



School Report Cards

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The Government plans to develop a new approach to school accountability that includes a School Report Card (SRC). The SRC will provide a short summary of a school's performance, published at least annually, so that it will be easier for parents to understand the information available, and will help schools focus on their goals for improvement. The SRC will report on outcomes across a wide range of performance: pupil attainment, pupil progress and well-being; a school's success at reducing the effect of disadvantage; and parents' and pupils' views of the school and the support they are receiving. It is intended that the new SRC will be introduced from 2011 but first it will be piloted over the next two years.

There has been consultation on the SRC proposals. The Government's plans are set out in the white paper *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century school system*, and in *A School Report Card: Prospectus*. The draft legislative programme set out in *Building Britain's Future* indicated that the forthcoming Improving Schools and Safeguarding Children Bill will include provision for the new SRC.

Whether the SRC should include an overall score or rating for a school is controversial. There are concerns that a single overall score may not provide a balanced summary view of the different aspects of a school's work. While recognising the complexity of this, the Government believes that without an overall score or grade on the SRC it would be difficult for parents to make meaningful comparisons between schools. The Government has decided that for the pilot programme the SRC will provide an overall score; however, a final decision on this will be made after further work has been done on the individual indicators and performance categories for the SRC during the pilot.

Once established the SRC will replace the existing Achievement and Attainment Tables as the main source of externally-verified information about a school's achievements; however, the detailed performance data used to prepare SRCs will continue to be published. Ofsted will continue to publish inspection reports on individual schools, and it is intended that Ofsted judgements should be shown on the SRC.

This Standard Note provides background on the SRC proposals, and relates to England only.

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1 Introduction

On 14 October 2008, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families made a statement on national curriculum tests, and announced the Government's plans to introduce a School Report Card (SRC):

Some parents find it difficult to judge how well their local schools are doing from national tests or Ofsted reports alone, so we also want to go further on school accountability. With the support of Ofsted, and following discussions with our social partners, it is our intention to introduce a new school report card for all primary and secondary schools. The school report card will help parents better to understand how well schools are raising standards and improving, compared with other schools in their area. It will show how each school is supporting the progress of every child and playing its role in supporting the wider development and well-being of children. It will draw on the successful model being used in New York city and elsewhere, but it will be designed to suit our schools. We will set out detailed proposals for consultation before the end of the year, with a White Paper to follow in the spring.¹

A Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) press release provided further background.²

Information on how the progress report was being used in New York City was provided at:

<http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/SchoolReports/ProgressReports/default.htm>

As part of the 14 October announcement the Secretary of State established an Expert Group on Assessment. The Expert Group said in its report that the DCSF should develop the School Report Card urgently.³

The DCSF commissioned a survey to garner the views of parents and the public on SRCs. This took the form a survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,634 adults, including

¹ [HC Deb 14 October 2008 c679](#)

² [DCSF Press release 14 October 2008](#)

³ [Report of the Expert Group on Assessment](#)

550 parents. The research was conducted in England in November 2008, and the results were published in a DCSF Research Report.⁴

2 Consultation on the SRC

An initial DCSF consultation paper on the general principles governing the design and implementation of a SRC was published on 8 December 2008, and the consultation closed on 3 March 2009.⁵

2.1 Rationale for the SRC

The consultation document recognised that much information is already published about schools' performance in the Achievement and Attainment Tables, Ofsted inspection reports, the online School Profile and in school prospectuses. However, it acknowledged that the Achievement and Attainment Tables and inspection reports are limited in some ways, and that the current arrangements could be significantly improved:

The Achievement and Attainment Tables are published annually and provide a wide range of data. But, partly because they contain so much, they can be difficult for parents to use, do not signal clearly the relative importance of different academic outcomes and, with the exception of the pupils' attendance rate, do not contain information about outcomes relating to other aspects of pupils' wellbeing. Although they contain information about the value added by schools as well as their pupils' attainment, the focus of the Tables remains narrow. For example, they do not report schools' success in raising the attainment of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds so that they have the same opportunities in life as their more advantaged peers. And, while the focus on age-related expectations is important – because reaching these levels provides children and young people with a good basis for continuing to progress in the next phase of learning – the sole use of threshold measures can mean that an undue premium is placed on the performance of a minority of pupils: those in Years 6 and 11, and those close to borderlines in their tests and examinations. A better system would equally support the progress of pupils both significantly below and significantly above these benchmarks.

