

Handbook for the inspection of local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement

Handbook for inspecting local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement

This handbook provides instructions and guidance for inspectors conducting inspections of local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement under section 136(1) (b) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

It sets out what inspectors must do and what local authorities can expect and provides guidance for inspectors on making their judgements.

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Introduction

1. This handbook sets out the main activities undertaken by inspectors conducting inspections of local authority functions in relation to supporting school improvement in England under sections 135 and 136(1) (b) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 from November 2014. It also sets out the judgements that inspectors will make and on which they will report.
2. Local authorities are selected for inspection based on a data set of key indicators where the inspection of schools or other providers, carried out under section 5 or section 8 of the Education Act 2005, raise concerns about the effectiveness of a local authority's functions to support school improvement or where Ofsted becomes aware of other concerns.
3. The handbook has two parts.
 - Part 1: How local authorities will be inspected: this contains instructions and guidance for inspectors on the preparation for, and conducting of, local authority inspections.
 - Part 2: The evaluation schedule: this contains guidance for inspectors on assessing the quality, and strengths and weaknesses, of school improvement arrangements in a local authority they inspect and provides an indication of the main types of evidence they collect and analyse.
4. As set out in 'The framework for the inspection of local authority arrangements for supporting school improvement' (paragraphs 21-29), there are three discrete elements¹ to the inspection:
 - the focused inspection activity (week 1)
 - the telephone survey of schools not under inspection (week 1)
 - the inspection of the local authority school improvement arrangements (week 2).

Part 1: How local authorities will be inspected

Before the inspection

Introduction

5. Inspectors are likely to encounter many different ways in which local authorities conduct their statutory functions, including formal contractual partnerships for the delivery of school improvement services. Lead inspectors must gain an overview of how arrangements are made as early as possible and work with the approach that the local authority is taking. Inspectors should evaluate the

¹ Each element is distinct and conducted by separate inspection teams.

quality of the arrangements and their impact on improving school performance. Lead inspectors must recognise that local authorities discharge their statutory duties within a context of increasing autonomy of schools.

Inspectors' planning and preparation

6. The lead inspector must prepare for the inspection by gaining a broad overview of the local authority's recent performance. The outcomes of this preparation must be summarised in the evidence notebook.
7. Inspectors must use all available evidence to develop an initial overview of the local authority's performance as reflected in the local authority dashboard and local authority RAISEonline. Planning for the inspection should be informed by analysis of:
 - data from the local authority RAISEonline
 - the previous inspection report (where local authorities have been subject to a previous inspection)
 - issues raised about, or the findings from, the investigation of any qualifying complaints² about schools within the local authority catchment area
 - information from Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) monitoring inspections of schools that are in a formal Ofsted category of concern or those schools judged as 'requires improvement'
 - information available on the local authority website.
8. Week 2 of the inspection (the on-site inspection) will also be informed by the analysis of the outcomes of:
 - the focused inspection activity
 - the telephone survey of a wider group of schools in the local authority not under inspection.
9. The lead inspector should prepare and distribute brief joining instructions to the inspection team. These should include:
 - key information about the local authority and the timings for the inspection
 - a brief analysis of the pre-inspection information, including important areas to be followed up
 - an outline of inspection activity, for example planned meetings with elected members, senior officers, school improvement staff, governors, school-based staff; this will be finalised once on site.

² Ofsted has specific powers (under section 11A-C) of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) to investigate certain complaints known as qualifying complaints. Further guidance is available at www.gov.uk/complain-about-school

10. Lead inspectors should deploy their inspection team members as they see fit. All members of the inspection team must contribute to the evaluation of key findings and come to a collective view about the quality, and strengths and weaknesses, of school improvement arrangements in the local authority.
11. The lead inspector should plan sufficient time for holding team meetings and providing feedback to the local authority. This can be provided during and at the end of the inspection to ensure that the inspection is concluded on time.

