



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

**FRAMEWORK
FOR THE
INSPECTION
OF
EDUCATION ACTION ZONES**

Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools

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INTRODUCTION

1. This framework provides the basis on which the progress of Education Action Zones is to be evaluated and reported to the Secretary of State as part of an evaluation of special national programmes to raise achievement and promote social inclusion in disadvantaged areas.

BACKGROUND

2. Education Action Zones are partnerships usually formed between groups of schools, their local education authority (LEA) and other organisations. Twenty-five zones were established with a start date of either September 1998 or January 1999. A second round of 47 zones has been established with start dates no later than September 2000.

3. Education Action Zones are intended to tackle entrenched problems of underachievement and social exclusion in disadvantaged urban and rural areas. Each zone is run by an Action Forum with representatives of schools and other partners. The Forum is a corporate body with exempt charitable status set up by statutory instrument arising from the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. Each zone is managed by a Director who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the zone. The Forum is required to draw up and implement an action plan agreed with the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). This sets out the zone's aims, objectives and strategies for raising standards and the targets to show how they will be achieved.

4. Education Action Zones are intended to encourage innovative approaches to raising standards and have been given flexibility in deciding action to pursue both in school and in other settings. In addition, zones are given priority access to other Government programmes, such as specialist schools, early excellence centres, programmes for gifted and talented pupils, and literacy and numeracy summer schools. Zones, or areas within zones, may also benefit from Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding and health or employment initiatives.

THE STATUTORY BASIS FOR INSPECTION

5. Inspections of Education Action Zones will be conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) under the School Inspections Act 1996. From time to time HMI may be joined by additional inspectors authorised under paragraph 2 of schedule 1 of the same Act.

THE PURPOSE OF INSPECTION

6. The inspection will:

- (i) assess the effectiveness of zone management by evaluating
 - the quality of the zone's planning, ways of working and use of resources;
 - the productiveness of the partnerships the zone has developed;
 - how well the zone monitors and evaluates its work;
 - how well the zone disseminates the outcomes of its activities.
- (ii) assess the extent to which the elements of the zone's programme
 - meet or are likely to meet the objectives set by the zone, through innovative approaches or otherwise;
 - connect with and enhance other improvement work;
 - contribute to raising standards and promoting social inclusion among the groups targeted;
 - are cost-effective and sustainable.

7. Evidence will be sought about the benefits brought about by elements of the zone programme in schools and other settings, including any which:

- improve teaching and learning, especially to raise standards in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology;
- extend school provision, including provision for study support;
- enhance support for pupils and young people, including at points of transition and in conjunction with relevant agencies;
- improve parental involvement in schools and provision for family learning.

CONDUCT OF THE INSPECTION

The Code of Conduct

8. HMI and any additional inspectors appointed under paragraph 2 of the Schools Inspection Act 1996 will:

- conduct themselves in a courteous and professional manner;
- evaluate evidence objectively and impartially;
- report honestly and fairly and communicate clearly and frankly;
- respect the confidentiality of information;
- deal appropriately with queries, concerns and complaints.¹

The Selection of Zones for Inspection

9. The selection of zones for inspection in each term will reflect a geographical spread and the range of activities zones are undertaking. Inspections of individual zones will not

¹ A copy of the OFSTED complaints procedure is available from the Corporate Services Group, OFSTED, Alexandra House, 33 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE. Telephone 0207 421 6567.

be carried out within 18 months of their programme starting date, although information may be sought from these new zones about plans and developments in order to provide a national picture of intentions and progress, and such information may contribute to the evidence for a future inspection.

10. In some cases it will be possible to carry out the zone inspection at the same time as an inspection of the LEA's support for school improvement conducted under section 38 of the Education Act 1997. This would have the advantage of reducing the overall burden of inspection and of enabling the relationship between the work of the zone and the work of the LEA to be evaluated without increasing the cost of inspection. In this case, suitable arrangements for the inspection and reporting process will be discussed with the Chief Education Officer and the zone Director. Separate reports on the LEA and the zone would be produced.

