

Stronger Management Systems (SMS)

The Stronger Management Systems (SMS) programme is designed to help schools improve how leaders and managers at all levels play their part in improving standards. It focuses on practical but essential elements of management, providing materials to help schools review, refocus and improve systems and structures.

Strong and consistent management systems are vital if schools are to improve and sustain their improvement. Planning improvement will also need to be sensitive to the need for short-term impact, focus and alignment and longer-term capacity building.

The materials and processes are designed to be used flexibly by schools through six-week improvement cycles to bring about rapid change and improvement.

Element 1: Effective line management

Rationale

Effective line management is critical to success at all levels within a school. As well as providing drive and vision, senior leaders have to ensure that staff at all levels are supported and guided to work as effectively and efficiently as possible and in so doing, reduce underperformance and eliminate in-school variation. This in turn means having effective and efficient structures to hold subject, team and year leaders to account as well as providing any support they may need with their own development and line management responsibilities, key levers in reducing in-school variation. The essential role of senior leaders is to ensure that those they manage are supported to develop and apply knowledge and skills in judging standards, monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning, and leading sustainable development of their department or team.

A productive relationship between the senior and middle managers is supported by a strong line management structure with clear lines of accountability underpinned by a clear system of performance management.

Quality standards

- The headteacher and governors have established and communicated a compelling vision and positive culture for change and improvement.
- Every aspect of the school's work is part of a chain of line management and accountability that leads via the leadership team to the headteacher.
- There are strong and productive relationships between line managers and those they manage permitting both support and challenge at the appropriate times.
- There are regular and monitored meetings between line managers and those they manage, which take place at least once a month. These are timetabled, have agendas to which each party contributes, and actions are recorded.
- Formal and calendared performance management review meetings are carried out at least twice a year and are informed both by outcomes of monitoring by the manager and self-evaluation by the reviewee.
- Line management meetings are recognised and used as an opportunity for professional development through coaching and mentoring.

- The senior leadership line management role includes monitoring of whole-school policy and practice in relation to teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance, through lesson observation, work scrutiny, pupil interviews and attendance at department or team meetings.

It is recommended first that senior leaders carry out the self-assessment exercise against the quality standards and then repeat at regular intervals to track their progress towards improved practice and increased impact. The self-assessment pro-forma can be found later on in this document in the section 'Self-assessment materials'.

Element 2: Effective performance management

Rationale

The revised arrangements for the performance management (PM) of teachers and headteachers in England came into force in September 2007. The revised regulations play a dual role in enhancing the professional status of teachers and headteachers: firstly by promoting the development of a culture whereby teachers and headteachers feel confident and empowered to participate fully in performance management, and secondly by developing a system where those who manage teachers and headteachers engage in a professional dialogue with them, respect them as professionals, and make decisions about their work and contribution fairly and openly.

Performance management is a key tool for school improvement. It sets the process for assessing the overall performance of a teacher or headteacher in the context of the individual's job description and the provisions of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD), and against the backdrop of the professional standards. It also makes plans for the individual's future development in the context of the school's improvement or raising attainment plan (RAP).

The regulations apply to teachers and headteachers only, but there are great benefits to the school and its pupils if all staff are covered by effective performance review arrangements.

Quality standards

- The school is compliant with regulations, and has developed a culture whereby teachers/headteachers feel confident and empowered to participate fully in performance management.
- The planning stage of the PM cycle is used effectively to ensure that all elements of performance management are agreed up front and recorded in a high-quality planning statement.
- Challenging, yet achievable, objectives are agreed. They clearly set out what is to be achieved and how it will be measured.
- The school's improvement priorities influence and inform the objectives set for individuals.
- Every teacher and headteacher views performance management as a developmental, supportive process that is part of everyday activity; review feedback is ongoing, honest and informed.
- Performance management is linked to the provision of timely and relevant professional development. The school's priorities are translated into continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities that meet the needs of the school and the individual.
- Performance review and development planning involves the whole workforce.