Notification and introduction

12. A focused inspection activity will take place during week 1 of the inspection. The schools that are inspected will be notified of their inspection in the normal way.
13. The lead inspector will normally inform the authority up to five days before the start of the inspection of its school improvement arrangements. The local authority will only be notified once all the inspected schools have been contacted. Lead inspectors should bear in mind that they may not get through to the Director of Children's Services (DCS) or their equivalent immediately. They should reserve sufficient time to ensure that they make direct contact.
14. If the DCS or their equivalent is unavailable, the lead inspector should ask to speak to the most senior officer available with responsibility for the improvement of schools. Once the lead inspector has spoken to the local authority and is able to confirm that the inspection will take place, she/he will send formal confirmation to the local authority by email.
15. The purpose of the lead inspector's notification call is to:
 - inform the local authority of the inspection
 - inform the local authority of the focused inspection activity and the telephone survey of a wider group of schools
 - make arrangements for the inspection; this includes an invitation to the DCS or their equivalent and/or nominee to participate in main inspection team meetings
 - make arrangements for discussions with key elected members, senior officers and other staff/partners
 - make arrangements for a meeting with the lead elected member for education (or similar) and other officials and/or councillors
 - invite the local authority to share a summary of any self-evaluation, if available, and contextual background on day one of the inspection fieldwork
 - request that relevant documents from the local authority are made available as soon as possible from the start of the inspection
 - provide an opportunity for the local authority to raise any initial questions.

The telephone call is an important opportunity to initiate a professional relationship between the lead inspector and the local authority. It should be focused on practical issues. Inspectors should not use this as an opportunity to probe or investigate the local authority's performance. However, inspectors should make clear the reasons why the local authority was selected for inspection.

16. Inspectors should also request that the following information is made available at the start of the on-site inspection of the local authority in week 2:
- if available, a summary of any self-evaluation (if not already shared with the lead inspector) regarding arrangements for supporting school improvement and their impact, the current local authority strategic plan for education, including details of partnership arrangements, commissioning, brokerage and any evaluation reports and/or reports to elected members
 - documentation about how arrangements for monitoring, challenge, intervention and support are provided to maintained schools, including details of the application of statutory obligations and powers
 - the local authority data sets about school performance and any analysis of it
 - case study material regarding targeted school improvement work and its impact on maintained schools
 - school improvement or similar staff list, where relevant, with roles and responsibilities
 - information regarding strategies used to improve leadership and management in schools and evidence of its impact
 - information regarding strategies used to improve the standards of governance in maintained schools
 - evidence to demonstrate how the local authority uses any available funding to effect improvement, particularly how it is focused on areas of greatest need
 - information about how the local authority seeks to work constructively with academies, and any action taken to alert the Department for Education (DfE) through the Regional School Commissioner where there are concerns about standards or leadership in academies.

Requests for deferral

14. Ofsted does not anticipate having to defer the inspection of a local authority's school improvement service except in very exceptional circumstances, such as an extreme weather event or other major incident. Where local authorities have concerns about the timing of the inspection they may submit a deferral request, with any supporting reasons, to the lead inspector at the point of notification. Ofsted will consider each individual request on its merits. If a local authority requests a deferral of its inspection, the lead inspector must notify Ofsted via the appropriate Regional Director as soon as possible. The absence of the Chief

Executive or DCS or their equivalent is not normally a reason for deferring an inspection.

Evidence collected during week 1

Inspections conducted under section 5 or 8 of the Education Act 2005

15. Inspectors conducting section 5 and, where appropriate, section 8, inspections of schools in the local authority area will gather information about the use, quality and impact of any support and direction given to schools by the local authority by holding separate meetings with the headteacher, a representative of the body that is responsible for governance and, if available, a representative of the local authority.³ They will explore the following themes:
 - How well does the local authority understand the school's strengths and weaknesses, its performance and the standards the pupils achieve?
 - What measures are in place to support and challenge the school and how well do these meet the needs of the school?
 - What is the impact of the local authority's support and challenge over time to bring about school improvement?
16. During each inspection, the lead inspector will make every effort to seek the views of a representative of the local authority by, wherever possible, arranging a separate discussion with them. Where a face-to-face meeting cannot be arranged, the discussion may take place by telephone. Ofsted will take the views of the local authority into account in arriving at the overall findings of the focused inspection activity. During the separate discussions to be held with the headteacher and the chair of the governing body, the school will have the opportunity to provide its views about the impact of the support it receives, openly and frankly.
17. All evidence related to the three additional questions and the separate discussion with the headteacher, the body that is responsible for the governance, and representative of the local authority will be recorded on separate evidence forms.

