

The Impact of the School Improvement Team

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In October 2013 Ofsted undertook a [focused inspection](#) of Northumberland schools:

"The support provided by the local authority to (vulnerable) schools has not been effective (and) actions have not been swift enough"

"The local authority's strategy for improving schools is inadequately communicated"

"Challenge to schools is, at best, patchy and usually inadequate"

"Schools lack confidence in the local authority's approach to supporting them"

"There is a significant and worrying decline in inspection outcomes"

"In summary, there is an urgent and pressing need for significant action to establish and embed a clear vision for sustained improvement across schools in Northumberland."

The School Improvement Team – April 2022



School Improvement Leader
(Literacy)



School Improvement Leader
(SEND)



Head of School Improvement



School Improvement Team Administrator



School Improvement Leader
(Disadvantage)



School Improvement Leader
(Assessment)



School Improvement Leader
(Mathematics)

- 20 external School Improvement Partners (providing 3 or 4 days support a year per school)
- The external School Improvement Partners are serving/retired headteachers, serving/retired Ofsted inspectors or school improvement colleagues from other LA's/Dioceses

Strengths of the Team

Highly skilled team members who are specialists in their specific areas

Strong relationships with all schools across the county

Vast experience of headship/senior leadership across a range of school types – 5 team members hold NQPH

Strong relationships with dioceses

2 team members will begin work as Ofsted inspectors from September 2022

6 team members are accredited Evidence Leaders in Education, via the Education Endowment Foundation

1 team member is a Senior Associate with the Association of Education Advisers

Specific [website](#) provides a single source of information and support to school leaders

What Do We Do?

Support school leaders every day

Act as the Moderation Managers for KS1 and KS2

Speak to and influence Ofsted during inspections and attend feedback meetings

Work in conjunction with the Education Endowment Foundation and Newcastle Research School providing training

Work as School Improvement Partners for 118 schools

Lead the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Provide regular training sessions on a wide range of subjects, based on national/local priorities and school needs

Provide support for Headteacher Performance Management for over 100 schools

Act as the Appropriate Body for Early Career Teachers

Provide leadership/management to the LA Governance, ICT, Equalities teams

Provide support for schools when recruiting a headteacher

Attend/provide briefings to specific groups – Disadvantage Leads, SENCOs, Governors, PSHE Leads, Headteachers

Supporting Schools Through the Pandemic

All Northumberland schools supported through the pandemic, including home learning resources, written and curated, by the team	Regular welfare calls to headteachers and senior leaders
Northumberland Education website was/is the hub for links to DfE guidance, Health & Safety information, HR and Communications team updates	Publication and distribution of over 200 "5 o'clock" COVID updates via the website
Collection and distribution of thousands of PPE items to schools	Support and guidance for schools who received remote monitoring visits from Ofsted (every outcome was positive)
Distribution of 2000+ digital devices via DfE schemes	Support provided at over 80 dedicated Covid information sessions for school leaders
Purchase and distribution of 2000+ digital devices via COVID Recovery funding	Training delivered to over 1000 school colleagues

Ofsted Inspections Over Time

	Aug 2017	Aug 2018	Aug 2019	Aug 2020	Aug 2021	April 2022
Outstanding or Good	133 (76%) Nat Ave: 86%	134	137	138	137	142 (88%) Nat Ave: 86%
Requires Improvement or Inadequate	40 (24%) Nat Ave: 14%	33	27	25	25	19 (12%) Nat Ave: 14%

The 19 less than good schools are key priorities for the actions of the school improvement team. All of these school are currently deemed by 'taking effective actions' following their Ofsted monitoring visits. This indicates they are well placed to move to good at their next section 5 inspection.

To add further context to the impact of the team in 2016 there were 74 schools either judged less than good or at risk of being so at their next inspection. Today that number is 23 with almost all taking effective actions, which was not the case for the 74 in 20016.

Current Ofsted performance

Since January 2021 32 inspections have been undertaken:

- 16 monitoring visits (of Inadequate/Requires improvement schools) have seen **all** schools "taking effective action"
- 2 Inadequate secondary/high schools have improved to Requires Improvement
- 1 secondary/high has improved from requires improvement to Good
- 1 secondary academy (previously not inspected) has been graded Good
- 1 secondary has retained its Good rating
- 1 secondary school has dropped from Good to Requires Improvement
- 3 middle schools have improved their grade from Requires Improvement to Good
- 1 middle school has improved their grade from Good to Outstanding
- 2 primary academies (previously not inspected) have been graded Good
- 3 primary schools have retained their Good rating
- 1 primary school has improved their grade from Good to Outstanding

