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Best practice in self-evaluation

A survey of schools, colleges and local authorities

**Better
education
and care**

This report looks at the factors which contribute to effective self-evaluation. It is based on visits to 12 schools, seven further education colleges and three local authorities where previous inspection reports identified strong practice in this area. The findings are intended to disseminate best practice and to provide help to institutions improve this aspect of their work. The report complements *Improving performance through school self-evaluation and improvement planning*, published jointly by the DfES and Ofsted in June 2006.

Of particular interest to:

Schools, further education and sixth form colleges and local authorities and national bodies.

Age group

All

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Executive summary

This report presents the results of a survey conducted in the autumn term 2005 and the spring term 2006. It aimed to identify the common features of best practice in self-evaluation, as well as investigating those aspects that are weaker, together with the reasons for this. It includes case studies illustrating effective practice, with the aim of bringing about improvement.

Inspectors visited 12 schools, seven further education (FE) colleges and three local authorities, selected from those where previous inspections had reported positively on self-evaluation and quality assurance.

The success of self-evaluation in these institutions reflected to a considerable degree the high priority given to it by senior managers. Headteachers, principals, council leaders and managers shared a firm belief that, to bring about improvement, it was essential to have a clear idea of where strengths and weaknesses lay. This derived from regular internal review supported, but not replaced, by external inspection. Thus, self-evaluation was clearly built into the management systems.

Another significant contributor to success was the commitment and full involvement of people at all levels in the organisation. Self-evaluation was an integral part of the culture and not simply a paper exercise completed for bureaucratic purposes.

In all cases, the quality of self-evaluation was enhanced by increasingly sophisticated use of a widening range of performance indicators. Although these were based on national data, institutions increasingly were developing local data in order to analyse in more detail and cast light on their own circumstances.

Institutions may be asked to present evidence of their self-evaluation, such as before a section 5 inspection or the annual performance assessment (APA) of a local authority. However, in the best instances, self-evaluation was part of a continuous process, governed by the needs of an institution rather than by external requirements.

An important element within these institutions was the emphasis they placed on seeking the views of those who received their services, particularly pupils and students. In local authorities, the move towards integrated children's services had extended the range of those involved in self-evaluation to include new partners, such as health services and the criminal justice system.

Schools, colleges and local authorities were also beginning to work in partnership with their peers to gain external views. However, inspection provided the main source of external validation of self-evaluation. This inevitably found institutions at very different points of development. The survey

showed that good self-evaluation led to improved outcomes for children and young people.

This report recommends that self-evaluation should focus specifically on the impact provision makes on outcomes for children and young people; the views of a wide range of stakeholders should be used to inform it. The findings from self-evaluation should inform priorities in development planning, and schools, particularly primary schools, should extend self-evaluation to embrace the whole curriculum, including greater focus on the foundation subjects of the National Curriculum. Schools and colleges should identify the precise characteristics of strong and weak pedagogy to help them focus more rigorously on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Key findings

- ❑ Institutions were at very different stages of development. All, however, were revising their self-evaluation systems to cope with change (see Notes, pp.17–19).

Best practice

- ❑ Headteachers, principals and council leaders gave priority to and led self-evaluation personally. They had a clear overview of their institutions, based on an accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses.
- ❑ Self-evaluation was integral to the culture of the organisations. People at all levels were committed to it and fully involved.
- ❑ Self-evaluation was a continuous process, governed by the needs of the institution rather than the requirements of external bodies.
- ❑ Self-evaluation was clearly built into management systems. External inspection supported but did not replace internal review. It provided, however, the main external source of validation.
- ❑ An increasingly sophisticated use of a widening range of performance indicators enhanced the quality of self-evaluation.
- ❑ Rigorous analysis of strengths and weaknesses, particularly of teaching and learning, led to the clear identification of priorities and strategies for improvement.
- ❑ Sharply focused monitoring, based on clear indicators, helped institutions to measure the extent to which their work improved outcomes for pupils and young people.
- ❑ The views of those who received services, particularly learners but also parents and carers, were actively sought and influenced decision making.

Weaker practice

- ❑ In schools and colleges, indicators to identify the personal development and well-being of young people and the outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda were at a very early stage of development.

- ❑ Schools, colleges and local authorities were only beginning to solicit the views of external partners and peers to inform their self-evaluation.
- ❑ The lack of detailed information on pupils' progress in the foundation subjects in primary schools detracted from the rigour and quality of schools' self-evaluation.

