



Implementation Review Unit (IRU) Statement for 2007

Annex B

Examples of Our Work In 2007

DCSF Policy Map

Since our inception a continuing theme running through all our discussions with government and its agencies has been the need for greater coherence and congruence in the planning, timing and execution of the range of new policy initiatives under development at any particular time and a better grasp of the impact in terms of outcomes individual policies are likely to secure.

We know that many others make similar points to government so we can claim only some credit for what we saw in the year as encouraging signs in the Department. Senior officials told us they had started work on a policy map of all the work in the Department and its agencies that would impact on schools, showing the timing of when that impact was likely to occur over the coming months and years.

We welcome these developments and intend to press the Department to demonstrate the use it is making of them to better manage the implementation of new and existing initiatives in school, though we recognise that priorities may change in the light of the new Children's Plan.

Working with Local Authorities

This year we have been working closely with the Lifting the Burdens Taskforce, which was established in September 2006 by the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

The taskforce is charged with undertaking a review of the bureaucratic burdens that exist as a consequence of the current relationship between central and local government.

A report due to be published soon will focus upon the DCSF and its counterparts in local authorities and will make some significant recommendations.

We will press for these to be adopted. Whilst they will undoubtedly have greatest benefit for local authorities, the IRU believes that schools will also benefit in the longer term.

We have also made early contact with the Association for the Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and believe that our dialogue will be helpful in

spreading the best of practice amongst the many local authorities. And it is good too that the ADCS are now represented on the DCSF Star Chamber Board jointly working alongside school practitioners looking at data management burdens on schools and on local authority children's services.

Primary Strategy

During the year we met Capita, the company contracted to the DCSF for the "national strategies", including the implementation of revised frameworks for literacy and numeracy. Whilst in principle we welcome the revisions we have concerns about the additional burdens their introduction in schools places on staff.

We continue to press Capita and the Department on this matter. We would find it helpful to hear from people in schools about the experience in your locality.

14 to 19 Diplomas – the Gateway process for consortia

IRU members have met regularly with officials at the DCSF to review the Gateway procedures and progress for implementation of Diplomas.

We have expressed concern at the heavy workload for schools associated with the bidding involved in the process. We know that officials in the Department are extraordinarily grateful for the work that schools across the country are doing to build capacity to meet the 2013 commitment. We understand that the view they take is that the work schools are asked to do to contribute to consortia Gateway proposals is a necessary part of the process for a school to successfully deliver diplomas. They see it as work which schools would have to undertake whether or not the Gateway existed. Whilst we accept this view in part, we believe that bidding processes themselves create additional workload and bureaucracy which go well beyond those required to produce fit-for-purpose plans.

Whilst welcoming the changes made in the work schools will need to do for the second Gateway cohort, we remain concerned. We are asking DCSF to set the process as far as possible within NRwS guidelines.

We acknowledge that the Department, through for example learning visits, TDA workforce development, QCA curriculum models, funding and so on, is giving schools a range of support in this area. We continue to press the Department to check with schools that this support is addressing the full range of organisational, curriculum, timetabling, logistical, transport, safeguarding, staffing, data, performance and accountability issues that the introduction of Diplomas present.

Other Curriculum Matters

The juxtaposition of curriculum change at Key Stage 3, 4 and 5 has placed a heavy burden upon schools in the current academic year 2007/2008. Through our efforts and others (notably WAMG) concessions have been made and we are particularly pleased that an additional training day has been allocated to allow for preparation. We still hold the view, however, that it was inevitable that significant workload and stress would result from the planned curriculum and qualifications changes and we will continue to discuss these with DCSF and others in 2008.

Children in Care (Looked after Children)

The IRU recognises that government has a responsibility to act to ensure much better outcomes for children in care. We responded to the Care Matters Green paper with its proposals to legislate in this area. One of our members joined the education working group looking at the implications of proposals for the education of children in care.

We stressed that the accountabilities placed on schools must come through the NRwS – SIP challenge and Ofsted inspection – and we alerted officials to the risk that the role of a “virtual headteacher” in every local authority might establish a parallel set of accountabilities outside that relationship.

We are pleased to see that the role of virtual school head being piloted by the DCSF will work through School Improvement Partners to support and challenge schools to improve educational outcomes for children in care, and that accountability should be through existing “new relationship” structures.

We remain disappointed that the designated person must be a teacher. We believe that many aspects of the role could be carried out by a qualified and senior member of the support staff in line with principles of school workforce reform. Whilst we agree that pedagogic expertise is essential to improving the life chances of this group of children, we know this to be available in abundance in schools and accessible through effective liaison and team work to whomsoever is the designated person. Having said this, we await the proposed regulations and remain happy to work with the government as it develops guidance on the role. Our shared aim should be to ensure that it is as consistent as possible with the school workforce agreement.

