taken and what they want them to achieve. They have the courage to reject plans which are not working, no matter how enticing the funding they attract, if the plans do not fit in with what needs to be done.

¹¹ See footnote 8.

Section 2: guidance on effective self-evaluation and improvement planning

20. There is no single, recommended blueprint for SSE. Schools can adopt the approach they wish, but need to ensure that it gives them insight into the strengths and weaknesses of their work and helps them to identify what they need to do to improve. This document offers guidance to help schools evaluate their work effectively.
21. Open, honest and robust self-evaluation helps leaders and managers at all levels to carry out their responsibilities more effectively. It requires good communication among all those with a stake in the school: the staff, governors, pupils, parents, the school's partners and SIPs. All members of the school community need to recognise their contribution to the school's success and the actions required for further improvement.
22. School leaders and managers need to be able to measure progress in practical ways. The steps needed for good self-evaluation are simple. They do not always have to be followed in a set sequence, or carried out at the same time, but they always focus on outcomes for pupils or actions that will lead to an improvement in outcomes. The outcomes provide schools' leaders and managers with benchmarks against which they can check whether or not their school is making a positive difference to the quality of education pupils receive and the outcomes they achieve.
23. The following paragraphs summarise steps which, on the evidence gathered by inspectors, lead to effective self-evaluation. The cameos exemplify ways in which some of the case study schools have addressed relative weaknesses in their provision.

Starting points: identify the school's context

24. One starting point for self-evaluation is to ask whether the school's population and pupils' needs have changed and whether the school is accommodating any necessary changes sufficiently well. Schools regularly review their activities in the light of new circumstances and seek to reflect their priorities in amended job descriptions, staffing responsibilities and the way in which these are organised. A school's unique features need to shape its approach to improvement planning and determine how it deploys its resources.
25. For example, secondary schools that are working towards specialist status for languages consider the characteristics of their specialism and how this will play a part in driving whole school improvement, their work with

partner schools, businesses and the wider community.¹² They consider the action needed to strengthen and develop their specialist subjects and develop their schools as regional centres of curriculum excellence.

26. In schools where there are rapidly increasing numbers of pupils for whom English is an additional language, the staff consider whether the school can meet these pupils' needs. To do this, they need to ask not only whether there are procedures in place to compare those pupils' progress against other pupil groups so that they can support their progress, but also whether the school's provision for these pupils is based firmly on performance data, observation and discussion.

Using data to measure, monitor and compare performance

27. Data raise questions. They need to be analysed and interpreted to identify strengths and weaknesses and used to set performance targets for school improvement.^{13,14} Comparisons between the school's data and national data can help the school to judge its relative performance and what its pupils should be achieving. In schools such as nursery schools, the 'last' year group in some middle schools and in some special schools, where data are not available from national tests, the information the staff gather, analyse and interpret can still provide a clear picture of how well individual pupils and groups of pupils are doing, how good their attendance is, and how well they are meeting their targets.
28. Schools can use data to evaluate pupils' progress at:
- **whole-school level:** to compare the school's performance with that of other schools nationally, including those that are performing best, using such data as the contextual value added (CVA) PANDA, Pupil Achievement Tracker (PAT) or commercially available materials^{15,16}

¹² Schools may find the following link for language entitlement helpful:

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=9522>

¹³ Targets are seen as essential to raising expectations for all pupils. They should fit within the school's cycle of self-evaluation and improvement planning.

¹⁴ The term 'data' is not just applied within the context of numerical data provided in the CVA PANDA. As indicated in subsequent paragraphs, data may include, for example, information about pupils' behaviour, the school's workforce and individuals' development needs identified through performance management.

¹⁵ The CVA model looks at pupils' progress after allowing for pupils' prior attainment and characteristics, as collected through the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC). CVA scores take into account the important contextual factors that affect progress so that all pupils' progress may be compared fairly and the school's contribution isolated.

¹⁶ The PAT website <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/performance/pat> provides advice on how to use PAT for target setting. PAT helps schools to set targets for individual pupils based on their prior attainment and expectations for their achievement at the end of the key stage. PAT is based on national expectations for the levels pupils should reach at the end of key stages and on what high performing primary and secondary schools are achieving. From October 2006 the CVA PANDA and the PAT will be replaced by a new joint product, RAISEonline.

- **key stage level:** to compare and contrast the performance of pupils at different key stages in the school, and of different cohorts of pupils over time; and to compare and contrast the school's performance with that of other schools using national data, the school's data and value-added information from Key Stages 1 to 2 in primary schools and Key Stages 2 to 4 in secondary schools
- **subject level:** for example:
 - *in primary schools:* to compare performance in core subjects with other schools using national data, conversion rates and value-added information; and to compare performance across the school's foundation subjects¹⁷
 - *in secondary schools:* to compare performance with other schools and with other subjects using national data, conversion rates, subject residuals and value-added information¹⁸
- **pupil group level:** to compare the standards and progress of different groups of pupils such as:
 - *pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds:* where the 'achievement gap' for some groups remains too wide schools can use their data about exclusions and pupils' behaviour, analysed by gender and ethnicity, to monitor their performance and identify any issues arising
 - *gifted and talented pupils,* from every ethnic background: to support schools in this work, the DfES has published whole school Quality Standards for the education of gifted and talented pupils, for schools to use in their self-evaluation and improvement planning¹⁹
- **pupil level:** to compare the standards pupils reach and their progress against that expected, and the best that could have been achieved, given the pupils' prior attainment and other circumstances. Target outcomes and value added measures can also be used at pupil level to provide a basis for intervention to prevent underachievement or exclusion, for example for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD), or children who are looked after by the local authority.

