

The National Strategies

LA pilot on the new procedures for the redesignation of specialist schools:

Evaluation report spring 2010



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The purpose of the pilot

DCSF is introducing new arrangements for the initial designation and redesignation of specialist schools from April 2010. Prior to the national roll-out DCSF, jointly with the National Strategies, has carried out a small pilot involving ten specialist schools in five local authorities (LAs) to test the new arrangements for redesignation and to inform the roll-out.

This document sets out the reasons for the new redesignation arrangements; describes the scope of the pilot and the expectations of the participating LAs and schools; summarises the key findings and sets out how these will be taken forward in the national roll-out.

Introduction

Five LAs, Cambridgeshire, Coventry, Dorset, Newcastle, and Redbridge, were invited to take part in the pilot. Each LA was asked to identify two schools that were due for redesignation in 2009–10.

The pilot was launched in September 2009 when headteachers, SIPs and LA SIP managers were fully briefed on the white paper *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system*, as well as on the reasons for the new redesignation arrangements and the scope and expectations of the pilot exercise. DCSF and the National Strategies also set out the support that would be provided, together with the key documentation and the policy support.

The launch event was well received and provided pilot schools and LAs with an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the new arrangements, and to ask questions about and comment on the new proposals, including the new benchmarks.

Policy context

The schools white paper, *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system*, published in June 2009, sets out the new expectations for specialist schools and places the specialist school programme at the heart of the 21st century schools system. Building on the strengths of the existing specialist programme, the key aims include:

- Specialist schools to become centres of excellence, to refocus on their specialism, and to achieve more impact from the investment in the specialist programme.
- Decisions about schools' specialist status to be taken locally by SIPs, so that this becomes part of a wider conversation about performance and school improvement.
- Reducing bureaucracy and burdens by moving from a redesignation process which has become too complex and centralised to a streamlined accountability system based on national benchmarks and moderated at both a local and regional level to ensure consistency.

An outline of the white paper proposals and the implications for the specialist schools programme can be found in Appendix 1.

Objectives

In the context of the key aims set out in the white paper, the objectives for the pilot were to:

- test the new benchmarks for specialist schools;
- help develop additional support and guidance for schools, SIPs and LAs;
- establish how DCSF can make the process as efficient as possible for schools, SIPs and LAs.

The scope of the pilot

The specialist schools redesignation pilot was a small, targeted pilot exercise which was carried out during the autumn term of 2009 prior to DCSF devolving responsibility for taking decisions about schools' specialist status to SIPs and LAs nationally.

The pilot sought to trial the new arrangements and national benchmarks for redesignation and to set out how LAs, schools and SIPs would work together to redesignate specialist schools in their areas. Each LA taking part in the pilot was asked to redesignate two mainstream specialist schools.

Decisions on redesignation had to be based on a national set of benchmarks, and evidence provided by schools from their Ofsted self-evaluation framework (SEF), the School Development Plan (SDP) and other key documents or validated data. SIPs were asked to ensure that they were satisfied that they had sufficient evidence to be able to justify their decision that all of the prompts within the benchmarks had been met. The expectation was that at the end of the process the pilot SIPs would have made 'real' decisions about whether the participating schools should or should not be redesignated and that their decisions would be ratified by the LA following moderation of the process.

In the event that a SIP identified that the evidence submitted by a school did not demonstrate convincingly that it met the requirements set out in the benchmarks, he or she could recommend that the school be placed 'on probation', for a period of one year initially, in order to give the school time to improve.

SIPs were asked to make their recommendations by the second week of December 2009. Following completion of the pilot, all participants would be invited to provide DCSF and the National Strategies with feedback via a telephone survey or visit and a short written questionnaire. This evidence would be analysed and used to develop the SIP guidance and training materials in advance of rolling out the new arrangement nationally from spring 2010.