Recommendations

To extend the best practice in self-evaluation, schools, colleges and local authorities should:

- take account of the views of a wide range of stakeholders to inform self-evaluation
- use the findings from self-evaluation to inform the priorities in planning for development
- focus self-evaluation specifically on the impact of provision on the outcomes for children and young people.

Primary schools should:

- extend their self-evaluation to reflect the whole curriculum.

Leadership and management

1. In all the institutions visited, a major contributor to the success of self-evaluation was high quality leadership. Headteachers, principals, directors and council leaders saw self-evaluation as the critical factor in improving provision and they ensured it was integral to the culture of their organisations.
2. Leaders had devoted considerable time to explaining, discussing and developing their ideas with colleagues, and involving them closely in implementing them. As a result, people at all levels within the organisation were committed to and fully involved in self-evaluation. During the survey visits, staff referred frequently to the climate of openness, trust, co-operation and mutual respect which leaders had established. Staff were encouraged to be frank and honest in expressing their ideas and were confident that their contributions were valued, regardless of their status or length of service in the organisation.
3. All the schools, colleges and local authorities visited had well devised, clearly understood systems of self-evaluation which were built firmly into their management processes. In schools and colleges, the initial impetus for developing these systems had come from the headteachers or principals. In the case of two of the three local authorities visited, the main catalyst had been the need to tackle the findings of two highly critical external reports, one on educational provision and the other on social services.

4. All the institutions had long established systems which they were reviewing and developing to take account of new inspection or other legislative requirements. Local authorities were facing the particular challenge of integrating children's services and developing children's trusts. This involved bringing together statutory services which often had very different cultures and approaches to self-review while, at the same time, developing partnerships with a range of other providers, including the voluntary sector. An essential requirement, therefore, was the need to establish shared priorities against which the effectiveness of partnership working could be assessed:

In one authority, the Children's Trust had developed from the Children and Young People's Partnership. Members of the partnership had worked together to identify priorities within the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda and focused on the areas where they could all make a realistic contribution. In the area of health, for example, the focus was on combating under-age drinking because this was a matter in which all partners had a part to play. A statement of vision and commitment, to which all partners subscribed, encapsulated these priorities. They were reviewed periodically, but the work to establish the partnership ensured that, at any time, all those involved had clear, common aims which informed the collaboration on self-evaluation.

5. Senior managers generally agreed that setting up the systems and processes of self-evaluation had been very time consuming. In one primary school, it had taken over a year. However, in all cases, this was seen as time well spent: it ensured that staff at every level understood why and how the systems were being introduced, as well as their roles and contribution. It also promoted a consistent approach to self-evaluation. Staff saw the processes benefiting them, as well as their pupils and students.
6. In schools and colleges, governors were involved closely in self-evaluation and received regular reports from senior and middle managers. These analysed strengths and areas for improvement clearly, both in specific areas and across the institution. To ensure each area was being properly monitored, two of the school governing bodies had reorganised their committees, so that each one focused on a specific area of the school improvement plan.
7. In the local authorities, councillors played a crucial role in self-evaluation. In one authority, the councillor with lead responsibility for children's services met the senior management team weekly. He set the agenda for each meeting and saw it as a way of holding officers to account while, at the same time, enabling him to contribute to self-evaluation. His fellow council members also scrutinised the performance management database regularly to check on the details of the implementation of policy.

The self-evaluation cycle

8. In schools and colleges, self-evaluation was based on a clear cycle of activities. Typically, this started with a review in July or September of the previous year's performance. Attainment data, predictions and value-added data were brought together to identify strengths and areas for improvement in terms of learners' performance. Individual subject areas and departments also reviewed critically the extent to which they had met targets in the previous year's development plan and examined information on the quality of teaching from any observations which had been made. They used this information to establish or refine priorities within the institution's overall improvement plan and built these into improvement plans for departments or subjects.
9. Measurable outcomes, in terms of the difference the actions were intended to make for learners, were defined in the plans. Targets were set for each individual, termly, half-yearly or annually. In most primary schools, headteachers and senior managers were very closely involved in setting targets. In secondary schools and colleges, the process was usually left mainly to individual departments and overseen by members of the senior management team. However, one secondary school was an exception:

The headteacher led the target setting personally. In order to overcome significant underperformance, he identified two targets for each pupil: an indicator target based on what a pupil needed to achieve to make satisfactory progress and a challenge target based on an above-average rate of progress. With a small range of well chosen mentoring and support strategies, most pupils made satisfactory progress and the school's GCSE performance rose from 15% to 30% A*-C in one year. The achievement marked a significant turning point in the school, demonstrating to staff and pupils that improvement was possible.
10. The next stage of the cycle involved regular and rigorous monitoring. The frequency varied. In most primary schools, it was conducted weekly or fortnightly, often by all the staff, to ensure that they identified and rectified quickly any slippage in progress. In secondary schools and colleges, it was more often conducted half-termly or termly within departments and used to allocate additional support.
11. Several of the schools visited had moved swiftly to implement the workforce reforms. One school had trained teaching assistants to analyse the results of tests in order to identify pupils who needed extra support. Following intervention, further analysis checked that the support had improved pupils' work.
12. Sharp analysis of information was also used to introduce changes to provision. In one school, focused support strategies, such as mentoring

and after-school booster classes, improved the progress of lower attaining pupils. In one secondary school, the impact was seen in pupils' attitudes to learning and in standards:

Too many boys who had achieved just Level 5 in English at the end of Key Stage 3 were not performing as well as expected at GCSE level. Teachers from the English department tracked a group of Year 9 boys to pinpoint the reasons for the underperformance. They discovered common difficulties in engaging with literature and writing at length. To combat this, they introduced a new media studies module to a class of boys. Regular monitoring showed that within one term all the boys were more motivated and engaged in lessons, all had met coursework deadlines and all were making greater use of technical language in their writing.

13. Since September 2005, Ofsted's school inspections have placed considerable emphasis on establishing the accuracy of schools' own assessments of the quality of teaching and learning. Those visited for this survey had well established systems for observing teaching regularly. In primary schools, the tendency was for each teacher to be observed several times a year by, for example, a phase coordinator, a subject coordinator and the headteacher or deputy headteacher. The size of secondary schools and colleges meant that such frequency was not feasible, but each teacher was observed at least once each year. One college had a particularly good system to ensure the extent and quality of observations:

All teachers, even those who taught for only a couple of hours a week, were observed at least once a year. At the end of an observation, the teachers assessed their own performance on a self-evaluation proforma and graded the lesson against 10 standards listed in the college's *Good teaching and learning guide*. This self-assessment provided the starting point for a discussion with the observer. It led to an action plan which detailed the improvements needed and linked them to training. In addition, a team of teaching mentors helped new teachers, including all part-timers and those needing further development, through a comprehensive programme of lesson observations and professional support. At the time of the inspection, around 150 of the 700 teachers were being mentored. As a result of these processes, the quality of teaching in the college was consistently of a very high standard.

14. In the colleges, many of those who led the process were also part-time inspectors. They were well informed and used their expertise effectively to train other observers, thus ensuring a high level of consistency in judging teaching and in the quality of feedback. Many of these colleges also had good systems for disseminating practice from which others could learn.

15. Evaluation of aspects other than teaching tended to take place over a longer period. In one primary school the ethos and culture of the institution were evaluated every two years, using a parental questionnaire and questionnaires on pupils' attitudes. In another, which had new nursery provision, the impact on the attainment of children entering the Foundation Stage was reviewed after three years. In one secondary school, behaviour was transformed:

The school identified 30 Year 11 boys whose behaviour caused concern. Questionnaires were sent to the parents and to the boys to try to identify the cause of each pupil's misbehaviour. A discussion was held which identified the strengths and weaknesses in the support which the school provided. External consultants were commissioned to conduct a motivation session. As a result of this work, one of the pupils received ten honour recommendations in one term because of his improved attitude and behaviour. There were fewer complaints from all staff about the 30 boys, behaviour improved steadily and more positive attitudes were established.

16. As well as monitoring the performance of individual learners, most of the schools and colleges visited monitored subjects regularly. Subject co-ordinators and senior managers in one primary school conducted a twice-yearly scrutiny of work in mathematics and English across the whole school and an annual scrutiny of science. Most of the secondary schools and colleges visited undertook detailed reviews of selected curriculum areas each year. These were carried out not only as part of the overall cycle of self-evaluation but also when problems were identified, such as underachievement or weaknesses in teaching or management. The impact is illustrated in the following example:

A college identified weaknesses in business provision. Recruitment was declining and there was a need for staff to work more flexibly, engage with industry and improve teaching and management. The quality assurance manager followed up these problems with the team and a senior manager was allocated to the department as an interim measure. Changes in staffing, including appointing a new head of the area, combined with the introduction of new courses, produced the required changes. The next self-assessment found the provision to be good, which was confirmed by the next inspection.

