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Background, Principles and Key Learning

Self-evaluation

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An introduction

This study, commissioned by NCSL, draws on a wide range of sources: schools, local authorities, professional associations, government agencies and an ever-growing body of literature and web-based documents. It casts its net wider to compare developments in England with what was happening in other countries, in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, North America and Asia-Pacific countries.

What became quickly apparent from this search is a pervasive similarity among local authorities and schools in the adoption of the Ofsted self-evaluation framework. Typically, local authorities have moved from their own schemes to adopt the Ofsted approach, although this has often been expanded to include complementary materials or advice. Online completion of self-evaluation protocols is beginning to ease the form-filling process, aided by an increasing number of private agencies offering a range of solutions.

In the light of the tendency for schools to equate the completion of the Ofsted self-evaluation form (SEF) with self-evaluation, the Chief Inspector, David Bell, has publicly encouraged schools not to follow this format slavishly but to be creative in carrying out their own processes, using the SEF only as an aid to drawing together key data.

The term 'self-review' is widely used, often synonymously with self-evaluation. However some documents do make a useful distinction using self-review to denote an overview of school quality and effectiveness, (essentially summative in nature) and self-evaluation as a more selective and formative in-depth process that feeds into self-review. Guidance on how to deal with the Ofsted self-evaluation form is a common feature of all local authority and private agency schemes. The move to the Ofsted inspection framework has brought with it a changing role for local authorities, recasting themselves from providers to a role that offers support to schools in preparing for, and following up, inspection and embedding self-evaluation in practice. The Centre for Public Policy describes the role of the local authority within the New Relationship with Schools as 'commissioner and quality assurer, not direct supplier'. It concludes:

Councils will retain responsibility for some overarching co-ordination roles, including capital strategies, holding schools to account and intervening where there is serious underperformance. They will help build up strong independent schools and networks of schools which can drive their own improvement.

(This paper, no longer on the website, is available on request from the Centre for Public Policy at www.cppseminars.org.uk)

In improving schools, self-evaluation is embedded in the day-to-day work of schools and classrooms, is integral to effective learning and teaching, the driving force of school improvement and the hallmark of enlightened and forward-looking leadership. Ofsted endorses and encourages an independent approach to school self-evaluation.

With the appropriate tools and creative thinking the twin goals of improvement and accountability can be married, and the SEF used for the purpose signalled by HMCI David Bell.

The underlying process which the school employs to identify its strengths and weaknesses is not prescribed. Schools are free to follow any model which gives them the best insights into their improvement priorities.

The best schools have simple processes which enable their leaders to measure progress in practical ways through their day-to-day work. (DfES and Ofsted, 2005)

Section 1: Self-evaluation, what and why?

Self-evaluation serves a range of differing purposes and is entered into for a variety of motives. It goes under diverse names and appears in different guises. What is self-evaluation and how is it different from assessment, review, audit or quality assurance?

The terms are often used interchangeably and a website search is bound to confuse as local authorities and schools use their own terminologies to describe the process. Self-review is one of the most common variants in England while in North America the term self-assessment is widely used. Although these various terms tend to refer to the same thing, it may be useful to make some conceptual distinctions as the New Relationship in Schools agenda in England moves towards a more common lexicon of terms.

The following may be seen as lying on a spectrum from summative to formative in purpose.

Audit

The origins of audit are from a financial practice designed to ensure the books are kept rigorously and ethically. It has also connotations of stock taking and in a school context applies to obtaining an overview of the educational stock or physical and human resource. Summative in nature.

Quality assurance

This is a form of audit. The term denotes a systematic examination of quality, usually by an external body and, like audit, is essentially geared to accountability in return for the trust and responsibility invested in schools and teachers. Summative.

Self-review

This tends to be used as synonymous with self-evaluation and is a term adopted by most local authorities. Some, such as Shropshire, make a distinction between the wider sweep of one-off review and ongoing self-evaluation. The term 're-view' implies looking again, with a connotation of scanning as in 'scanning indicators', which take a comprehensive overview rather than an in-depth investigation of selected areas. Tends to be used summatively but may also be formative.

Self-assessment

This is also used widely as synonymous with self-evaluation. The distinction between assessment and evaluation is, however, important. In the UK, assessment refers to knowledge, skills and attitudes gained by pupils and is used both summatively (as in test performance) and formatively (as in assessment for learning). Evaluation, on the other hand, is concerned to examine critically the extent to which a process such as assessment is effective, bringing to it an evaluative judgement on the process or outcome. Both summative and formative.

