

# Changes to school inspection in England

## Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

### Introduction

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 15,000 members of leadership teams of maintained and independent school and colleges throughout the UK. This places the association in a particularly good position to provide a wide ranging response to this consultation.

### Summary

- 2 It is ASCL's view that pupil progress should be the key basis for judgements to ensure that they are fairly made about schools from all areas and with different student bodies. We agree that this should relate to the progress of individual pupils.
- 3 The performance measures used to judge attainment must include an appropriate range of valid performance data and not rely too much on any single indicator.
- 4 Inspectors should consider all the evidence about a school, not rely on just test and examination results but also observe standards of work and how well students are learning.
- 5 ASCL is strongly against the use of limiting judgements, as their use can make it unreasonably difficult for some schools. ASCL understands from the suggestion of weighting that for a school to be judged as good it must have at least good for both achievement and teaching implying that these are linked and limiting judgements. We would oppose this.
- 6 ASCL is concerned about how inspectors will judge standards of literacy: what definition of literacy will be used and how will SEND pupils with complex needs will be assessed?
- 7 ASCL urges that the statistical calculation which determines expected levels of progress is differentiated by starting levels so that a fair comparison can be made in assessing the relative progress of students with high and low prior attainment.
- 8 ASCL agrees that Value Added is one way of assessing progress but not that it is more "straight forward" at present, as it will continue to suffer from the same equivalences problem as CVA. There is compelling evidence that Value-Added, like Attainment, correlates positively with the prior attainment of pupils. Contextual Value Added does not.
- 9 ASCL agrees that inspectors should consider context when assessing progress and achievement and that comparisons with similar schools will help inspectors to do this. However, the reference to similar schools seems to be a narrow measure. The data used for this must include levels of deprivation, EAL, SEN, gender as well as prior attainment as these factors can all act as barriers to learning for some students.

- 10 ASCL accepts that bullying in some form will probably occur in a number, if not most schools. The key issue that inspectors should be focusing on is how effectively a school tackles this issue rather than just relying on hearsay evidence from pupils and parents.
- 11 ASCL agrees that inspectors should also focus on the teaching of skills and not just knowledge and understanding. Inspectors should not expect a specific teaching style but instead look at how effective the teaching is in promoting good progress for all pupils. It should be learning outcomes focussed.
- 12 Since progression in learning is not necessarily linear, inspectors should be wary of making judgements based on an expectation of all pupils making progress in a single lesson but should take into account the progress of individual pupils across a sequence of lessons.
- 13 ASCL expects that due consideration will be given to a school's own evaluation and that this will continue to be validated via joint lesson observations. ASCL feels strongly that this collaboration should continue, including meetings with inspection teams, enabling the type of professional dialogue which, in practice, would implement intelligent accountability.
- 14 Clear definitions of what literacy is and the criteria for judging how well it is taught must be established in order to avoid inconsistencies in this new judgement.
- 15 Although the new framework is based on five headings (including overall effectiveness) rather than 27, much of what appeared under leadership and management in the previous framework remains. We also note that this slimmed down framework has additions in that CPD and support to staff have been added.
- 16 ASCL agrees that capacity for sustained improvement should not be a separate judgement but form part of leadership and management. This judgement should be based on what a school is doing to tackle its key issues and the impact of the strategies used in terms of student outcomes.
- 17 The inclusion of the accuracy and use of the school's self-evaluation would imply that this is part of the process of inspection; that Ofsted is there to validate a school's self-evaluation both in terms of process and quality of judgement. This is welcome. It is important to recognise that self-evaluation has been a key driver of school improvement.
- 18 ASCL has welcomed the culture of collaboration with leadership and management teams as part of the inspection process and strongly feels that their attendance at meetings with inspectors should continue. It would be helpful to build on and develop this approach.
- 19 Now that the quality of the curriculum is included under leadership and management, ASCL expects that criteria will be laid down for judging this so that it is not left to the individual interpretation of inspectors. These criteria should enable inspectors to determine how each school offers a curriculum which matches its vision, aspirations and contextual circumstances and enables good outcomes for all its pupils.
- 20 ASCL agrees that the safety of pupils is essential and a statutory requirement but sees safeguarding as an issue of compliance which should not need the time and focus currently allocated to it as part of the inspection process.