Telephone survey

18. Evidence will also be gathered through a separate telephone survey of schools and academies within the local authority area that are not under inspection. Schools previously judged good or outstanding will be contacted in order to

³ These include monitoring inspections of schools that are judged as 'requires improvement', monitoring inspections of schools judged to be causing concern, and short inspections of good and outstanding non-exempt schools. They do not include Section 8 inspections carried out under the no formal designation non-exempt process or section 8 unannounced inspections of behaviour, which **do not** form part of focused inspection activity.

ascertain the extent to which they support other schools to improve and the extent to which the local authority facilitates or supports this. Schools previously judged as 'requires improvement' or inadequate will be contacted in order to explore the extent to which they recognised that their performance was not good or outstanding before they were inspected and how they receive support from the local authority in order to improve. Academies will be contacted to explore the nature and quality of the local authority's engagement and relationships with them.

19. The outcomes of these focused inspections and the telephone survey is passed to the local authority inspection team for analysis before week 2.

During the inspection

The start of the on-site inspection of the local authority

20. Inspectors must show their identity badges on arrival and ensure that the Chief Executive and DCS or equivalent have been informed of their arrival. Inspectors should ensure that inspection activity starts promptly.
21. The lead inspector should meet briefly with the Chief Executive and/or DCS or their equivalents or representatives at the beginning of the inspection to:
 - introduce team inspectors and other attendees
 - make arrangements for a longer meeting on day 1 to receive the local authority's contextual briefing and any other relevant matters
 - confirm arrangements for meetings with representatives of the local authority and schools
 - confirm arrangements for providing feedback at the end of each day and at the end of the inspection
 - request information about staff absence and other practical issues
 - share the outcomes of the focused inspection activity and telephone survey conducted the previous week.
22. A short team meeting should take place to clarify the areas to be explored, inspection activities and individual roles and responsibilities.

Gathering and recording evidence

23. Inspectors must spend as much time as possible gathering and triangulating evidence that will ensure a robust first-hand evidence base against the scope of the inspection in order to arrive at a fair conclusion about the strengths and weaknesses of the local authority's arrangements for supporting school improvement.
24. Inspectors must record their evidence clearly and legibly in the evidence notebook, ensuring that all relevant sections are completed for all evidence-

gathering activities. This includes records of analyses of data and the evidence that underpins key findings. The notebook should also be used to summarise the main points of discussion when feeding back to senior officers and elected members.

25. Notebooks may be scrutinised for the purposes of retrieval and quality assurance monitoring and in the event of a complaint. It is important that inspectors record accurately the time spent gathering the evidence in the notebook. Inspectors should highlight or identify any information that was provided 'in confidence'.
26. The lead inspector should then coordinate the summary of the evidence and judgements made in the summary notebook, including the outcomes of the focused inspection activity and telephone survey. This is used to inform final feedback and the inspection report and is part of the inspection evidence base.

The use of data on inspection

27. Inspectors should use a range of data to inform the evaluation of a local authority's performance, including that found in the local authority RAISEonline, and examination of the local authority's own data sets where available. No single measure or indicator determines findings.
28. The data, including that provided by the local authority, should be used to:
 - check the accuracy of the local authority's assessment of school performance, pupils' progress and attainment levels
 - check the robustness and accuracy of any local authority self-evaluation.

Meetings with elected members, senior and operational staff, school-based staff and governors and other stakeholders

29. It is important that every opportunity is taken to discuss the arrangements for supporting school improvement and their impact with the full range of senior and operational staff and stakeholders in the local authority.
30. Inspectors are likely to conduct meetings with a range of people to evaluate the impact of school improvement services on raising the quality of provision within the local authority. These may include:
 - elected Members of the Council, particularly those responsible for education
 - the Chief Executive
 - the DCS or their equivalent
 - the head of school improvement or their equivalent
 - local authority staff or contracted staff who support school improvement
 - school improvement data manager(s)