Inquiry

This is a term with North American resonance, used to denote a more open-ended process, less tied down to pre-specified criteria. A form of this known as 'appreciative inquiry' sets out to understand the strengths of a school within its own frame of reference. It is essentially formative rather than summative.

Self-evaluation

This is the term now favoured by Ofsted and it has a growing currency in European and Asia-Pacific countries. It has many definitions. A simple and singular definition for the purposes of this document is:

a process of reflection on practice, made systematic and transparent, with the aim of improving pupil, professional and organisational learning.

It is essentially a formative process.

The 'why' question

Why schools should wish to, or be required to, engage in self-evaluation may be argued on a number of grounds: personal and professional, institutional, and with reference to national and international policy imperatives.

- **As an essential human quality.** The counsel offered by the Oracle at Delphi to 'know thyself' refers to a deeply individual quality and is the antidote to self-delusion. It may be seen as a fundamental tenet of what it means to be an educated person.
- **As a professional responsibility.** Self-knowledge assumes a greater sense of urgency when applied to teachers or other personnel who deal with children and are accountable to their colleagues, to parents and their employers.
- **As a policy imperative.** In a policy, or quality assurance context, 'self' is generally seen as applying to the school as an institution. Like the individual, a school is expected to know itself in all its complexity. Self-delusion or simply lack of insight into its own quality and effectiveness works to the detriment of its students and its staff and is apt to mislead parents.
- **As an economic indicator.** In an international climate in which nations are compared according to the performance of their students, which is used as a proxy economic indicator, politicians and policy makers do not wish to be taken by surprise by external evaluations undertaken by OECD or by other influential external agencies. Self-knowledge, therefore, assumes great importance on an international stage.

The 'what for' question

When asked what school self-evaluation is for, we are met with a range of different answers. Some of the reasons given may be seen either as incompatible, or complementary, given the number of different ends that self-evaluation is seen to serve.

Preparation for inspection

Self-evaluation may be introduced by a school as a prelude to inspection, and although this is a pragmatic response to external pressure it may then come to be seen as the primary rationale for engaging in it. In other words, its essential purpose is regarded as one of accountability to an external body rather than as something owned by teachers themselves. However, the self-evaluation form (SEF) is not self-evaluation. It is simply a way of recording a summary of the school's own self-evaluation, which needs to be driven by a school improvement motive. Ofsted, for its part, encourages schools to use a variety of approaches.

Raising standards

For many staff, self-evaluation has as its key purpose the raising of standards. This is in tune with what is widely seen as a key purpose of school education. 'Standards' may, however, assume either a broad or narrow meaning, and when interpreted narrowly, refer simply to the raising of pupil attainment scores. Interpreted more broadly, standards may apply to more effective learning and teaching in which attainment levels rise as a natural consequence of improved pedagogy. Self-evaluation then serves a broader and deeper purpose.

Professional development

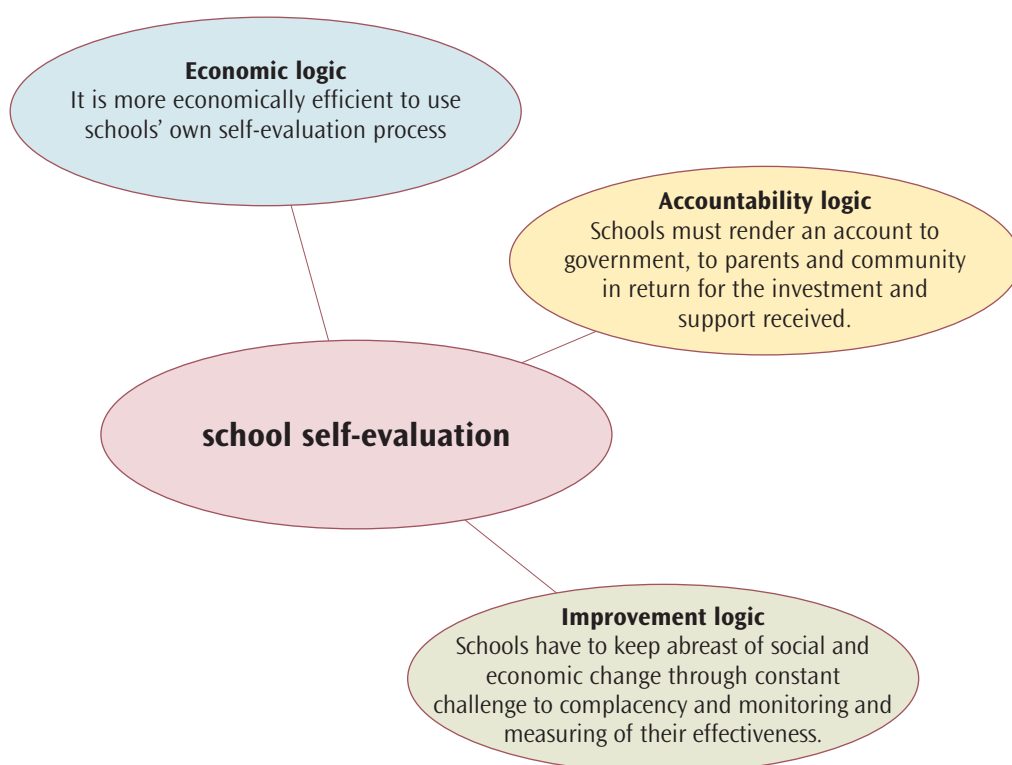
Self-evaluation may be seen as a handmaid of professional development. When this is seen as its rationale, the impetus is for teachers and other staff to use tools of self-evaluation to develop professionally, becoming more self-aware, more reflective and more self-critical by virtue of how they monitor their own performance and professional growth. When this happens, it is argued, pupil learning should logically follow in its wake.