17. Within the local authorities, self-evaluation also tended to follow a yearly cycle with a similar starting point: a review of performance in the previous year against specific targets related to service, departmental and corporate priorities. In the case of children's services, councils were experiencing tensions in evaluating their effectiveness because, although they held the responsibility for ensuring good outcomes under the Every Child Matters agenda, they did not always have the relevant powers. Outcomes for health, for example, depended on the effectiveness of the primary care trusts. All the authorities expected that the recently

introduced annual performance assessment (APA) would influence increasingly the timing and organising of the cycle of self-evaluation, particularly in terms of meeting deadlines for producing written reports and completing the self assessment needed for the APA. However, generally they felt that the most important element of the self-assessment was that it should be a continuing process.

18. As part of their drive for improvement, these authorities were also working collaboratively with schools to support them in their own self-evaluation:

Over the previous 18 months, at the request of schools, the authority had been piloting supported self-review. A school wishing to take part in the scheme would identify a focus for evaluation, relating to standards or teaching and learning. A team of local authority officers would work with senior managers from the school to conduct a two day review, involving lesson observation, scrutiny of pupils' work and interviews with pupils and teachers. The school itself was responsible for collating the evidence and writing the report. This ensured that the focus was on the school reviewing itself. At the time of the survey, this process was nearing the end of its first cycle. A substantial reduction in the number of schools in categories of concern within the authority showed its impact.

19. In addition to working with individual schools, local authorities were also bringing schools together to promote self-evaluation:

One authority decided to emphasise school autonomy particularly, as a means of raising standards, and established ten learning networks, each a mixture of nursery, primary and secondary schools. Schools were given a well developed system which they could use to support self-evaluation, at whole-school and at subject or department level.

In the case of 14–19 provision, this was extended across all the partner schools in each collaborative group and broadened further to include, in each area, further education, the dioceses, the Connexions service, work-based learning and the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The findings were used to measure progress on the 14–19 priority within the education development plan, as well as for the self-evaluation conducted as part of the APA.

A central element in these self-evaluations was the gathering of the views of children and young people. The next step planned was to develop a common system of self-evaluation with the FE college. The effectiveness of this work was being evaluated by a local higher education institution. One important measurable outcome was a considerable rise in GCSE results. In this area of very high social deprivation, the proportion of pupils gaining five A*–C grades had risen by 15 percentage points, from 35% in 2001 to 50% in 2005.

The role of performance management and training

20. In all the organisations visited, there was a clear link between self-evaluation and performance management. On the basis of review, staff identified institutional, team and individual development needs which were translated into specific targets. Support and training were sometimes provided individually but, in most instances, common areas for development were identified and tackled across the institution:

Self-evaluation in a primary school had shown weaknesses in marking: pupils were not clear enough about how they could improve their work. Solving the problem became a whole-school activity. Teachers examined each other's marking to identify good practice. Eventually, they agreed that the teacher would identify and reinforce three positive features and highlight one weak area. To embed this approach, it was included as a target in each teacher's personal profile.

21. In another primary school, the termly review of subjects two years previously had shown that many teachers had difficulty with information and communication technology (ICT):

ICT became a focus for whole-school development. All staff passed a basic qualification in using ICT. In addition, within their individual performance profiles, they had to identify specific targets for using ICT, not only teaching it as a discrete subject but also using it across the curriculum. Their increased confidence resulted in greater breadth and depth of study of the subject for pupils. After review, it was decided to extend the whole-school focus to a second year. At this point, in order to refine the support given, the programmes of training and support were differentiated to take account of differing rates of development. Again the training was closely related to specific performance management targets.

22. A key feature in many of the schools visited was their involvement in action research to tackle issues arising from their initial self-evaluation. Investigation was usually initiated by the headteacher and staff took pride in being part of a 'learning school'. One secondary school, concerned about the slower progress made by pupils in middle sets, commissioned in-service training based upon the headteacher's initial reading about the latest research on pupils' progress and achievement. The training generated enthusiasm from staff for the new approach and led to the school developing its own indicators to set realistic performance targets. Teachers also shared effective teaching and learning strategies in subject teams and more widely across the school. The sharper focus on achievement led to an initial improvement in the attainment of the Year 11 and Year 9 pupils. The school shared the practice with four neighbouring schools and the local authority adopted the same rigorous approach to

setting performance targets. Current achievement in the school is now two percentage points higher than predicted.

