
**OVERVIEW OF THE SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE PROVIDED TO
DARLINGTON'S SCHOOLS BY THE SCHOOLS, IMPROVEMENT AND
DEVELOPMENT SERVICE.**

SUMMARY REPORT**Purpose of the Report**

1. This report explains the development of the role of school improvement partners (SIPs) nationally. It considers their functions and those of Lead Officers (LOs) in the Schools Improvement and Development service (SID) and outlines:
 - how they support and challenge Darlington's community schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)
 - the focus of SID activities this term.

Summary

2. The school improvement and development service has remained relatively stable in Darlington in recent years. Relationships forged with schools have flourished in this period and are currently very good. Every school has a SIP. The level of support and challenge a LO provides for a school depends on its category. This may be universal, targeted or intensive depending on the school's unique circumstances. The future of SID functions and the role of SIPs and LOs are currently uncertain. This term, SIPs and LOs, whilst fulfilling their usual support and challenge roles in schools, are also working on sharpening planning and report writing and considering how they might help schools build their own capacity to deliver school improvement and support for each other in the future.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of the report.

**Murray Rose
Director of Children's Services**

Background Papers

None

Wendy Ripley: Extension 2824

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no matters arising from this report
Health and Well Being	There are no matters arising from this report
Sustainability	There are no matters arising from this report
Diversity	Maintaining efficient schools with difference forms of governance provides parents with choice in the style of education they desire for their child
Wards Affected	All wards in Darlington
Groups Affected	All mainstream schools, the 2 PRUs and employees of the School Improvement and Development Service.
Budget and Policy Framework	Consistent with existing budgets but the MTFP includes reductions for the school improvement and development service into the future
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Intervening, challenging, monitoring and supporting schools is consistent with the aspiring Darlington theme of maintaining strong schools of choice within the Borough
Efficiency	Efficiencies in the service are being considered as part of the transformation process for the Council

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

The national context for the development of SIPs 2006 to present

4. The School Improvement Partner (SIP) programme was developed to provide challenge and support for school leaders as part of the previous Government's 'New Relationship with Schools'. As a result of the Education and Inspection Act 2006 and an agreement with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), it has been a statutory requirement for local authorities (LAs) to appoint and deploy SIPs to all their mainstream schools, special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) for an average of five days per year for each school. Every academy also had to have a SIP, but the DCSF (now the Department for Education – DfE) academies division rather than LAs manage them.
5. Before an individual with relevant professional experience and qualifications could become a SIP they had to participate in training resulting in accreditation through the National College for School Leaders. Once accredited, SIPs typically carry out the LAs statutory duties to challenge, support and monitor their schools by:
 - challenging and supporting school leaders on their self-evaluation, their roles and responsibilities through the relationships they build with them and the professional conversations they hold during their visits
 - interrogating the school's performance and other management information/data
 - helping school leaders to identify a small number of key priorities for improvement
 - ensuring the school adopts high-impact strategies to achieve its priorities
 - broker support from others to assist the school in its improvement
 - help the school monitor and evaluate the impact of its actions and the support it has engaged, or that has been engaged on its behalf by the LA.
6. Since the change in Government in May 2010, the future of the SIP programme has been under review. This aspect of school improvement work and others such as functions associated with the 'National Strategies' for example, are uncertain. The Education White paper is expected in the second half of November and a decision is awaited from the DfE in the near future about the role of SIPs and the extent to which LAs will provide school improvement services. However, following the recent spending review and current Government announcements, all the indications are that LAs will no longer have a statutory function to provide SIPs and other aspects of school improvement work will be substantially diminished as funding for such services is devolved directly to schools.
7. Darlington schools have already established a mechanism to plan and fund support for each other, through the schools' commissioning board activity carried out as a part of the self-help activity, described as schools@onedarlington. It is increasingly likely that this kind of model, schools supporting each other, will be the future delivery model.

How SID has operated to date.

8. Darlington's Schools, Improvement and Development team undertakes a wide range of functions for Children's Services and deliver a range of services for schools. Each LO reports to the Assistant Director: SID, and line manages a number of staff in different teams that deliver a wide range of provision. This currently includes the virtual leadership

college, school governance service, behaviour support, e-learning, the 14-19 partnership, Early Years Foundation Stage advisory services and education other than at school provision (EOTAS) such as the home and hospital education service for example. The vast majority of Darlington's LOs are accredited SIPs who provide support and challenge for schools in the ways outlined in paragraph 5 above in addition to their other LA roles and responsibilities.