6. Ofsted inspection reports and monitoring letters give a wider view of schools' effectiveness, taking account not only of the range of outcomes achieved but also of the quality of provision (especially the quality of teaching and its impact on learning), the effectiveness of leadership and management, and the school's capacity to improve. In so doing, inspection also provides an analysis and diagnosis of why a school's outcomes are as they are. Inspection reports are used by many parents, but most schools are only inspected once every three years and, for some, the interval between inspections may soon become longer; Ofsted inspection reports, on their own, cannot provide the balanced view of school performance at the frequency that parents and government require.

7. Schools sometimes see the information in the Achievement and Attainment Tables and the analyses based upon them as being in conflict with, rather than complementary to, the evaluations provided by Ofsted inspection reports. Another concern is that the combined effect of different, insufficiently co-ordinated accountability processes can make schools feel that they are placed under undue pressure, potentially distracting them from their greatest priority – to provide excellent education and development for all their pupils.

⁴ [School Accountability and School Report Card Omnibus Survey November 2008: Top Line Findings](#), DCSF Research report 107, May 2009

⁵ [A School Report Card: consultation document](#), DCSF December 2008

8. For all these reasons, we think that the arrangements for reporting school performance and holding them to account could be significantly improved. We believe that there is an opportunity to make the school accountability system more coherent, better co-ordinated, more streamlined and better able to recognise the full range of each school's achievements. However, this will only be possible if each school's performance is reported in a way which is clear, powerful, easily understood and easily used by school governors, parents and the public.

9. Our intention is that the School Report Card, with an overall score, should be the means by which we achieve this. It will complement rather than compete with Ofsted inspection reports and form the core of the process by which Ofsted selects schools for inspection. It will underpin a school's dialogue with its School Improvement Partner and its governors. At the same time, it will incorporate information currently presented in the Achievement and Attainment Tables, supplement it with other available information to provide a broader picture of each school's performance, and present it in a way that is fair, balanced, comprehensive and easily understood by parents and the general public. The School Report Card will set out the range of outcomes for which schools will be held to account, show the relative priority given to each outcome, and provide an indication of the degree of challenge faced by each school.⁶

2.2 The aims of the SRC and consultation on its key features

The aims were summarised in the consultation document as:

For parents and carers, the new School Report Card will:

- provide a clearer, more balanced and comprehensive account of each school's performance, which complements Ofsted's inspection reports;
- inform parents' choice of school and improve schools' accountability to parents; and
- provide information in a more easily understandable format, which is accessible to a wider audience.

For schools, the new School Report Card will:

- provide a single, clear and prioritised set of outcomes against which schools will be judged by all parts of the system, with predictable consequences for both excellent or poor performance;
- recognise the value of schools' work for all children and across all outcomes (but only hold schools to account for those outcomes they can influence); and
- provide a balanced account of outcomes achieved and the degree of challenge faced by each school.

For government the new School Report Card will:

- provide a means of achieving the vision for 21st century schools;
- help to hold schools predictably and consistently to account for what is most important; and
- incentivise schools in the right way, and remove perverse incentives.

⁶ *ibid.*, paras 5 to 9

For Ofsted, the new School Report Card will:

- support the school inspection process.