29. Asking how well the school has performed in relation to its targets is a crucial first stage in the school's self-evaluation process, involving staff at

¹⁷ CVA PANDA conversion rates show how successful the school has been (within subjects): in moving pupils who started Key Stage 2 at Level W, 1, 2c-a, or 3+ to Level 4 and above by the end of the key stage in the reporting year, and in moving pupils who started Key Stage 3 with a Key Stage 2 level of below 3, Level 3 or Level 4 to Level 5 or above in the reporting year.

¹⁸ Data enables student performance in GCSE subjects to be compared with performance in other subjects at GCSE.

¹⁹ In trials, some schools have used the Standards to evaluate personalised learning for all pupils; they have found the Standards a useful way of developing whole school involvement in self-evaluation. Details may be found on the gifted and talented resource hub, G&T Wise at <http://www2.teachernet.gov.uk/gat/>

all levels.²⁰ This stage also involves feedback from the SIP and recent inspections, all of which help to check the validity of the school's conclusions.

30. The targets set for each pupil, class, year group and subject should contribute to the school's overall targets.²¹ The process needs to involve staff at all levels, enabling them to recognise the contribution they can make to achieving the school's targets and how these relate directly to teaching and learning. Starting points can be found in what teachers already know about individual pupils' prior attainment and progress within a year group and across a key stage. Targets that are directly related to what individual pupils can achieve should be both motivating and grounded in reality. Schools can also focus on areas where improvements have been sought and where intervention has been targeted, for example in aspects of the curriculum.
31. If targets have been met or exceeded, this often indicates a real strength in the school's provision – the quality of its teaching, curriculum, care, guidance and support, and its leadership and management. However, schools also need to check that their own expectations were sufficiently demanding. If targets have not been met, the school needs to ask why. It may be, for example, that good progress has been made towards a target that was very ambitious; on the other hand, progress may have been more limited than it should have been.

The process of target setting should include pupils with LDD. The following cameo demonstrates briefly how a special school has responded to a situation where performance criteria have not been used well enough to measure progress and set appropriate targets.

Context

The school caters for pupils with significant learning difficulties including those diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders. The school's community has changed considerably in the past 18 months as it now includes pupils with greater and more complex needs than was the case previously.

The school provides excellent care, pastoral support and guidance for its pupils but there has been an important weakness to address. The headteacher identifies the issue:

²⁰ This includes staff responsible for pupils' attainment and progress, teaching assistants, class teachers and senior staff and those responsible for the leadership and management of courses, subjects, areas of learning, and other aspects of the school's work.

²¹ The DfES website <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ts> contains local authority guidance and advice for schools on target setting. RAISEonline will also be available in 2006. RAISEonline is designed to help schools analyse performance and set internal targets. It has a range of sample reports which help schools to get started; the 'online' feature allows schools to design reports to fit their needs.

'Last year, our self-evaluation identified gaps in aspects of pupils' learning and we realised that we were not meeting either the pupils' targets or our improvement plan targets. We needed to check more carefully on pupils' rates of academic progress and meet this particular Every Child Matters outcome more effectively.'

As a result, the school's most urgent priority has been to devise an assessment system which can measure finely the very small steps its pupils can be expected to make. The specialist external agencies which support pupils in the school have contributed to this system, for instance, speech and language therapists have given guidance on language development. The school has taken this action because it recognises the importance of clarifying expectations for pupils, teachers and the whole school. It also recognises the need to set challenging but achievable targets for its pupils.

Outcomes

The school is well placed to evaluate its work against assessment information and pupils' performance data. Managers also have better information upon which to inform discussions with teachers and parents about the effectiveness of the school's provision.

Impact on pupils

The school's work has contributed to improved rates of pupils' progress, particularly in personal and language development and as a result, pupils are now able to access other areas of the curriculum very well.

The SEF reports that a parent says of this initiative:

'I was asked by the school what I thought of its new assessment system. It was good to know what other parents thought and I was pleased that action was taken. I was glad to be asked if this system had improved things because I think it has and so do other parents.'

Observing and evaluating teaching and learning

32. It is difficult for leaders and managers at any level to evaluate the quality of education the school provides unless they experience aspects of it first-hand, seeing provision as it is. Observations of teaching and learning enable them to do this and, through discussion, provide the basis for improvement. However, the purpose of observation should be to inform practice and improve its quality and not just to simply monitor. The reasons for observations need to be discussed and made clear, and staff whose lessons are being observed should be able to receive developmental feedback from the observer and talk about and reflect on their own practice.

33. Observations of teaching and learning ought to lead to improvement; continued monitoring of the same practice without a clear rationale is unlikely to contribute meaningfully to this. Peer observations and those carried out by leaders and managers can helpfully promote reflection and self-evaluation, providing the staff with a basis to improve further their own practice. Such observations can also allow staff to assess the success of strategies deployed to tackle issues like underachievement. As well as generating improvement in teaching and learning, observations can help staff to gather a general picture of the quality of the curriculum, pastoral arrangements and academic guidance.
34. Schools also use observation to identify and provide for the professional development needs of staff, and to link performance management with school self-review rather than establishing separate systems. In this way, observations can be kept at a manageable level and the outcomes used to evaluate staff needs, as well as individual staff performance.

The next cameo demonstrates how a comprehensive school uses evidence from lesson observations and discussions with pupils to identify weaknesses in the school's care, guidance and support for personal development.

Context

The school is situated in an area where many higher attaining pupils enter selective grammar schools. The headteacher and senior managers are concerned that too little emphasis is being placed on personal development in Key Stage 3. They arrange to focus on progress in personal development through a series of (short and longer) lesson observations and discussions with individuals and groups of pupils. Evidence from their monitoring suggests that a lack of focus on personal development could be impacting detrimentally on standards. As a result, senior staff concentrate on bringing about sustained improvement in pupils' achievement, through greater attention to the school's provision for pastoral care, support and guidance. They evaluate and subsequently strengthen systems for regularly tracking and reviewing the personal development, as well as the academic progress, of individual pupils. New timetabling arrangements – and the school's response to workforce reform – are designed to allow staff to become more available to talk to pupils and the school is able to devise a flexible and personalised curriculum tailored to the aptitudes and aspirations of each pupil.