The supporting documentation provided to the pilot schools and LAs at the launch included:

- the new benchmarks for specialism based on five key principles. These benchmarks were developed in collaboration with the SSAT and YST and summarise the requirements of the specialist schools programme in the light of the white paper commitments (**Appendix 2**);
- a redesignation flowchart (**Appendix 3**);
- a suggested six-week schedule mapping the processes and roles that SIPs, schools and SIP managers had to carry out (**Appendix 4**).

The redesignations were completed as planned at the beginning of December 2009 and evaluation visits and interviews took place shortly after that. The surveys were conducted by DCSF and National Strategies based on a pre-agreed evaluation script (**Appendix 5**).

Key findings

1. New redesignation process

All of the participants in the pilot – headteachers, SIPs and LA SIP managers – found the new process straightforward, with many commenting that the new arrangements were an improvement on previous redesignation procedures and resulted in a reduced administrative burden on schools.

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Feedback comments from pilot schools, SIPs and LAs:

Headteachers were of the view that the new system is far less bureaucratic and time-consuming. Both schools commented that the new process is better and that the involvement of the SIP is a welcome move. (Coventry SIP)

Overall the school found this a positive experience and felt that with minor modifications it should prove to be a significant improvement on the previous system. (Dorset SIP)

Everyone involved has been delighted with the way in which the process has linked into the whole-school development and challenge process. (Newcastle LA SIP manager)

2. Benchmarks

All the participants in the pilot agreed that on the whole the use of benchmarks was straightforward and user-friendly. DCSF advice was that SIPs should look at the whole picture, probe the evidence submitted by schools, give equal weighting to all benchmarks principles, and use their professional judgement when reaching their decision.

Feedback comments from pilot schools, SIPs and LAs:

All the participants commented that they found the benchmarks easy to navigate, clear and appropriate. (Coventry LA)

A well run school would have no difficulty in gathering the evidence. (Cambridgeshire headteacher)

Both schools involved in the pilot found the benchmarks easy to use and the process of completion developmental. (Newcastle LA)

Prompts were very good (better than SEF), succinct and well set out. Prompts enabled the specialist team coordinator to focus on where they are with the specialism. (Redbridge headteacher)

3. The role of SIPs

All the participants in the pilot were of the view that for SIPs to take decisions on redesignation was a natural extension of their current role in relation to specialist schools. SIPs already have detailed knowledge of schools as a whole and will already have knowledge of schools' specialisms and the requirements of the specialist programme.

The results of the pilot

All schools in the pilot were successfully redesignated. All SIPs commented that this process was helped by the fact that they had good knowledge of the schools and that they had one full day in total to visit the school, discuss the evidence in some detail and write the redesignation report.

Issues raised

The SIPs involved in the pilot raised the following:

- There may well be a need to align decisions regarding redesignation with the allocation and deployment of SIPs on a three-year cycle.
- Some, though not all, schools will require more SIP time if the redesignation process is to be done properly.
- There is a risk that the new role could result in a change in the relationship between SIP and headteacher.

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Feedback comments from pilot schools, SIPs and LAs:

The SIP found the pilot a positive activity and very informative. It enabled him to identify and understand areas that are a real strength in the school and which were not part of most SIP visits. (Dorset LA)

The SIP reported that the new role fits well with the SIP brief as a whole, but is concerned about the amount of SIP time needed for some schools. (Coventry LA)

Redesignation should be included in SIP training and should be part of the termly SIP visit; very beneficial as a school improvement process. (Redbridge SIP)

4. The role of the local authority

In all of the pilot LAs there was debate and discussion about the role of LAs and the level of seniority at which the moderation process should take place. DCSF's advice was that these issues would not be prescribed and should be decided locally, depending on the tier at which strategic decisions for school improvement are taken. The new role of LAs in moderating SIP's redesignation decisions is designed to achieve consistency at local, regional and national level and to ensure that the specialist programme becomes a key component of an LA's strategic planning.

DCSF also made clear that the role of the LA was not one of offering a second opinion on the SIP's decision, but rather of ensuring that the process was applied consistently to all schools being redesignated. This would also ensure that the LA can undertake its role in conducting internal appeals should a school dispute the SIP's decision by invoking procedural irregularities.