The consultation document proposed that a school's outcomes should be grouped into broad categories, and a score for the school's performance within each category included, with an overall score given on the SRC, calculated from its scores for each of the categories of performance. The categories of performance could include

- Attainment - the academic outcomes achieved by the pupils
- Pupil progress - the progress that pupils make during their time at school, taking account of their starting points and capabilities as well as of their final attainment
- Pupils' well-being - pupils' health, safety, enjoyment, opportunity and ability to make a positive contribution, and prospects of future economic wellbeing. This would help assess a school's performance against all five of the Every Child Matters outcomes.
- Narrowing gaps in pupil performance – i.e. efforts to raise the achievement of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of pupils.
- Parents' and pupils' views of the school, this could, for example, include views on how well a school engages parents and pupils' views on the extent to which they feel safe or experience bullying.

The context in which a school operates was an important consideration. The consultation document proposed that the SRC should reflect both the outcomes that the school achieves, and the scale of the challenges that it faces otherwise a strong performance in the face of challenging circumstances may be hidden behind what could otherwise be disappointing outcomes. Views were sought on whether 'stand alone' contextual information should be provided alongside scores that do not reflect the school's context; and/or whether some or all of the indicators that contribute to the scores for different categories should be contextualised.

2.3 Consultation responses

The consultation responses were summarised in the DCSF's [Analysis of responses to the consultation documents](#). This noted:

The significant majority of respondents supported the need for a School Report Card, recognising the need to capture the wider performance of schools beyond academic attainment. Just over a fifth (21% of respondents), over two thirds of whom represented primary schools, expressed disagreement in principle with the School Report Card. Among the reasons given were that it would not capture the flavour of the school, that it would be confusing for parents, and that it would represent a duplication of effort and an additional layer of accountability for schools.

There were mixed views on the proposed performance categories to be included on the School Report Card, with most respondents agreeing with the inclusion of 'Pupil Progress', 'Attainment' and 'Wider Outcomes'. There was less support for the inclusion 'Pupils' and Parents' Views' and 'Narrowing the Gaps', which were seen as more difficult to quantify.

Just over half of respondents agreed that each performance category should have a numerical score and/or an assigned rating. Although there was no majority support for

including an overall score or rating, respondents agreed that, if an overall score or rating were adopted, it should be based on performance in each of the categories in the School Report Card. Suggested alternatives to including an overall score or rating included: using the Ofsted inspection grade; providing a narrative report; scoring the individual categories without aggregating them; encouraging parents to visit the school; and adapting the Self-evaluation Form for public use.

Respondents were keen that the School Report Card should hold information on a school's context as a separate item, as it would help to give parents background information for the scores and ratings. There was also support for contextualising the scores for 'Attainment', 'Pupil Progress' and 'Wider Outcomes' as this would be fairer to those schools in the most challenging circumstances.

Most respondents thought that the School Report Card should show separate information about the school's performance in the previous three years. It was believed that this would give a better indication of trends, by ironing out annual peaks and troughs which were particularly prevalent in smaller schools where yearly cohorts could have significant variations.

There was agreement for including information about the school's contribution to its local partnerships in the School Report Card as this was considered to be an increasingly important aspect of a school's performance. There was some uncertainty however on how this could be measured.

Most respondents agreed that the School Report Card should cover all maintained schools, including special schools, Pupil Referral Units and alternative provision, in due course. There was also support for showing separate information about the effectiveness of sixth forms and the Early Years Foundation Stage where appropriate.

Including the latest Ofsted judgement on the School Report Card was widely accepted, with the caveat that it should only be shown if it was recent to ensure that it gave a current view of the school. However, respondents envisaged occasions where the Ofsted judgement could differ from the overall score or rating on the School Report Card, which could be confusing for parents.

There was agreement with proposals to agree a common set of indicators for the School Report Card and Ofsted's risk assessment, and that the School Report Card should take the place of Ofsted's proposed health check report. Respondents felt that both measures would obviate duplication and added bureaucracy. Most respondents were of the opinion that the School Report Card should be published annually.

