

To be distributed in the week commencing 28 August 2012

Dear Colleagues

Update on Section 5 inspections

Please be aware of the following additional guidance for inspections carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) from 1 September 2012.

Rather than modify the published documents and run the risk of confusion over the currency of guidance, we have decided to issue this important additional information.

Where there are any further additions or amendments we will update colleagues via a short newsletter such as this, or if appropriate, through 'Schools and Inspection'.

Involvement of representatives of the local authority or academy chain during S5 inspections

You will be aware that, during each section 8 monitoring inspection of schools in a category of concern, inspectors meet with a representative of the local authority or academy chain. The purpose of this meeting is to judge the impact of the support that these essential partners provide.

From 1 September 2012 we propose to extend this practice to all school inspections. When notifying a headteacher that their school is to be inspected, lead inspectors must ask for a meeting to be set up with a representative from the local authority or academy chain. This will apply to all maintained local authority schools and any academies or free schools that are part of a chain or formal partnership. This does not apply to converter academies that are not part of chain¹. This conversation may be a face-to-face meeting or take place by telephone. Lead inspectors will also request that, unless it is impossible, a representative from the local authority or academy chain is present at the inspection feedback. Directors of Children's Services have been made aware of this change.

The purpose of the meeting with the representative of the local authority or academy chain is to consider the impact of their support. Inspectors must include a brief comment in the inspection report on the nature of this support under the section on leadership and management. For example:

'The local authority provides light touch support for this good/outstanding school'

'The local authority provides effective support for the teaching of mathematics/English which has improved the quality of teaching in this/these subjects'

¹ Currently around a quarter of schools that have converted to academy status are part of a chain, as defined by the DfE.

'The local authority has not provided support or challenged this school despite its rapidly declining national test results in recent years. Consequently...'

'The academy chain has ensured that governors are well equipped to hold school leaders to account for the school's performance. As a result...'

Recommendations for improvement relating to governance

Where governance is weak particularly where a school judged to 'require improvement' or has 'serious weaknesses' and is graded 3 for leadership and management, inspectors should include aspects of governance in their recommendations for improvement.

Where autumn term 2012 inspections are led by an HMI this will include a recommendation that an external review of governance should be undertaken. It is likely that this will apply to all inspections where governance is found to be weak from January 2013.

Sue Gregory HMI
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