- 21 Clear criteria on how inspectors will assess SMSC and its contribution to overall effectiveness must be established. Context should be considered in making judgements leading to an assessment of the overall effectiveness of the school.
- 22 ASCL saw the revision of the framework as an opportunity for inspection in colleges and schools to be aligned. At least that inspections of schools and sixth form colleges (SFCs) could be put on a more level footing. ASCL agrees that there should be consistency of application across the diversity of schools and colleges and we would look for greater clarity in terms of how the judgements of school sixth forms and 16 to 18 education in colleges will be aligned. By implication, this would mean that separate reporting for sixth form provision would be preferable.
- 23 ASCL is broadly in agreement with a proportionate approach to inspection and the use of risk assessment using the current criteria. ASCL agrees that parents have a proper part to play in providing feedback to schools and this has always been part of a school's own self-evaluation process. However, ASCL has concerns about the method described as contributing to your risk assessment as it could lead to distorted views about a school.
- 24 It is clear that Ofsted will be expected to spend more time on 'weaker' schools so some method of doing this has to be established. This focus means that it is vital that random sampling of good schools and survey inspections of all schools continue if HMCI is to obtain an accurate picture of provision and overall standards of schools across the country. As it is, the annual reports do not paint a full picture and make year on year comparisons impossible. Because we are in essence seeing a "biased sample", the reports can give the impression that the quality of education is declining when in fact this is not the case.
- 25 ASCL agrees to some extent with shortening timescales for schools in categories. Schools given a notice to improve on one issue, for example safeguarding, will welcome an earlier opportunity to exit from the category. However, the scale of the problem for some schools might require more time no matter how competent their senior teams may be. It is perfectly reasonable to make the first monitoring visit to a school in special measures earlier. Without SIPs and the availability of LA support, these schools may need support to keep up the impetus to improve and resolve issues post inspection, especially with the reduced time to establish the necessary improvements.
- 26 It is understandable that a school judged as good should want an inspection. A great deal now rests on gaining an Ofsted judgement of 'outstanding', for example the opportunity to become a teaching school. Ofsted would have to make a good case for not agreeing to a request from these schools.

## Consultation questions

### ACHIEVEMENT

#### **To what extent do you agree with our proposed approach to judging achievement?**

- 27 It is ASCL's view that pupil progress should be the key basis for judgements to ensure that they are fairly made about schools from all areas and with different student bodies. We agree that this should relate to the progress of individual pupils.
- 28 The performance measures used to judge attainment should include an appropriate range of valid performance data and not rely too much on a single indicator. If schools are to be judged on specific indicators, these indicators need to be announced well in advance of students making curriculum choices. It is wholly inappropriate to make judgements on indicators that are introduced retrospectively. Applying this rule any inclusion of the English Baccalaureate as an indicator should not take place until 2014 at the earliest to take into account those schools operating a three year key stage four.
- 29 Care should be taken in drawing inferences and making judgements from particular indicators. For example, if achievement of the English baccalaureate is to be used as an indicator it should only be after it has been adjusted to be a percentage of the number of students in a school who select that somewhat arbitrary combination of subjects. And if the English baccalaureate is to be included as an indicator then it should be only one of a range of such indicators used to give a balanced overall view of the achievements of all pupils in the school.
- 30 Inspectors should consider all the evidence about a school, not rely on just test and examination results but also observe standards of work and how well students are learning and making progress. They should continue to consider all the evidence available about a school, including that provided as part of its self-evaluation.
- 31 On page 9 paragraph 12, the framework states that the judgement about achievement will continue to be a critical factor in determining a school's overall effectiveness. ASCL is concerned that this may imply that the revised framework will contain linked and limiting judgements. ASCL is opposed to the use of limiting judgements.
- 32 If Ofsted determines to use limiting judgements ASCL would again strongly state that progress should be the main factor in determining achievement as explained earlier. This will ensure that low attainment as a result of low prior attainment on intake (but good progress) does not prevent a school's outstanding features being recognised in terms of a grade for achievement. An over emphasis on levels of achievement, as distinct from degrees of progress automatically militate against schools in challenging circumstances.
- 33 ASCL will be interested to know how inspectors will judge standards of literacy: what definition of literacy will be used? We are concerned about how pupils with special educational needs will be assessed, as some individuals will have a low literacy level because of their complex needs.

#### **Do you have any comments or suggestions?**

- 34 We would advise further consultation with experts on assessing standards of literacy of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. It will be essential to ensure that inspectors are clear about the definition of literacy and work to clear criteria for its assessment. There are probably significant training implications for inspectors in this area.