Outcomes

Lesson observations show that pupils have an increased enthusiasm for learning. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good, having been developed in a climate where they are encouraged to help each other.

Some Year 9 pupils say:

'We feel we're getting on much better than we were. It's easy to get to see the teachers when we need to talk about our studies or problems and we know what targets we need to aim for to improve the standard of our work. The lessons are nearly always interesting now and we don't repeat the stuff we already know and did in Year 7!'

Work on this particular improvement priority leads to a revised focus (and new improvement priority) on teaching in core subjects in Key Stage 3.

Impact on pupils

Following the school's action for both these initiatives there is a year on year rise in standards in English, mathematics and science as seen in the Key Stage 3 test results.

Consulting parents, pupils, staff and the school's partners

35. Consultation with key stakeholders is an important element of SSE. For instance, the school needs to know whether pupils feel safe. One way of finding out is to talk to them. The student council is a vehicle that many schools use successfully to gauge pupils' views and perceptions, but if that is the only means of communication, the views, ideas and concerns of the most vulnerable groups, such as looked after children, are likely to be missed.
36. Schools will want to gather and use pupils' views to find out how well things are going, whether they feel safe and well supported, and then to do something about areas of concern, for instance by asking pupils whether they understand the school's policy for behaviour and whether they think the policy is consistently applied by staff.
37. The views of staff, parents, SIPs and agencies with which schools work can be usefully incorporated into SSE. Schools need to canvass their stakeholders selectively, canvassing different groups for specific purposes, for example parents of primary-age pupils to evaluate the impact of new outside equipment and the introduction of organised activities aimed at improving playground behaviour in Key Stage 2.

The following cameo shows how a big inner city primary school consults and works with its parents to develop additional support/extended provision.

Context

The school has a large minority ethnic pupil population. It has developed a strong local reputation for helping children and their families to cope with difficult social circumstances and in many cases high levels of poverty. The school and local authority bid for funding to set up a Sure Start Children's Centre to operate on the school's site, in order to extend its support to younger families in the community. The bid was successful.

Senior staff identify that the school could be doing more to help parents to support their children's learning but want to find out what *parents* think they need.

The deputy headteacher says:

'It's not up to us to patronise our parents by telling them what help they need. They have their own ideas about what the school should do for them and they put their children's needs first. We have established a weekly 'pop-in' half-hour session where parents who are available can come and talk to us about how they feel their children are getting on and what help they feel we might arrange for them. Once a month we arrange the session in the evening just before the Sure Start Centre closes at 6.00 pm so that parents who are not free during the day can come and talk to us.'

The school now regularly consults its parents, pupils and other key partners to find out whether it is providing the right levels of support for families and pupils. For example, it asks parents whether they need help to support their children's learning in literacy or parenting classes for the management of behaviour. As the school is already involved in local networks of schools through its Education Action Zone and Excellence Cluster Group it is able to bring in further expertise to support its families.

Outcomes

The school is judged by the local authority and Ofsted inspectors to have developed outstanding procedures for helping parents to be better equipped to support their children, and for working jointly with parents to monitor pupils' personal development and academic performance. This, together with the school's strong links with outside agencies, ensures that pupils' well-being and academic learning are supported very effectively. In addition, new links between the Sure Start Centre, schools and local secondary specialist sports college have extended opportunities in physical education and sport; the impact of this is being monitored.

Impact on pupils

Standards have risen significantly in English, mathematics and science in Key Stages 1 and 2.

Evaluating all key aspects of provision

38. Schools evaluate all they do, but not necessarily all at once. By combining the different steps or stages of self-evaluation, schools are able to evaluate all the key aspects of their provision over time, as informed by their analysis of the data and what they know about pupils' achievement, their personal development and well-being.

39. In order to carry out an honest appraisal of strengths and relative weaknesses, schools will wish to find ways of involving governors and staff at all levels in the process of review. Governors, for example, can visit their schools to talk to teachers about the impact of a new approach, and to pupils and parents about the difference that any new initiative is making to teaching and learning.
40. Assessment for learning helps teachers and others to gauge whether initiatives which have been introduced into the classroom are helping the pupils to make the progress they should.²² In lessons, for instance, they can target their questioning and encourage pupils to talk about and evaluate their learning. They might also want to discuss samples of pupils' work with them. If staff are not confident about judging accurately the quality of different aspects of the school's work, such as the learning of pupils and in identifying the action needed to improve its quality, the school's leaders and managers will want to take steps to support them, such as individual coaching.

The next cameo shows how the workforce in a pupil referral unit tackles the school's relative weaknesses in self-evaluation by addressing the staff's ability to share a common understanding of the quality of the school's provision.

Context

The pupil referral unit admits vulnerable pupils unable to cope with mainstream schools, including looked after children and unaccompanied asylum seekers. The teachers, teaching assistants and specialist staff reflect upon and evaluate what they are doing and what they need to do next to provide for each pupil's needs through a series of pre-arranged meetings identified at the start of each academic year. Staff are clear about the agenda for each review, and have time set aside for any necessary follow up action.

However, the head of the unit recognises that the school could do even better in relation to units in comparable circumstances.

Subject and aspect leaders in particular have had little dedicated time to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses and improvement priorities in their particular areas of responsibility. The head knows that to sustain improvement, the teachers must be able to make an accurate judgement about the quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum, have a sharper grasp of how these impact on pupils' progress and an understanding of how to improve their practice. The senior managers audit the needs of staff and find they must provide training and support for all staff and governors on the principles and

²² Assessment for learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there (Assessment Reform Group 2002).

practice of effective school self-evaluation. As a result, a timetable is established for dual observation. The paired work is designed to ensure that staff have a common understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. The headteacher also reviews performance management procedures and links performance objectives and staff training and support this year to securing more rigorous monitoring of teaching and pupils' personal development and academic achievement.