- the chair/vice chair of the schools' forum
 - other agencies involved in school improvement, such as National/Local Leaders of Education/training schools and/or other contracted partners
 - the post-16 strategic planning representative
 - headteachers of maintained schools subject to intervention or intensive support
 - headteachers of maintained schools subject to local authority monitoring
 - the headteacher of the virtual school and/or others responsible for this provision
 - headteachers of academies, including, where applicable, university technical colleges, studio schools and 16-19 academies to determine the effectiveness of relationships, where established
 - governors
 - governor support services (or their equivalent) staff
 - other stakeholders as appropriate.
31. In drawing on evidence from meetings with staff and other stakeholders, every effort must be made not to identify individuals. There may, however, be circumstances where it is not possible to guarantee the anonymity of the interviewee. Inspectors have a duty to pass on disclosures that raise child protection or safeguarding issues and/or where there are concerns about serious misconduct or criminal activity.

How the Director of Children's Services or their equivalent or representative is involved in the inspection

32. The lead inspector should meet the DCS or their equivalent or their nominee throughout the inspection to:
- provide an update on emerging issues and enable further evidence to be provided
 - allow the DCS, their equivalent or nominee to raise concerns, including any related to the conduct of the inspection or of individual inspectors
 - alert the DCS to any serious concerns.
33. The outcomes of all meetings with the DCS or their equivalent or nominee should be recorded in the evidence notebook.

Team meetings held during the inspection

34. The inspection team should meet briefly at different points during the course of the inspection to reflect on their respective evidence and discuss emerging findings. Where possible, the DCS or their equivalent or nominee should be invited to attend more formal team meetings where emerging and final

judgements are discussed. Inspectors should record such meetings in the evidence notebook.

35. It must be emphasised that final judgements are not made until the final team meeting towards the end of the inspection week. In some instances, inspectors may need to consider evidence further after the end of the on-site inspection before arriving at their judgements.

Arriving at the inspection findings

36. The team should ensure that time is set aside to prepare for the final team meeting and the final feedback. There should also be sufficient time planned for the team to meet to consider the evidence available and reach their conclusions. The findings should be recorded and key points for feedback should be identified as the meeting progresses. In advance of the final feedback to the local authority, the lead inspector should contact Ofsted's relevant Regional Director to discuss the findings.

Providing feedback to the local authority

37. At the end of the inspection, there must be a brief feedback meeting that includes, where possible, the DCS or their equivalent, the lead elected member and Chief Executive. It is for the lead inspector to decide, following discussion with the DCS or their equivalent, whether other senior staff should also be present. If it is appropriate, representatives from contracted partners for school improvement may also be invited by the DCS.
38. The lead inspector should explain to those present that the purpose of the feedback session is to share the main findings of the inspection and how the local authority can improve further. Those present may seek clarification about the judgements, but discussion should not be lengthy. Any feedback or comments should be in the form of professional and objective language and should not include informal remarks that may be personally damaging to the reputation of a member of staff or to the professionalism of the inspectors. Key points raised at the feedback should be summarised and recorded in the evidence notebook.
39. In the event that the DCS or their equivalent has declined or been unable to take up the opportunities to engage with the inspection team, the lead inspector should prepare a more extended formal feedback meeting. In such circumstances, the lead inspector should inform the DCS or their equivalent of the main findings in advance of the extended formal feedback meeting.
40. Before leaving, the lead inspector must ensure that the local authority is clear:
 - about the key findings, strengths and weaknesses and priorities for improvement

- that the inspection outcomes may be subject to change as a result of moderation and should, therefore, be treated as confidential until the local authority receives a copy of the final inspection report
- that the strengths and weaknesses and main findings of the inspection and the main points provided orally in the feedback will be referred to in the text of the report subject to quality assurance and moderation
- about the procedures leading to the publication of the report
- whether the inspection team is recommending further inspection at an appropriate point in the future.

