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National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

The school improvement planning framework

Its impact on leadership and Every Child Matters in six case study schools

Keith Lloyd

Resource

Background

The school improvement planning framework and its impact on leadership and Every Child Matters in six case study schools

The school improvement planning framework (SIPF) is a tried and tested suite of tools and techniques, developed and improved during a two-year process involving more than 200 schools. The framework is one of the ways that the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (National College) and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) is supporting local authorities and school leaders to improve their planning and strategic thinking. It prioritises the needs of children and their families in their local context, with the ultimate aim of improving their well-being and attainment.

Between November 2009 and February 2010, six schools were visited, consisting of one special, three primary and two secondary schools. All had recently made effective use of the SIPF as a school improvement planning tool, selecting modules and activities that matched their needs at the time.

The case studies that follow examine the various ways in which the schools have made use of the SIPF. They also explore the extent to which the SIPF has impacted on the work of the schools, with particular emphasis on changes in leadership, improvement planning and delivery of the five outcomes of Every Child Matters (ECM).

All references to sections or tools in the SIPF are shown in bold type and page numbers are given when they appear for the first time.

School 1

Spofforth is a village primary school with just under a hundred pupils whose ages range from 3 to 11. It provides extended services for its pupils, almost all of whom are from White British families. Ofsted rated the school as 'Outstanding' in May 2009. The school began using the SIPF as a school improvement planning tool in September 2008 at the beginning of the planning cycle. The headteacher, senior teacher and chair of the Governor's School Improvement Committee attended a SIPF training day in Spring 2008 that was run by the local authority.

Key learning/outcomes

Before

- The school felt restricted in its capacity to provide for some of the hard-to-influence areas of ECM. Also, communication with and between the range of agencies involved in supporting the school with specific aspects of ECM was not always easy or straightforward.

After

- By using the **ECM card sort** (pp 56–9) from the SIPF with staff and governors it became clear, through what the headteacher describes as 'a light bulb moment', that responsibility for some of the hard-to-influence ECM outcomes could be shared with partner agencies. This was particularly valuable for governors who were able to see the bigger picture of ECM provision more clearly and explore ways of working with partner agencies on the priorities identified by the school.
- A key outcome of the **ECM card sort** and work with the **Blockers and enablers** (pp 44–7) activities has been the setting up of a multi-agency task force for the local area with representatives from relevant agencies such as the primary care trust, the education psychology service and social services. Positive outcomes from this arrangement have already been seen in better communication and sharing of information about individual children, better communication about changes of personnel and better understanding of referral thresholds across the agencies.

Before

- The school was firmly committed to the ECM agenda, but had not examined in detail the connections between the school's ECM priorities, the whole curriculum and the school improvement plan.

After

- Using the **ECM extension to the Solutions matrix** (pp 58–9) in the SIPF, all the staff evaluated the impact of the school's ECM provision across the relevant aims and objectives in the improvement plan. They found the **0–4 rating system** for 'no impact' to 'high impact', suggested in the SIPF on page 48, very helpful.
- The results of this activity revealed a range of strengths and weaknesses that, on the one hand, affirmed the good work that the school was already doing, while on the other, highlighted aspects of ECM that needed more emphasis. The development of 'enterprising behaviour', for example, had the lowest score on the table, and this led to a much higher profile for this area and inclusion in the school improvement plan.

"The school was firmly committed to the ECM agenda."

School 1

Key learning/outcomes

Before

- The school had always evaluated the impact of its ECM provision and recorded strengths and weaknesses in the self-evaluation form.

After

- Use of the **ECM extension to the Solutions matrix** (pp 58–9) in the SIPF had two valuable outcomes. As well as showing the combined effect of the school's provision on its key ECM objectives – 'Engaging in decision making', for example, had a high score compared with 'Developing enterprising behaviour' – the matrix also allowed the school to compare the impact of each element of its provision with all the others.
- For example, high ECM impact scores were recorded for the breakfast club, sharing assemblies and circle time, whereas low scores were recorded for computers and parent booklets. Analysis of the completed matrix provided clear evidence of the value of the school's 20 ECM initiatives by comparing their impact and provided a solid basis for the inclusion of new priorities for improvement in the strategic plan.

Before

- The Ofsted report in 2006, published only a short time after the current headteacher was appointed, judged the effectiveness of leadership and management and the school overall as 'Satisfactory'.

After

- The most recent Ofsted report, in May 2009, judged the effectiveness of leadership and management and the school overall as 'Outstanding'. The headteacher attributes some of this success to the use of the SIPF as a planning and evaluation tool.

- The school's ability to evaluate its work is stronger and there is greater clarity of purpose in the three-year strategic plan. Use of **Blockers and enablers** in the SIPF with staff and governors has given them a shared language with which to analyse and discuss school improvement.
- Leadership, too, has been enhanced because leaders now have clearer goals, feel more confident in their judgements and are working in a climate of open communication that encourages constructive criticism.

Before

- Parents and professionals involved with the previous annual review for a pupil with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) used a variety of ways of giving the school feedback, making the analysis of progress and needs both difficult and time consuming.

After

- Use of the SIPF evaluation tool **What's working?** (pp 34–5) at the annual review meeting resulted in a more rounded picture of the pupils' needs and development. All the stakeholders from within and outside the school were represented and were asked in advance to complete a questionnaire based on the key questions on page 35 of the SIPF: **What's working well? What's working so so? What's not working so well?**
- It was not only the first time that some of the stakeholders had been able to share their perspectives of the pupils with all the others involved, but it was also immensely valuable for each of them to hear and discuss the range of evidence that the activity drew out, including the views of the pupils themselves who had been helped to complete the questionnaire.

School 1

Key challenges and issues

Key barriers faced

- There have been no significant barriers to using the SIPF in this school. Its small size, good leadership and a strong partnership with governors have made the introduction of the SIPF a positive and rewarding process.