Element 3: Professional development

Rationale

The key to raising standards is a highly skilled workforce and the key to a highly skilled workforce is a clear, effective and comprehensive approach to continuing professional development (CPD) and training. Not only does developing the workforce ensure that they have the skills and competencies they need to do their job effectively, it also helps staff to feel valued and contributes to an improved ethos across the whole school. Only schools that have such an approach to CPD can truly consider themselves to be learning organisations. However, consequent to this assertion is that it is

essential that any CPD is evaluated for and has impact on pupil outcomes. Without impact there is no school improvement and therefore little value in participating in CPD for the school or its pupils.

In the context of clear improvement priorities which are identified and shared across the school, teams and individuals understand how they will contribute to the school's targets for improvement and the way in which CPD will give them the skills to contribute to their personal success, to the success of their teams and the wider success of the school.

In these ways professional development is a central means by which schools can improve and a key way in which staff are supported to reach their performance management objectives.

Quality standards

- Professional development for teachers is directly related to high-quality first teaching and, for the whole workforce, leads to changes that have a positive impact on pupil learning and attainment.
- A range of types and styles of learning opportunities are provided, making good use of all occasions where staff come together at whole-school, team and individual levels.
- Every member of the workforce has a professional development plan closely linked to their needs as identified through the performance management process, the subject/aspect needs and school needs as identified in the Raising Attainment Plan (RAP).
- There is a clear link between professional development, performance management objectives and the priorities of the RAP.
- The school makes time for staff to learn together.
- All professional development opportunities are evaluated for impact on and changes in teacher behaviours that result in improved outcomes for pupils.

In starting out, we recommend that you carry out a short self-assessment exercise against the quality standards. You can then repeat this at regular intervals to track progress. (See 'Self-assessment materials' later in this element.)

Element 4: Behaviour and Attendance and SEAL

Behaviour

Rationale

The aims of the programme are to ensure that schools have the skills and support they need in order to maintain creative and positive learning environments for all pupils. Much is already happening to support behaviour in schools, and this programme will help schools promote positive behaviour for learning and tackle the issue of low-level disruption. The school workforce, parents and pupils themselves all have a role to play in ensuring positive and productive learning environments for the whole of the school community, as do governors and LAs.

Quality standards

Where schools demonstrate a proactive and positive approach to behaviour there is/are:

- A robust school behaviour policy that details the aims, expectations and responsibilities of the school, parents/carers and pupils.
- Senior staff who support the school in leading and managing behaviour by promoting an emotionally healthy school and a positive climate for learning.
- Clear and agreed systems of rewards and sanctions consistently applied and used by all staff.
- A dynamic learning environment both within and beyond the classroom that encourages positive behaviour.
- An understanding by all staff of the links between behaviour, attendance and pupil progress and attainment.
- A workforce who are confident in managing all aspects of behaviour
- Partnership working with other schools and relevant support services to share provision, expertise and resources.

Many schools have implemented a strategic drive to move from a satisfactory behaviour rating to secure a good rating. Actions that have helped are based on the use of the school self-review framework to secure a good behaviour rating (see Annex B, available on the Element 4 homepage).

Attendance

Rationale

Pupils who attend school on a regular basis and are offered access to high-quality teaching and learning opportunities will usually leave school with qualifications and access to greater employment opportunities. The links between attendance and achievement are strong, and high levels of attendance at school should be a right of each pupil. Schools identified as having high levels of persistent absence in 06/07 used and reviewed the school framework for improving attendance and reducing persistent absence (Annex A, available on the Element 4 homepage) in a systematic way which included identifying key areas for development and working to embed one or two aspects which were then introduced, embedded and subsequently reviewed. The work was led by a member of the senior leadership team. Schools that did not use the framework showed lower rates of improvement.

Quality standards

There are low levels of absence, few pupils with persistent absence and incidents of absence are well managed where there is:

- A senior leadership team that actively promotes attendance, and includes one member with the role of school attendance leader who takes a strategic approach to attendance and understands the school's legal responsibilities.
- An escalation of interventions which are used systematically, applied consistently by all teaching and non-teaching staff and the impact of these interventions is known to the SLT. These are reflected in the school's attendance (or behaviour and attendance) policy.
- A senior leadership team with a clear understanding of the links between attainment and attendance. The profile of attendance at pupil and key stage level is understood and acted upon.
- Use of data to provide a clear profile of absence, and identification of vulnerable groups with clear actions taken as a result of the findings.
- Quality of provision for pupils which encourages regular, high levels of attendance.
- Views of learners, parents, carers and other stakeholders are considered and used to promote positive attendance.
- Partnership working with other schools and relevant support services to share provision, expertise and resources.