After the inspection

Arrangements for publication of the report

41. The report will be forwarded to the DCS or their equivalent for a factual accuracy check shortly after the end of the inspection. The local authority will have five working days to respond. The lead inspector will respond to the comments about factual accuracy.
42. Local authorities will receive an electronic version of the final report, usually within 28 working days of the end of the on-site inspection.
43. Once a local authority has received its final report, it is required to take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that stakeholders receive a copy of the report within five working days. After that time, the report will be published on Ofsted's website. The local authority will be required to respond with a written statement setting out what action it proposes to take in light of the inspection findings and setting out a timetable for those actions. The local authority must publish the letter report and action plan.

Quality assurance and complaints

How are inspections quality assured?

44. Responsibility for assuring the quality of the inspection and the subsequent report lies with Ofsted. The lead inspector is expected to set clear expectations for the team and ensure that those expectations are met. The lead inspector must ensure that all judgements are supported by evidence and that the way in which the inspection is conducted meets the expected standard.
45. All inspections are subject to quality assurance visits. The lead inspector should explain clearly the purpose and likely format of the visit during the initial telephone conversation with the local authority.

What happens if a local authority has a concern or complaint during the inspection?

46. If a local authority raises a concern or complaint during the course of an inspection, the lead inspector should seek to resolve it directly. It is often easier to resolve issues informally at the earliest opportunity and this helps to avoid formal complaints later.

Part 2: The evaluation schedule – how inspectors make their assessments

47. The evaluation schedule sets out the sources of evidence and considerations that guide inspectors in judging the quality of school improvement arrangements provided by the local authorities they inspect. The schedule is not exhaustive and the inspection outcomes are subject to inspectors' professional judgement, taking account of the context of the local authority under inspection.
48. The evaluation schedule must be used in conjunction with the guidance set out in Part 1: How local authorities will be inspected.

Assessing the quality of arrangements for supporting school improvement

49. Inspection is primarily about evaluating how well the arrangements for supporting school improvement are working and whether they are having sufficient impact on improving standards, progress and attainment and the quality of provision in maintained schools and, where appropriate, other providers.
50. In order to assess the quality and impact of arrangements for supporting school improvement, inspectors must take into account the following aspects:
 - the effectiveness of corporate and strategic leadership of school improvement
 - the clarity and transparency of policy and strategy for supporting school improvement and how clearly the local authority has defined its monitoring, challenge, support and intervention roles
 - the extent to which the local authority knows schools and other providers, their performance and the standards they achieve and how effectively support is focused on areas of greatest need
 - the effectiveness of the local authority's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming maintained schools, including the use of formal powers available to the local authority
 - the impact of local authority support and challenge over time and the rate at which schools and other providers are improving, including the impact of the local authority strategy to narrow attainments gaps
 - the extent to which the local authority brokers and/or commissions high quality support for maintained schools and other providers, as appropriate
 - the success of strategies to support highly effective leadership and management in maintained schools and other providers
 - support and challenge for school governance

- the way the local authority uses any available funding to effect improvement, including how it is focused on areas of greatest need.
51. In making their judgements, inspectors draw on the available evidence, use their professional knowledge and consider the guidance in this document.

Local authorities and academies

52. Local authorities' statutory responsibilities for education are set out in sections 13 and 13A of the Education Act 1996. Under section 13A of the Act a local authority must exercise its education functions with a view to promoting high standards. Local authorities are discharging this duty within the context of increasing autonomy and changing accountability for schools, alongside an expectation that improvement should be led by schools themselves.
53. Inspectors should note that local authorities have no powers of intervention in relation to academy schools. Local authority powers of intervention as set out under Part 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 **do not** apply to academy schools, which are state-funded independent schools. The lead responsibility for standards in academies and holding sponsors to account for this lies with the Department for Education and the Regional Schools Commissioners.
54. Inspectors will evaluate the ways in which the local authority seeks to form relationships and work constructively with academies. However, the form of relationship between academies and local authorities is ultimately for the academies to determine.
55. Where the local authority has concerns about the performance of an academy, inspectors should explore whether the local authority has, within the confines of its responsibilities, raised these concerns directly with the Department for Education, through the Regional Schools Commissioner.

The quality of arrangements for supporting school improvement

56. When reporting on the quality, and strengths and weaknesses, of arrangements, inspectors must evaluate evidence for each of the key aspects above and identify pertinent strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors will then judge the extent to which the arrangements are having sufficient impact and making the important contribution to school improvement. Irrespective of how the arrangements in the local authority are configured, inspectors must consider the impact of the local authority in improving standards and the quality of education in maintained schools.