Outcomes

The head and staff develop a sharper and more robust approach to judging the quality of provision and the action needed to bring about improvement. This leads them to devise detailed procedures for monitoring pupils' achievement and the staff can now confidently demonstrate that all children make very good progress no matter what their starting points. The work of the staff to put new systems in place seems to be paying off.

Impact on pupils

Pupils make better academic progress and the new system helps staff to assess more accurately when pupils are ready to be reintegrated back into mainstream schools. Overall, the school can demonstrate that its leaders are now more accurate self-evaluators.

Using the findings of self-evaluation to plan for improvement

41. Priorities for improvement, which build on strengths and rectify weaknesses, emerge from the findings of self-evaluation; they form the basis of the school improvement plan. A single, integrated improvement plan brings coherence to the school's actions by setting out priorities for development. It can also help to ensure that action is targeted to have the greatest impact.
42. For schools to get the most out of their improvement plans, they need to be :
 - based on the school's evaluation of the outcomes achieved by pupils, and relevant aspects of its provision, remembering that a school should evaluate everything it does but not all at the same time
 - focused on a few, short-term, operational priorities
 - presented with a clear timeline with manageable steps, which take account on the capacity of staff in the areas concerned to improve
 - linked to the school's longer-term strategic aims and designed to have the greatest impact on pupils' achievement (some priorities apply across more than one year)
 - explicit, identifying precisely what needs to be done, how and why, setting goals or targets for improvement

- systematic, in identifying through performance management where good practice already exists and the support needed by groups of staff (for example, year groups, departments, key stages) in order to meet their performance objectives/improvement priorities
 - clear, indicating who is responsible for what action and the resources needed
 - constructed in consultation with staff, governors, parents, pupils and other key stakeholders, and disseminated widely
 - monitored and adjusted to take account of successful action and if necessary the timescale and pace of change modified
 - evaluated regularly, so that staff know how well developments are progressing and that the managers leading them are well supported in their work.
43. Some schools fit the cycle of review and improvement planning into the academic year, basing short-term priorities on their annual evaluation of test and examination results.²³ Others plan their cycle around the financial year to take account of changes in funding streams and staffing levels. Regardless of the year they choose to adopt, schools need to check that they have a clear framework and timescale for their review and improvement planning. A framework and timescale can help identify when schools will implement and monitor the delivery of their initiatives, and when they will evaluate the impact of the initiatives in order to make necessary adjustments.

The following cameo demonstrates how an 11–16 secondary school uses self-evaluation to put in place a single, integrated improvement plan to tackle weaknesses in provision.

Context

The school serves a deprived ward on the edge of a large city. In its previous inspection it was deemed to have serious weaknesses. The new headteacher's evaluation of the school's performance prior to the initial inspection is frank in its identification of underperformance and reasons for it. These relate to weaknesses in teaching and an underdeveloped curriculum. His plans to address the underperformance are clear and fully supported by the SIPs and local authority. A few urgent priorities are identified. These relate to improving the consistency and quality of teaching and assessment and to an urgent review of the curriculum. The improvement priorities are clear and understood by staff, governors, pupils and parents.

²³ A school's cycle for improvement planning and review may extend beyond one year.

Outcomes

The school is making good progress in addressing the causes of its serious weaknesses, due in part to an exceptionally clear, single post-inspection action plan and detailed planning for each area of improvement. The monitoring visit carried out by inspectors two terms after the inspection confirms this. There has been a prime focus on evaluating the impact of teaching on pupils' achievement and attitudes. In particular, teachers are now encouraged to account for the success (or otherwise) of their pupils in reaching their targets. As a result teachers' expectations have risen, they plan carefully for the next appropriate steps in learning and teaching has improved in all year groups.

Impact on pupils

There is a trend of improvement, as seen in pupils' work, their attitudes and behaviour in lessons.

Developing the capacity of staff to deliver school improvement

44. A school's self-evaluation may lead it to re-assess staffing structures and the responsibilities held by individuals following consultation where appropriate, and their training and development needs, in order to embed self-evaluation into the day-to-day working life of the school. This may be of particular importance where schools have undergone rapid change or where managers are finding it difficult to bring about improvement in key areas.
45. Effective self-evaluation enables leaders and managers to identify priorities for action, but the resulting improvement plan can be a wish-list unless key managers have been identified to implement the plan and resources are made available to support and train staff in the areas where improvements are needed.
46. Effective self-evaluation and effective performance management, supporting each other, can help schools to build the capacity of staff. First, the needs of the whole school workforce should be identified, to ensure that staff develop the knowledge and skills they require to carry out their roles effectively. However, schools can also build capacity by identifying and sharing good practice, by making it possible for staff to support each other, and by encouraging them to reflect on their own practice.
47. For example, a primary school which identifies a need to raise the standard of boys' writing clarifies what needs to be done in each year group, identifies where there are already areas of good practice in the teaching and learning of writing and disseminates it through peer observations and year group and whole staff discussions, in parallel with staff training and professional development. In this way, senior managers ensure that staff have both the incentive and the capacity to contribute

fully to the drive for further improvement in this aspect of the school's work.