Where a school plans to implement a large-scale strategic drive to reduce persistent absence it is recommended that they access the support from the LA behaviour and attendance consultant supported by the National Strategy specialist advisers to draw up an effective plan and make best use of the wide range of supporting materials available on the internet.

Element 5: Assessment for Learning

Rationale

The Assessment Reform Group has defined Assessment for Learning (AfL) as 'the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there' (Assessment for Learning: 10 principles, Assessment Reform Group, 2002, available in the publications section of the website, www.assessment-reform-group.org (link opens in new window)).

'Assessment for Learning is a powerful way of raising pupils' achievement. It is based on the principle that pupils will improve most if they understand the aim of their learning, where they are in relation to this aim and how they can achieve the aim (or close the gap in their knowledge). It is not an add-on or a project; it is central to effective teaching and learning' (Assessment for Learning Strategy, Ref: DCSF-00341-2008).

This element identifies how effective AfL can be successfully developed in classrooms and consistently across the whole school to improve pupils' learning, accelerate their progress and reduce in-school variation.

Quality standards

- The leadership team give priority to and lead on Assessment for Learning across the school. They have a clear understanding of the principles and practice and ensure all teachers are supported to develop their skills through focused, high quality professional development.
- All teachers have a secure and shared understanding of AfL and how it impacts on learning and standards.
- In core subjects teachers use the secondary Frameworks' learning objectives to plan sequences of lessons, and criteria from the Assessing Pupils' Progress materials (APP) to inform learning outcomes.
- All teachers have a good understanding of progression in the key concepts and skills in their subject.
- All pupils have a clear understanding in every lesson of what they are trying to learn (learning objectives) and how they can recognise achievement (learning outcomes) and what 'good' looks like (success criteria).
- Every pupil knows what progress they are making, and understands what they need to do to improve and how to get there.
- Skilful questioning and focussed dialogue (whole class, group and paired discussion) is a regular feature of lessons.
- All teachers provide clear feedback on pupils' work which identifies pupils' next steps and provides opportunities in lessons to respond to feedback.
- All pupils are involved in setting their own learning targets and evaluating their own understanding and progress and that of their peers.
- Each child's progress, what they need to do to improve, and how they can be supported in their learning is regularly shared and discussed with their parents or carers

Element 6: Identification and intervention for individuals and groups

Rationale

In order to meet the learning needs of individual and groups of pupils and raise standards, it is essential for schools to establish rigorous monitoring and tracking systems. Analysis of the attainment of current Year 10 and Year 11 pupils, and the proportions of pupils not on track to attain 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics, can reveal patterns of underachievement in identifiable groups of pupils including those identified by gender, free school meals (FSM) or ethnicity. Schools can use this evidence to target specific groups of pupils, or individuals, more effectively for appropriate interventions. Monitoring the progress of these pupils on a frequent and regular basis will provide evidence that will enable senior leaders to take early and rapid action to support teachers' professional development and individual pupils' learning needs as appropriate.

Many teachers find it difficult to extract useful information from numerical spreadsheets to inform teaching. The Venn analysis tool uses a simple Venn diagram approach to show where pupils are achieving aspects of the 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics and not others (for example, 5+ A*-C including English but not mathematics). It provides a clear visual representation of complex cohort data and enables all teachers to see at a glance where there are groups of pupils underachieving who require targeted support.

Quality standards

- Pupils' progress in relation to their ambitious targets, including English and mathematics, is monitored and tracked across time and compared between specific pupil groups related to ethnicity, gender and FSM.
- Pupils' attainment is benchmarked against national data with regards to gender, FSM and ethnicity.
- All staff work collaboratively to gather, share and use information about pupils' progress, comparing rates of progress in all subjects to enable early, rapid and accurate identification of pupils' underperformance and reduce in-school variation.
- Teaching, intervention and professional development are informed by regular tracking of progress and adjusted in the light of pupils' needs.

- Pupil attainment and rates of progress of individual and groups of pupils is a standing item for discussion on line management, department and year group meeting agendas.
- Senior leaders use information from the Venn analysis and other tracking systems to hold middle leaders and teachers rigorously to account.
- There is a shared understanding of what constitutes good progress.