## **CONTEXTUAL VALUE-ADDED MEASURES OF PROGRESS**

### **To what extent do you agree with our proposed approach to using value-added measures by making comparisons with similar schools?**

- 35 Value added is a particularly useful way of assessing progress made. However, ASCL does not think that this is yet “straight forward” as it will still suffer from the problem of equivalences. ASCL has previously presented significant evidence to both the Department for Education and Ofsted that indicates how the use of equivalent qualifications to GCSE has affected value added scores for schools.
- 36 ASCL urges that the statistical calculation which determines expected levels of progress is differentiated by starting levels so that a fair comparison can be made between the progress of students of high and low prior attainment. There is clear evidence that pupils with a high prior attainment level make greater progress than those with a lower prior attainment level and an understanding of this by inspectors is essential in coming to judgements over student achievement.
- 37 Great care must be taken in measuring progress “from when pupils first arrive in school” due to issues arising from present difficulties in KS2 assessments and for 14-19 schools if based on final teacher assessment at KS3. Progress from KS2-4 would produce a fairer picture for these schools.
- 38 ASCL agrees that inspectors should consider context when assessing progress and achievement and that comparisons with similar schools will help inspectors to consider context when making their judgements. However, the reference to similar schools seems to be a narrow measure, limited to the data about school’s intake. ASCL would like to have further details about the criteria used to identify similar schools.

### **Do you have any comments or suggestions?**

- 39 Ofsted should ensure the data it uses includes levels of deprivation, EAL, SEN, gender as well as prior attainment as these factors can act as barriers to learning for some students. Data must include this information if we are to focus on the progress and achievement of individual pupils. Levels of funding available to a school can affect the school’s ability to develop and implement strategies to work with some students and hence lead to variations in achievement: this needs to be taken into account when making an overall judgement about the school and its effectiveness.
- 40 There is compelling evidence that value-added, like attainment, correlates positively with the prior attainment of pupils. Contextual value added does not. It will therefore be even more difficult in future for inspectors to compare fairly school whose intakes have high prior attainment with those whose intakes have low prior attainment. Inspection procedures will need to mitigate this risk.

## **PUPILS’ BEHAVIOUR AND SAFETY**

### **To what extent do you agree we should judge behaviour and safety in this way?**

- 41 Bullying in some form will probably occur in many, if not most, schools. The key area that inspectors should be focusing on is how effectively a school tackles this issue and inspectors must not just rely on hearsay evidence from pupils and parents. Care must be taken in considering the evidence to ensure that it gives a reliable picture of the way in which bullying is tackled by the school and the success of the strategies used.

- 42 ASCL is concerned about how inspectors will judge “well-targeted support”. Further discussions on the criteria on which such judgements will be made would be very useful and it will be important to publish criteria such as this at an early stage.

**Do you have any comments or suggestions?**

- 43 It is right that inspectors should consider the extent to which teachers and the school promote appropriate behaviour and challenge disruptive behaviour effectively and have addressed issues over time.
- 44 Judgements about attitudes and respect should be made in the light of social class and other social factors pertaining to the student population. It should not be automatically easier for a school whose students are drawn from the same social class as most inspectors to receive a favourable judgment than one whose students come from home backgrounds that mean that they need more guidance in what is generally accepted as respectful behaviour, and more persuasion to positive attitudes to education.

**THE QUALITY OF TEACHING**

**To what extent do you agree that inspectors should judge the quality of teaching as proposed above?**

- 45 ASCL agrees and is very heartened by the statement that inspectors will focus on the teaching of skills as well as knowledge. The consultation document makes it clear that there is a recognition that the subject knowledge of teachers is not just about the level of their degree but their ability to understand how to advance pupils’ understanding and skills as well as knowledge of the subject.
- 46 If the criteria above are used then inspectors will look at how effective teaching promotes good progress for all pupils and not look for a particular style of teaching. Judgements should be outcomes focussed.
- 47 Since progression in learning is not necessarily linear, inspectors should be wary of judgements made on the need for all pupils to make progress in a single lesson. Clearly, a large majority will make observable progress in a single lesson; however, a better test of progress will take into account the progress of individual pupils across a sequence of lessons. It is critically important that this factor is considered in making rounded and valid judgements about pupil progress.
- 48 As more time will be devoted to classroom observation in an inspection, ASCL hopes that due consideration will continue to be given to a school’s own self-evaluation, which the inspection will still validate via joint lesson observations. This allows uncharacteristic classroom performance to be set in context. It has also been a factor in the new collaborative line followed in inspection and has been greatly valued by schools in allowing senior staff and inspectors to work together.
- 49 ASCL feels strongly that this collaboration should continue, including meetings with inspection teams enabling professional dialogue supporting intelligent accountability.