The proposal to end the requirement on schools to complete the School Profile was welcomed. Respondents felt that to retain the School Profile alongside the School Report Card would be an unnecessary duplication, though there was a view that its ability to provide a fuller picture of the school could be usefully incorporated into the School Report Card.

3 The Government's plans: the white paper and prospectus

The white paper *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century school system*, published on 30 June 2009, included the Government's plans to introduce the SRC.⁷ Alongside the white paper the DCSF and Ofsted jointly published *A School Report Card: Prospectus*.

⁷ Cm 7588

The main components of the school accountability and improvement framework proposed in the white paper are:

- a. continual self-improvement – based on thorough and regular self-evaluation;
- b. the new School Report Card – providing clear, regular external assessments of each school's performance for the local community, wider public and prospective parents, local and central government, and Ofsted;
- c. Ofsted inspection – in-depth, qualitative, professional judgement of the school's overall effectiveness, complementing the annual, outcomes-based School Report Card; and
- d. SIPs (School Improvement Partners)– appointed by the local authority⁸, who will monitor schools' performance, provide support and challenge, ensure issues are addressed through an effective school improvement plan, and help to broker external support.⁹

The white paper confirmed that the SRC will report on outcomes across the breadth of school performance: pupil attainment, progress, and wellbeing; a school's success in reducing the effect of disadvantage; and parents' and pupils' views of the school and the support they are receiving. The Prospectus considered which indicators might underpin these performance categories, including recognition of functional skills qualifications in line with the recommendation of the Expert Group on Assessment, and standards of behaviour. The Government is also considering how best to recognise partnership working and whether the SRC (or elements of it) could be aggregated to recognise formal partnerships.

The white paper said that with the introduction of the SRC the Government will remove the legal requirement on schools to produce a School Profile, and that the SRC will supersede the Achievement and Attainment Tables as the central source of externally-verified information on the outcomes achieved by schools. The detailed performance data used to prepare the SRC will continue to be published.¹⁰

The SRC and Ofsted inspection of a school will be complementary but different elements of the school accountability framework. The latest Ofsted judgement will be included on the SRC; however the Prospectus states that this judgement should not contribute to the calculation of the report card's scores.¹¹ The SRC will contribute to Ofsted's risk assessment:

7. Our intention is that the indicators that underpin the School Report Card will form the core of the process of risk assessment that Ofsted will use to select schools for inspection. This congruence, particularly with regard to the indicators of pupil wellbeing and the satisfaction of parents and carers, will be developed over time, as individual indicators are piloted and evaluated. In the short term, Ofsted will use the selection process developed for the launch of the new inspection arrangements in September 2009. In determining whether schools should be inspected, Ofsted will not only use indicators, but also consider other information of a qualitative nature (for example, concerns reported by the local authority), which would not be included in the School Report Card.

⁸ For Academies, subject to Parliamentary approval, the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA)

⁹ White paper, paragraph 4.19

¹⁰ *ibid.*, paragraphs 4.24 and 4.25

¹¹ *A School Report Card: Prospectus*, paragraph 6

8. We intend that the School Report Card alongside school inspection will become central to the accountability framework and will be used by all – the school, its parents, its Governors, its School Improvement Partner and Ofsted – to inform school evaluation and become a trigger for intervention, based on a mutual understanding of the school's performance across a broad range of outcomes.¹²

The Government strongly believes that the SRC should give an overall score for the school's performance, and this approach will be developed during the pilot; however, the Government has acknowledged the potential difficulties involved in developing a robust, credible and accepted means to draw together school performance data into an overall score. A final decision will be made once detailed work on this has been conducted:

20. Of course, parents and other stakeholders will rightly have different views about what –for them – constitutes good outcomes for a school. Different parents will be looking for different strengths, reflecting the specific interests, aptitudes and needs of their children. By reporting all the underpinning performance data on the School Report Card, different users will still be able to look at the particular aspects of performance that interest them most – identifying areas of a school's work that are particular strengths; or areas in a strong school that continue to need improvement. The inclusion of an overall score will, however, allow that detailed consideration to take place in the context of a general understanding of the school's overall performance.