Section 3: using the SEF to summarise the outcomes of school self-evaluation and improvement planning

48. Completing the SEF is not in itself self-evaluation. The SEF provides a structure to record a summary of the findings of routine self-evaluation, which is a key element of school management. It encourages schools to make well evidenced judgements which link the quality of their provision to outcomes for pupils. The SEF is not only useful for inspection and inspectors. It can provide schools with an opportunity to communicate their judgements about their work to SIPs and key stakeholders as well as to external audiences like Ofsted's inspectors. SIPs can act as critical readers of the SEF, whilst inspectors use it (together with the previous inspection report and PANDA report), as a starting point for their discussion with the school.
49. **Part A** of the SEF enables schools to draw attention to particular aspects of their work. However, completing Part A can be a burden when a school describes everything it does, and in such cases a school's SEF can read more like a prospectus than an honest appraisal of its strengths and weaknesses. Completion of Part A need not be a burden if schools start with evaluation and only provide the detail needed to substantiate their judgements. Many schools have found the 'first time' completion of their SEF challenging. However, they also report that they are glad to have engaged in the process because it has given them new insights into the effectiveness of their work.
50. **Part B** provides the information needed by inspectors to set up an inspection.
51. **Part C** provides information about whether the governing body is meeting statutory requirements. If there are areas where the school is not fully compliant, the school needs to refer to these in the relevant Part A sections.
52. There is no blueprint for a good SEF, but there are several factors to take into account to make sure the SEF is concise and evaluative. The main priority is for the school's leaders to convey a clear picture of how well the school is doing, how they know and what they are doing to build on successes and remedy weaknesses. The SEF will probably be completed by a school's leaders and managers, but because it summarises a school's internal evaluation, it needs to reflect the contributions made by staff at all levels, and the governing body, to the process of review.
53. Schools' leaders do not need to continually update the SEF. However, there are key points in the year when they might wish to update sections of the SEF. For example, they might choose to update the achievement and standards section after the analysis and interpretation of the school's

most recent test and examination results, or when new PANDA data are received. They might also wish to update the quality of provision section when there is clear evidence that action taken towards a particular improvement priority is, or is not, achieving success. Senior staff and the governing body are in the best position to judge when to update and agree the content of sections, and re-submit the SEF to the Ofsted website.

54. Before updating Part A of a SEF it is helpful to keep a few points in mind:

- **mull over the key messages** from the school's self-evaluation
- **browse the SEF website** and read Ofsted's guidance
- **evaluate** – it is easy to describe what the school is like and what it does, but that is not what is needed; the SEF should be evaluative and the judgements about outcomes for pupils and the quality of its provision, leadership and management clear and unequivocal
- **avoid repetition** – if the school has recently received awards, such as the Charter Mark or Investors in People, it may want to draw attention to the impact of its work in related areas without repeating what is already documented elsewhere
- **be precise** – schools should base judgements on evidence and not what might happen
- **explain impact** – when judging the quality of provision and leadership and management it is important to link them to impact
- **be transparent and specific** – a school's SEF should be recognisable by staff, governors and other stakeholders
- **keep Part A of the SEF short** and to the point. The length will vary according to a school's individual circumstances but if Part A is more than 20 pages long, a school is probably describing what it does rather than the impact of its work²⁴
- **reflect stakeholders' views.**

Fitting the parts together

55. A SEF can help schools to make reference to key policies and sources of evidence which inform the school's view of itself. To be effective it must provide a clear and convincing analysis and identify key indicators which demonstrate impact. Through the SEF, the school will want to point to evidence which substantiates its own judgements about the quality of its work.

²⁴ There are exceptions, for example a specialist school working towards re-designation may need to expand its SEF for that year only.

56. The remainder of this section focuses on Part A of the SEF and shows schools how they might fit together the different sections of the SEF into a coherent whole. Paragraphs 57–72 make suggestions about how a school's leaders might summarise the areas of the school's work that they want to improve and the problems they want to solve, as well as those aspects of the school of which they are proudest.
57. **SEF Section 1: characteristics of your school** is crucial to a SEF's coherence. Ofsted's guidance on the SEF rightly says that the achievement and standards, personal development and well-being sections should be completed first because these are about the outcomes for pupils and everything else should relate to them. For someone reading the SEF, though, it is the characteristics section which sets the scene. Whether this section shows a school in a deprived area attended by children with personal and social problems or a school in a much more favoured area, it provides a context which the sections that follow will reflect.
58. The section concludes with a list of the school's main priorities for development. These should be consistent with those priorities listed in the subsequent sections of the SEF. When priorities are returned to later in the SEF, it should not be to repeat them but to provide a summary of the evaluation that led to them being established. Each section of the SEF has to draw on the other sections but should not simply restate the same evidence.
59. **SEF Section 2: views of learners, their parents or carers, and other stakeholders** should relate back to the first section and forward to the others. A school with a challenging local area, for example, might show how it seeks out the views of parents who are hard to reach, or a school where staff have identified a need to strengthen the curriculum for physical education might wish to show in later sections how its curriculum and/or its after school activities are responding to the needs and views of its pupils. Alternatively, where the children want an increase in after-school team games, but the staff and governors decide that this is not viable, they will want to state in another section why the pupils' suggestions are not being followed up.
60. **SEF Section 3: achievement and standards** relates back to section 1, as well as forward to the quality of provision; for instance, where a school is taking action to address relatively weak attainment in one subject by improving the teaching of that subject.
61. Inspectors will analyse data and pose hypotheses based on them before the inspection and will expect schools to have used the data well. However, there is no need to repeat the data in the SEF; instead schools should show what they make of them and what action they have taken as a result of their analysis. Schools have data that are not in the public

domain, such as Fischer Family Trust data. Schools should explain what these data identify and what use is made of them.

62. As section 3 deals with outcomes, it should be possible to seek and find references to them throughout the SEF. A school where most pupils attain well might wish to show how it identifies those few whose achievement, though satisfactory, is not as good as it could be and the action which it takes to improve matters.
63. **SEF Section 4: personal development and well-being** should be built on in much the same way. If the majority of pupils behave well, but a minority group does not, there should be clear reference in the SEF to data on exclusions and attendance and the impact of any steps taken to improve behaviour and attitudes to learning.²⁵ It should be remembered that the success of steps taken to improve the quality of provision is judged in relation to the ECM outcomes.
64. **SEF Section 5: the quality of provision** should grow out of all of the preceding sections. Each of its sub-sections, teaching and learning, the curriculum, care, guidance and support should show how the school's provision contributes to its good outcomes and/or is aimed at improving its weaker ones.
65. Schools should be conscious of the ECM agenda throughout their evaluation and this should be reflected in the SEF. The key priorities are to raise the standards that pupils reach and their achievement, and to promote pupils' personal development and well-being; in so doing, schools promote successful progress in all the ECM outcomes. Schools should consider what difference their provision has made and how they know. Aspects of the ECM agenda, such as physical well-being, are easier to evaluate than those aspects that deal with personal development. Even though these may be more difficult, schools should make sharp judgements and find factual evidence to support them in the SEF; for instance, by citing pupils' concern about injustice and their high levels of compassion as examples of their good spiritual development.