Feedback comments from pilot schools, SIPs and LAs:

The LA welcomed the opportunity to be more involved and feel that it strengthens their strategic role at a local level. (Coventry LA)

How you moderate depends on the size of the LA and how well you know the schools. Maybe a formal meeting is required, particularly if schools do not engage, or have performance issues. (Redbridge LA)

5. The redesignation schedule

DCSF and the National Strategies produced a six-week redesignation schedule for the pilot (see Appendix 4). This schedule was not mandatory and was designed to ensure the best use of the time available to the pilot schools and LAs. Many of the participants indicated that the use of the schedule was adequate for the purpose of the pilot, but that they would have preferred a slightly longer period of time. When the process is rolled out, discussions regarding redesignation will need to become a regular feature of the conversations between SIPs and schools.

Feedback comments from pilot schools, SIPs and LAs:

The six-week time period was an appropriate length of time in which to collect the information. Very helpful. (Newcastle LA)

Both schools would have preferred a bit longer – between 8 and 10 weeks – but liked the idea of having a schedule. (Coventry SIP)

Some overall comments on the pilot process:

Overall this was a very positive activity. (Dorset LA)

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We are delighted about the way in which the pilot has been managed – with appropriate guidance but with the sense of being involved in a real pilot – not one that had been ‘made earlier’. Thank you for this. (Newcastle LA)

Conclusion

The feedback and findings of the pilot are a positive endorsement of the proposals in the white paper *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system* for re-focusing the specialist schools programme. The arrangements trialled by SIPs for taking decisions on the redesignation of specialist schools are workable, rigorous and robust and should be rolled out as planned.

The benchmarks were found to be straightforward and user-friendly and should be embedded as the essential specialism framework. Schools should provide, as a minimum, the evidence from their SEF as signposted in the benchmark framework and also any other relevant evidence. SIPs should probe the evidence and use their professional judgement to make redesignation decisions that can stand up to moderation by the LA and to possible challenge by schools. The specialist schools guidance will include more information about the use of the benchmark framework and will include case studies.

To ensure consistency, all SIPs should undertake some form of training before carrying out redesignations or initial designations. Face-to-face training or an online training module should be made available to support SIPs.

The role of the LA is to ensure that the redesignation process has been applied consistently and robustly to all schools. LAs should also establish clear and transparent appeal systems should schools challenge decisions taken by SIPs.

SIPs have unanimously reported that the activities relating to the redesignation as recommended by DCSF amount to one full working day. DCSF should therefore consider increasing the amount of SIP time in 2010–11 to take into account the enhanced role of SIPs.

DCSF will publish detailed arrangements and supporting documentation on the redesignation arrangements in the new specialist schools guidance. These documents will be published online at www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies.

Appendices

Appendix 1

The Specialist Schools Programme – Building on success

The schools white paper, *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system* sets out some specific proposals aimed at enhancing the specialist schools programme. This document summarises these proposals and their implications for schools.

White paper commitments:

3.15 Building on the near-universal specialist schools system, we will seek to make sure that across the country, children and young people have access to the best subject teaching and centres of excellence in specialist schools, through partnership working and the specialist schools networks. We want to see 21st century special schools developing partnerships, sharing their expertise and facilities with other schools and providing children with the skills and confidence needed for greater independence in adult life.

The key proposals are:

- a renewed emphasis on specialist schools as centres of excellence in their specialist areas;
- a simpler accountability regime, with SIPs taking decisions about schools' specialist status locally, in line with rigorous national benchmarking; and
- a commitment to build on the High Performing Specialist Schools (HPSS programme) to reward the best schools for supporting improvement as part of the Government's wider Good and Great strategy.

Specialist schools as centres of excellence

White paper commitments:

3.4 As important as establishing partnerships, is that we continue to support them to be strengthened. As we work with the Special Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) and others to build on the success of the specialist schools programme, renewing our emphasis on their role as centres of excellence in their subject areas and on sharing their specialist expertise and facilities with other schools, we will simplify the accountability regime so that decisions about redesignating schools as specialist can be taken locally but rigorously.