Guidance for inspectors

57. All key aspects of a local authority's arrangements for supporting school improvement in maintained schools should be evaluated. For reporting purposes, the aspects have been aligned into four reporting areas, as follows:
- corporate leadership and strategic planning
 - monitoring, challenge, intervention and support
 - support and challenge for leadership and management (including governance)
 - use of resources.
58. As previously stated, inspectors are likely to encounter significant diversity in the way in which local authorities configure their arrangements for supporting school improvement. Professional judgement should be applied at all times when evaluating the quality and impact of the arrangements on school improvement.
59. Inspectors should note that this framework for inspection is limited to school improvement. It is very likely that other important services have a part to play in supporting school improvement, such as human resources, early years services, admissions and school place planning and pupil and student services for those with additional needs. These services, where encountered, are not inspected discretely, as they fall beyond the remit of this inspection framework. However, where such services are making a significant contribution to coordinated strategies for improvement or otherwise, reference may be made to this when evaluating the strengths and weaknesses and arriving at the key findings.
60. Inspectors are reminded that where a local authority has concerns about standards or leadership in any academy within its area, the expectation is that these concerns should be brought to the attention of the DfE⁴ through the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Corporate leadership and strategic planning

61. Inspection must examine the impact of corporate and operational leadership and evaluate how efficiently and effectively the local authority school improvement arrangements are led and managed.
62. Inspectors should consider:
- the local authority's vision for better education for all pupils and how strategic planning has matched the delivery of those changes

⁴ *Schools causing concern: statutory guidance for local authorities*; Department for Education, May 2014; www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-causing-concern--2.

- the quality of its decision-making, including the effectiveness of its consultation with schools and other parties
 - the commitment of elected members and senior officers to school improvement
 - the degree to which schools understand the strategy and the priorities for school improvement.
63. School improvement arrangements are led and managed efficiently and effectively where the evidence indicates the following.
- Elected members and senior officers have an ambitious vision for improving schools, which is clearly demonstrated in public documents. Elected members articulate the local authority's strategic role and enhance schools' ability to self-manage. Accountability is transparent and efficiently monitored in a systematic way. Members' challenge of officers is well informed by high-quality information and data.
 - There is coherent and consistent challenge to maintained schools and other providers to ensure that high proportions of children and young people have access to at least a good quality education.
 - Communications and consultation with schools are transparent. Schools respect and trust credible senior officers, who listen and respond to their views and advice.
 - Senior officers ensure that strategies for improvement are understood clearly by maintained schools, other providers and stakeholders. There is clear evidence that the strategy is effective in enabling schools to improve and preventing schools from deteriorating.
 - Elected members and senior officers exercise their duties in relation to securing sufficient suitable provision for all 16-19-year-olds and in respect of raising the participation age (RPA) requirements.⁵

⁵ Local authorities should work with all local providers to ensure up-to-date mapping of all 16 to 19 provision across the full range of study programmes and make the information available to all learners in Years 10 and 11, their parents, all schools and academies, providers, employers and any other stakeholders: *Transforming 16 to 19 education and training: the early implementation of 16 to 19 study programmes* (140129), Ofsted, September 2014; www.gov.uk/government/publications/transforming-16-to-19-education-and-training-the-early-implementation-of-16-to-19-study-programmes.

64. In assessing the quality of the local authority's corporate leadership and strategic planning, inspectors will also consider the extent to which there is clarity and transparency of policy and strategy for supporting school improvement and how clearly the local authority has defined its monitoring, challenge, support and intervention roles. The local authority will be exercising this function well where there is clear evidence of the following.
- Priorities in the local authority's plans for school improvement (including brokerage and commissioning plans) are clearly articulated and reflect both national priorities and local circumstances.
 - Maintained schools and, where appropriate, other providers and stakeholders have been fully consulted on the strategy and priorities for school improvement.
 - Plans for school improvement demonstrate close integration with the programme for differentiated local authority support and intervention.
 - Reliable and valid measures are used to monitor progress of the school improvement strategy. Evaluation of its impact is comprehensive and regular and its effect on standards and effectiveness is identified.
 - The rationale for support is explicit, flexible, tailored to need and endorsed by schools and other providers. Every effort is made to coordinate partnership arrangements and expertise residing within schools.
 - The local authority promotes the effective participation of all 16- and 18-year-olds in education, training or an apprenticeship.
 - The local authority's definitions, arrangements, procedures and criteria for monitoring, challenge, intervention and support are clear, sharply focused, comprehensive and understood by school leaders and governors.