Building capacity

If an essential purpose of school improvement is to build the school's capacity to respond to and manage change, such a goal cannot be achieved without a commitment to self-evaluation. This rationale sees self-evaluation as a multi-layered process, employing a diversity of approaches to measurement and evidence. Terms such as social capital or intellectual capital refer to the synergy within a school which has the knowledge and know-how to become more intelligent than its individual members.

The policy context

These various purposes for embracing self-evaluation have to be set in a policy context in order to understand the rationale for its progressive move from periphery to the centre of school priorities. The erratic progress towards its present status is part of a wider global movement. As inter-country communication becomes easier and swifter, policy-borrowing increases, and with greater access to international comparative data, national and local target-setting follows, bringing in its wake raised expectations of schools' outcomes and processes. Self-evaluation in every country where it is promoted is being driven by three competing logics shown in the figure below.



The economic logic derives from a recognition that external quality assurance, whether through inspection or other means, does not offer value for money especially in a policy climate where finance and financial management is devolved to schools.

The logic of accountability is a necessary complement to a value-for-money view. Management of finance entrusted to schools implies accountability for its use. The logical extension of the concept is accounting for the school's main purposes: the achievement and welfare of students, implying systematic, valid and reliable forms of evidence.

The improvement logic sees it as axiomatic that self-evaluation drives improvement and contends that improvement is a misnomer without the means of knowing where we are as a school, where we are going and how we will know when we have arrived.

While there is a tension between these three driving logics, they may in practice be reconciled. The economic argument may be seen as offering schools an opportunity to be grasped and turned to school improvement purposes. Out of self-knowledge and evidence of improvement, accountability can flow as a natural consequence. Without self-evaluation for improvement, accountability comes to be seen as imposed and a burdensome extra, and when driven by purely economic motives, self-evaluation becomes ritualised and resented by school staff.

Key features of the policy context that impinge directly on self-evaluation imply a new role for schools. The following are five of those changing roles.

1. Schools as self-managing

The trend to push down financial responsibility and decision-making power to the individual school is a worldwide phenomenon. It is driven by economic as well as political motives. The middle tier between government and schools has been widely seen as not only inefficient and, under both Conservative and Labour, as counter-productive as well, mediating and often weakening decision-making at both school and government levels. School self-management carries within it self-evaluation as a necessary and integral component.

2. Schools as competitive

The extension of parental choice, the proliferation of information on performance and the increasing variety of school types and specialisations casts schools as competing in an educational market place. The popular reference to performance tables as league tables illustrates the perception that in order to survive schools must be able to measure their quality and output. Self-promotion assumes a higher profile and makes self-knowledge a higher-stakes imperative.

3. Schools as collaborative

The isolation of schools competing unsuccessfully with their neighbours, together with recognition of the adverse effects on some schools, has led to a greater emphasis on collaboration. The Beacon Schools Initiative, followed later by Leading Edge Schools, were both designed to help schools provide mutual support and raise standards through collaborative enterprise. The work of clusters of schools working together has been further promoted by NCSL's support for networked learning communities. In such communities there is the potential for self-evaluation that goes beyond the individual school to encompass a collaborative view of quality and effectiveness.