3.7 As a result, through partnership working, it will now be possible to achieve the ambition of children having access to centres of excellence across the curriculum. Through these partnerships, specialist expertise in science (including access to triple science GCSE) and languages, for example, can be made available to all. Likewise, School Sport Partnerships are transforming opportunity in sport. We will continue to work with SSAT and the Youth Sports Trust (YST) to make sure that we seize the transformational opportunities now presented by the specialist system and the local and national networks of schools now in place.

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What this will mean for schools:

- Specialist schools will be required to deliver excellent outcomes in their specialism, for both their own pupils and for young people generally.
- All schools will be required to demonstrate how they work with partners and Ofsted will be making judgements about the effectiveness of this. Specialist schools will be expected to demonstrate the impact of their specialism-related outreach work.
- Working with SSAT, YST and other stakeholders, the Department will develop a national benchmarking framework for specialism that sets out clear expectations for schools.
A simpler accountability regime

White paper commitments:

4.36 We will introduce more rigorous arrangements for the designation and redesignation of specialist schools, while eliminating red tape. In future SIPs will take decisions about schools' specialist status, taking account of their performance, including their work with partner schools, and the local pattern of specialist provision. We will work with stakeholders, including the SSAT and YST, to ensure that challenging national standards are applied.

4.39 This will be a significant shift in the way in which SIPs and local authorities work with schools. We want to make sure that the relationships work well. Schools need to be confident in the quality of the support and challenge they will receive from their SIP; the local authority will want to be satisfied that SIPs are maintaining independent scrutiny on their schools. All SIPs already must be accredited by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (formerly NCSL). This role will be further developed by the National College.

What this will mean for schools:

SIPs will take decisions about the designation and redesignation of specialist schools from early 2010.

- Pending the introduction of this new role for SIPs, the current designation and redesignation arrangements were suspended from September 2009.
- Existing specialist schools will continue to be funded during the suspension of the current arrangements, and those expecting to redesignate in 2009/10 will be considered by their SIP from early 2010.
- Aspiring specialist schools will not be disadvantaged by the move to the new arrangements. SIPs will take decisions about the designation of these schools, the first of which will become operational from September 2010.
- Ofsted inspections will no longer trigger the redesignation process. Instead there will be a fixed redesignation cycle under which schools will need to be redesignated as specialist every three years from their designation or last redesignation.
- This means that schools that were designated or redesignated before September 2007 will need to go through redesignation under the new arrangements by the end of the 2009/10 academic year. We will inform all specialist schools about when they will next need to redesignate.

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- As now, schools will report on their specialism as part of the Ofsted self-evaluation form and will reflect plans for their specialism as part of their School Development Plans. SIPs will include a section on specialism in their report. The redesignation process will not normally require any additional paperwork from schools.
- Where a school is struggling to meet the requirements, SIPs may advise the school to consider a different specialism based on an assessment of the school's strengths and local needs.
- If the SIP judges that a school does not meet the redesignation requirements, it will go into probation for one year. Schools in probation will retain their specialist status and funding during this period. SIPs will be able to advise schools on how to access the appropriate support from SSAT, YST and other organisations.
- Schools still not meeting the requirements at the end of their probation year will be de-designated. They will be free to seek designation again, through the SIP, as soon as they feel they are able to meet the requirements.

We will provide training for SIPs on their new role, and publish a benchmarking framework and supporting guidance to ensure decisions are consistent. Local authorities, as employers of SIPs, will play a role in monitoring and moderating SIP decisions to help ensure consistency of judgements.