**Do you have you any comments or suggestions?**

- 50 Ofsted needs to establish clear definitions of what literacy is, and clear criteria for judging it. This will avoid inconsistent judgements in this new area.
- 51 ASCL suggests that the extra time that can now be spent in the classroom should be used to ensure a better spread across subject areas and to make all observations at least 30 minutes to allow for more developmental feedback.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

### **To what extent do you agree that inspectors should judge the effectiveness of leadership and management as proposed above?**

- 52 Although we have a framework based on five headings (if we include overall effectiveness) rather than 27, much of what appeared under leadership and management in the previous framework remains. This raises the question as to whether it will actually be any different in practice from the provider viewpoint. We also note that despite the framework being intended to be slimmed down CPD and support to staff have been added.
- 53 ASCL agrees that capacity for sustained improvement should not be a separate judgement but form part of the one on leadership and management. This should be based on what a school is doing to tackle its key issues and the impact of the strategies used in terms of pupil outcomes.
- 54 The consideration of the accuracy and use of the school's self-evaluation as part of the inspection would suggest that Ofsted is looking to validate a school's self-evaluation both in terms of process and the quality of judgement. This is welcome, as self-evaluation has been a key driver of school improvement. If Ofsted is to help schools and colleges to improve, they need to offer feedback, constructive criticism and advice. The school's self-evaluation material is a good starting point for this.
- 55 ASCL members have asked whether the new approach to self-evaluation would still allow schools to show how well they were doing in those areas not placed under the four main headings, and if Ofsted would then celebrate such good practice in its reports. ASCL considers that the inspection process should report on activities the school does well in even if outside the four main headings.
- 56 ASCL has welcomed the new culture of collaboration with leadership and management teams and strongly feels that their attendance at meetings with inspectors should continue. It would be helpful to develop this approach further.
- 57 Also included under leadership and management is the quality of the curriculum, described as 'the appropriateness of the curriculum in helping all pupils to achieve well'. ASCL has concerns about how that quality will be measured and how it will be assessed as a contributory factor to the judgement of leadership and management.
- 58 ASCL expects that criteria on "the appropriateness of the curriculum" will be laid down so that it is not left to the interpretation of individual inspectors. And this judgement should not be based on making most students follow a specific pathway such as the English Baccalaureate, given that the focus is on all pupils achieving.
- 59 These criteria should ensure that when making judgements on the curriculum inspectors will determine how each school offers a curriculum which matches its vision, aspirations and contextual circumstances thus enabling strong outcomes for its pupils.
- 60 We note that safeguarding will be scrutinised within this leadership and management heading. Although ASCL thought that this would be the case, we trust that this will not require as much time as previously because of inspectors' time being directed to the classroom. ASCL agrees that the safety of pupils is essential and a statutory requirement, but sees this as a compliance issue which should not need the time and focus currently allocated to it. We will be interested to see if a half day for safeguarding still features under the revised framework. ASCL presumes from the document that its

current status as a limiting judgement has been removed, which is welcome if true, and seeks clarification on this point.

**Do you have you any comments or suggestions?**

- 61 Ofsted should continue to involve the senior leadership team in the inspection process so that inspection is 'done with' rather than 'done to' a school.

**THE OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL**

**To what extent do you agree we should give more weight to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement when making a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the school?**

- 62 This depends on what 'more weight' actually means. As previously stated ASCL does not agree with the use of limiting judgements. These factors would have already been used to make a judgement on leadership and management.
- 63 In the text the statement is made in relation to the current framework and this revision "we propose to adopt a similar approach." ASCL would infer from this that for a school to be judged as good it must have at least good for both achievement and teaching, and that these are linked and limiting judgements.
- 64 If this is the case then a great deal will depend on how achievement is determined and what are the roles of attainment, learning, progress and the context of a school. In paragraph 35, we are pleased to note that it describes achievement as including learning and progress as well as attainment. However, although it is part of the consultation, nothing has yet been determined as to how the context of the school will be taken into consideration when judging achievement. As with a number of areas mentioned previously, it is important for schools to be aware of the criteria on which inspectors will be making their judgements and in this case how the school's context will be taken into account.
- 65 ASCL would like to see details regarding how inspectors will gather the information from the inspection to assess SMSC as this forms part of the judgement on the overall effectiveness of a school. The description of how this will be done is very vague.