Community Cohesion

From September this year (2007) all maintained schools in England have a new statutory duty to “promote community cohesion.” Government included this new statutory obligation at a late stage in the passing of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. We recognised the intense pressures on the government to be acting in this area. Along with others we argued that if it

wanted to bring schools with it rather than have this new obligation perceived as yet another burden, the implementation arrangements had to be thought through carefully.

With just months to go before schools came under the duty the DCSF was yet to issue guidance to schools on what would constitute compliance. Yet the intention at that stage was that Ofsted should include a judgement of school activity to promote community cohesion in its inspection regime from September 2007.

We are confident that our IRU intervention helped, with others, to persuade ministers to defer inspection for a year. This, we argued, would allow schools a little time to come to grips with the new duty and the associated guidance. We suggested this was a better approach than putting 23,000 schools at risk of censure in the first months of a wholly new and untested piece of legislation.

We intend to continue to work with the Department to refine the guidance for schools and to ensure that there is a common understanding across schools, intermediaries and government of what is required.

Health and Safety

We are actively working in partnership with the Health and Safety Executive, the DCSF and other government departments to rationalise these most challenging and important aspect of life in schools.

The key issues for this new partnership remain the unwarranted volume of paper attached to the assessment of risk, the proportionality of health and safety regulation and policy, the patchy provision at LA level, the inadequate resource and training for schools and the increasing levels of stress in staff.

The partnership is looking to increase the understanding in LAs and schools about the assessment of risk, identify and disseminate good practice, and increase the number and range of lessons and experiences taking place outside of the classroom.

SEN

In Spring 2007 the IRU supported a joint project carried out by DCSF and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) designed to measure the number of hours and costs involved in conducting those parts of the statementing process that arose from regulation. The report from this project, which was completed by PwC and endorsed by DCSF, carried four recommendations that, if implemented, could make a difference in the area of SEN burdens. They were:

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- Improving the efficiency of information transfer between schools and local authorities;
- Using delegation (i.e. a cheaper resource), for administrative tasks involved in implementing the SEN Code of Practice e.g. filing or photocopying;
- Ensuring that schools have an electronic management information system from which up-to-date pupil data can be extracted at any time; and
- For external agencies to provide assessments/reports to schools and local authorities as soon as possible after the assessment takes place.

We believe that progress can and should be made on implementing these, though all four may prove challenging since they strike at the heart of the relationship between local authorities, schools and government. In this sense they affect an agenda wider than special educational needs and the potential gains, therefore, could be much greater. We have also asked officials to take the full report into account when the more fundamental review of SEN provision is carried out in 2009.

Artsmark

Whilst we support the mark as a way of celebrating excellence in the Arts, we feel that the current application process is far too bureaucratic. The IRU has met with representatives of the Arts Council to discuss ways of minimising the burden on schools and bringing the paperwork into line with the NRwS. We are awaiting their response, though we sense they are reluctant to move in this direction.

Specialist School redesignation

Last year we did a great deal of work to reach agreement with the Department to bring this process as far as possible into line with the new relationship accountabilities through Ofsted and the SIP. We understand anecdotally that this is beginning to bear real fruit for schools. This is not only in terms of reducing the burden of the re-application process but also more effectively embedding the specialism work into the mainstream school improvement processes of the school. We are keen to learn more from schools of how it is working and any difficulties you may be encountering.

IRU work with agencies and intermediaries

Over the past year we have worked not only with officials and ministers in the

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Department. We have spent a good deal of effort engaging those working in

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the many agencies and intermediaries who operate between central government and schools. We have challenged them to ensure that their work adds value in terms of outcomes for young people. We have urged them to work closely with people in schools in designing detailed arrangements for implementation of their policies and initiatives. Those we have worked with include:

Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education)
NCSL (National College for School Leadership)
TDA (Training and Development Agency for Schools)
LSC (Learning and Skills Council)
QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority)
NAA (National Assessment Agency – part of the QCA)
BECTA (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency)
HSE (Health and Safety Executive)
DEFRA (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)
BLF (Big Lottery Fund)
Artsmark

We have also worked closely with bodies that share our concern that burdens in schools be kept to a minimum. These include

WAMG (Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group)
School Workforce Advisory Panel (the Welsh counterpart to the IRU)
BRE (Better Regulation Executive, part of the Cabinet Office)
NBA (National Bursars Association)
ADCS (Association of Directors of Children's Services)
Lifting the Burdens Taskforce (Dept for Communities and Local Government)