Appendix 2

Specialist school redesignation

SIP recommendation for specialist school redesignation

School:

LA:

SIP:

Date:

Principles of the Specialist Schools Programme

1. The specialist school as a centre of excellence in the specialism demonstrated by:

Focus on	To be recommended for redesignation the school should be able to provide sufficient evidence that:	Prompts for schools:	Section of the SEF where schools record evidence for these principles
<p>a) Rich provision</p>	<p>i) Students at all Key Stages have access to a suitable range of options, at Key Stages 4 and 5 from the four learning pathways, in the specialist areas.</p>	<p>Does the school ensure that it offers an appropriate range of qualifications with access to the four learning pathways – general qualifications, Diplomas, foundation learning (e.g. ASDAN) and apprenticeships?</p> <p>Does the school provide high quality information, advice and guidance on opportunities to take up apprenticeships?</p> <p>Will the school be actively contributing to the delivery or planning of at least one Diploma line related to its specialism?</p> <p>Does the school contribute as appropriate to the LA's strategy for delivering Foundation Learning?</p>	<p>A2.3, A3.3, A6.2, B5.2, B5.4</p>

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	ii) All students have access to a broad range of high quality specialism-related extra-curricular activities, accessible to all students and with good take-up rates.	How does the school ensure that activities are accessible to all pupils? Activities might include study visits, homework clubs, study groups, lunchtime activities or other options.	A2.3, A3.3, A6.2, B5.2
	iii) Learning in a specialism is enriched by community and other external partners, for example business, FE, HEI, other individuals and organisations.	Does the school have effective links with external partners that support and enrich its specialist teaching and learning areas? Has the school selected partners who are best able to support it, based on its own individual circumstances?	A2.3, A3.3, A6.2
b) High take-up	i) Key Stage 3 – All students participate in specialist areas.	In schools whose specialism is outside the Key Stage 3 curriculum, it should be clear exactly how pupils are involved with the school's specialism(s), for example through an open day, embedding the specialism through learning at Key Stage 3, or through other activities.	A2.2, A2.3, A3.4
	ii) Key Stage 4 – Take-up in specialism-related accredited courses reflects or exceeds national averages.	Refer to national benchmark data	A2.2, A2.3, A6.2, B3.6
	iii) Strategy for successful post-16 progression has a clear specialism element, including impartial information, advice and guidance.	What is the specialism element of the school's strategy for progression post-16? Does the school act as a centre of excellence for high quality and impartial information, advice and guidance on progression in courses related to its specialism? Do a reasonable number of young people go on to take further high quality specialism-related qualifications?	A2.3 A6.2
	iv) Key Stage 5 (as relevant) – Significant participation in specialism-related areas.	Is there a reasonable take-up of high quality qualifications related to pupils' specialisms at Key Stage 5?	A2.3, A6.2, B3.6, B5.4, B5.5

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c) Effective and innovative teaching and learning	i) Quality of teaching and learning judged as good or better in the specialist areas.	NB: evidence will be provided in the school's SEF and any reports on internal monitoring that the school has undertaken, and in Ofsted inspection reports. SIPs are not expected to make independent judgements on the quality of teaching and learning in the specialist area as part of the redesignation process.	A2.2, A2.3, A3.1
	ii) Proven commitment to continuing professional development, within the context of the whole-school plan, for all relevant staff associated with the specialist areas.	How does the school use CPD related to its specialist areas to enhance teaching and learning across the school?	A4.2
	iii) Student voice indicates that students enjoy specialism-related learning	Do students enjoy specialism-related learning?	A2.4
d) Improved outcomes	i) Students make good progress relative to their starting point in the specialist subjects at Key Stages 3, 4 (and 5 if relevant).	How does performance compare with national and other benchmarks? NB: SIPs will base their judgement on any comparative data on achievement in the specialist subjects available at national, regional or local level.	A2.1, A8.1, B3.4
	ii) Attainment trends in the specialist subjects over the last three years have maintained high standards or shown improvement.	Has attainment in the specialist subjects improved over the last 3 years or – in the case of schools with very high attainment – been maintained? NB: SIPs will have regard to any comparative data available at national, regional or local level. How has the school sought to narrow gaps in attainment between different groups of pupils?	A4.9, A8.1, A8.2, B3.4, B3.5
SIP comment on principle 1 (Specialist school as a centre of excellence in the specialism)			

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2. The specialist school as a centre of excellence using the specialism to drive whole-school improvement and the systematic development of a distinct ethos of continual improvement and success.