Next steps

- At the beginning of the next school year the **What's working?** tool in the SIPF will be used with the whole staff and the results will determine the agenda for all staff meetings over the term. Problem areas and their solutions will be displayed on the staffroom wall and will remain there until the problem is solved.

School 2

Stobhillgate is a first school in Morpeth, Northumberland. Most of the 179 pupils on roll, whose ages range from 3 to 9, are from White British backgrounds. The school provides a full offer extended service and Ofsted rated it as 'Outstanding' in May 2009. It began using the SIPF as a school improvement planning tool in July 2008. This followed a training day for all staff and key stakeholders, initiated by the headteacher, funded by the local authority, and led by the school improvement partner.

Key learning/outcomes

Before

- Pupils were not directly able to contribute to the process of school improvement planning.

After

- The pupils now have their own improvement plan (Appendix 1 and 2) which they have drawn up with the help of selected tools in the SIPF. For example, under the leadership of the deputy head, children took part in **Blockers and enablers** and **Learning potential aims** (pp 46–7) to evaluate the outdoor learning environment. Their recommendations for action are now included in the children's improvement plan.
- In the recent Ofsted report, the inspectors praised the role of pupils as school councillors in identifying ways of making the school a better place and described how proud these pupils were of their success in securing new facilities such as the popular climbing wall.

Before

- The school already had an effective leadership team with a good track record and a well-established distributed approach, but there was scope for better integration with its external partners, particularly those involved with the provision of extended services.

After

- A one-day conference involving all staff, governors and external partners made extensive use of selected tools in the SIPF. Stakeholders involved in the process of improvement planning for the first time included the adviser for community cohesion, the Sure Start manager, the extended services coordinator, the parent support partner (PSP) and members of the school support and ancillary staff.
- Beginning with **Think, feel, say, do** (pp 24–5), small groups containing a mix of stakeholders shared their thinking about how they would

School 2

like the school to be in three years' time. The reasons behind discrepancies and commonalities were explored, before a strategic vision for the school emerged to which everyone could feel committed.

- The views of the school workforce and external partners were then gathered through **What's working?**, before moving to the key focus of the day which was to examine how the school was contributing specifically to each of the five ECM outcomes (see below).
- Use of selected tools in the SIPF over the day helped to give the staff, governors and external partners a clearer focus on the school's priorities and more confidence to commit themselves to what was needed for the pupils.
- The improvement plan that resulted from the one-day conference was described by the headteacher as:

"A truly shared document informed by all parties and a three-year agenda for improvement which all staff and stakeholders are committed to."

Before

- The five ECM outcomes have been fundamental to the school's aims and ethos for some time and a contributory factor behind its continuing success. There was a tendency, however, for the various partners to retain ownership of key areas of their work and to pursue their own agendas.

After

- Use of **ECM card sort** and **ECM extension to the solutions matrix** by staff, governors and external partners at the one-day conference resulted in better prioritisation of the school's aims across the ECM agenda. In particular, the involvement of the school's external partners in the planning process combined to strengthen provision for ECM in the areas where it was most needed, as well as improving the integration of the services those partners were providing.
- For example, extended services staff and the PSP helped the school to produce an ECM booklet for children, 'Change for Children'. The booklet contains achievements under the five outcomes to which children can aspire and an attractive way of recording their success, leading to an ECM award.
- Other priorities identified through the **ECM extension to the solutions matrix** include a strengthening of the links between the school's aims for ECM and the work of the PSP with families most in need of support. Recent work by the PSP with parents and children around healthy eating and homework, for example, have forged a vital link between the school's responsibilities for ECM and the hard-to-reach areas of that agenda.

Key challenges and issues

Key barriers faced

- Finding a process by which the wide range of stakeholders and partners, including parents, can make a meaningful contribution to improvement planning.
- Making stronger connections between children's learning and the five ECM outcomes, especially in the hard-to-reach areas associated with life in the family and community.
- Finding ways to improve the integration of the services and support provided by the school's external partners in order to achieve success across the five ECM outcomes.
- Using the SIPF to involve pupils in the process of school improvement planning.

School 2

Solution or approach

- The role of the PSP, along with the roles of the adviser for community cohesion and the Sure Start manager, have been the key to success in achieving strong connections between children's learning and the hard-to-reach areas of ECM associated with life in the family and community. By using the tools in **Beyond the classroom** to involve these key partners in the planning process, the school has built an integrated network of support and intervention which is impacting on the quality of children's lives and their achievement in school.
- The involvement of pupils in the improvement planning process through the use of activities in the SIPP, such as **Blockers and enablers**, has been a great success. Whole class sessions with post-its placed by the pupils on large wall displays of brown paper have not only been very enjoyable, but have also had a tangible impact on, for example, outdoor learning facilities.

Next steps

- The school intends to develop a second school improvement plan with the pupils, focusing on teaching and learning using selected activities in the SIPP.
- Further work with the SIPP by staff, governors and external partners will be used to review and evaluate progress across the key areas for improvement.
- There is a determination to find ways of involving parents, other than the parent governors, in the school improvement planning process and use of the SIPP.

“ . . . the school has built an integrated network of support and intervention which is impacting on the quality of children's lives and their achievement in school.”

School 3

Alfred Sutton Primary School in Reading is a large urban school with 400 pupils aged 4 to 11. Most are from minority ethnic groups, the largest being from a Pakistani background. Just over half of the pupils speak a home language other than English.

The school began using the SIPF as an improvement planning tool in Spring 2009, following a training day run by the local authority. The training was attended by the head and deputy headteacher, the school business manager and the chair and vice chair of governors, who subsequently formed a steering group to plan and lead the use of the SIPF across the school community.

Key learning/outcomes

Before

- Governors and staff had always been consulted about, rather than being actively involved with, the school improvement plan, while pupils and parents had not been involved in this process at all. The tools in the SIPF were seen as a means of drawing all the school's stakeholders and pupils into the improvement planning cycle, with an emphasis on collaboration.