Pupils and parents have regular opportunities to discuss pupil progress and achievement. Teachers actively involve pupils in setting their own targets.

It is recommended first that senior leaders carry out the self-assessment exercise against the quality standards and then repeat at regular intervals to track their progress towards improved practice and increased impact. The self-assessment pro-forma can be found later on in this document in the section 'Self-assessment materials'.

Element 7: Quality standards in lesson planning

Rationale

Where teaching is effective and consistent across a school it leads to improved learning and outcomes for all pupils and a consequent reduction of in-school variation (ISV). Securing the quality of lesson planning and monitoring delivery of lessons are essential elements in securing high-quality teaching and learning. This is particularly important in schools with a relatively high number of inexperienced or temporary staff and where large numbers of pupils are making inadequate progress. Indeed, it is likely to be a case of cause and effect between these two conditions, which can also be a key cause of significant ISV.

Quality standards

Consistently high standards in teaching and learning will be achieved where senior leaders ensure that:

- There is a common understanding and agreement of the essential characteristics of a good lesson among all staff and these characteristics are regularly and consistently applied in all lesson planning and lessons.
- All staff regularly employ a wide range of teaching strategies to maintain pace and actively engage all pupils in lessons.
- All lessons are planned for inclusion, taking into account the learning needs of specific pupil groups, for example, gender, free school meals (FSM) and ethnicity.
- Appropriate challenge is visible in all lessons, planning allows all pupils to make good progress, taking account of the full range of ability from low attaining to gifted and talented pupils.
- There is a clear and agreed teaching and learning policy that reflects the stated aims of the school and which is consistently applied by the whole workforce.
- Account is taken of the need for high-quality long-, medium- and short-term planning in all subjects. The planning cycle involves collaboration of staff at all levels.
- Planning takes account of the need to use Assessment for Learning (AfL) to make each pupil a partner in their learning.
- There is close, targeted and frequent scrutiny of teachers' planning and pupils' work to monitor the impact of planning and teaching and a comprehensive programme of lesson observations to ensure quality and consistency.

It is recommended first that senior leaders carry out the self-assessment exercise against the quality standards and then repeat at regular intervals to track their progress towards improved practice and increased impact. It can also be used to gain the perspective from other groups of the workforce. The self-assessment pro-forma can be found later in this document in the section 'Self-assessment materials'.

Element 8: Self-evaluation

Rationale

In order to improve, schools need to know themselves well. Indeed, this lies at the heart of the improvement process. However, schools are complex organisations and so it is no small feat to ensure that a thorough, accurate and dispassionate self-evaluation is arrived at. The purpose of this unit is to assist schools with this process. The fundamental purpose of any school improvement activity is to improve outcomes for all pupils. Self-evaluation should therefore focus specifically on the impact provision makes on these outcomes and should be informed by the views of a wide range of stakeholders. In a cycle of continuous improvement the findings from self-evaluation should then inform priorities in development planning.

A new relationship with schools: Improving performance through school self-evaluation (DfES 1290-2005DOC-EN) identifies some key points about self-evaluation that schools should take into account:

- rigorous self-evaluation helps schools to improve;
- schools should shape for themselves a process that is simple and integrated with their routine management systems;
- schools must listen and respond to the views of stakeholders.

Quality standards

- Headteachers and senior leaders give priority to and lead self-evaluation personally. They have a clear overview of their school, based on an accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses.
- The views, particularly of learners, but also parents and carers, are actively sought and taken into account.
- Self-evaluation is integral to the culture of the school. Staff at all levels are committed to it and fully involved.
- Self-evaluation is a continuous process, governed by the needs of the school and its pupils rather than the requirements of external bodies.
- Self-evaluation is at the heart of the key management systems of the school, operates to an agreed policy and leads to action to achieve the longer-term goals for sustained school improvement.
- A range of performance indicators is used to enhance the quality of self-evaluation.
- The school compares itself with similar schools nationally and uses this information to set targets.
- Rigorous analysis of strengths and weaknesses, particularly of teaching and learning and behaviour and attendance, leads to the clear identification of priorities and strategies for improvement.
- Sharply focused monitoring, based on clear indicators, helps schools to measure the extent to which their work improves outcomes for pupils.

