

Implementation Review Unit (IRU) Statement for 2007

We in the Implementation Review Unit all work in schools. We were established in 2003 by the then Secretary of State for Employment and Skills. Our remit was refreshed and reinforced in the White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All* (paragraph 2.69). Our purpose is to challenge and support government to help them implement their policies for children, young people and families in ways that maximise their effectiveness and minimise unnecessary burdens and bureaucracy on schools.

The context and our engagement

Over the past year we have, to all intents and purposes seen a new government installed, a new Prime Minister, a new Department covering schools, and a new Secretary of State for that Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) with responsibilities that include education as one, integral, part of a very much wider remit.

Expectations placed upon schools are already high, and rightly so, but the agenda for change has never been more demanding. During the past year we have engaged with officials on a range of issues which include, amongst others:

- personalised learning;
- significant progression for every child at every key stage;
- contributions to the five Every Child Matters outcomes;
- extended services including wraparound childcare across the day and throughout the year;
- closer engagement with all those with a parental role;
- early identification of complex, often multiple and overlapping barriers to learning and personal growth and the integrated working necessary to build a team around the child to tackle those barriers;
- a much expanded range of choice at age 14, to be offered without closing off access to other learning pathways at a later stage.

Whilst we know that the vast majority of schools have worked hard to embrace this agenda, we believe that capacity and resource are real issues. There can be no doubt that impact is differential across the phases and between schools of different size. The agenda cannot and should not assume a 'one size will fit all' approach across all 24,000 schools.

The Children's Plan

This year change continued right to the end. In December the DCSF published its Children's Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW UNIT STATEMENT FOR 2007



MINIMISING BURDENS IN SCHOOLS
THE IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW UNIT

The aspiration, to achieve better outcomes for all children over the next ten years, is one that we fully share and embrace. It will, however, cause schools to think long and hard about how they are to deliver this ambitious plan given the finite resources and capacities generally available to them.

We are delighted that in the published Children's Plan, DCSF commits itself to "continue to work with the Implementation Review Unit" (chapter 7. paragraph 29) and specifically to help to reaffirm the principles of the New Relationship with Schools (NRwS). We will engage with the detail of delivery through discussions with the DCSF early in 2008 and we are grateful to all of those who have made time to work with us this year and who will continue to do so in the months ahead. Officials at all levels from within the Department, together with those who work to deliver policy, have invariably welcomed the advice and challenge that has been offered by us.

The New Relationship with Schools and the task ahead

In our many engagements with practitioners and others one theme consistently emerges, that of capacity.

In our view, schools need the autonomy to decide for themselves the local priorities and where to invest their finite resources to get the best possible outcomes for children. This needs to be done in the context of the local and national agenda and schools should be held accountable for the decisions made. We believe these to be the principles that are implicit in the NRwS which we have consistently championed since its inception in 2003. In our view, it is only through the practical implementation of the ideas set out in the New Relationship that schools can really focus their energies on better outcomes and not be distracted by more bureaucracy and burdens. We hope, therefore, that the government and its agencies will continue to work to make this a reality.

The IRU has recently published a position statement with regard to NRwS which can be found on our website, as can the original commitments made by the then School Standards Minister, David Miliband, in 2003. Annex A to this document (website only).

So we see our task in the year ahead as continuing to promote the importance of the new relationship; to help the Department develop more practical and effective policy; to improve the clarity of its messages to the intermediaries, and the effectiveness with which it holds stakeholders to account for the way they support schools in securing better outcomes for children and young people.

IRU communications

Our report this year is deliberately brief, but we have set out other examples of the issues with which we have engaged as an annex to this report

IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW UNIT STATEMENT FOR 2007



MINIMISING BURDENS IN SCHOOLS
THE IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW UNIT

(Annex B) on our website.

Much of what we discuss with the Department and its agencies is at an early stage of development, is “work in progress” and inevitably confidential until the point of publication. It is at this point that we will recognise the influence that the IRU may have had, but also where we continue to have reservations around particular aspects of implementation.

This year we decided that the right thing to do when we reach such a point is to produce a ‘real time’ note rather than waiting until the end of the year to report. We also see these public notes as a mechanism, where appropriate, to stimulate wider debate.

The IRU Position Statements serve these purposes. Those published to date are listed below, with links to the full statements on our enhanced and re-launched website.

- New Relationship with Schools
- Financial Management Standard in Schools
- Extended Services
- Common Assessment Framework
- Special Schools
- ContactPoint
- IRU Principles

Contact us

Finally – and on a practical note, we are currently recruiting three new IRU members drawn from classroom teachers and front-line support staff. One of our first tasks in the months ahead, with their help and that of WAMG, is to take a look at lesson-planning – Is there a common understanding amongst schools, local authorities and Ofsted of the work involved in fit-for-purpose planning and the extent to which it should be recorded? Or is there a tendency to over-bureaucratise (and under-deliver)? If so, why? And, most importantly, what needs to be done to promote effective practice?

We very much welcome your views on this or any other matter involving burdens and bureaucracy for schools – please contact us via:

- our new website: www.iru.org.uk
- our email address: IRU.PANEL@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk
- our secretariat at: IRU Secretariat
c/o DCSF
Level 2 Sanctuary Buildings.
Great Smith Street
LONDON SW1P 3BT.