



MINIMISING BURDENS IN SCHOOLS
THE IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW UNIT

NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOLS

IRU POSITION STATEMENT

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.

The New Relationship with Schools (NRwS) provides the opportunity to reshape the relationship between schools, central and local government. It should build capacity and trust, releasing greater initiative and energy to help students in our schools to maximise their progress.

Clear evidence now exists that there are some specific and important issues that must be addressed if the NRwS is to develop.

Making the New Relationship a Reality

To achieve success, the IRU believes that central government should adopt a more cohesive approach to policy implementation. It must work harder to persuade local authorities and the many national and regional intermediaries who work with schools of the crucial importance of them too working within the principles of the new relationship

- **Single Conversation**

The IRU believes that the school's single conversation with their SIP lies at the heart of the new relationship. We urge local authorities to ensure that they have revised their working practices to ensure that the SIP is the sole line of accountability with their schools and seen also as being the usual point of contact with their schools with all other discussions informed by this SIP/school dialogue. This will avoid the fragmented discussions that we believe many schools currently experience. It is not acceptable for a local authority simply to introduce SIPs and then retain all their other contacts with schools. Without this, we will not achieve the efficiency gains necessary to raise standards.

- **School Improvement Partners**

We welcome the challenge and support which these professionals can bring but we urge the Department to take whatever steps are necessary to increase the percentage of serving headteachers or people with recent headship experience employed as SIPs to work with secondary schools and special schools in order to retain the credibility of the role.

We also remain watchful on the introduction of SIPs to work with primary schools and special schools and expect the same principle to apply.

- **Funding**

We welcome the simplification to funding streams and would press for efforts to continue in this direction of simplification and streamlining. Of particular note are two examples: 14-19 funding and funding for extended services.

- **School Profile**

We remain unconvinced that the school profile provides parents with any meaningful information on schools. Most of the contents are made available to parents in other ways and the rationale for its existence is now not clear. We believe it should be scrapped.

- **The School Plan**

We believe that two documents should be produced by all schools. The SEF should summarize the self-evaluation record of the school and The School Plan should set out the strategic plans for school improvement. Bidding at national and local level is inappropriate, as are requests for further information or evidence, unless under exceptional circumstances. The existence of collaboratives and partnerships should not be used as a reason for circumventing the procedures.

- **Data**

We continue to press for data to be collected once and used many times. And schools are already at liberty to refuse any additional non-mandatory requests. This should not though preclude them from taking part in pilots/trials or data collection exercises that they consider to be of benefit in raising standards in their school. Any such additional data demands should, as a matter of course, be collected by simple electronic transfer. And any additional costs associated with a voluntary pilot/trial or data exercise should also be fully assessed and made public before a school decides on whether they wish to take part in that exercise. Finally, we believe that greater gains are possible by the wider use of School Management Information systems

- **Action by Schools**

We regard it as essential that schools play a full part in making the new relationship work. We may on occasion need to adopt an assertive role. We have set out a set of principles that summarises the approach we believe schools might take. These can be found at www.dcsf.gov.uk/iru/

The IRU firmly believes the schools should challenge the DCSF, the local authority or other government-funded bodies, if they seek to work outside the new relationship.

In the meantime we value your experience of NRwS – good and bad.

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

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