4. Schools as extended

As schools extend their boundaries, self-evaluation is required also to broaden its reach. It has to concern itself with an extended curriculum, out-of-hours learning and adult and community learning. Extended schools and full-service schools work across professional boundaries with a child, family and community-centred focus. The implication is that self-evaluation must be attentive to the scope and efficacy of those relationships. The five key concerns outlined in Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003) traverse the boundaries of school learning to include health and welfare and imply a more rounded role for self-evaluation.

5. Schools as bounded

In England schools also operate within the bounds of a national curriculum, accompanied by key stage assessments and targets of attainment. These are powerful drivers of self-evaluation and other indicators of success count for little if the school is not able to demonstrate a trajectory of improvement, or at least a maintenance of performance, over time.

School self-evaluation may be portrayed as subject to external pressure and support.



Accountability in question

What this diagram illustrates is the range of demands for accountability as well as the support provided to meet the obligations that come with those new imperatives. As decision-making power and financial independence are pushed professional accountability has to be understood and observed. Its essential tenets are described by Eraut (1992, p 21) as:

- a moral commitment to serve the interests of clients
- a professional obligation to self-monitor and to periodically review the effectiveness of one's practice
- a professional obligation to extend one's repertoire, reflect on one's experience and develop one's expertise
- an obligation that is professional as well as contractual to contribute to the quality of one's organisation
- an obligation to reflect on and contribute to discussion on the changing role of one's profession in a wider society

These principles of professional accountability not only describe what good teachers do but also underpin a notion of self-evaluation which is integral to the teaching task, with a reach that extends beyond the classroom to parents and the wider community.

The purposes of self-evaluation generate a set of principles, depending on how the purposes have been framed.

A matter of principles

Self-evaluation rests on a number of principles. The following are the eight defined by Ofsted:

- 1 Intelligent accountability should be founded on the school's own views of how well it is serving its pupils and its priorities for improvement.
- 2 Strong self-evaluation should be embedded in the school's day-to-day practice.
- 3 Effective self-evaluation should ask the most important questions about pupils' learning, achievements and development.
- 4 It should use a range of telling evidence to answer these questions.
- 5 It should benchmark the school's and pupils' performance against the best comparable schools.
- 6 It should involve staff, pupils, parents and governors at all levels.
- 7 It should be integral to the school's central systems for assessing and developing pupils and for managing and developing staff.
- 8 It should lead to action.

(Ofsted, 2000a and 2000b)

These are far-reaching principles. They do, however, conceal more than they reveal. They require a great deal of teasing out and so offer a useful starting point for dialogue with staff as well as a set of criteria against which a school can begin to evaluate its own approach to self-evaluation.

Section 2: The background

Landmarks in recent policy development

Over the last four or five decades, self-evaluation has been revisited, embraced and then apparently forgotten as new ideas and more pressing priorities have emerged. It was given life for a period in the 1970s by GRIDS, a form of self-evaluation using a set of criteria for schools to review their performance. It was a form of review not dissimilar to many of the grids that have emerged, or re-emerged, in the last decade and that are now widely used. It gradually fell out of use, according to Fidler et al (1997 p 63) because teachers were 'better at identifying improvement rather than bringing about improvement'. The demise of the GRIDS approach is also accounted for by the new inspection regime, which raised the profile and stakes of external evaluation. In the late 1970s, self-evaluation came briefly to the fore again with the Technical, Vocational and Educational Initiative (TVEI) of the Thatcher government. Built into funding was a requirement for schemes to evaluate themselves, giving rise to approaches and tools of inquiry that have, in some cases, laid the groundwork and seeded thinking about self-evaluation more generally.

The Education Reform Act 1988 gave local authorities the power to inspect, instituting a parallel system to HMI. Four years later, however, Secretary of State John Patten criticised local authorities for the slow progress and argued for a tougher role of HMI, for a regime of 'big cats prowling the educational landscape' (Learmonth, 2000 p 33). In 1992 Ofsted was established to fulfil that purpose.

On 22 July 1991 John Major's government published The Citizen's Charter, providing information on the range of public services, including the right for parents to be informed about the performance of schools and opening up parental choice. 'League tables of examination results, truancy and leavers' destinations will be introduced in schools', Major announced in his speech introducing this new measure.

In the mid-1990s, self-evaluation enjoyed a rapid growth as local authorities developed their own approaches and packages, in part as a response to the new inspection regime. During that period the National Union of Teachers (NUT) commissioned a study inspired by previous work in Scotland on ethos indicators and qualitative self-evaluation. Published in 1996 as *Schools Speak for Themselves* (MacBeath et al, 1996) it was adopted by numerous authorities and individual schools. In the following year it was presented to an NUT fringe meeting at the Labour Party conference and endorsed by then Labour MP Estelle Morris, promising that a Labour government would put self-evaluation at the heart of school improvement policies.