9. The number of LOs employed by the LA is relatively small. This means that there is insufficient in-house capacity for the Local Authority to meet its statutory obligation to provide a SIP for all of its mainstream schools and PRUs through its own Lead Officers. Consequently the LA also has contracts with a small number of independent SIPs that varies according to need. Two of these are serving primary headteachers in the local authority, two other independent SIPs have specialist expertise related to behaviour and attendance and EOTAS. These individuals provide support for the PRUs. The quality and effectiveness of SIPs work is monitored through one LO who acts as the SIP Manager. The number of independent SIPs has been reduced considerably over the past year in order to minimise LA expenditure. Consequently each LO has more schools to provide SIP support to than in previous years and in some instances this year, the SIP and LO role are undertaken by the same person whereas in previous years it was more likely to be two different individuals..
 10. At the start of the academic year the Assistant Director: SID works with the LOs to decide what other support a school may need in addition to the SIP. Using a very strict protocol that has been agreed with schools, a wide range of information including local and national performance data (educational standards, attendance and exclusion rates, free –school meals and deprivation indices etc) and local knowledge and understanding of each school is considered. This results in a school being allocated to one of three categories for support. These categories are designed to ensure that the support and challenge the LA provides is proportionate to the school's needs.
 11. The category of support that each school is allocated remains confidential. It is not shared beyond the Director of Children's Services, the Assistant Director: SID, and LOs and is only communicated to the headteacher of each school. This ensures that trust is maintained between the LA and schools and opportunities for unfounded speculation around the reason for the category of support are limited. The category of support usually stays in place for a full academic year but may change in response to specific/unexpected circumstances or through discussion and negotiation with the headteacher and, where appropriate with the SIP.
 12. School leaders are invited to discuss their 'category' with the Assistant Director: SID. This year there were no challenges or concerns from schools arising from their allocated category of support. This is because the relationships the LA has forged with schools in recent years are very positive and the reasons for the categorisation are clear and fully understood by school leaders.
 13. Where a school is considered to be performing well and requires little additional support from the LA, it will be categorised as requiring 'universal' support. This means that beyond the statutory SIP work, LO involvement and support from other LA specialist teams will be 'light touch'. LA engagement with universal schools is usually agreed by the LO and the headteacher in an initial meeting or telephone conversation..
 14. A school that has been identified as having a specific issue to address that requires very specific support - such as a higher than average rate of absence for a small number of pupils, long term absence of a key member of staff or receiving a satisfactory judgement
-

for overall effectiveness at a recent Ofsted inspection - is categorised as requiring 'targeted' support. In these schools LOs will increase their direct contact with the school and will put together a LA action plan to help the school address these specific issues. Typically the LO will visit the school each half term and other LA and external support will also be brought in and coordinated as necessary .

15. A school facing a more complex range of challenges is categorised as requiring 'intensive' support. For example, this would be the case for a school that has received a 'notice to improve' at a recent Ofsted inspection or where the standards attained by pupils have declined when compared to the previous year. Here LOs would typically meet with school leaders every two weeks or on a weekly basis as appropriate. An action plan and additional support would be put in place and this would be closely monitored throughout the year.
16. The LA plays a key role in ensuring that all the streams of support going into a school are being channelled and used to best effect and their impact is being monitored and evaluated effectively. It is important to note that schools are largely autonomous. As such they can choose to buy in, commission or bid for support through specific initiatives such as 'Leading Edge' and 'Gaining Ground' to meet any needs they perceive, in addition to that provided by the SIP and/or LO. In a very few cases too many different sources of support results in 'initiative fatigue' and there is limited impact from the different types of support as a result. If this happens, LOs have a key part to play in working with school leaders and others to streamline the sources of support and target it effectively.

What has SID been working on this term?

17. As the future of SIPs and SID both nationally and locally is currently so uncertain and our capacity to support schools diminishes as funding streams end, we have chosen to focus our activities this term on:
 - sharpening how we plan, monitor and evaluate the impact and outcomes of the support we provide to schools
 - improving the focus and the usefulness of the reports we write when we have visited schools
 - working more closely with other LA specialist teams such as those for children and young people with special educational needs; the educational psychology service and locality teams to ensure we capture and can report back accurately on the impact of their engagement with schools within our reporting mechanism
 - working out how best to challenge and support schools to improve their planning processes and evaluate their effectiveness rigorously given that the completion of a standardised self - evaluation form is no longer a requirement once the current academic year ends
 - succession planning: that is, considering how we can best future proof schools and enable them to work together in partnership to support and challenge each other and deliver their own school improvement services should changes in funding and statutory requirements result in the demise of SIPs, LOs and SID.
 - maintaining focused support on schools currently in an Ofsted category for improvement or where academic results in 2010 were lower than expected.

Outcome of Consultation

18. No specific consultation took place for this report.