



MINIMISING BURDENS IN SCHOOLS
THE IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW UNIT

Implementation Review Unit – Integrated working: the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) – Position Statement – September 2007

The Implementation Review Unit (IRU) is an independent panel of school practitioners appointed in 2003 by the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills. Our remit is about supporting and challenging the government and its agencies, including local authorities, in removing and avoiding unnecessary burdens on schools.

We have kept in touch with work to develop and introduce the CAF since it was first announced in 2003.

We recognise that work on establishing the new arrangements of working with and using the CAF is in progress rather than complete. But we have now had several presentations from Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) officials who are in the lead on the CAF and this statement sets out our current analysis of the situation in respect of CAF. What we have seen and heard from DCSF officials is set out in the annex. We have also produced a separate Statement on another element of integrated working, Contact Point.

During the next 12 months we will review this policy area, hearing again from officials in DCSF about progress and probing as thoroughly as we are able to on the evidence supplied on the impacts on the school workforce in respect of burdens and bureaucracy. With this in mind we will be revisiting and updating this position statement in the Spring of 2008.

In the meantime we value your experience of CAF and of integrated working - good and bad.

Please contact us at IRU.PANEL@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk.

The CAF

The government is introducing a Common Assessment Framework for children who appear to need multi-agency intervention and support. The government's publicity on this says:

“Assessing needs at an early stage and deciding on what action to take is where the CAF comes in. We want practitioners to be able to gather and record information about a child or young person with additional needs in a systematic, holistic yet simple, way so that they can begin to work out what the needs are and what should be done to address them swiftly”.

We have made clear from the outset that we support the Framework if it leads to:

- Help for children that is more effective than can be obtained using existing approaches;
- Easier and swifter access to that help.

We believe that both of these conditions for our support are measurable.

Our reading of the situation in what we have seen and heard so far is:

- We have welcomed the offer of early sight of draft guidance to schools and other potential CAF users from DCSF.
- The guidance on CAF needs to be explicit that in some cases the first step does need to be an urgent phone call not time spent completing an assessment.
- We have also endorsed the DCSF in its work to continue and develop their dialogue with local authorities both at working level and also getting the right and consistent messages to service leaders about CAF and the management of CAF.
- There is a need for much clearer messages on when, if at all, to complete a CAF.
- We have said to DCSF that early messages on CAF to us via our networks across schools were not encouraging - latterly they seem more positive. Nevertheless the risks remain that a systematic and integrated approach may fail if messages remain mixed.
- In cascade rollout training of CAF we have alerted DCSF to the lessons we have learned from our experience of this approach:
 - intermediaries in local authorities, the national strategies, regional offices and the TDA need sharper steers from DCSF;
 - they need to be directed to avoid demanding attendance with little regard for the diaries of the school workforce
 - think more about who in schools is best placed to attend particular events
 - tailor training to the prior knowledge and skills of those needing to be trained
- We are not sure that the Department is explicit enough in messages about how in a school it intends common assessment and child protection to sit alongside each other. Sometimes the right action is an urgent phone call not the completion of a form.
- We are encouraged by a growing body of evidence that is starting to show that schools are not always taking on the majority of lead professional roles. This is to be welcomed: other bodies need to shoulder some of this responsibility also and the DCSF needs to be firmer itself and through LAs to do so.

- The commitment of some agencies to the CAF process, including social services, police, probation services, health, youth offending teams, and youth services varies and remains questionable at this stage – staff from schools attend meetings, other agencies are too often still notable by their absence.
- We remain concerned that the Department still, four years after the announcement of its policy intention, is unable to provide a quantified assessment of the impact on workload and outcomes in schools of the CAF process in particular or more integrated working in general.

We will continue to press the DCSF on these issues.