After the election of the Labour government in 1997, the publication of the white paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997) provided guidance for a five-stage cycle of review and target-setting by schools together with related policy documents on school improvement, target-setting and benchmarking. It stated that 'evaluation by the school should draw from the criteria and indicators used in inspection and should employ similar techniques'. (DfEE, p 6).

The following year *School Evaluation Matters* (Ofsted, 1998) was published. It presented for the first time Ofsted's endorsement of self-evaluation and set out its key principles, starting with the key questions, borrowed from the Scottish model 'How Good is Our School' and 'How Do We Know?'.

The Autumn Package was published for the first time in 1998 by DfES, drawing on the test data provided by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). It provided national pupil performance data to schools and local authorities. The package has developed progressively since then, allowing schools to examine their performance against all schools nationally as well as to a group of similar schools. It has also allowed investigation of progress at pupil, as well as at school level, with the key purpose of helping schools examine where performance has exceeded or fallen short of expectations.

Its intention is to provide the data that will inform classroom practice and raise standards through more rigorous self-evaluation. The Autumn Package has been subject to progressive development in the intervening years with new additions as developing insights into value-added have gained greater favour, and as statistical techniques have been refined. With the introduction of the Pupil Achievement Tracker (PAT) software, schools and LEAs have been able to import and analyse their own pupil performance data against national performance benchmarks published in the Autumn Package. They were now able to use value added data to compare the progress of individual pupils or groups of pupils between key stages with progress nationally.

Integral to the Autumn Package is the PANDA, an acronym for Ofsted's Performance and Assessment Reports. These are now published on the internet and can be accessed confidentially with an appropriate code through the ePANDA website (www.ofstedpandas.gide.net). The report gives an overview of the school's performance in relation to other schools using data from Ofsted, DfES and QCA. These are not part of the public reporting of schools' performance unless a school chooses to report in these terms to parents and the wider public.

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 redefined the power of local authorities. This required LEAs to prepare education development plans including school and LEA targets with the advice that their intervention into individual school improvement should be in inverse proportion to the quality of self-evaluation.

In 1999 the *Handbook for Inspecting Schools* (Ofsted, 1999) was published along with guidance on inspecting subjects and aspects (Ofsted, 1999b). The publication of these two booklets helped inspectors and staff in schools and colleges to evaluate standards and quality in their subjects for students post-16. Each guidance booklet focused on issues specific to the subject.

As self-evaluation grew from 1999 onwards the demands on schools also increased. Schools now had PICSI (pre-inspection information) as well as PANDA (performance and assessment data) and S1 to S4 forms were introduced for the school's own self-evaluation. These were described as self-evaluation forms. Forms S1 and S2 asked for background information on the school, S3 was to be completed by governors vis-à-vis statutory requirements while S4 asked the headteacher for personal statements on a series of criteria on school effectiveness. Each indicator needed to be accompanied by evidence, summaries of strengths, areas for improvement and priorities for future development. The rating given was a seven-point scale from excellent to very poor.

In acknowledgement of the imposition on schools, in 2002 Ofsted published a document entitled *Reducing the Burden of Inspection*, promising a slimming down of requirements, greater collaboration between DfES and Ofsted, and merging PANDAs and PICSIs into one Common Basic Data Set.

In 2003 nursery, infant, primary and secondary schools could go online to complete self-evaluation forms and access ePANDA data to support that process. No longer was the S4 described as a personal statement by the headteacher but it was now suggested that it be completed by the headteacher, other key staff and governors.

In the same year, the publication of the *Framework for Inspecting Schools* (Ofsted, 2003), set out changes introduced by the new HMCI and signalled a gradual shift away from previous forms of inspection and a growing endorsement of self-evaluation as the way forward. The New Relationship with Schools was first signalled by David Miliband at the North of England Education Conference in January 2004. The aim was to improve schools' relationships with local and central government and with Ofsted. Self-evaluation, planning and data collection would be streamlined. The speech contained three key ideas.

There are three key aspects to a new relationship with schools. An accountability framework, which puts a premium on ensuring effective and ongoing self-evaluation in every school combined with more focused external inspection, linked closely to the improvement cycle of the school. A simplified school improvement process, where every school uses robust self-evaluation to drive improvement, informed by a single annual conversation with a school improvement partner to debate and advise on targets, priorities and support. And improved information and data management between schools, government bodies and parents with information 'collected once, used many times.' (DfES, 2004).