**Do you have you any comments or suggestions about the proposal for judging the quality of the school?**

- 66 Ofsted should establish clear guidelines for how inspectors will assess SMSC under the framework and the criteria on which judgements will be made and ensure that context is considered in judgements leading to an assessment of the overall effectiveness of the school.

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SIXTH FORM AND EARLY YEARS**

**To what extent do you agree we should report on the school sixth form within the four key areas, covering teaching, behaviour, leadership and achievement?**

- 67 ASCL agrees that there should be consistency of application across the diversity of schools and colleges. However, it is not enough to make all areas of a school fit in without considering the way same-age learners are inspected in sixth form colleges (SFCs) and the criteria on which similar programmes in general further education colleges are judged. ASCL saw the revision of the framework as an opportunity for inspection in SFCs and schools to be aligned. The government is looking to establish a level playing field on funding between schools and colleges, so we would hope that the

opportunity will be taken to use the same criteria to assess the success of post-16 education in a school or college. ASCL considers that there should be consistency in the inspection of all post 16 providers.

- 68 In areas where the majority of the sixth form provision is in schools we can see the logic in reporting judgements on the whole school and not separating them out between pre- and post-16. However, in many areas there is a mixed economy of schools with sixth forms, schools without sixth forms, and colleges of various types. In these parts of the country in order to give accurate comparisons between institutions separate reporting on the sixth form element of the schools will be needed.

## **INSPECTION ARRANGEMENTS**

### **To what extent do you agree with this approach to risk assessment?**

- 69 ASCL is broadly in agreement with a proportionate approach to inspection and the use of risk assessment using the five point criteria. However, we have concerns regarding the new method proposed.
- 70 ASCL agrees that parents have a proper part to play in providing feedback to schools and this has always been part of schools' own self-evaluation processes. Many schools use parental questionnaires to seek parents' views. Parents would appreciate being able to complete an Ofsted parental questionnaire on-line. However, the method described could lead to distorted and unfair views about a school should a handful of disgruntled parents go straight to Ofsted rather than using schools' own complaints procedures.

### **Do you have you any comments or suggestions about how we might improve risk assessment?**

- 71 You could shorten the timescales as applied to risk assessments of good schools by informing them of the outcome of the interim assessment sooner. Although these schools are liable to random sampling and subject/survey inspections, it would be helpful to notify them earlier in the academic year.
- 72 It is vital that random sampling and survey inspections continue if HMCI is to get an accurate picture of schools. As it is, the annual reports do not paint a full picture and make year on year comparisons impossible. As outstanding schools are rarely visited, it can give the impression that the quality of education is declining when in fact this is not the case.

### **To what extent do you agree that our monitoring of satisfactory schools should be based on the factors set out above?**

- 73 The White Paper made it quite clear that Ofsted would be expected to spend more time on 'weaker' schools so some method of doing this has to be established. This will lead to more full inspections of satisfactory schools whilst a reduced number of good schools are inspected less frequently, with no outstanding schools inspected at all. This will have the consequences in terms of reporting described above.

### **Do you agree that we should inspect a satisfactory school sooner when our monitoring indicates that it is making inadequate progress?**

- 74 See above

**To what extent do you agree that we should shorten the timescale for monitoring and re-inspecting schools with a notice to improve?**

75 Schools given a notice to improve on one issue, for example safeguarding, will welcome an earlier opportunity to exit from the category. However, the scale of the problem for some schools might require more time no matter how competent their senior teams may be.

**To what extent do you agree that we should shorten the timescale and increase the frequency of monitoring inspections of schools requiring special measures?**

76 It is very sensible to make the first monitoring visit to a school in special measures earlier. Without SIPs and the availability of LA support, these schools may need support to keep up the impetus to improve and resolve issues post inspection, especially with the reduced time to establish the necessary improvements.

**REQUESTING INSPECTION**

**To what extent do you agree Ofsted should respond positively to most requests for inspection?**

77 It is understandable that a school judged as good especially with outstanding features should want an inspection. A great deal now rests on gaining an Ofsted judgement of 'outstanding', for example the opportunity to become a teaching school. Ofsted would have to make a good case for not agreeing to a request from these schools. However, there is no indication of costs to ascertain whether this is a feasible option for a school.