²⁵ The National Strategies' behaviour and attendance audit tools provide a systematic framework for analysing relevant data and assessing the effectiveness of a school's approach to managing behaviour and attendance. The results of a school's current audit can be the best source of evidence for those elements of the SEF which summarise the impact of a school's work on behaviour and attendance. The behaviour and attendance electronic audit for secondary and middle schools can be found at:

http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/keystage3/respub/ba_indepthaudit.

The primary behaviour and attendance electronic audit can be found at

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/banda/eaudit>

These tools cannot be used online and have to be downloaded.

66. In the same way, a school's SEF should show how it responds to the views of its stakeholders as well as to the context in which it operates. For instance, comprehensive schools where all pupils are encouraged to learn a modern foreign language when previously they were not, might wish to show pupils' and parents' responses to this initiative, and the impact of teaching and the curriculum on standards and achievement in the particular languages chosen.
67. **SEF Section 6: leadership and management** is central to the analysis being developed in the SEF, just as the related section will be in the report. This section must show how the leadership and management of the school impacts on the outcomes it achieves for all its pupils.
68. It is not enough to say in this section that equal opportunity is promoted and discrimination addressed; leaders and managers must be able to point to the evidence. A school where attendance is below the national average, but which provides a sound education for those pupils who do attend will want to demonstrate the impact of action it is taking with outside/partner agencies to tackle absenteeism and truancy.
69. Inspectors and SIPs will want to know whether the school's action is making a positive difference. Schools should bear in mind that the quality and robustness of a school's self-evaluation and the way in which senior managers demonstrate that they understand and tackle improvement priorities is important evidence in an inspection. The leadership and management section must therefore build its case on what the SEF has shown so far.
70. This section also requires schools to comment on the use of monitoring and evaluation to raise standards and improve the quality of education. If inspectors are to make a positive judgement about a school's management, they must be convinced that the school's management knows its strengths and its weaknesses. The ability of senior managers and governors to demonstrate their knowledge of how well the school is performing, and that they are able to address or avert problems robustly, provides very good indicators of the school's capacity to improve.
71. **SEF Section 7: overall effectiveness and efficiency** draws together the SEF as a whole and for this reason it is best to leave this section until last. It provides a statement about the overall effectiveness of the school and should not simply provide a list of what was stated earlier. If schools' leaders and managers are clear about the progress pupils make in their learning and personal development they will find it easy to make clear links between this and the other sections. Schools might wish to set out the section as a commentary which starts by stating 'We are a good school because...'

72. If the section is to convince, it must be soundly based on what has gone before, honest about improvements since the last inspection and what still needs to be done, and convincing about the capacity to improve further in the future.

Appendix A: case studies

73. The case studies illustrate some of the ways in which the schools in Ofsted's sample have approached self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Case study 1

Context

74. School A is a large specialist college of technology; an 11–16 mixed school. It has gained recognition under the Investors in People initiative and is now seeking European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) recognition. Both of these awards require strong self-evaluation. However, seeking such awards is only one way of developing self-evaluation; this is a school that knows itself well.

The school's approach to self-evaluation

75. This specialist technology college drew up its SEF using evidence from its extensive and already existing procedures for self-evaluation; these are at the heart of its management practice. They are key ingredients of its development planning process because annual review is the starting point for the production of the college's three year rolling plan for improvement.
76. The college's SEF shows that it attends to a broad range of views from its staff, from parents and from pupils. The views of pupils are collected from surveys and from the members of the college council. Those views are taken seriously. Behaviour and bullying were of concern to the pupils and as a result became a priority for the improvement plan. The college's recent inspection confirmed the school's evaluation that the pupils have a strong confidence in the college's ability to promote their welfare.
77. The college regards external views and advice as contributing strongly towards the process of self-review. The local authority's advisory service is a key source of such information, but so also is the network of local headteachers and contacts made through the school's involvement in teacher training and, for Church schools, diocesan opinion.
78. The breadth and diversity of evidence contributing to the college's SEF is striking. Classroom observation makes a strong contribution to this. It has established the need for teachers to improve their target setting at both class and individual pupil level, in order to improve attainment in the core subjects. Pupils' attainment is improving rapidly as a result of the improvement work. At the same time self-evaluation is being expanded in a new system of departmental review which incorporates target setting and leads to the production of departmental development plans. The process of self-evaluation is therefore being kept under review and is itself being improved in order to make it more effective.

79. Action upon self-evaluation is regarded by the college as the crux of the matter. The review activities lead into improvement planning, and that planning is then subject to further review. The process involves all of the staff of the school because the priorities it establishes are incorporated into each staff member's performance review meetings, during which their performance objectives are agreed. The staff of the school are held to account for their contribution to the improvements which self-evaluation has shown to be necessary through the school's performance management systems.

Impact of self-evaluation

80. In the last two years the college has been among the most improved schools in the country. That improvement is founded upon rigorous scrutiny of performance figures, combined with an accurate analysis of what lies behind those figures and effective action in priority areas.
81. The college had a sophisticated and effective system of self-evaluation in place before the requirement to produce the SEF; this raises the issue of whether the production of the SEF was helpful to the college. The view of the headteacher, senior staff and governors is that producing the SEF was beneficial because it demanded a fresh look at the college's arrangements for self-evaluation. As a result, the staff and governors have now agreed when to update and resubmit the SEF and this has been incorporated into the college's three year planning system.