21. For the reasons above, we strongly favour the inclusion of an overall score on the School Report Card. However, we recognise that it is difficult to reach final conclusions in the absence of a clear proposal on how the overall score would be derived; that can only be finalised once much of the detailed work on the individual indicators and performance categories for the School Report Card has progressed. For example, we need to pilot indicators and engage stakeholders in further discussion about the relative weightings of the performance categories and the indicators within them so that, if finally adopted, the overall score and rating command wide acceptance in schools and with the general public. **While we proceed with the presumption that the School Report Card will incorporate an overall score, we will return to make a final decision once the detailed work has been concluded. There will be full consultation about these matters before a final decision is taken.**¹³

The Prospectus considers the proposed approach to be used in the pilot to the different performance categories and indicators that will contribute to the overall score on the SRC, and looks at related issues including the approach to measuring schools' success in securing positive outcomes for pupils with special educational needs, and partnership working and the SRC.

A very important consideration is how to take account of the school's context in the information provided in the SRC. The Government believes that absolute attainment must be clear in the SRC. It therefore proposes that the indicators of pupil attainment should not be contextualised in any way but that the pupil progress category should be the means through which the context of the pupil intake will be taken into account.

The pilot is to last for two years from September 2009. It is intended that the new SRC will be introduced from 2011 for all mainstream primary and secondary schools (including Academies); and, after considering the lessons learned, it will be developed for special schools, Pupils Referral Units and alternative provision. During the pilot the alignment of the

¹² [A School Report Card: Prospectus](#), paragraph 7 and 8

¹³ [A School Report Card: Prospectus](#), paragraphs 20 and 21

SRC and the Framework for Excellence (FfE) will be considered as well as how the SRC can reflect results from the FfE for school sixth forms. The pilot will also consider how for those schools with early years provision, the effectiveness of their early years provision will be represented in the SRC.¹⁴ Further details on the pilot are given in section 5 of this note below.

The Government proposes that the SRC should be published at least annually, and that the results of any more recent inspections should be incorporated as soon as possible.¹⁵ An illustrative example of a SRC is given in the Annex to the Prospectus.

4 Selection of comment on the white paper's SRC proposals

Section 2.3 of this Standard Note refers to the summary of responses to the DCSF consultation paper on the SRC proposals. The following, which reproduces extracts from comments made by a selection of organisations on the subsequent white paper, is not intended to be comprehensive coverage of reaction. (Any Member who is interested in obtaining reaction from a particular organisation should contact the author of this note who can seek further information.)

The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT):

Measures such as the School Report Card have the potential to be a useful tool for schools and their whole communities but not if the broader, more representative outcomes which are recorded are to be reduced to a single, meaningless "grade". This is 'reductio ad absurdum' in its most extreme form.¹⁶

Philip Parkin, the General Secretary of Voice, said:

I am appalled that the proposed school report cards will give an overall 'grade'. Like any institution or organisation, a school has strengths and weaknesses across the many aspects of its work. Schools are already the most over-inspected, over-accountable, minutely examined institutions in the country so a 'B plus, could do better' style of mark would be shallow, pointless and meaningless.¹⁷

Christine Blower, General Secretary of the NUT, said:

"While there are some things that I welcome within the schools white paper, particularly the commitment to one-to-one tuition, the white paper also represents missed opportunities.