Following this speech, DfES confirmed that self-evaluation would be put at 'the heart of the inspection', and would become 'the most crucial piece of evidence available to the inspection team' (DfES, 2004, p 24). In June 2004 *A New Relationship with Schools* was published jointly by Ofsted and DfES, summarising the key aspects of this 'new relationship'.

Following the piloting of the New Relationship with Schools in March 2005, *A New Relationship with Schools: Next steps* (DfES and Ofsted, 2005) set out the practical changes planned, implications for local authorities, schools, governors, parents and pupils together with a timetable for change and the actions that schools and local authorities could begin to take.

The Children Act 2004 proved the legislative spine for reforms which would support:

- Partnership: Local authorities working with local partners to agree local priorities for improving outcomes and commissioning services for children, young people and parents
- Accountability: Local authorities appointing by 2008 at the latest, directors of children's services and lead members to provide vision and impetus for local change
- A sharper focus: a sharper focus on safeguarding children: statutory local safeguarding children's boards will replace the current area child protection committees
- Inspection: new joint area reviews of children's services will assess how successfully services are working together to improve outcomes

Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003) sets out the guidelines for schools and for inspection, broadening the role of school education to a more child-centred view of provision, underpinned by a multi-agency approach to the five key outcomes of a new approach (be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well-being). Under each of the five outcomes the document provides six more specific criteria that a school might use to evaluate its provision.

These five key concerns traverse the boundaries of school learning to include health and welfare and imply a role for self-evaluation that includes the effectiveness and impact of inter-agency collaboration. These are in turn linked to priority national targets. New inspection arrangements will need to include these five broad areas such as well-being, with a new emphasis that 'would be reflected in school's self-evaluation' (DfES, 2003 p 2). How inspectorates will judge the contribution of services is detailed in the *Outcomes Framework* (DfES December 2004).

Within each of the five broad outcomes of *Every Child Matters* are six specific areas of focus. Each of these may be taken as an indicator or criterion for self-evaluation. So, for example, under the heading Make a positive contribution, the six criteria are as follows:

- Engage in decision-making and support the community and environment.
- Engage in law-abiding behaviour in and out of school.
- Develop positive relationships and choose not to bully or discriminate.
- Develop self-confidence and successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges.
- Develop enterprising behaviour.
- Parents, carers and families promote positive behaviour.

These are not easy areas to measure but present a challenge to school leadership to find ways of putting them at the heart of self-evaluation.

Paralleling policy

In March 2005 the government announced that in future school menus would be included in Ofsted inspections. Given the New Relationship with Schools, this implies that the quality of food and its preparation and delivery should also be the province of self-evaluation. There is a certain irony in this as school meals have tended to be one of the priorities among pupils' concerns when asked for their views. The high-profile television series *Jamie's School Dinners* has lent a new focus to how food is evaluated and the wider part it plays in behaviour and learning.

Running in parallel with these policy developments numerous other agencies were developing their own approaches to self-evaluation. These included professional associations such as the National Union of Teachers (NUT), Secondary Heads Association (SHA) and National Association of Headteachers (NAHT). The General Teaching Council (GTC) ran a series of seminars and produced a sequence of policy statements on self-evaluation and its relation to external inspection.

In 1996, NUT published *Schools Speak for Themselves* (MacBeath et al, 1996), an approach to self-evaluation developed in collaboration with 10 English schools. Its criteria were derived from what pupils, parents and teachers considered to be key indicators of a good school. This was followed in 1999 by a Routledge publication *Schools Must Speak for Themselves* which included examples of how the framework had been used by school and local authorities in England and Scotland.

In 2002, NAHT published its own self-evaluation framework for primary schools, *Primary Leadership Paper 1*, a 40-page document setting out the rationale, strategies, principles and practice, and links with external inspection. It included case studies illustrating what schools were already doing together with guidelines on the pros and cons of tools used to support the process.

In the same year SHA published *Managing the School for Inspection* (SHA, 2002), followed a year later by *Towards Intelligent Accountability for Schools* (SHA, 2003), revised in 2004 to include 36 recommendations with regard to accountability and self-evaluation structures, including radical change to the performance information on schools and PANDA reports. *Intelligent Accountability: One year on* (SHA, 2004 p 1), welcomes 'a substantial move in government thinking in the direction of intelligent accountability and also welcomes the new relationship with schools'. SHA welcomed the proposals for scaled-down Ofsted inspections, allied to school self-evaluation. 'A window through which others see the school. But it is also the mirror through which the school sees itself as others see it.'