School Improvement SLA take up 2021 - 2022:

	Primary	Secondary	Special	Other	Total
Schools using LA School Improvement Partners	95	13	7	3	118
Total in phase	127	29	10	N/A	166
	75%	45%	70%		

- 65% of Northumberland schools are LA maintained schools
- Of the 32 first/primary schools that do not buy the SLA - 1 is a maintained school, the rest academies
- Of the 16 middle/secondary/high schools that do not buy the SLA - all are academies
- Of the 3 special schools that do not buy the SLA - 1 is a maintained school, the rest academies
- *The local authority knows its own schools very well.*

Comments regarding the LA in Ofsted reports:

“The local authority provides honest and purposeful support to the school. Moderation activities have helped to secure accurate assessment procedures. Local authority advisory staff are effectively supporting subject leaders to improve the quality of teaching effectively, particularly in mathematics.” Primary School Ofsted report

“The local authority’s school improvement partner provides focused support and challenge that are underpinned by their good understanding of the school’s priorities. They make regular checks on their progress.” Primary School Ofsted report

“Senior leaders draw on expertise from across the trust and share best practice as well as offering constructive feedback to each other. They also work well with the local authority. Leaders feel confident that this critical friendship is supporting the school’s improvement journey effectively. ” Primary School Ofsted report

"The local authority continues to provide consultant support to the school. The support packages that the school has accessed are well targeted and having a positive impact, for example around behaviour and attendance." Secondary School Ofsted report

Comments regarding the School Improvement Team from schools:

“The Co – Headteachers continue to appreciate the professional dialogue and challenge that arises during the SIP visit. The emerging questions are helping to cement future strategic action.”

“This virtual SIP visit was very beneficial in terms of having the opportunity to reflect on the work of the whole team during the COVID pandemic so far. The school improvement partner was supportive of what we had put in place and achieved but also offered an element of challenge through questioning to acquire more depth in certain areas.”

“As always, our SIP visit was extremely useful in terms of moderation, quality assurance, support and challenge.”

"Headteachers were grateful that the School Improvement Team had put together such a positive and effective termly visit template, which reassured them that they had the continual support from the council and this team.”

“The best training, I have ever attended.”

“Hugely valuable to newcomers of SLT. How to implement at whole-school level. Support from School Improvement Team and staff - excellent, not just from a Pupil Premium view but implementing change in general.”

"Many thanks for your help. I have been going around in circles for months and you sorted it within hours."

From 2022 the School Improvement Service reports to the Education Strategy Board on the following priorities:

- 2. We will know the strengths and weaknesses of our schools and other educational providers, challenge and support them to improve and report their performance to the Council and the community.
- 6. We will work across the early years sector to ensure all children are school ready and that the schools are ready for every child
- 7. We will support all first and primary schools to ensure their pupils have all the skills and knowledge required to access the secondary curriculum.

Challenges: DfE to remove the School Improvement Grant:

In January 2022 the DfE announced the removal of the [School Improvement Brokering & Monitoring Grant](#). This grant provides about 60% of the income for the School Improvement Team.

The grant will be reduced by 50% in 2022 – 2023 and removed altogether from April 2023.

Whilst there are cost savings that the service can make it will be difficult to make up for the shortfall that the removal of the grant will leave.

Considerably raising the cost of the SLA would add pressure to already stretched school budgets. Those budgets have been impacted by COVID costs, staffing cost increases, gas and electric costs and the forthcoming 1.25% increase in National Insurance contributions for Health and Social Care will cost Northumberland schools in the region of £1.5million.

Opportunities: DfE to allow Local Authorities to set up Multi Academy Trusts

In the [White Paper](#) of March 2022 the DfE announced that Local Authorities would be allowed to set up Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), and that all schools are expected to join a MAT by 2030.

The LA has always supported schools working together in 'families'. Being able to form a Trust and invite schools to join an LA MAT is an opportunity the School Improvement Team are exceptionally well placed to develop, support and coordinate.

Next Steps

- Expand the number of schools engaging with the School Improvement Team
- Further develop of consultancy work with other Local Authorities
- Work with the Director to establish the School Improvement Function in any potential MAT
- Build upon success and continue to support schools to improve Corporate KPIs at headline level
- Increase the team members undertaking Ofsted Inspector training
- Secure the finances to at least maintain the capacity of the team

Committee is recommended to:

- Review the performance of the team over time via this report and the PowerPoint in appendix 1
- Comment on the team's ability to support and develop the quality of education in Northumberland
- Give further direction to the team as they continue to operate
- Consider the changes to funding imposed by the DfE and the possible impact on the service