



MINIMISING BURDENS IN SCHOOLS
THE IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW UNIT

Implementation Review Unit – integrated working: Contact Point- Position Statement – December 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 ContactPoint (originally called the 'Information Sharing Index') since it was first announced in the Children Act of 2004. ContactPoint is potentially a database on every child in the country.

We recognise that work on the new arrangements is in progress rather than complete. We have had several presentations from Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) officials who are in the lead on Contact Point and this statement sets out our current analysis of the situation in respect of this development

We have also produced a separate Position Statement on another, related, element of integrated working, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

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 summer of 2008.

In the meantime we value your experience of Contact Point and of integrated working - good and bad. Please contact us at IRU.PANEL@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk.

ContactPoint

The government presents ContactPoint as a key part of the Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda. It is an electronic tool intended to support the work of children's services in all areas of England by mid 2009. There is an expectation that all agencies working with children, including 23,000 schools, will use it.

The stated objectives of ContactPoint are to:

- help practitioners identify quickly a child with whom they have contact, and whether that child is getting the universal services (education, primary health care) to which he or she is entitled.
- enable earlier identification of needs and earlier and more effective action to address these needs by providing a tool for practitioners to identify who else is involved with a particular child.
- be an important tool to encourage and support better communication and closer working between different professionals and practitioners.

Recent evidence from the ContactPoint team at DCSF shows positive messages emerging from the pilots that are underway.

Overall, much effort has been applied to involving people in schools and in many other agencies to develop and use ContactPoint. We think that it does have the potential to make it easier for schools and other agencies to work together more effectively for the benefit of children and young people.

There is, however, much to do before those benefits can be realised. We share the Department's view that ContactPoint can only be one element of a culture change in the way professionals working with children share information and co-operate with each other. On the practicalities we have urged the Department to ensure that *security arrangements* for selecting and approving staff to access the system are as burden-free as possible and give schools maximum scope for them, not others, to decide who they deploy to access and manage their part of the system.

On *training* we have stressed the importance of ensuring clear messages are given to local authorities and intermediaries. That training should be bespoke to the needs of those attending and not delivered through the blanket approach often used in cascading major changes through the educational system. And those who are to be trained should be the ones that schools nominate and who will access ContactPoint in school – not those whom the training providers or the LA believe should be trained. We have also suggested to DCSF that alternative, 'virtual' training methods should be considered to replace face to face training which is often a burden on schools.

And finally we remain watchful on *data* over the changing PLASC interface for schools and the newly emerging E-CAF which is due to be introduced in 2009. We will keep under review how these two elements contribute to, and complement, integrated working.