After

- A 'school improvement week' in April 2009 was designed to focus the attention of everyone, including the pupils and parents, on how to make their popular school even better. The week included a school improvement day for the pupils, three school development workshops for parents and working groups comprising staff, parents and governors.
- On the school improvement day for the pupils, selected tools in the SIPF were used and, where necessary, modified for the younger children. The most successful tools were **What's working?**, **Blockers and enablers** and **Develop and prioritise solutions – spidergram** (pp 78–9). The children's ideas were written on post-its and displayed on large sheets of brown paper, first in the classrooms and then in the community room where they could be seen by parents.
- One of the most powerful messages to come from using **What's working?** with the pupils was that they spent too much time sitting on the carpet. Other messages about outdoor play and games provision, linked to the use of the **Spidergram**, have resulted in substantial improvements which have helped many pupils to feel more positive about school:

"I like coming to school on Mondays now because I get to go on the new climbing frame." (Year 3 pupil)
- Use of selected tools in the SIPF with three mixed groups of staff, governors and parents took place in two evening sessions during the week. Each group was led by one of those who had attended the local authority training day. Using **Think, feel, say, do** followed by **SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats)** (pp 32–3) and **What's working?** gave participants a unique opportunity to hear the views and aspirations of others with different perspectives to their own:

School 3

“The governors had not been directly involved in talking to staff or parents before and it was very productive to be a member of one of the groups. I now feel much more involved in the planning process than before.” (chair of governors)

“The mixed groups showed us that we all shared the same ideals and had the effect of knitting us all together. We discussed issues for the school improvement plan that would not have been raised and came up with solutions that we would not otherwise have got.” (subject leader for literacy)

- The three workshops for parents were held at different times over the day and evening so that all parents had the opportunity to attend. They were described as an opportunity for parents to share their views about the school’s priorities and were attended by around 40 parents in all. The workshops, led by the head and deputy headteacher and members of the governing body, focused on two sections of the SIPF: **Think, feel, say and do** and **What’s working?** The outcomes of the workshops were recorded and displayed in the community room and publicised in the parents’ newsletter. SIPF activities will now be used during future meetings of the parents’ forum.

Getting across positive messages to parents about the planning process, the part that they can play in it and its impact on their children’s lives in school are the school’s preferred solutions to increasing parental involvement in the future:

“This gives us a voice and it’s good to see the challenges and practicalities – it can’t all be done overnight.” (parent)

Before

- The school’s ability to meet the requirements of the ECM agenda had not been fully evaluated. ECM outcomes were only loosely connected with the school improvement plan and provision for groups of vulnerable pupils was not sufficiently related to the five outcomes.

After

- After identifying a collective vision for the school and a consensus on its strengths and weaknesses, the mixed working groups used the **ECM card sort** to prioritise aims and raise awareness of ECM among staff, governors and parents:

“Using the ECM activities in the SIPF was an enlightening experience for us all, including the governors. It gave us a more rounded view of education.” (subject leader for literacy)
- The **ECM card sort** identified gaps in the school’s provision, developed a sense of ownership and helped to prioritise options for the inclusion of ECM in the school improvement plan. It also encouraged staff to engage with the hard-to-influence areas of ECM, such as barriers to learning associated with life in the community or the family, which might otherwise have had too little attention. The plan now makes reference, where relevant, to one or more of the five ECM outcomes in every priority for improvement.
- There is also a much greater emphasis in the school improvement plan on specific provision for the learning and well-being of vulnerable groups in terms of ECM, and more clearly defined criteria for evaluating their progress.

School 3

Key challenges and issues

Key challenges faced

- Involving parents in the process of improvement planning was not easy, in spite of making the process as non-threatening as possible and providing a choice of activity sessions in the morning, afternoon and evening. Good use was made of the school's community room where the results of the planning sessions attended by parents were displayed so that others could add comments or ideas of their own.
- Following the initial training day run by the local authority 12 months ago, the school has 'felt alone' and in need of contact with others who have been similarly involved.

Solution or approach

- The school worked hard to get over 40 parents involved in the planning process. Ofsted said in November 2009 that the school has good links with parents and carers and that it works well to communicate with them.
- Establishing a network of schools that have used the SIPF is a straightforward solution to the need for further professional contact described by the headteacher.

Next steps

- The new school improvement plan will run until 2012, but with annual revisions based on emerging issues. The school will use selected activities in the SIPF in staff meetings, governors' meetings and the parents' forum to evaluate the impact of its provision on learning, to identify new and emerging priorities and will continue to focus on achieving success across the five ECM outcomes.

“Establishing a network of schools that have used the SIPF is a straightforward solution to the need for further professional contact described by the headteacher.”

School 4

Nidderdale High School and Community College is a small comprehensive school with 454 pupils on roll, serving the North Yorkshire town of Pateley Bridge and the surrounding rural area. It has been a specialist school for science and the visual arts since 2004. Its students, aged between 11 and 16, are almost all of White British heritage. Ofsted described it in 2007 as a good school with good leadership and management.

The school began using the SIPF as a planning tool in Spring 2008 at the beginning of the annual planning cycle. The headteacher had attended a SIPF training day in December 2007 that was run by the local authority.

Key learning/outcomes

Before

- The senior leadership team (SLT) was already familiar with using the **SWOT** process to inform the self-evaluation form and strategic plan, but they had not made use of the wide range of other tools in the SIPF either among themselves or with the whole staff.

After

- A good opportunity to use the SIPF arose when the SLT wanted to launch the SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) programme with the whole staff on a training day. By working in small groups on **Success characteristics** (pp 42–3), the staff reached a consensus on the key characteristics of successful learners, such as social awareness and self-discipline. When these characteristics were compared with the objectives of the SEAL programme they were remarkably similar and generated a positive response across all departments to the introduction of SEAL. SEAL objectives are now firmly embedded in the schemes of work for all subjects.
- **The five whys?** activity (pp 36–7) helped the SLT to uncover the reasons behind the challenging behaviour of a group of Year 8 students. This led

to an action plan of support and intervention that has had a positive impact on the behaviour and attitude of these students, who are now in Year 9.