In November 2004, NUT published a set of proposals for the future relationship between inspection and self-evaluation. Entitled *Bringing Down the Barriers* it suggested that:

- There should be one single form of institutional evaluation: school self-evaluation. Institutional evaluations should be developmental, not punitive. Punitive evaluation does not strengthen schools, it makes them fragile.
- HMI should evaluate the procedures put in place by schools to assess their strengths and weaknesses and their plans for improvement. It should examine the processes and procedures schools have in place for gathering information on levels of learners' achievement, on the personal and social development of learners and on the views of stakeholders. The HMI evaluation schedule would be flexible enough to respond to self-evaluation models which have been developed or adapted by schools themselves to reflect their curriculum range and activities.
- Ofsted should be replaced by an independent Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) and would be responsible for evaluating schools. This would be independent of government, as a stand-alone independent, publicly funded body.
- External evaluation should be conducted by HMI, possibly accompanied by a small number of trained advisers. HMIs would be drawn from teachers, advisers, parents and school communities.
- Each setting should be able to appoint a critical friend whose job it would be to provide advice to the headteacher and staff and seek to secure additional support where necessary. Appointments would be made solely by the school.

In 2005 NUT published an independent survey of schools entitled *Self-evaluation and Inspection: a new relationship?* It contained a broad welcome for shorter inspection with less notice but with added caveats as to the dangers of self-inspection rather than an approach to self-evaluation embedded in the day-to-day life and work of the school.

The General Teaching Council for England's view of self-evaluation

The General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) has kept a close watching brief on the developing relationship between self-evaluation and inspection. It has argued for schools to be given more responsibility for their own accountability, a greater role in steering and shaping their own improvement and an emphasis on professional accountability to replace the culture of compliance to external mandate. GTCE's commitment to a school self-evaluation model is based on the premise that 'while the balance of power between schools and inspectors is so uneven, and the penalties for failure are so high, there cannot be genuine partnership between them'.

In its response to the Ofsted consultation on the draft framework for inspecting schools in England from September 2003, GTCE reiterated its commitment to a three-dimensional model for school self-evaluation, including:

- a rigorous internal self-evaluation system involving all stakeholders
- regular monitoring and advice on the processes of self-review and performance outcomes by external sources including local authority teams
- external audit and quality assessment

The following documents are available on request from the GTCE. However, they have been replaced by updated compilations of the issues entitled *Rethinking the Inspection Framework* (2004) and *Accountability and School Self-evaluation: advice to the Secretary of State for Education* and others (undated). Both can be accessed from the GTCE website at

www.gtceinfo/ofstedintro.asp

- *Improving Inspection, Improving Schools*
- *The GTC's Response to the Ofsted Consultation*
- *Conceptual Frameworks and Definitions of Accountability*
- *School Self-evaluation and Peer Review*

What this retrospective reveals is the nature of policy development, moving forward in incremental steps. Rather than a clear linear process, however, it reveals a looping back, reviewing and responding to ideas, often many years after they were first articulated. Inspection as focusing on self-evaluation was advocated almost a decade before finally being implemented in 2005. Until the election of Labour in 1997, self-evaluation was not on the Ofsted agenda and yet, given developments on the world stage, it was an idea of its time rather than specifically a party political initiative.

The roles played by professional associations, local authorities, non-government bodies, pressure groups and academics have all been part of the complex mix which has impelled self-evaluation to occupy centre stage. Incentivising self-evaluation through mandate is seen by Ofsted as lending an impetus and urgency to the process. Not least in the push for more school-driven review, however, were the financial implications of inspection, which has provided a key driving logic.

1988	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Reform Act 	
1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Citizen's Charter 	
1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ofsted established • The Citizen's Charter: Information for Parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authorities develop approaches to self-evaluation
1996		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NUT Schools Speak for Themselves • Local authorities publish self-evaluation packages
1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election of Labour government • Endorsement of self-evaluation 	
1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ofsted School Self-evaluation Matters • The Autumn Package • School Standards and Framework Act 	
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handbook for Inspecting Schools 	
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the Burden of Inspection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GTC publishes position papers on self-evaluation • NAHT Primary Leadership Paper 1 • SHA Managing the School for Inspection
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framework for Inspecting Schools 	
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A New Relationship with Schools • The Children's Act • Every Child Matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SHA Intelligent Accountability A Year On • NUT Bringing down the barriers
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A New Relationship with Schools: Next steps • A New Relationship with Schools: Improving performance through self-evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NUT Self-evaluation and Inspection: A new relationship? • NCSL Self-evaluation: a guide for school leaders

Section 3: The seven elements of self-evaluation

However embedded, spontaneous or intuitive self-evaluation may be, it is also systematic, evidence-based and with a clear sense of purpose and outcome. The table below suggests seven key elements and poses the question 'What happens if any one of these elements is missing? What for example is the likely outcome if all the elements are in place but there is no shared understanding of purpose? What if there is lack of clarity as to the audience to whom the story may be told? What if there is much ongoing activity but no coherent framework? How can self-evaluation be effective without the criteria being thought through critically and matched to the needs of the school? How can self-evaluation operate well without the right, most appropriate, tools for the job? How is it implemented in order to vouchsafe the greatest engagement, ownership and promise of success? What is the final product one is aiming for and what kinds of differing forms might it take?