It is recommended first that senior leaders carry out the self-assessment exercise against the quality standards and then repeat at regular intervals to track progress on the improvement and development of the process of becoming a self-evaluating school. The pro-forma can be found later in this document in 'Self-assessment materials'.

Element 9: Monitoring and evaluation

Rationale

Monitoring is a key aspect of ensuring consistent practice across the range of school activity. The mere fact of monitoring consistent implementation of policy, practice and procedure has been found to make things work more smoothly.

Targeted and focused observation of lessons and studying a carefully selected sample of pupils' work are key monitoring tools contributing to self-evaluation and improvement. Seeking the views of key stakeholders, in particular those of the pupils, provides a valuable insight into the quality of the 'everyday' teaching that they experience on a regular basis. They provide tangible and immediate evidence of how pupils are progressing and enable staff at all levels to plan for improvements with confidence. The observations and scrutiny should be used to make judgements on standards of attainment and degrees of progression; scrutinising work with groups of colleagues ensures consistency and agreement on standards. Work scrutiny and observation should also be used to develop action points about the

quality of teaching, the quality of Assessment for Learning (AfL), curriculum provision, pupils' learning and progress, their attitudes to work and the consistency with which the school's policies are implemented.'

Quality standards

- There is a monitoring strategy which involves managers at all levels in the school that ensures all the school's basic policies and procedures are adhered to.
- There is an agreed self-evaluation policy that identifies work scrutiny and lesson observation as key elements of the evidence base and sets out the processes, procedures and expectations of this aspect of the school's work. Responsibilities are clearly assigned for the organisation, management, coordination and evaluative summarising of these activities.
- There is a clear and explicit focus, hypothesis or lead question for each monitoring activity that takes place.
- A specific sample for scrutiny or observation is selected, based on existing knowledge, which provides the best evidence within the constraints of time available.
- Discussion and agreement takes place between key staff about the main features that emerge from the scrutiny or observation.
- Outcomes from monitoring and evaluation lead to an action plan implemented by subject departments, and impact is tracked by subject leaders and senior leaders through repeat observation and re-sampling work over time.
- Outcomes are monitored and evaluated by senior leaders through normal line management arrangements.
- The views of pupils on the quality of their work are actively sought and evaluated.
- Monitoring and evaluation activities lead to improving quality of pupils' work and accelerated progress as a result of improving standards and consistency from teachers and other members of the school workforce.

It is recommended first that senior leaders carry out the self-assessment exercise against the quality standards and then repeat at regular intervals to track their progress towards improved practice and increased impact. The self-assessment pro-forma can be found later on in this document in the section 'Self-assessment materials'.

Element 10: Tracking pupil progress

Rationale

Schools need to establish rigorous monitoring and tracking systems as the critical first steps towards ensuring the learning needs of all pupils are met. Such systems enable schools to set appropriately ambitious and challenging targets. These numerical targets should lead to curricular targets, which inform learning objectives and learning outcomes. Analysis should identify strengths and weaknesses in the performance of individuals and groups of pupils and inform lesson planning and the appropriate use and impact of intervention strategies.

Quality standards

- All staff work collaboratively to gather, share and use information about pupils' progress, comparing rates of progress in all subjects to enable early, rapid and accurate identification of pupils' underperformance and reduce in-school variation.
- Teaching, intervention and revision programmes are informed by regular tracking of progress and adjusted in the light of pupils' needs.
- Pupils' progress in relation to their ambitious targets is monitored and tracked across time and compared across subjects using a range of performance measures including accurate and moderated teacher assessments and test results.
- Pupil attainment and rates of progress of individual and groups of pupils is a standing item for discussion on line management, department and year group meeting agendas.
- Pupils' attainment is benchmarked against local and national data and there is a shared understanding of what constitutes good progress.
- Through the line management chain, information from RAISEonline and other national and local data is used to hold senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers to account for the progress of pupils.

- Pupils, parents and carers have regular opportunities to discuss pupils' progress. Teachers actively involve pupils in setting their own targets.

It is recommended first that senior leaders carry out the self-assessment exercise against the quality standards and then repeat at regular intervals to track their progress towards improved practice and increased impact. The self-assessment pro-forma can be found later on in this document in the section 'Self-assessment materials'.