- Another positive outcome from use of the SIPF was achieved when three of the tools in **Develop and prioritise solutions (spidergram, prioritisation matrix and bullseye)** on pages 78–85 were used by the SLT to inform the section of the strategic plan concerned with improving teaching and learning. Among the solutions were the use of coaching triangles and learning to learn embedded across the school.
- Four key objectives (Appendix 3) emerged from the **Prioritisation matrix** and these have determined the key actions in the school development plan 2009–10. All subject and department action plans also reflect the four key objectives and these are subsequently used to evaluate the impact of provision on test and examination results. The roles of all subject and middle leaders are focused on the four key objectives that also form the basis of all performance management reviews.

School 4

Before

- A wide range of specialist status stakeholders have been closely involved with the school for some years, but have never had the opportunity to assess the impact of the school's specialist status on the community.

After

- A stakeholder conference, led by the specialist services coordinator, was held in March 2009, during which the **SWOT** activity from the SIPF was used to focus on the school's impact on the community and community cohesion.
- Small-group activities using **SWOT** generated a number of issues, some known and some unknown to the school, before solutions in the form of 'amazing possibilities for future development' were proposed and discussed in the groups.
- In all, 10 possibilities were adopted into a formal action plan and these in turn fed into the school strategic plan. Examples include a skills audit in the local community to create a talents database, using former students for extra curricular activities during their university holidays and a school newsletter for the community.

Before

- A group of 12 Year 10 students were under-achieving and lacking in motivation and self-esteem. There were also problems with their attendance and behaviour.

After

- The school achievement coordinator set up a project called 'The Nidderdale Academy', a 12-week programme of activities run in conjunction with the local authority extended schools coordinator and young people's development worker. The core component of the 12-week programme was participation in the Junior Open Water scuba diving course, leading to the PADI Open Water certificate.

- After an initial team-building day involving outdoor challenges, the students met again but this time to use the **Learning potential** module (pp 40–51), with particular emphasis on **Success characteristics** and **Blockers and enablers**. Using these tools, the students were able to identify the success characteristics of good learners and the key blockers and enablers to successful learning (Appendix 4).
- Following these activities, the students used the **Needs assessment option A score card** (pp 64–5) in the 'Personalisation' module to arrive at a personal baseline score on a scale of 0–10 against the characteristics of successful learners. The 0–10 scale was applied to each of five success criteria: attendance, confidence, communication skills, ambition and motivation. The same scorecard was also completed by the students' parents and selected staff. Once the various cards had been consolidated and analysed by the achievement coordinator, they provided a baseline against which the progress of the students could then be measured.
- The impact of this programme on the five success criteria has been evaluated in detail by the school achievement coordinator (Appendix 5). There was also a positive impact on all of the five ECM outcomes.

- The average scores for the group as a whole improved in all five criteria. The attendance of six of the 12 students improved, with the biggest gains among those with the poorest attendance record. Sixty per cent of the students said that their confidence had been boosted, two thirds that their communication skills had improved and 80 per cent said that they felt more ambitious about their future. All but one of the students said that the Academy had affected their motivation to do well at school.

"Through the Nidderdale Academy I have been asked to be on an interview panel. This is a new opportunity for me."

"I can take on new challenges. Learning to Scuba has given me loads of confidence."

School 4

Key challenges and issues

Key barriers faced

- This is a well-managed school with good leadership. The introduction of the SIPF was received positively by staff, governors, the school's external partners and the pupils in the Nidderdale Academy. There have been no significant barriers to the school's use of the tools in the SIPF.

Solution or approach

- The headteacher describes the SIPF as an array of management tools that must be used selectively to meet the particular needs of individual schools. In this case, the toolkit served very specific purposes in well-defined contexts, such as the introduction of the SEAL programme and the Nidderdale Academy. The result has been greater clarity about where the school is now, a clearer vision for leadership at all levels and a greater sense of ownership and commitment to new plans and objectives.

Next steps

- A similar process of using the SIPF will be used again next year, but with an emphasis on the impact of provision within the four key objectives on teaching and learning.
- The school plans to hold another stakeholders' conference next year in which tools in the SIPF will be used to evaluate the impact of earlier initiatives and to plan the next steps.
- The Nidderdale Academy will be repeated with a new group of students in 2010.

“The headteacher describes the SIPF as an array of management tools that must be used selectively to meet the particular needs of individual schools.”

School 5

Bentley Wood High School in Stanmore, Middlesex, is a 12–18 comprehensive that gained mathematics and computing specialist school status in 2005. Its students, all of whom are girls, come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. In 2007, an Ofsted report described Bentley Wood as a good and improving school with good leadership and management. The school's first use of the SIPP was in 2008, working in collaboration with two other high schools through the Specialist Schools Academy Trust (SSAT).

Key learning/outcomes

Before

- The Ofsted report in May 2007 said that although senior leaders monitor and support the work of middle leaders extremely well, the monitoring of subject performance by middle managers was not sufficiently effective in some departments.
- Towards the end of the following school year, a one-day conference was organised for the middle leaders of Bentley Wood and two other local high schools. Two of the aims of the conference were to affirm the importance of the role of middle leader and to experience some of the tools from the SIPP.
- The day for middle leaders was followed by two shorter conferences involving the senior leadership group and heads of year from Bentley Wood. Use of selected tools from the SIPP was a key feature of both conferences.

After

- The middle leaders' conference began with the **ECM card sort** that was introduced by a representative of the TDA. Working in mixed school groups, the middle leaders identified the need to give a higher priority to promoting community cohesion. This aspect of ECM consequently gained a higher profile in the school improvement plan that in turn led to a range of new initiatives. The impact of these initiatives enabled the school to judge the extent to which its pupils contribute to the school and wider community as 'Outstanding' in the self-evaluation form in January 2010.