Focus on	To be recommended for redesignation the school should be able to provide sufficient evidence that:	Prompts for schools:	Section of the SEF where schools should record evidence for these principles
The Specialist School as a centre of excellence	There is a demonstrable impact of the specialism in terms of raising achievement in line with agreed whole-school targets, including consideration of narrowing gaps in attainment.	How has the specialism contributed to raising standards across the school, in relation to the overall targets that they agree through other processes or targets that the school may set themselves? How has the specialism helped to narrow gaps in attainment? NB: Schools will no longer need to set separate whole-school targets as part of the specialist process.	A 2.1, A4.1, A 4.9, A8.2, A8.3 A8.4, B3.2, B3.3 B3.4
SIP comment on principle 2 (Specialism driving whole-school improvement)			

3. The specialist school as a centre of excellence working with partner schools to improve outcomes for young people in those schools.

Focus on	To be recommended for redesignation the school should be able to provide sufficient evidence that:	Prompts for SIPs and schools:	Section of the SEF where schools should record evidence for these principles
The Specialist School works effectively with a minimum of five named schools including secondary schools	i) there is curricular provision in partner schools in specialist areas	What does feedback from partner schools indicate about the contribution that joint development of curricular provision through the specialism has made to improved outcomes in partner schools?	A1.1, A4.5, A4.6

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	ii) teaching and learning takes place in the specialist areas	What does the feedback from any partner schools indicate about the contribution that joint development of teaching and learning in specialist areas has made to improved outcomes in partner schools? NB: Other evidence here could include pupils' views, or a school's internal department or topic monitoring and review indicating that quality had improved.	A4.5
	iii) there are appropriate specialism-related ECM outcomes	What does feedback from partner schools indicate about the contribution that joint development of provision in specialist areas has made to improved ECM outcomes in partner schools?	A2.4, A2.5, A2.7, A2.10, A2.11
SIP comment on principle 3 (Working with partner schools to improve outcomes for young people in those schools)			

4. The specialist school as a centre of excellence working with wider community groups to support community cohesion, family learning and extended services.

Focus on	To be recommended for redesignation the school should be able to provide sufficient evidence that:	Prompts for SIPs:	Section of the SEF where schools should record evidence for these principles
	Specialist schools are able to demonstrate how their specialism supports their engagement with the community, including activities targeted on particular groups.	Have schools gathered feedback from the community to evaluate the success of this engagement? IS the feedback positive? Engagement could include opening up facilities for the community to use out of school time, learning opportunities for the community or contributing to their extended services offer. Is what schools offer matched against the interests and needs of the local community? Schools, SIPs and LAs will already be trying to engage particular groups and they should be able to show how specialism will help to engage some of these.	A4.4, A4.5, A4.8

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SIP comment on principle 2 (Specialism driving whole-school improvement)

5. The specialist school as an outward-facing centre of excellence contributing to specialism-related developments at a regional and national level.

Focus on	To be recommended for redesignation the school should be able to provide sufficient evidence that:	Prompts for schools:	Section of the SEF where schools should record evidence for these principles
	Schools use their specialism in their work with groups or networks of schools to maximise opportunities for young people. They should help these groups or networks to contribute to local, regional or national specialism strategy and curriculum innovation.	<p>What contribution has the specialism made to the work of the groups or networks focusing on how their specialism has contributed to the group?</p> <p>How has the specialism contributed to the school's wider partnership arrangements (for example Diploma consortia, clusters of schools, families of schools or other LA, regional or national groups or networks)?</p> <p>NB: schools could also show this by their engagement with local or national strategies in their specialism and by innovative development of the curriculum, including involvement in specialist networks where appropriate.</p>	A4.9, A8.1, A8.3, B1.26, B1.30, B1.31, B1.32