"The intention of the school report card may well be to give a rounded picture of the school but the Government's idea of judging schools by a single crude letter is a great disappointment. Neither this nor league tables give a proper picture of what schools do."¹⁸

¹⁴ [A School Report Card: Prospectus](#), paragraphs 126 and 127

¹⁵ [A School Report Card: Prospectus](#), paragraph 131

¹⁶ [Education White Paper 2009 - Curate's Egg or Unfinished Symphony?](#), NAHT, 1 July 2009

¹⁷ [Voice: the union for education professionals, Statement on the Education White Paper, 30 June 2009](#)

¹⁸ [21st Century Schools White Paper, NUT news comment, 30 June 2009](#)

Dr Mary Boustead, General Secretary of the ATL, said:

"We remain deeply sceptical about school report cards, which would still be based on flawed data so continue to give a partial view of how well schools are meeting pupils' needs."¹⁹

The Local Government Association:

It is unclear whether local authorities will be obliged to use a combination of the SRC and Ofsted judgements as the sole means of measuring school progress and triggering intervention, notwithstanding local knowledge and data.

It is unclear how the SRC coheres with the Framework for Excellence reporting for post 16 learning institutions for schools with sixth forms. This is potentially bureaucratic for those schools and different processes pre- and post-16 are unhelpful in ensuring understanding and transparency in choices being made by parents and young people, particularly in the context of 14-19 curriculum and courses. We believe there should be one coherent reporting system.²⁰

The General Teaching Council for England (GTCE):

39. The GTC has contributed to the development of the school report card (SRC) proposals and its views on the prospectus are appended to this response. We maintain the view that the various stakeholders in school accountability have, legitimately, differing information needs and that it may not be possible to create one device for so many audiences and purposes. The GTC remains to be convinced of the availability of robust, outcomes-based, school-level data in some of the areas such as partnership and contribution to wider well being that would have to be included if the SRC is to give a rounded picture of the school. It will be very important that the pilots are assessed against the original aim of the SRC: ensuring intelligent accountability across the full range of a school's responsibilities. If it cannot fulfil this aim it should be rethought.

40. The GTC notes that most respondents to the recent consultation shared its scepticism about the usefulness of a single overall grade and is disappointed to see that the government is minded to proceed with it, without support or compelling evidence.²¹

5 Pilot: next steps

The pilot is to last for two years from September 2009. The results of the pilot will be published at regular intervals.²² The Prospectus sets out what will happen during the first and second years of the pilot:

In the first year of piloting we will

- develop the performance indicators which might be used in the Pupil Attainment, Pupil Progress, and Narrowing Gaps in Pupil Performance categories, and exploring the weightings to be used to produce a score for each of those categories
- test the robustness of the 16-19 Progression Measures for use in the Pupil Wellbeing category

¹⁹ *Education White Paper is a mixed bag – ATL, 30 June 2009*

²⁰ *LGA briefing on White Paper – Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future: building a 21st century schools system 30 June 2009: <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/2438583>*

²¹ *A response to the White Paper from the General Teaching Council for England, September 2009*

²² *A School Report Card: Prospectus*, paragraphs 137 to 139

- consider which background information about a school should be included on the Report Card and the possibility of a free format field to be completed by the school to demonstrate unique aspects – e.g. the school ethos statement
- test options for contextualising the School Report Card information
- begin to develop design features – including how the top level information and underpinning data will be presented on the School Report Card; and how the School Report Card will link to other sources of information
- continue to consider the need for a single overall grade and how it might be constructed

In the second year of piloting we will

- build on lessons learnt in the first year – agreeing and refining methodologies, and improving systems for data collection
- when survey data becomes available, develop the indicators which might be used for Pupil Wellbeing, and for Parents' Perceptions and Pupils' Perceptions – including exploring the weightings to produce a score for each of those categories
- build the public website, based on lessons learnt in the first year
- continue to consider the need for a single overall grade and (with a full dataset now available) test how it might be constructed
- test options for reflecting a school's work with children with Special Educational Needs and disability
- pilot a means of showing a school's performance over time
- confirm our arrangements for publication of the School Report Card alongside the Framework for Excellence²³

²³ [A School Report Card: Prospectus](#), paragraphs 138 and 139