- Individual school groups of middle leaders then focused on **What's working?** to evaluate the existing teaching and curriculum offer in their own schools and departments. This was followed by use of **Success characteristics** and **Blockers and enablers** to identify the key success characteristics for their students and what was blocking and enabling these in the context of their own schools and departments. The outcomes of these activities fed into school and department action plans and provided middle leaders with a clearer agenda for their monitoring of teaching and learning within their departments and year groups.
- The school was able to say, in the latest self-evaluation form, that:

The continuous development of monitoring teaching and learning with a more rigorous approach has led to an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in the last three years.

- The use of **What's working?** was a very positive experience for the school's middle leaders. The 'post-it' activity gave them the freedom to express their ideas and concerns about teaching and the curriculum anonymously. This had the effect of what one described as:
"Levelling the playing field and enabling less experienced staff to have a voice. I had wanted to have a debate about these issues for some time, but it is not always easy to initiate this on your own."

School 5

- There was also an expectation that this 'post-it' activity would succeed in bringing into the open things that were not working, in addition to those that were, and to ensure that the weight of opinion behind the more prominent issues would ensure they received attention.

Before

- The school was concerned about the behaviour and attendance of a small minority of students and wanted to explore ways of reducing exclusions.

After

- A conference in July 2008 involving the senior leadership group and heads of year used **Develop and prioritise solutions – spidergram** to explore solutions to improving pupils' behaviour at key times in the day such as registration and movement between lessons. This led to much clearer expectations of students as well as clearer identification of the roles and responsibilities of all members of staff. The 2010 self-evaluation form states that 'The sanctions system ... has improved consistency and has impacted positively on students'. The latest self-evaluation form grades pupils' behaviour as 'Outstanding'.
- The conference then examined the school's systems for sanctions, rewards and internal exclusions through the use of **What's working?** This resulted in a better understanding of the issues and the setting up of an internal exclusion room in the school known as the Blue Room, a form of sanction where students spend time working and receive support and counselling, rather than being excluded.
- The number of fixed exclusions fell substantially, from 23 in Spring 2008 to 14 in Autumn 2009. The headteacher attributes much of this success to the measures introduced as a result of the July 2008 conference.

Before

- The student council is the established channel through which students can have a say in decisions relating to their learning and well-being. Student focus groups are part of the school's monitoring, evaluating and reviewing procedures, but these tend to be 15-minute sessions. More in-depth gathering of students' views had not been done systematically.

After

- In early 2009, a representative from the TDA came to the school and used **What's working?** over a double period with a group of Year 8 students who were just beginning their second term in the school. There were many positive comments about the school that could be celebrated, but the students were also asked where 'quick wins' could deliver a significant impact.
- The students' suggestions included a change of uniform, more interactive lessons and action to reduce the length of the queue in the canteen. An evaluation by the students in January 2010 produced very positive responses under 'What's going well', including a cashless system for lunch payment that has cut queue times, more clubs and after-school activities including a choir and more interactive lessons.

Before

- The governing body wanted some training to clarify their roles and responsibilities and enable them to be more effective. They chose the SIPF after seeing how successful it was being used by staff and pupils.
- A representative of the TDA ran an evening workshop with the governors in January 2009 using selected tools in the SIPF.
- Use was made of the **SWOT analysis** and **What's working?** to explore the role and effectiveness of the governors, including the format and outcomes of their meetings.

School 5

After

- The SIPF tools gave the governors the opportunity to reflect, for the first time, on their roles and responsibilities. There were frank exchanges of views, but the activities opened up the role of governors in a positive way and clarified the scope and limits of what they were expected to do.
- The chair of the governors' curriculum sub-committee describes the impact of the SIPF experience as:

“Giving us more confidence in our meetings to make a contribution and say what we feel. There is a greater sense of leadership generally and I personally feel able to take more of a lead in the area for which I’m responsible. Our involvement with the SIPF tools has transformed the role of the governors.”

- Improvements have also been made to the way that governors' meetings are organised, including a more open structure through which papers are circulated in advance and attendance at sub-committee meetings, when the papers are discussed, is open to all.

Key challenges and issues

Key barriers faced

- The school's use of the SIPF was led by trainers from the TDA. Staff, pupils and governors were open minded and positive about using the tools and this, combined with skilled facilitation from the TDA, ensured a smooth process throughout and no key barriers.

Next steps

- Middle leaders intend to use the tools in department and year team meetings, particularly at the start of the annual review and planning cycle.
- Further use of the **What's working?** tools will be made with pupils in different year groups along the lines of the work done with Year 8 pupils.

“There is a greater sense of leadership generally and I personally feel able to take more of a lead in the area for which I’m responsible.”

School 6

Foxwood Foundation School and Technology College is an all-age special school for pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties, providing the full offer of extended services. An Ofsted report in 2007 said that the school provides its pupils and students with a good education and that the headteacher provides good leadership, well supported by his senior team. An Ofsted inspection of continuing professional development (CPD) in November 2008 judged the overall effectiveness of CPD at the school to be 'Outstanding'.

The school began using the SIPF early in 2008, after the extended services coordinator attended a TDA event promoting it.

Key learning/outcomes

Before

- The school improvement plan had, over time, become very long, over-complicated and difficult to manage. Putting it together required a lot of staff time and it was having insufficient impact on the learning and well-being of pupils and students.
- The school had also made the decision to provide the full offer of extended services, adding more complexity to the planning process and to evaluating the impact of provision.