SIP comment on principle 2 (Specialism driving whole-school improvement)

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Overall recommendation

The recommendation of the SIP is that the school **is/is not** redesignated because:

Signed _____

LA comment:

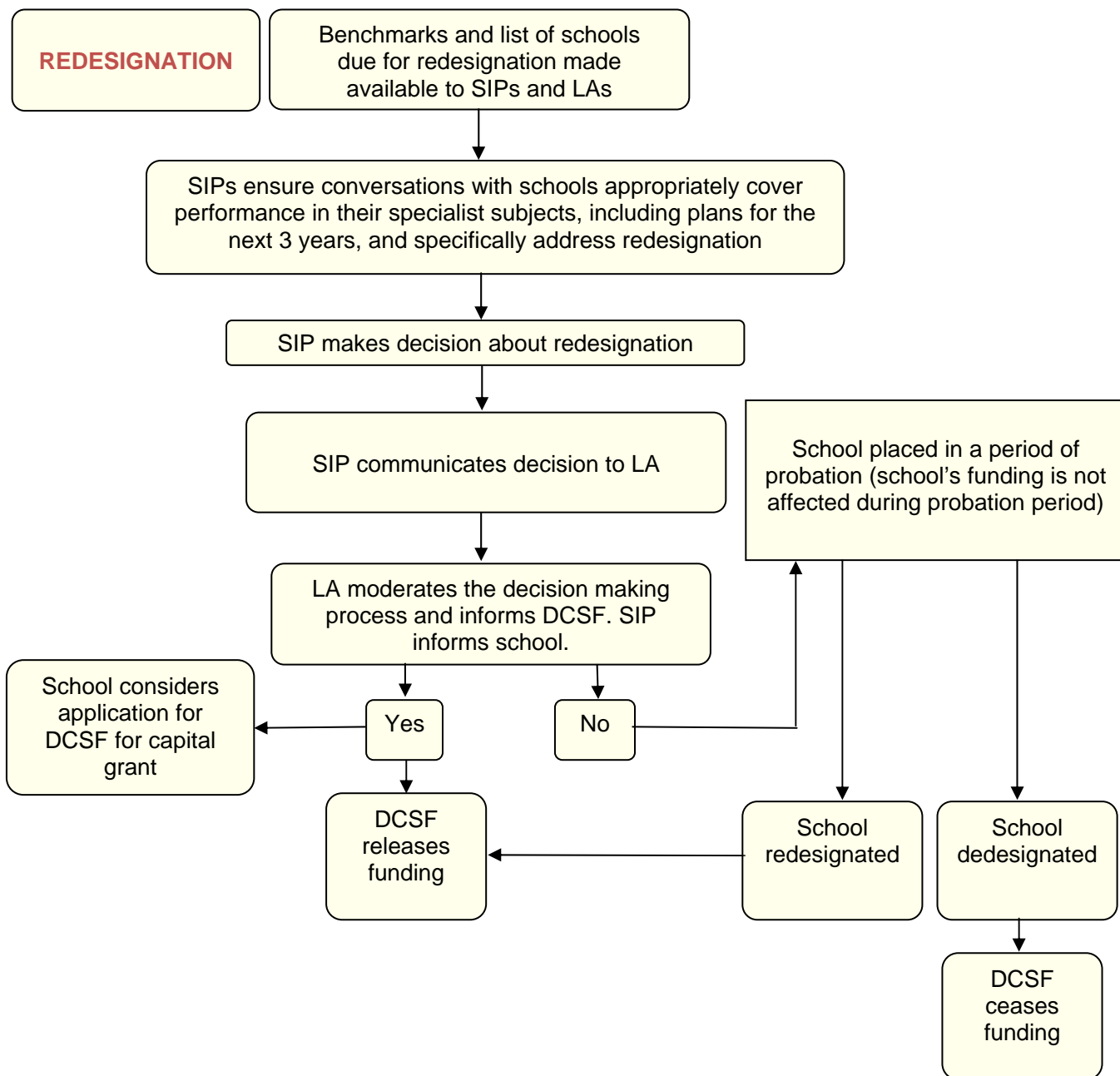
Signed _____

Headteacher comment:

Signed _____

Appendix 3

The role of the SIP in specialist school redesignation



Appendix 4

Specialist school redesignation LA pilot – Weekly schedule

Week	School	SIP	LA	Other
1	Headteacher begins to gather together evidence for each of the main benchmarks		LA ensures that both of the identified schools and the attached SIPs are fully briefed on the aims of the pilot	
2			LA liaises with pilot schools to identify how it (LA) can help provide data/information in support of schools' assertion that benchmarks have been met	
3	Headteacher sends the SIP and LA the relevant data/information in support of redesignation	SIP analyses the data/information sent by the school and forms a view as to whether the school meets the benchmarks and should or should not be redesignated or put into probation	LA provides SIP with details of the effectiveness of the school's current partnership working with local schools and community groups	

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4		SIP analyses the data/information sent by the school and forms a view as to whether the school meets the benchmarks and should or should be redesignated or placed into a period of probation		
5	SIP visits to meet with headteacher and other key personnel	SIP visits school to discuss the data/information provided in more detail		DCSF or National Strategies visit LA to meet with headteachers, SIPs and LA officers
6	School receives report and accepts or seeks to challenge* the SIP's recommendation	SIP completes report and formally makes recommendation about redesignation	LA reviews the SIP's report and formally accepts or queries the recommendation regarding redesignation	DCSF or National Strategies visit LA to meet with headteachers, SIPs and LA officers

***Challenge to the recommendation should be made via the LA**

Appendix 5

Evaluation of the specialist schools redesignation pilot

Name of LA pilot	Interview carried out by: [DCSF or National Strategies colleague]
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Questions for all participants
1. Overall, how easy/difficult did you find using the new benchmarks?
2. Overall, how easy /difficult was it to gather evidence for the benchmarks?
3. Are there any specific areas in the benchmarks that were more difficult than others to evidence/evaluate?
4. In terms of alignment with the Ofsted self-evaluation form (SEF), was the benchmark document's format and SEF signposting helpful?
5. To what extent did Ofsted's judgements form part of the evidence which was considered?
6. Any other comments:

Questions for headteachers
7. If your school has been redesignated before, overall how does the 'new' system for redesignation compare to the 'old' one? How does the 'new' process compare in terms of the desire to reduce any administrative burdens? Is it an improvement?
8. If your school has not been redesignated before, how did the redesignation process compare to any expectations that you had about the process in terms of administrative burdens?
9. Do you have a view on the six-weekly schedule? Is six weeks about right, or would you have preferred longer?
10. Any other comments:

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Questions for SIPs
11. Based on the evidence seen, how easy/difficult was it for you to reach your decision?
12. How much of your SIP time was taken up purely by the redesignation process?
13. Do you feel that, in most cases, you would be able to deliver this role within the current five-day allocation?
14. Was there a cut-off/threshold that you considered that the school should 'pass' in order to be redesignated?
15. If your decision was that the school should be put into probation, was there a cut-off/ threshold that you considered the school did not 'pass'?
16. How confident were you that the evidence available enabled you to take a robust decision?
17. To what extent, if any, has the new role in redesignating a school changed your overall improvement role and your relationship with the school?
18. As the SIP undertakes the headteacher's performance management as well, is there a potential conflict if one of the headteacher's targets is successful redesignation?
19. Any other comments:

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Questions for LAs
20. How was the decision of the SIP moderated at LA level?
21. What have been the time and resource implications in terms of managing the new process at LA level?
22. Was the suggested six-week redesignation schedule helpful, and if not, how would you improve it?
23. Any other comments:

Overall feedback comments
(Please include below a short summary of the key issues that emerged from your discussions with headteachers, SIPs and the local authority about the implementation of the new redesignation arrangements.)

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Partners and headteachers
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