Case study 2

Context

82. School B is a primary school of average size serving pupils aged 4–11 in a small town. Pupils are mostly White British, but the school draws pupils from a broad range of social backgrounds. When children enter the Foundation Stage reception classes they are below levels expected of the majority of four year-olds. Pupils leave school at age 11 with exceptionally high standards in all subjects.

The school's approach to self-evaluation

83. Self-evaluation permeates all aspects of the school's work, and is used by the school's leaders as a means of ensuring that everything the school does has a recorded impact on pupils' achievement or personal development.
84. The school has very well-established systems for formative assessment and target setting in all key stages and over time; the information gained from assessments has become central to the school's evaluation of the quality of its provision, and to planning for improvement at all levels.

85. The headteacher reports how staff at every level are involved in the process of school review:

'Long before workforce reform brought in PPA time, we ensured that subject leaders were provided with one day per half term to plan for the curriculum and monitor the teaching of their subjects across the school.²⁶ Subject leaders often monitor teaching and learning in their subjects with senior leaders, and with less experienced and newer members of staff. This means that staff share ideas and expertise and the school builds its management capacity. Subject leaders develop a co-ordinator's file which shows how they are addressing development priorities in their subject and the impact of their work. Such priorities are directly linked to the whole-school improvement plan. Progress against whole-school improvement priorities is reviewed at every monthly whole-staff meeting, and teachers check their contribution to the school improvement plan and the steps needed to meet the plan's success criteria at the end of every term.'

86. The school maintains a file containing brief, regular evaluations of all new initiatives, again squarely based on their impact on pupils' progress. This comprehensive evaluation of the school's provision has made completion of the SEF relatively straightforward. The school has been readily able to identify what is working and what is not and the issues it needs to tackle next.
87. Children are consulted on all new developments which directly affect them, such as alterations to the playground and family learning schemes.
88. The children bear testimony to this themselves. A group of 11 year-olds said:

We didn't much like our playground. It was boring and children were always squabbling. Sometimes they had bad rows and the dinner ladies didn't know what to do. Then we talked to the teachers, they said to tell the school council and we did and it's been brilliant! We had a competition to design what we wanted – that was when we were in Year 3 and it's taken a long time but it's nearly finished now. We've got a wildlife area and a senses garden especially for our pupils who can't hear properly and places to play football and quiet sitting seats for reading or going to when you want to be quiet. But what's best is the friendship bench where people who are feeling sad can go and that means that we ask them to play. Playtime is great and now we want to start on the inside with new designs!'

²⁶ PPA time is used by teachers to plan and prepare for teaching and to assess pupils' progress.

89. Parents too are consulted about school improvement priorities and informed at regular intervals of the success or otherwise of the school's action to address these. In this way the whole school community is involved in a full and open consideration of how well pupils are doing and what action the school still needs to take.

The impact of self-evaluation

90. The staff and governors are confident that they have a very good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's work. Parents share their confidence and the school has become popular and over-subscribed. The local authority and the school's recent Ofsted inspection judge the school to be providing an outstanding quality of education.

Case study 3

Context

91. School C is an infant school of average size with a nursery, situated in a deprived city ward that is also part of the New Deal for Communities scheme. Almost half the pupils are entitled to free meals and one in three has learning difficulties. Pupils come from a wide range of minority ethnic groups with half being of Black Caribbean or Black African origin. Twenty-eight languages are spoken with Somali and Arabic being the most prominent.

The school's approach to self-evaluation

92. The school has developed high quality systems of self-evaluation. At the end of each academic year all staff, including those with responsibilities for core subjects, for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, and for gifted and talented pupils, analyse data and establish the priorities for the year. The headteacher maintains a high profile in and around the school during the day, monitoring and feeding back both formally and informally. The impetus for development and improvement is sustained through the advice and guidance of a consultant who visits once a term to evaluate the impact of developments.
93. The school uses a sophisticated tracking programme, developed by a local university, to analyse pupils' progress, including those with learning difficulties and those of higher ability, and to set targets for their learning and development. This feeds directly into the school's self-evaluation process. The programme helps identify pupils' knowledge, reasoning, memory and subject skills.
94. Children in each year group are tested six weeks into the term. The outcomes are analysed by the university and this helps the school to map out the support needed for each group of pupils, including those who are learning English as an additional language. The test is repeated at the end of each year. It is completed in January for Year 2 children. It provides

information about the school's added value; it also identifies where early intervention is necessary to help children to achieve as well as they can. In addition, the local authority provides its schools with an analysis of national test data and comparisons with like schools on ethnicity and gender, both locally and nationally. This adds to the school's knowledge about how well it is doing and how it might improve. For example, this year, the school's tracking programme has helped senior staff to identify priorities for development in mathematics vocabulary, linguistic skills and pupils' attitudes to school.

Impact of self-evaluation

95. The data collection last year enabled the school to identify that higher attaining girls could do better in writing and in applying their early scientific knowledge and understanding. Those were the key priorities in the school development plan and the basis for staff training, performance management objectives and lesson observations.
96. The school's action to raise the quality of teaching in these areas has been linked to a 'partnerships in learning' project with other schools. In addition, a research project with the education department of a local university helped the school to analyse carefully the views of its learners. Teachers' assessments show that higher attaining girls are more aware of their own potential and of their 'next steps' in learning. The whole school data show that this particular group of pupils is now making very good progress.

Case study 4

Context

97. School D is a large comprehensive school in a relatively disadvantaged suburb of a large city. The pupils' backgrounds represent over 50 countries and many are at the early stages of learning English. One fifth of pupils come from asylum seeking or refugee families. A comparatively high number of pupils in the school have learning difficulties.
98. When the headteacher was appointed two years ago, she knew there was an urgent need to raise the standards and achievement of the school's different pupil groups. She instigated an audit which revealed that:
 - teachers' expectations of what pupils knew and could do were not high enough
 - pupils' aspirations for their future lives were too low.
99. The headteacher shared her findings with staff, governors, pupils, parents and the local authority and set about improving teachers' and pupils' expectations and raising standards. As a result, the process of review has evolved and is continually improving.