After

- After agreeing to trial the SIPF, the SLT used the first tool in the framework, **Prepare and engage – diagnostic** (pp 18–19), to analyse the existing school improvement plan. They used six of the questions on pages 20–1 of the SIPF plus two of their own. This process revealed wide gaps between **Where we are** and **Where we would like to be**, particularly with regard to two of the questions: 'How are extended services integrated into the plan?' and 'Does the plan support personalised learning?'. As a result of this exercise, the SLT concluded that in future plans the highest priority should be given to personalisation.
- A working group of stakeholders representing governors, parents, therapists, teachers and teaching assistants was formed soon after the diagnostic outcomes were published. It was this group's responsibility to develop the objectives under each of the priorities.
- The SIPF was launched in February 2008 through the training day with all staff, together with representatives of the governing body, parents, the local authority and the TDA. There was agreement that the SIPF would be used 'in its entirety' and that the programme would be 'bold and ambitious'.
- By using **SWOT analysis** and **What's working?**, a range of quick wins and challenges emerged and were organised into nine key themes which included, for example, personal care, healthy lifestyles and individualised learning. There was strong support for linking all of the themes with a single, unifying objective:
 - All 3- to 19-year-old students have inclusive access to a relevant, personalised curriculum and additional services that prepare them very effectively for life and enable them to reach their potential.
- During March and April, further staff meetings used the tools in **Blockers and enablers** and **Develop and prioritise solutions** to develop SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed) objectives for change across each of the key themes, with particular emphasis at the end of the process in April on the **Prioritisation matrix**. It was agreed that the plans for each of the key themes would include a column linking each objective with one or more of the ECM outcomes.
- At the end of this process, a new school improvement plan for the next three years was published in April 2008.

School 6

- During the first year of the new improvement plan, two independent sources of evidence provided useful feedback. The Ofsted survey of CPD reported in November 2008 that:
CPD is well linked to wider national initiatives such as phonics, the school improvement planning framework and Building Schools for the Future.
- The Ofsted report also included a recommendation for improvement:
The overarching school improvement plan does not yet contain rigorous enough criteria to measure the success of actions in order to judge the impact of some strategies.
The school responded quickly to this by agreeing a set of measurable targets for each of the nine key themes and these formed the basis of the targets for the following year's improvement plan.
- Very positive comments were made by David Bell, Permanent Secretary at the Department for Children, Schools and Families, after visiting the school in April 2008:
"I am impressed with the use of the TDA school improvement planning framework at Foxwood school. Involving the wider community is really making a difference on the ground, it makes sense for children, parents and support staff to be involved in school improvement."
- Towards the end of the first year of the new school improvement plan, all nine key themes were evaluated in terms of their impact on pupil and student outcomes, using six 'Top level targets'. These targets included CVA scores, the percentage of lessons judged good or outstanding, and attendance. The outcomes of this evaluation led to refinements to the improvement plan for Years 2 and 3.
- In January 2010 the SLT used the **Diagnostic tool** (pp 18–21) to re-visit the questions they had used the year before to assess the gap between **Where we are** and **Where we would like to be**. This revealed an encouraging narrowing of the gap for all eight questions. The biggest shift was in the extent to which the plan supports personalised learning (Appendix 6). The school had given the highest priority to this area over the preceding two years, so it was very gratifying to see this emerge as a major improvement.
- The school's analysis of the performance data in September 2009 showed improvement in a number of key indicators. For example, the Key Stages 2–4 CVA for 2009 of 1015.8 was the highest ever achieved by the school and placed the school in the top 25 per cent of all schools nationally. The school attributes much of this to the impact of its specialist status, but the changes in improvement planning are also believed to have played a significant part.

School 6

Key challenges and issues

- The challenge for the headteacher has been adjusting to the extensive delegation that the process of using the SIPF with a wide range of stakeholders has required:

“I have had to let go of quite a lot of leadership responsibility. I had to feel comfortable about doing it, but the benefit is that you mobilise others in the leadership process.”
- The benefits of this distributed leadership are clear, however. The coordinator for personal care, for example, who has been involved in the SIPF process from the beginning, sees the opportunities for leadership very positively:

“Because it has been a shared process we all take responsibility and team work is much stronger. We are now more consistent in the way we work with the children and this has had a positive impact on their health and physical development. I also have a better overview of all the care provision and can review its impact more easily.”
- The time frame for developing a new improvement plan through use of the SIPF in its entirety was very tight and was compounded by restrictions imposed by school budget planning. Meticulous planning of the whole process and the efficient use of time ensured all deadlines were met.
- Incorporating new provision for the full offer of extended services appeared daunting at the outset, but including extended services as a key theme ensured good two-way connections with all other aspects of provision.
- More still needs to be done to identify measurable outcomes when setting objectives within the school's priorities for improvement.
- The allocation of a budget to each of the key themes has proved difficult. A nominal, overall budget is agreed for each theme, but more detailed costing of initiatives is underway.

Next steps

- A consultation involving all stakeholders, including pupils and students, will be used to inform the next year of the improvement plan for 2010–11. Responses will be focused on the six 'Top level targets' and these will form the basis of impact headlines.
- The new improvement plan will also be informed by the outcomes of the diagnostic exercise undertaken by the SLT in January 2010.

“Because it has been a shared process we all take responsibility and team work is much stronger.”

Conclusion

This survey set out to examine in a small sample of schools the capacity of the SIPF to plan, implement and evaluate provision to improve learning and promote pupil well-being. It was also interested in the impact of the SIPF on leadership and improving the capacity of schools to meet the requirements of the five outcomes of ECM.

There was no uniformity in the schools' use of the SIPF. Each tailored its use of the tools to meet particular needs, but they all shared an unwavering focus on improving pupils' learning and well-being. They were also all unanimous in their belief that the SIPF is a powerful tool in the process of school improvement.

Some sections of the SIPF were used more frequently than others. **What's working?**, **Blockers and enablers** and the **ECM card sort** were the most popular, but every section of the SIPF had been used by at least one school in the sample.