The Process of Inspection

Stage 1: initial contacts

11. Zones to be inspected will be given a minimum of forty working days notice of the main inspection period.² A meeting will be offered between the lead inspector and the zone Director and the Chair (or other representative) of the Forum to discuss the arrangements. The zone Director will be asked to provide at this stage:

- a list of major activities, such as training or conferences, which are planned for the half-term in which the inspection takes place;
- a list of the major partners and other agencies with which the zone has links.

Stage 2: the provision and analysis of evidence

12. The zone Director will be asked to provide:

- (a) information on the zone's context, plans, structure, staffing, activities, connections with other local improvement work, and expenditure; and
- (b) an evaluation of the quality of the zone's work and, where relevant, obstacles to progress. This may include or be supplemented by evidence of monitoring and evaluation by the zone or by other agencies and illustration of activities in schools and other settings.³

13. The lead inspector will circulate a questionnaire to all schools and other settings involved in the zone asking for views on the planning, conduct and quality of the zone's work and the benefits which have accrued. Views will also be sought in writing from the major partners in the zone and, where relevant, from local services which are involved in associated developments, such as action on employment and health. The

² Working days include days on which schools are normally open and school holidays of five or fewer days.

³ A list of the information sought is given in Appendix 1.

questionnaire and written responses will be treated in confidence and views will not be attributed to named organisations in the report without their agreement.

14. The lead inspector will assemble existing evidence about the provision in and the performance of schools in the zone before and after the zone began work. The DfEE will provide information about the performance of pupils in schools in the zone. OFSTED evidence will include information from inspections and HMI visits, among them visits to schools which are contributing to the national sampling of the impact of area-based improvement programmes.

15. On the basis of the evidence available at this stage, the lead inspector will produce a short summary of salient points and a list of issues to be pursued in the inspection. This will be discussed with the zone Director and the Chair (or other representative) of the Forum and will help to determine the further enquiries to be made.

16. Not all the zone's work will be covered. The main inspection will normally focus on three or four main themes as illustrations of the zone's work. Inspectors will look for evidence that the activities organised are relevant to need, coherently planned, efficiently managed and are effective, or likely to be effective, in raising standards and promoting social inclusion among the targeted groups. Criteria for judging the quality and outcomes of work on particular themes will draw, where relevant, on the process and performance measures established by the zone and on the criteria for judgement in the OFSTED Framework for the inspection of schools.⁴

Stage 3: the main inspection period

17. The main inspection will normally be carried out by two or three inspectors over no more than a week. However, where relevant events are planned for the term, inspectors will endeavour to attend those taking place before or shortly after the main inspection period which may be of particular value in gaining a picture of the zone's work.

⁴ *Inspecting Schools* and the associated *Handbooks for inspecting primary and nursery schools, secondary schools, and special schools and pupil referral units* (OFSTED, The Stationery Office, 1999). See also *Evaluating Educational Inclusion: Guidance for Inspectors and Schools* (OFSTED, 2000), which covers the contribution of specially-funded programmes to the promotion of inclusion.

18. The main inspection will begin with a presentation by personnel from the zone of aspects of its work. Arrangements thereafter will depend on the themes being pursued. They will involve consideration of additional documentation, including records of activities and outcomes. They will also include discussions with zone staff and representatives of the Forum and may involve discussions with the LEA (whether with the Chief Education Officer or nominees) and representatives of other major partners, headteachers, governors and other staff in schools, and representatives of community organisations and interests.⁵

19. Visits will be made to a selection of schools or other settings in which the zone is working to collect evidence of the extent to which improvements are under way or achieved. The basis of the visits will be discussed with the headteacher or organiser. Inspectors will look for evidence of how the zone activities are contributing to any improvement in provision and outcomes for the targeted groups, including through links with other improvement programmes. Such evidence will be sought from documentation, data and discussion. It may also be sought, in appropriate cases, from direct observation, but this will not normally form the major part of visits.

20. Visits will not exceed one day; where the visits are to update information gained in earlier HMI visits or section 10 inspections, they will be shorter than a day. There will be no written report on the visit and schools will not be named in the report on the zone. (Evidence from the visits will be used in subsequent national survey reports and these may identify schools or other provision in which good practice was seen.)