Monitoring, challenge, intervention and support

65. Inspection must examine the impact of the arrangements for monitoring, challenge, intervention and support in relation to maintained school improvement.

Inspectors should consider:

- how effectively or otherwise the local authority uses pertinent data and management information to inform actions within the area
- the effectiveness and responsiveness of its monitoring of schools
- the form, nature and particularly the impact of its challenge to schools
- how swiftly, robustly and effectively the local authority has intervened, particularly in schools causing concern
- the quality of the support that the local authority has led, brokered and commissioned (and monitored) to enable schools to improve standards and outcomes for children and young people

- the use and effectiveness of formal powers of intervention
- how effectively the local authority promotes and engages school-to-school improvement
- the extent to which any significant variation in school performance within the local authority area has been tackled successfully.

66. Inspectors will consider the extent to which the local authority understands the needs of its schools and other providers, their performance and the standards they achieve and how effectively it focuses support on areas of greatest need. The arrangements for monitoring, challenge, intervention and support in relation to maintained school improvement are likely to have a positive impact on schools where there is evidence of the following.

- Senior officers and schools make intelligent use of pertinent performance data and management information to review and/or revise strategies for school improvement.
- The local authority systematically and rigorously uses data and other information effectively to identify schools which are underperforming. It uses this information consistently to channel its support to areas of greatest need, resulting in interventions and challenge that lead to improved outcomes.
- The local authority provides or commissions and brokers a suitable range of performance data, including data about the local performance of different pupil groups (including those for whom the pupil premium provides support, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs), local benchmarking and post-16 destinations comparative data.⁶ Schools and other providers have high regard for this, which is influential in helping them to identify priorities for improvement.
- School improvement staff are well equipped to use data and to challenge and support schools.

67. Inspectors will also focus on the impact of the local authority's identification of, and intervention in, underperforming schools, including the use of formal powers available to them. In particular, inspectors will seek evidence of the following.

- Where appropriate, the local authority deploys its formal powers of intervention promptly and decisively.
- Weaknesses are typically identified early and tackled promptly and incisively. Headteachers, staff and governors in all maintained schools causing concern to Ofsted and the local authority, and those schools requiring improvement

⁶ Including data on retention, achievement and closing the gap at age 19.

to become good, receive well-planned, coordinated support, differentiated according to their needs.

- The local authority engages systems leaders to support and challenge those in need and actively promotes school-to-school improvement.
 - Progress of maintained schools and other providers is monitored regularly and to a planned programme. Reports to headteachers and governing bodies are fit for purpose. The work of the local authority with its underperforming schools results in sustained improvements in standards and provision.
 - The progress of schools causing concern is kept under continuous review by senior officers and scrutinised by elected members frequently and regularly. Robust action is taken where progress is judged to be insufficient.
 - Where the standards and/or leadership of an academy are a cause for concern, the local authority reports promptly such concerns to the DfE, through the relevant Regional Schools Commissioner.
68. The impact of local authority support and challenge over time and the rate at which maintained schools and other providers are improving will be a key focus of the inspection. Such support and challenge has a positive impact where the following are in evidence.
- Timely, differentiated intervention and coordinated strategies to support school leadership contribute to the improvement of school performance. All services recognise and actively support the autonomy of schools. Good and outstanding maintained schools are encouraged to take responsibility for their own improvement and to support other schools.
 - Support services, either provided or procured, are well coordinated and accurately focused to make a sustainable improvement to overall educational standards and performance.
 - The number of schools on the local authority's list of schools causing concern is reducing rapidly. Inequalities in the quality of education in schools and other providers in different areas of the local authority are reducing.
 - The support and challenge of the local authority is rigorous and sharply focused on areas of greatest need and results in sustained improvements in standards and provision.
 - With very few exceptions, schools are either at least good or improving rapidly.
69. Inspectors will also consider the extent to which the local authority commissions and brokers support for schools. Such arrangements are likely to have a positive impact on school improvement where there is evidence of the following.