None of the schools reported any difficulties with the tools in the SIPF. On the contrary, everyone who was interviewed, including pupils and students, spoke with enthusiasm about their involvement and the benefits they had gained from using it. The most noteworthy benefits can be summarised as follows:

- The SIPF changed the dynamics of school improvement planning, widening the range of participation across stakeholders to include, for the first time in most cases, parents, pupils and external partners. The SIPF tools gave participants a voice within a context that promotes openness and joint enterprise. There was a strong sense of ownership of the resulting improvement plans, and the initiatives associated with them, in all the schools.
- The impact on leadership stemmed partly from the greater depth and range of participation that the SIPF helped to achieve. Leaders at all levels drew confidence from knowing that the SIPF tools had revealed the strengths and weaknesses of what their schools were doing and had given all stakeholders the opportunity to contribute to improvement planning.
- Middle leaders, in particular, also benefited from the facility of tools such as **What's working?** and **Blockers and enablers** to "level the playing field", as one described it. Activities such as these begin with the expectation that weaknesses as well as strengths in the school's provision will be brought into the open and expressed anonymously through the post-it system.
- The impact of the SIPF on the leadership and management of the schools as a whole was less tangible, but was undoubtedly influenced by the clearer goals and greater commitment that emerged from the improvement planning process. What is clear, however, is that the use of the SIPF resulted in more distributed leadership as well as a greater degree of shared leadership with other professional partners.
- There was a general feeling among the headteachers that their use of the SIPF tools would be of benefit when they were next inspected by Ofsted. In two of the schools, the benefits had already become apparent; in one case the judgement that leadership and management were 'Outstanding' was attributed by the headteacher, in part, to the use of the SIPF as a planning and evaluation tool; in the other, an Ofsted survey report made specific reference to the good links between CPD, which was judged to be 'Outstanding', and the school's use of the SIPF.

Conclusion

- Use of the SIPF enabled some schools to improve the planning of provision for extended services and ECM, helping them, in particular, to identify the strengths and weaknesses in these areas of their provision. By bringing together the school workforce with other agencies and providers through activities such as **What's working?** and the **ECM card sort**, the schools were able to build networks and achieve a more coordinated approach to ECM and extended services. Overall, a much higher profile was given to ECM in improvement plans, together with more clearly defined success criteria across the five outcomes.
- Use of the SIPF tools with pupils and students changed attitudes and helped in some cases to reduce barriers to learning. The capacity of pupils and students to contribute to the improvement planning process was clearly demonstrated in several of the schools in the sample.
- It was too early to say whether using the SIPF had enabled the schools to raise standards, but its impact on leadership, attendance, motivation and attitudes to learning was not in doubt. All six headteachers were, however, confident that the SIPF would prove to be a key contributory factor in the drive to raise standards and to improve the learning and well-being of their pupils.

Further information

- SIPF is a free resource. To find out more please visit: www.nationalcollege.org.uk/publications or www.tda.gov.uk/schoolimprovement.

“... a much higher profile was given to ECM in improvement plans, together with more clearly defined success criteria across the five outcomes.”

Appendix 1

Stobhillgate First School, Morpeth

Action plan:

Area: Teaching and learning

Objectives: To continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning at Stobhillgate

Action	Person responsible	Success criteria	Monitored and evaluated through	Governor involvement	Resources	Timescale
Make lessons fun. Include more games linked to learning, drama, ICT etc	Teaching and support staff	Lessons will be enjoyable, cross-curricular (where possible) and interactive	Observation Pupil feedback	Governor curricular visits	Planning time. Resources relevant to lessons/activities	On-going
Provide more opportunities for children to work together in groups on activities/projects	Teaching staff	More lessons planned with opportunities for group work. Children's skills in working together improve	Observation Teacher and pupil feedback		As above	On-going
Keep learning environments tidy and attractive	All staff and children	School kept clean and tidy. Attractive displays				

Appendix 2

Stobhillgate First School, Morpeth

Action plan:

Area: The outdoors

Objectives: To create an interesting and safe environment that can be used for both recreation and teaching and learning.

Action	Person responsible	Success criteria	Monitored and evaluated through	Governor involvement	Resources	Timescale
Replace and improve equipment children can use at playtimes	Headteacher	Children have a wider variety of good quality equipment they can play with at playtimes	Observation and feedback from children through school council		Cost of playtime equipment	Spring 2008 onwards
Create a quiet area (for example to read in, have a chat, do artwork, storytelling, drama etc)	Headteacher (See groundworks plan)	Children have a specific area to relax and do quiet activities in	Observation of use of area and feedback from children	Governor linked to outdoor plan in main school improvement plan	See groundworks plan	
Provide a climbing frame	As above	Climbing frame in school grounds for children to play on	As above	As above		

Appendix 3

Strategic plan for 2009/10 – key elements

1. Improving teaching and learning

- Establish a VLE by September 2010 ▲
- Deliver new GCSE courses ▲
- Ensure that the curriculum and teaching approaches are responsive to learner need, including IDP, L2L and SEAL ▲
- Develop and embed systems for assessment across the curriculum including AFL and APP ▲

2. Maximising achievement

- Prepare to meet the 14–19 national agenda including diploma introduction ▲
- Review our approach to working with gifted and talented students ▲
- Develop further the use of mentoring ▲
- Refine further our intervention strategies with students ▲

3. Develop identity as a specialist college for science and visual arts

- Continue to promote community cohesion ▲
- Establish workshops with Year 5 children ▲
- Explore further cross curricular links between subjects ▲
- Further raise the profile of science and art within the school ▲
- Review activities week and curriculum enhancement activities ▲▲

Appendix 3

4. Address the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda

- Achieve Healthy Schools status ▲
- Achieve Level 4 of the IQM by Summer 2010 ▲▲▲▲▲
- Review and develop PSHCE provision ▲▲▲▲▲
- Review and develop extended school provision ▲▲▲▲▲
- Explore options for the development of one to one tuition ▲
- Introduce online reporting in September 2010 ▲
- Review and develop a new rewards and sanctions system for 2010 ▲▲

Key examination targets for 2010

- Students achieving 5 or more GCSEs at A*–C 78%
- Students achieving 5 or more GCSEs at A*–C including English and Maths 67%
- GCSE capped average points score 315
- GCSE targets in Science 78% A*–C
- GCSE targets in Art 80% A*–C

ECM: Key outcomes code

▲ **Be healthy**

▲ **Stay safe**

▲ **Enjoy and achieve**

▲ **Make a positive contribution**

▲ **Achieve economic well-being**

Appendix 4

Nidderdale Academy – Learning potential activity – 12 February 2009

Session leaders: Sarah Lewis, Bryony Rodgers, Siân Dover

Using the SIP framework: Learning potential – step 1, success characteristics

Aims of the session:

- To identify the characteristics of successful learners.
 - To identify the enablers and the blockers to these characteristics for this particular group of students.
 - To shortlist a number of activities that the group would like to participate in as part of the project.
1. The students were asked what they thought were the characteristics of successful leadership. The responses were written on a flipchart.
 2. The students were asked to draw around two volunteers on a large piece of paper. The paper people were cut out and stuck onto the wall. Post-its with the successful learning characteristics were stuck on each paper person.