23. In all three local authorities visited, training and staff development in self-evaluation had become highly important as they moved towards the integration of children's services. Two of the authorities had strong performance management of their education services which they were seeking to extend to social services. One used an information technology system extensively:

The authority had a very elaborate performance management database which supported self-evaluation. It was a multi-level system which enabled each policy strand or priority to be tracked through the organisation, from the highest statement of principles to everyday operational management. This thorough system enabled continuous monitoring of activity and of the implementation of policy by members and officers. As well as mainstream performance management, the system had an element of risk assessment. Once a risk was identified, it was referred back to the manager concerned for comment and, if necessary, proposals for action. Frequently, this resulted in changes which reduced the risk.

24. Two of the authorities had core performance management teams to oversee the collection and collation of information and to identify required improvements. The teams were concerned to develop common approaches across the various elements, both statutory and voluntary, of children's services while, at the same time, enabling them to concentrate on their distinctive work. They were also concerned to select, develop and use indicators to fit their particular circumstances: the comparative performance of different ethnic groups was important in one authority and measures to reduce alcohol harm were important in another.
25. In all the institutions visited, all staff were involved fully in evaluating their organisation's effectiveness. In schools and colleges, non-teaching staff were seen as having a crucial contribution to make, although this was rarely related explicitly and formally to self-evaluation and planning. The following example from a secondary school was an exception. A key priority was to improve the health and well-being of pupils. The school cook, as with other staff, had been asked to identify how she contributed to this:

The school cook's role focused on promoting healthy lifestyles generally and healthy diets in particular. She had worked out where menus could be improved and gradually introduced changes over two years, modifying her approach in light of the pupils' responses.

Over a year, she had steadily reduced the amount of chips, burgers and hot dogs eaten and had increased the take-up of alternatives, using strategies such as special offers and free tasting of vegetables,

pasta and rice. She monitored the impact of these actions: more pupils were staying in school at lunch time and choosing to eat school lunches. Following an evaluation of the progress, she adopted a new approach to improve provision even further. She researched alternatives and worked with local suppliers to improve the quality and freshness of ingredients. The headteacher had firmly encouraged this approach and the canteen staff felt they were playing their part in improving the school.

26. One special school, in reviewing its behaviour modification programme, realised that it could be improved by involving not only teachers but also escorts and bus drivers since they could provide additional advice on the times and circumstances which triggered specific behaviour. They helped to reinforce support strategies being used at school and ensured that they were implemented consistently. The school was able to provide clear evidence of the impact of such strategies.

Quantitative and qualitative indicators

27. All the schools, colleges and local authorities visited made considerable use of national data to measure the impact of their work and to compare their own performance with that of similar institutions. This helped to improve performance. In the best instances, this information was supplemented by in-depth analyses of a range of locally produced data to identify subtleties in patterns of performance. These data included analysis of the performance of different groups and individuals by gender, ethnicity, age, prior attainment and socio-economic background. Schools and colleges also used information from lesson observations and scrutiny of work. As a result, it was possible to produce challenging but realistic targets for individual, group and organisational development and to establish clear milestones against which to monitor progress:

A primary school's analysis of performance and assessment report (PANDA) data and scrutiny of pupils' work showed that standards in writing at the end of Year 6 were weak, particularly amongst boys. Discussions with the pupils showed that they did not feel stimulated by the types of writing activities in which they were involved during the year. The school introduced a new teaching strategy, 'writing in role', where writing was taught through drama and related to themes such as the Second World War. Termly writing assessments evaluated the effectiveness of the approach and very challenging targets for improvement were set. The proportion of pupils gaining Level 4 or more in English at the end of Key Stage 2 rose, over one year, from 86% to 91%. Most significantly, the proportion gaining Level 5 went up from 24% to 41%. Improved standards in writing, with 81% gaining Level 4 and 20% gaining Level 5, contributed considerably to this.

28. In the best practice, staff at all levels had been trained to interrogate data rigorously and probe their findings further. In one college, staff found that the single group which made the least progress was made up of boys who entered with a GCSE score of less than 5.8. Plans were developed to find out why, and to focus attention on improving their performance. Within this college, as in the other institutions visited, increasingly sophisticated computer systems were valuable in increasing the depth of analysis.
29. Schools and some colleges used a range of methods to help to identify learners' starting points and monitor progress. These included interim standard assessment tests, reading and attitudinal tests and, in some schools, tests which they had designed themselves. It was possible to identify and challenge underperformance early by analysing this information.
30. All the primary schools visited had very detailed information on each pupil's progress in English and mathematics. Several also had good information on performance in science. However, schools had very limited information on foundation subjects. This detracted from the rigour and quality of their self-evaluation. Two schools had not begun to focus on foundation subjects. One school reviewed which units of work had been covered by a class but it did not use National Curriculum levels as indicators and did not set targets. The focus was more on covering the content than on pupils' performance. In the secondary schools visited, however, it was more common to find individual targets being set for pupils in all subjects. In all cases, they were involved closely in setting these targets and knew what was expected of them.
31. Local authorities were developing targets and specific quantifiable measures for each of the Every Child Matters outcomes, but there were some common difficulties. First, the published national data sets, such as those for health, social services and education, did not all relate to the same period of time; further, the regularity with which they were updated varied from one outcome to another. For some outcomes, notably 'making a positive contribution', there were no nationally produced data sets. Even within education, existing data sets did not cover the full range of information required to set targets and monitor progress relating to the full range of activities embraced by the outcome 'enjoying and achieving'. Authorities were therefore beginning to rely more heavily on locally produced data:

In one authority, Ofsted's inspection of its music service had prompted it to establish detailed records of the number, gender, ethnicity and age of children taking up the service and also to improve its mechanisms for assessing the extent to which it reached children from low-income families. These changes were being used to improve data gathering and the evaluation of impact within other services, such as drama, sport and leisure.

32. Another challenge for local authorities was to gather together data and evidence from across the full range of partners. In restructuring its children's services department, one authority had succeeded in bringing all information-gathering systems, including those for partner organisations, into one division. As a result, officers were now able to establish the basis for a very sophisticated and comprehensive mechanism for gathering and analysing data.
33. In the case of the schools visited, indicators to identify the personal development and well-being of young people and the outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda were at an early stage of development. One of the secondary schools was beginning to tackle the issue and, within its improvement plan, had identified the need to develop pupils' health and well being. It had introduced regular fitness testing into the physical education programme for Year 7 pupils and, in food technology, pupils were encouraged to record their food intake each week. In this way, starting points were being established against which future progress could be measured.

Involving stakeholders

34. Schools, colleges and local authorities actively sought the views of those who used their services. They used the results when evaluating the quality of their services and deciding where improvements needed to be made. In the past, most schools relied on informal methods to elicit pupils', parents' and carers' views. However, they were now using more formal methods, similar to those used by local authorities and colleges. These included:
 - using Ofsted's parental questionnaire each year
 - commissioning external consultants to develop and conduct general surveys
 - using questionnaires or focus groups to identify pupils' and parents' views
 - establishing or extending young people's representation on consultative groups, such as school or college councils and youth parliament groups.

In one school, a technique called zing was introduced to take quick soundings about how pupils, parents and staff felt about an issue. In another, end of term and key stage feedback assemblies focused on open discussion of how to improve particular aspects of provision.

35. In many colleges, students were involved in a wide range of committees and groups and directly in self-assessment, as in this typical example:

A student quality review group met senior managers regularly to review college practices. The college involved students in interviews for teachers, course review groups, the board of the college, the academic board, the equality and diversity committee and the

support needs disability forum. Students' views were surveyed systematically and used to inform development plans.

36. The colleges visited rarely gathered the views of parents and carers as part of self-assessment, although they did consult them at parents' evenings.
37. In the best instances, considerable effort was made to tell children, young people and their families what had been done in response to their comments. For example, through a survey, a primary school identified parental concerns about the lack of homework and the narrow range of extra-curricular activities:

The school introduced homework in English, mathematics and science every week and held several meetings to explain the changed approach to parents. Parental satisfaction with this aspect of the school's work rose, over three years, from 73% to 96%. The appointment of an after-school activities coordinator considerably extended the extra-curricular activities offered and an increase from 73% to 93% in the proportion of parents who saw this as a strength of the school.

38. There was a growing recognition of the need to involve young people further. Primary schools took particular care to ensure that even the youngest children could contribute by arranging, for example, for older pupils to act as transcribers or interpreters for them.
39. In the authorities visited, the extent of children's involvement in both evaluation and development had been one of the most striking changes in the transition to children's services. In one authority, children and young people were consulted alongside their parents and carers. The authority found that doing this was time-consuming but well worth it in terms of the increased credibility of their planning. All the authorities were concerned that the children and young people whom they consulted would be representative. One of them had an active and effective youth parliament but it did not include young people who were hard to reach. To ensure that their views were represented, the authority worked closely with the youth service:

By writing to schools, colleges and youth groups, it established a voluntary database of children and young people who were willing to be consulted on a range of issues and to work with the council on determining its priorities. The young people were involved through the youth parliament, youth fora, schools councils, and the 'speaking out' group. The latter included teenage mothers and children with learning difficulties and disabilities. They had chaired a discussion on a Green Paper and a number of these young people had put themselves forward to represent the county on the national youth parliament. Children and young people attended council and scrutiny

panel meetings to present reports. They also helped to monitor the effectiveness of council provision, for example, by acting as 'mystery shoppers' for the library service and reviewing transport arrangements.