The school's approach to self-evaluation

100. The analysis of data plays a key role in the school's self-evaluation. Performance data are analysed to identify strengths and areas where standards are too low. CVA data are seen as crucial in measuring how well different groups of pupils are performing and how well the school is performing overall. Local authority data give a clear indication of those groups which are doing well and those that are doing less well in comparison to other schools in the locality.
101. Performance data are analysed once a term. Discussions about progress towards targets are built into departmental meetings, reviews of individual education plans and parents' meetings and the information is fed back to the senior management team. Following this, action is taken promptly where pupils' progress is identified as being too slow.
102. The school uses this information to ask questions about why some groups are doing better than others, how staff know, and what could be done to improve performance. The data are also used to set challenging but achievable targets and to measure success. Targets are set for the whole school, departments, year groups and individual pupils. Parents are involved in the targets set for their children and pupils know what they need to do to achieve well.
103. For example, following a recent data analysis, the school began a review of the achievement of Somali pupils; these pupils make slower progress than other minority ethnic groups. Meetings with groups of pupils and their parents, aided by translators, have identified particular difficulties associated with the school's approaches to teaching. The school is responding rapidly, making changes to provision by ensuring that staff use a wider range of teaching strategies based on the visual, oral and practical methods that appeal to a wider range of pupils' learning styles. Training has been provided for staff and the quality of teaching and learning for this particular group of pupils is the focus for lesson observations.

Impact of self-evaluation

104. As a result of the action taken to improve pupils' performance, teachers' expectations have risen. Equally, pupils' have greater aspirations for their future lives and are more highly motivated to reach their potential. The school's work has proved to be particularly successful for pupils from Bangladeshi backgrounds and for those with learning difficulties; their achievement is now exceptional. The CVA data show the school that its pupils of Bangladeshi heritage are now doing extremely well in comparison to all schools nationally. The school is monitoring the impact of its work to improve the achievement of Somali pupils.

Case study 5

Context

105. School E is a small 2–19 mixed age special school in a large city. It has over 70 pupils diagnosed as being on the spectrum of autistic disorders; a significant proportion have severe behavioural difficulties.

The school's approach to self-evaluation

106. The school's procedures for self-evaluation emphasise the importance of collaborative teamwork. All staff use self-evaluation to prioritise the order in which improvement needs to take place in their team's areas of responsibility.

107. The school assesses every pupil's attainment on entry in order to establish a baseline. This is seen to be the starting point for assessing students' progress over time. Rigorous monitoring of individual students' progress identifies at an early stage where there is underachievement. Subject managers and their teams (which include highly skilled and talented teaching assistants) use their analysis of pupils' performance to evaluate the impact of teaching and the curriculum in their subject; this generates improvement priorities. Senior staff use a system of formal review to keep an eye on the quality of teaching and learning and to check whether the school's training and support are sufficient to help staff to meet their performance objectives and further improve the quality of their delivery.

108. The school's self-evaluation process involves all staff and governors and also demonstrates innovative ways of capturing the views of parents and pupils. This includes questionnaires, workshop sessions and after-school sporting activities. Some 60–100 parents and pupils per week access the school's after school sessions and the majority are willing to share their views on the quality of what the school offers. In this way, the school's improvement plan really is informed by the views of pupils and parents.

109. One parent represented many others when he said:

'Our children are brought to and from school by bus every day so the after school sessions provide us with real opportunities to talk to staff in a friendly and non-threatening way. Staff seem prepared to listen to us and they are just as keen to find out what our children really think about things. For instance, the children didn't much like school dinners so they told the staff. The staff got the younger children to help them to work out more nutritious menus and the older ones helped the headteacher and governors to set about changing the school dinner contract and having more homely food.'

Impact of self-evaluation

110. The school received its sports college designation in 2000. There is strong evidence to show that the high levels of subject knowledge and expertise amongst staff, particularly in physical education and science, coupled with rigorous procedures for review and improvement planning have had a significant and positive impact on pupils' progress.

Case study 6

Context

111. School F is a large junior school for pupils aged 7–11 on the outskirts of a town, bordering on a rural area. On entry, the majority of pupils have reached the expected levels. Pupils make consistently good progress and achieve exceptionally high standards by the end of Year 6.

The school's approach to self-evaluation

112. The headteacher has been in post for several years and over that period his approach to self-evaluation and school improvement planning has changed considerably:

'I stopped using a scatter gun approach because I realised it doesn't really work. Instead, we structure the process of review carefully, focusing on four or five areas for improvement in depth. We've got a system that we're happy with now – staff at all levels of leadership have specific monitoring and evaluation tasks timetabled throughout the year. These are linked to routine management activities like performance management and staff training. It works. How do we know? Well, results are going up and up!'

113. The school maintains a strong, unerring review on pupils' progress, gaps in their learning, and ways of improving teaching. This has had a significant impact on the quality of teaching and in raising standards.
114. The views of the school council and other pupils play a vital role in identifying pupils' progress and the quality of their learning. Pupils are actively encouraged to discuss with teachers what has worked well in their subject work and why, and they help teachers to identify what needs to be done to help them learn more effectively. For example, after a World War 2 project, pupils said that they had spent too much time using maps; they wanted more time reflect on and develop an understanding of what it must have been like to be a child at the time. This process of involving pupils has led to a review of the curriculum, carefully considered changes in teaching styles, and learning targets for pupils.

Impact of self-evaluation

115. The school's PANDA data show significant improvements in standards over the past five years. All pupils make good or outstanding progress throughout the school and those with learning difficulties do especially well.