Each Student was asked to place an enabler for each characteristic on paper person 1 and a blocker for each characteristic on paper person 2.

The five most popular responses are collated in the table below and will be used to formulate success characteristic score cards.

Success characteristics	Blockers	Enablers
Attendance	Not enjoying the lesson Being in too higher sets	Good attendance by friends. Parents thinking school is important I have no choice
Confidence	Teachers putting you down Inconsistent marking An expectation of failure from staff	Help with difficult work Supportive family
Good motivation	Boring lessons Being in too lower sets Not getting on with teachers Poor concentration	Fun, enjoyable lessons Good teachers
Ambitious	Teachers putting you down Other students put you down if you do try for being a swot	Encouragement from people Enjoying a subject
Good communication skills	Scared of saying the wrong thing Poor relationship with teacher Shyness	Good relationship with teacher Being able to participate in lessons Being able to concentrate on listening

Appendix 5

Analysis of results of mentor session 4 June 2009

In relation to the success characteristics:

Six of the students feel the Nidderdale Academy has helped to improve their **attendance** at school.

Sixty per cent of the students said their **confidence** has been boosted.

Eight students feel their **communication skills** have improved.

Eighty per cent of the students said they feel more **ambitious** about their future.

All but one of the students said the Nidderdale Academy has effected their **motivation** to want to do well at school.

In relation to the ECM outcomes:

Be healthy

As a team students undertook a physical course by taking the PADI Open Water certificate. They spent 1.5 hours a week doing scuba diving for 10 weeks. This had an impact on physical, social and emotional wellbeing.

Stay safe

Huge emphasis was put on safety during completion of the course particularly during the open water sessions. Students always worked with a partner and were in charge of checking each other's equipment. At Log Heights, students worked as a team to ensure the whole group was safe.

Enjoy and achieve

All the practical sessions have been fun. The students have enjoyed what they have done and have achieved success in many areas (particularly in relation to the success characteristics). Students were awarded their PADI Open Water Certificate at the Key Stage 4 Achievement Evening. One student was nominate 'Student of the Week' by several staff.

Make a positive contribution

Students have been involved in writing for the school newsletter and school prospectus. One of the students was asked to be on interview panel for the Children and Young People's Services. Many of the students have spoken at North Yorkshire County Council conferences about their positive experiences. Some of the students have flourished in their leadership skills.

Achieve economic well-being

Students are more aware of their ambitions and how realistic they are. One of the mentor sessions focussed on the need to be ambitious in their careers and future in order to achieve economic well-being for themselves and others.

Appendix 6

Summary of SIP diagnostic – January 2010 Senior Leadership Team

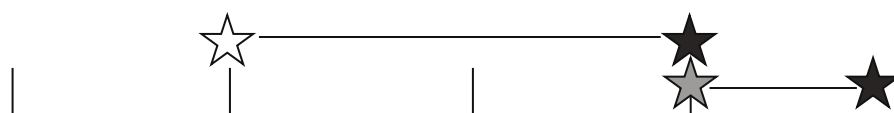
1. Who is involved in the process of developing your school improvement plan?



Original conclusions: Would like to effectively involve more people. Quite a wide perception of now but consistent view of future

Current conclusions: Very much on the way to the original target point. Still would like to effectively involve other groups. Consistent view of current and future

2. What is the scope of your school improvement plan?



Original conclusions: Generally perceived to be Curriculum focussed although quite a wide range of perceptions. This is an area that should be explored to understand barriers and opportunities to learn.

Current conclusions: Wide ranging scope of plan. Original targets met but aspirations increased.

3. How is the well-being of all pupils integrated into the plan?



Original conclusions: Massive variations in perceptions of now and future. Need to undertake serious work on linking extended services to *Every Child Matters* and what we already do. Potentially need to link current provision to school priorities.

Current conclusions: A little difficult to compare as question changed to focus on well-being rather than Extended Services. A range of perceptions about current position. Overall improvement in this are linked to scope question.

4. What types of objectives are set?



Original conclusions: Desire to be smarter at setting targets and priorities that link to measurable outcomes. (See question 5)

Current conclusions: Some improvement in this area but still need to work on objectives

Appendix 6

5. To what extent is impact measured?



Original conclusions: Desire to differentiate and measure individual achievement. Again, a wide range of perceptions expressed. This is linked to desire to be smarter at setting targets and measuring impact.

Current conclusions: Some progress but work to do

6. Does the plan support personalised learning?



Original conclusions: Personalisation is the highest priority for future plans

Current conclusions: Much improved area showing personalisation being a major change in school.

7. Is there a feedback process that informs future plans?



Original conclusions: Suggests a need to improve effectiveness of feedback process and learning opportunities

Current conclusions: Much improved planning and feedback cycle.

Overall, this shows that:

- improvements in the effectiveness of school improvement plans since introducing the SIPF
- progress has been made in all areas although more work needed on the type of objectives set
- personalisation was the highest priority of SLT over the two years and has been the biggest shift

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Triumph Road
Nottingham NG8 1DH
T 0845 609 0009
F 0115 872 2001
E enquiries@nationalcollege.org.uk
www.nationalcollege.org.uk

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