40. In most of the institutions visited, children and young people could identify specific changes which had been made in response to their suggestions.

A college's survey of students' views of tutorial provision concluded that they valued individual tutorials highly, but were more sceptical about the value of group tutorials. As a result, one-to-one tutorials became the norm and group tutorials were held only when they were the better way to disseminate information to students.

In other instances, a school had introduced drama as an option for 14–16-year-olds and had improved the toilet facilities in response to pupils' suggestions. Pupils expressed the view, in one authority, that they wanted police in schools not to befriend them but to ensure order. The authority acted on this by revising its policy and negotiating with the police to get the equivalent of 10 full-time officers working in schools.

41. Young people could also identify where their suggestions were not taken up and why this was so. In one school, some pupils had wanted the policy on uniform to be changed so that they could wear jewellery. Governors took time to discuss with the school council why this could not be done. Consequently, the pupils understood better the school's corporate responsibilities for health and safety.

Partnerships

42. Schools and colleges were beginning to solicit the views of external partners and peers to inform self-evaluation. In one secondary school, the headteacher had developed close mentoring links with the head of a neighbouring school and a series of informal visits had been arranged in order for them to gain an external perspective on each other's work. Specialist colleges and schools involved in the leadership incentive grant initiative worked with neighbouring schools as a matter of course and sought their views in evaluating their work and planning developments.
43. Colleges and schools worked closely together on developing 14–16 and 14–19 provision and one college had developed a framework to monitor the quality of its provision. The response from partner schools fed into the self-evaluation process. The involvement of employers in college self-assessment was less well developed, although most colleges used surveys to seek their views on the provision made.
44. In several instances, the local authority had made a positive contribution to schools, for example by assisting them in developing models for self-evaluation or helping them to identify and observe good practice locally or

regionally. Several schools had also found the contribution of local authority advisers helpful in conducting departmental reviews, in tackling weak teaching within particular subject areas or in commenting on their proposals for development:

The headteacher of a primary school had consulted the school's link inspector before beginning a comprehensive review of provision. The resulting action plans were discussed with senior officers in the authority. They had provided timely advice on increasing the emphasis on ICT, prompting the school to refine its systems further. Subsequently, the link inspector visited classrooms and provided an external view on the quality of teaching and learning which the school used to check its own judgements on the progress it was making.

45. As children's services departments developed in local authorities, the range of stakeholders becoming involved in self-evaluation process widened. Although this was valuable, it was not always an easy process to manage, as one authority found when faced with the competing demands on individual members of the children and young people's partnership:

One of the aims of this council was to reduce the number of young offenders. However, the local police force had recently been criticised considerably for its low rates of detection and prosecution. Pressure to improve these figures resulted in the police treating offences by young people more formally than in the past, leading to a 60% increase in reporting and convictions for such crimes as criminal damage. These factors were brought into stark relief at the time of drawing up the local area agreement: the police wanted to increase the number of convictions whilst others in the partnership wanted to reduce them. Officers of the authority found the police very open about the problem and understanding about the difficulties that this situation was creating. It was a symptom of the maturing relationship between members of the partnership that they could continue to work together effectively, even when faced with these conflicting pressures.

External perspectives

46. In addition to the agencies already mentioned, schools, colleges and local authorities commissioned external consultants to support the establishment or evaluation of specific projects. Several had established close contacts with neighbouring universities and teacher training institutions which had helped them review and develop provision in specific areas of the curriculum, notably teaching modern foreign languages in primary schools.
47. The main external perspective, however, was provided by inspection. It had been very valuable to the institutions, either in prompting change or

in providing independent validation of the impact and success of particular developments. In one authority, a highly critical inspection report had led to a total overhaul of its education provision. As a result, within 12 months, it moved from being judged 'poor' by Ofsted to 'highly satisfactory' and, four years later, to 'good'. Similar progress could be traced in one of the infant schools visited:

The school's second inspection by Ofsted had criticised the presentation and content of pupils' writing. Discussion in the feedback meeting at the end of the inspection proved useful. Inspectors quoted good practice they had seen in other schools. This encouraged the headteacher and language coordinator to visit several schools to observe good practice. They also arranged for other colleagues to visit these schools, particularly the 'doubting Thomases', 'so that they could see what could be done with children of this age'. This led to staff working together to develop a new writing policy, setting considerably more demanding targets for them and their pupils. The success of this work was recognised in the next inspection.