Stage 4: reporting

21. Each inspection of a zone will lead to a short report that will provide:

- a summary of the main judgements on:
 - the extent to which zone management is providing an effective, efficient and productive basis for schools to work with business and other partners to achieve the objectives agreed for the zone;
 - the extent to which the zone is contributing to raising standards and promoting social inclusion, including through the use of innovative approaches and the links made with other local programmes.
- a brief analysis, based on information provided earlier by the zone Director, of the zone's context, structure, staffing, plans, activities, connections with other improvement work, and expenditure;
- a commentary on salient issues, taking account of views expressed by those involved in the work of the zone, any relevant evaluation by the zone or others, and the inspection team's findings in the inspection;
- recommendations that the zone should consider.

⁵ Illustration of the main inspection timetable is given in Appendix 2.

22. A draft of the report will be given in confidence to the zone Director and the Chair (or other representative) of the Forum to enable a check to be made on factual accuracy, with a meeting with the lead inspector held if necessary. A copy of the report will also be sent at this stage to the Standards and Effectiveness Unit in the DfEE so that it is able to consider the implications of the report at an early stage.

23. The final report will be sent to the zone Director for circulation within five working days of receipt to all members of the Forum and to all schools and major partners in the zone. The lead inspector will be available to discuss the findings of the report with the Forum. The zone will wish to make copies of the report available to members of the public on request. HMCI will send the report to the Secretary of State and may arrange subsequently for it to be published.

24. Following a zone inspection, the Secretary of State expects that the zone's next action plan will take account of recommendations in the inspection report.

APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION FROM THE ZONE

The list of information which the zone is asked to supply is illustrative and not exhaustive. It is expected that zones will make an important contribution to the inspection from the information which they hold. Zones may supply information in the form of existing documents.

1. Context

- information on the context of the zone and the schools and communities which it supports.

2. Management

- the membership of the Forum
- the zone's executive structure
- the application to establish the zone, a statement of the zone's objectives, reviews of progress, and the current zone action plan
- minutes of the three most recent meetings of the Forum and its committees and working groups
- evidence of the application of performance review and Best Value principles, including the latest audit report.

3. Partnerships

Evidence of partnership and consultation arrangements with:

- zone schools and other education providers
- the Local Education Authority
- business
- other partners or agencies
- the wider community.

4. Funding

For the most recent complete financial year and for the current financial year:

- the resources available to the zone, including sponsorship
- the allocation (or planned allocation) of resources, including the support provided for each initiative in each zone school
- expenditure on zone staff (with expenditure shown separately for administrative, teaching, classroom support, and other staff)
- other expenditure on zone administration.

5. Zone Activities and Outcomes

- any targets set for the zone and for individual schools within the zone, with the rationale for those targets
- the activities supported by the zone and evidence of their impact, including any evidence arising from monitoring or evaluation by the zone itself or by other agencies.

APPENDIX 2: SCHEDULE FOR STAGES 2, 3 AND 4 OF THE INSPECTION

Stage 2: pre-inspection preparation

1. A meeting in advance of the inspection will be held between the lead inspector and the zone Director and the Chair (or other representative) of the Forum to discuss the arrangements for the inspection.
2. A questionnaire will be sent to schools and views sought from the zone's partners.
3. The lead inspector will draw up a list of salient points and issues to be pursued for discussion with the zone Director and the Chair (or other representative) of the Forum.

Stage 3: the main inspection period

1. The week of inspection in the zone will normally include:
 - (i) a presentation about the zone's work by zone staff;
 - (ii) discussions with:
 - the zone Director and other zone staff
 - representatives of the Forum
 - representatives of major partners
 - representatives from zone schools
 - where possible, representatives of the community served by the zone.
 - (iii) visits to schools and other settings in the zone.
2. Illustrative programme for the inspection week:

Monday	presentation by zone
Tuesday	discussions with zone staff and representative groups
Wednesday	visits to schools and other settings and further discussions if needed
Thursday	visits to schools and other settings

Stage 4: reporting

1. A draft of the report will be provided in confidence to the zone Director to enable a check on factual accuracy, with a meeting with the lead inspector if necessary, within 25 working days of the end of the inspection.
2. The final report will be sent to the zone for circulation within 35 working days of the end of the inspection.
3. The lead inspector will be available after the report has been circulated to discuss its findings with the Forum if required.