- Schools are clear about what is provided by the local authority or brokered or commissioned from other sources. Support brokered (and monitored) by the local authority leads to sustained improvement.
- The local authority has detailed knowledge of good practice within and beyond the local authority that is drawn from wide sources of information and routinely shared with maintained schools. Local networks and collaborative work between schools are well established and linked to an identified strategy, with evidence of sustained improvement. There are well developed links with partners, including further education, vocational providers and higher education.

Support and challenge for leadership and management (including governance)

70. Inspection must examine how effectively the local authority arrangements promote and support highly effectively leadership, management and governance in schools.
71. Inspectors should consider:
- the effectiveness of the local authority's support for senior and middle managers across its maintained schools, from those graded outstanding to those in categories of concern
 - the precision with which support or intervention is identified, including the prompt application of statutory powers where appropriate
 - strategies for the recruitment and training of senior managers and governors
 - how effectively the local authority arrangements are promoting self-reliance and using systems and school-to-school resources
 - the support and challenge of the local authority for governing bodies; this should take account of the effectiveness of any brokered or commissioned or in-house training aimed at improving governors' ability to support and challenge the senior leadership team.
72. The local authority's strategies to support highly effective leadership, management and governance in schools and other providers are likely to have a positive impact where the following are in evidence.
- The local authority builds strong working relationships with education leaders in its area and encourages high-calibre school leaders to support and challenge others.
 - Training for headteachers, governors and middle managers, appropriately differentiated, is improving the capacity of maintained schools and other providers to develop accurate self-evaluation and secure continuous improvement.

- The local authority identifies accurately all maintained schools that need support or intervention for leadership, management and governance, including prompt application of statutory powers when necessary.
- The local authority brokers or commissions effective school-to-school or other support for leadership and management in weaker schools. Maintained schools are effectively signposted to where they can access high quality support.

73. It is equally important that local authorities have systems and strategies in place to effectively support and challenge those responsible for governance in schools. Inspectors will therefore focus on this aspect and expect to see evidence of the following.

- The local authority knows the governing bodies of maintained schools, including their strengths and weaknesses.
- Where maintained school performance and effectiveness are a cause for concern, the local authority acts promptly to remedy concerns, including applying its powers of intervention, with demonstrable evidence of rapid and sustained improvement. For academies, such concerns are reported promptly to the DfE, through the Regional School Commissioner.
- The local authority has a successful strategy for recruitment and retention of high quality governors. The local authority has access to experienced governors who are prepared to be deployed to, or support, governing bodies of schools causing concern or those schools which are not yet good.
- Governors are deployed where they are needed and any weaknesses in governance are being acted on.
- Training programmes for governors are of good quality, well attended and highly valued, using a range of modes of delivery. Training and local authority communications are clear about the respective roles of governing bodies and school leadership.

Use of resources

74. Inspection must examine how any available funding/resources are deployed to effect school improvement.

75. Inspectors should consider:

- how well the local authority has used any resources (such as staffing, local authority training courses, funding) and their sufficiency to support maintained schools to achieve best value for money
- how well the local authority enables maintained schools to purchase from a diverse market of excellent providers

- how resourcing decisions are made and understood by schools so that funding is delegated to the front line wherever possible and as much as possible reaches pupils
- how the use of resources delegated to maintained schools is monitored and challenged, where appropriate.

76. In particular, inspectors will consider the extent to which:

- resourcing decisions are based on an accurate analysis of the needs of schools
- the local authority undertakes regular and thorough reviews of the cost-effectiveness of any resource allocation and acts decisively and effectively on its findings
- the local authority's budget-setting process is based on a thorough and detailed review of spending needs and is both timely and transparent; consultation on the budget ensures that the deployment of local authority resources is well understood by schools.

77. The local authority rigorously monitors and challenges the sufficiency and use of resources and those delegated to schools.