48. Although colleges have freedom to determine their own format for self-evaluation, the ones visited had tended to base their approaches on guidance issued by the LSC and the inspectorates. The following was typical:

The college had responded readily and in a timely way to the new common inspection framework (CIF) by updating its quality manual and providing training for staff about the changes. This included rewriting the criteria for lesson observation in line with the new four-point grading scale. The documentation for producing the course reviews and final self-assessment report replicated the format of the CIF.

49. Four high performing colleges in one area had worked with the local LSC to produce a good practice guide, taking colleges through the requirements of the new inspection framework and scope of self-assessment, and providing examples.

Notes

This report presents the results of a survey carried out in the autumn term 2005 and the spring term 2006 to identify the features of best practice in self-evaluation in a sample of 12 schools, seven FE colleges and three local authorities. These were selected from those where previous inspections had reported positively on their self-evaluation and quality assurance.

The survey was conducted by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. They examined inspection reports, self-evaluation

documents and interviewed managers, staff, learners, governors and elected council members in local authorities.

Although it is not a recent initiative, self-evaluation is becoming more important in the work of schools, college and local authorities. Increasingly, inspection has required institutions to show how they use it to improve provision. Since the Children Act 2005, institutions have been expected to evaluate the extent to which their provision leads to improved outcomes for children and young people under the five areas of the Every Child Matters agenda: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being.

At the time of this survey, most schools were adapting their self-evaluation procedures in the context of the new section 5 inspection framework.¹ Changes included reviewing the timing of their self-evaluation activities and identifying a regular point at which to complete the self-evaluation form expected by Ofsted.

Colleges have a relatively long history of self-evaluation since they became independent corporations in 1993. They have been expected to develop quality assurance systems based on a self-critical assessment of their provision. In 2001, when Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate became responsible for inspecting colleges, a college's self-assessment report, together with data on students' outcomes, became the starting point for inspection. Since 2005, college inspection has been matched more closely to the quality of provision, with good colleges being inspected with a lighter touch. Such arrangements therefore place more emphasis on a college's self-assessment.

For local authorities, self-evaluation is not new. In part, its origins lie in Ofsted's inspections of provision for education in local authorities. Between 1999 and 2005, there were two cycles of such inspection. The second of these made increasing use of the local authority's own evaluation as part of the risk assessment. In 2005, this process evolved into the approaches of the APA and the joint area reviews. The first focuses on the contribution which council services make to the outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda, the second on the contribution of the council and its partners. Both processes start from self-evaluation. As that cycle of inspection developed, authorities' self-evaluations became an increasingly important part of the inspection.

At the time of this survey, authorities' established self-evaluation systems were changing considerably to meet the new requirements placed on them by the establishment of integrated children's services. The self-evaluation systems had to be capable of evaluating the effectiveness of the closer working relationships between services within councils, as well as closer collaboration between

¹ *Framework 2005: framework for the inspection of schools in England from September 2005* (HMI 2435), Ofsted, 2005:
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=3861>

councils and their external partners. Authorities were making considerable efforts to involve partners more closely in self-evaluation.

Further information

A new relationship with schools: improving performance through school self-evaluation (DfES - 1290-2005DOC-EN, ISBN 1-84478-429-0), DfES/Ofsted, 2005:

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

Improving performance through school self-evaluation and improvement planning (HMI 2646), Ofsted, 2006.

Ofsted's website contains details about self-evaluation for all types of institutions at: www.ofsted.gov.uk/schools/sef.cfm

Annex

Schools visited for this survey

Ashfield Infants School, Cumbria

The Broxbourne School, Hertfordshire

Campsmount Technology College, Doncaster

Greensward Technology College, Essex

Halifax High at Wellesly Park, Calderdale

Ingleby Mill Primary School, Stockton-on-Tees

Morecambe and Heysham Westgate Primary School, Lancashire

Piper Hill High School, Manchester

Riverside Primary School, North Tyneside

South Pelaw Infant School, Durham

St Sebastians Catholic Primary School and Nursery, Liverpool

Western Community Primary School, North Tyneside

Colleges visited for this survey

Godalming College

Knowsley Community College

Liverpool Community College

Nelson and Colne College

Peter Symonds Sixth Form College

South Downs College

Sparsholt College Hampshire

Local authorities visited for this survey

Liverpool

Shropshire

West Berkshire