

School improvement planning

Issue

School Improvement planning must be recognised as the driving force to deliver and enable development in schools.

Headline Position

For School Leaders to deliver significant and continued improvement in schools they must be allowed to identify the development needs of their school and take action to address these.

Initiatives and tied funding from the Scottish Government and local authorities divert schools from the issues identified in development plans.

Full Position

In the early 1990's formal development planning was presented to head teachers with great care. It was made clear that it should provide strategic planning for and control over workload for schools. The principle was clear – school staff were to make a detailed 'audit' of every aspect of the school's performance and based on this draw up a development plan. Once accepted by the local education authority there should be no further external additions during the life span of the plan.

AHDS fully supports Improvement Planning in this form and believes it is the only way to deliver truly self-improving schools capable of implementing national and local priorities and a pace and in a way suitable to the school's own circumstances.

The reality for many Head Teachers and staff is that Improvement Planning has been reduced to a mechanistic tick-box exercise which fails to address genuine needs of the school and is routinely circumvented by external policy initiatives and priorities that are ill-timed for school planning cycles.

School Improvement Plan can only be relevant and meaningful if staff, pupils, parents and carers have a shared vision which resists incorporating external initiatives not relevant to the development needs of the school. Rather, schools should plan strategically to positively impact on children's learning, build on achievements of the past, and increase their capacity for improvement and vision for the future. To be valuable and effective, plans must give a strategic view of how things are, of the shared values and beliefs arising from all stakeholders thinking and must be based on reflective and evaluative assessment of children and young people's needs.

For schools to prepare and act on development plans which identify key areas for improvement the following conditions must exist:

- A sense of ownership for children, young people, parents, carers and staff.
- Local Authority support for school based plans for Improvement Plan.
- Improvement planning and budget planning cycles should correlate to enable strategic planning e.g. over a 3 year budget/planning period.
- Money for funding external priorities should be equitably shared among schools and bidding for resources should be withdrawn.
- There should be greater freedom for Head Teachers to apply resources as necessary to deliver agreed plans

- The Local Authority should do all within its power to prevent school budgets being clawed back to pay for over spends in areas such as energy and water costs as this ultimately has a detrimental impact on the pupils' learning
- External priorities should be limited at the beginning of the improvement plan cycle and should not dominate the plan.
- Money for funding external priorities should be equitably downloaded to schools and bidding for resources of this nature should be kept to the bare minimum in order to reduce the administrative burden for local authorities and school leaders.
- Recognition from Education Scotland that national initiatives and priorities do not take precedence over agreed priorities for development in individual establishments.

The intention of CfE is to deliver a culture in which schools can innovate and operate to deliver the best possible learning experience for pupils. The DSM and school improvement structures/policies should reflect this.