In examining the following table, the questions for schools are:

- Are all these elements in place?
- Have you considered the consequences of any missing element?

Purpose	Audience	Framework	Criteria	Tools	Process	Product
?	Audience	Framework	Criteria	Tools	Process	Product
Purpose	?	Framework	Criteria	Tools	Process	Product
Purpose	Audience	?	Criteria	Tools	Process	Product
Purpose	Audience	Framework	?	Tools	Process	Product
Purpose	Audience	Framework	Criteria	?	Process	Product
Purpose	Audience	Framework	Criteria	Tools	?	Product
Purpose	Audience	Framework	Criteria	Tools	Process	?

Purpose**Question: Why are we doing this?**

The strategy through which to answer this question is creating a forum or forums for discussion, gathering a range of views, examining the potential range of purposes and agreeing which one is pre-eminent for the school. It may not be one single purpose but a cluster of cognate purposes. It is helpful, however, to have one overarching visionary purpose, neither too vague nor grandiose but one that people feel represents their lived priorities.

Audience**Question: Who is this for?**

It is difficult to discuss the purpose without considering the audience for self-evaluation. If the audience is seen as Ofsted, the purposes will necessarily be different from self-evaluation with an internal focus. When asked about audience, teachers tend to see self-evaluation as for the school itself, as informing planning and practice and having the improvement of learning and teaching at its core. Reporting to an external audience such as Ofsted is then seen as a subsidiary purpose and that account becomes shaped by an accountability, rather than an improvement, purpose. Maintaining different documents for differing audiences is testament to the tensions inherent in the improvement-accountability interface.

Framework**Question: What is the best structure?**

Self-evaluation is often a random unco-ordinated process, occurring in pockets within a school, in individual classrooms or departments. This is often a lively and valuable process in which self-evaluation takes root. In order to grow and infuse whole-school policy, it needs a supporting structure or framework. There is such a plethora of these that schools often adopt the Ofsted framework because it is there and because it is on that basis that inspectors will judge the school. If teachers and pupils are to feel any ownership they should be encouraged to do one of two things. Either adapt the Ofsted model to give it their own flavour or branding, or devise their own model and then cross-reference it to the Ofsted framework.

Staff need to be reminded that the self-evaluation framework is not self-evaluation. It is a reporting mechanism drawing out key issues from the school's own approach and practice. They may also wish to know that completion of the self-evaluation form is voluntary not mandatory.

Criteria and measures

Question: How are we to judge?

Self-evaluation has to be evidence-based. Many schemes pose the question 'How do we know?'. We know because we have criteria against which to measure success or progress. The most easily measurable criteria are attainment in tests or exams. These can be reported in scores, levels and percentages and for that reason have a compelling attraction.

The danger is that these criteria override others because they are both easily measurable and high stakes. Criteria that measure the quality of learning or teaching, or school ethos and culture for example, are less easy to grasp and report on. These have most meaning when developed by teachers themselves with the help of pupils and if possible with the support of a critical friend. There are plenty of sources to draw on rather than reinventing the wheel but engaging critically in the process of thinking these through for oneself will lend greater vitality and ownership to the process.

We must learn to measure what we value rather than valuing what we can easily measure. (Education Counts, Report to US Congress, 1991 p 1)

Process

Question: What do we do?

Self-evaluation often takes the form of an event. Groups of key stakeholders, including some or all of the following - senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers, support staff, pupils, parents - may go through the criteria and make a judgement on each, perhaps using a four-point scale such as the one adopted by many schemes including the new Ofsted reporting format.

This can be a time-consuming process but if well handled can also produce a rich dialogue. It is also likely to throw up a very wide diversity of viewpoints and make it difficult to arrive at a consensus. That may be treated as a virtue rather than a problem, however, as it illustrates the complexity and diversity of what a school 'is' and what it means to different people.

The process is not always an event however. If self-evaluation is truly embedded in a school's way of thinking and being, it is ongoing in the life of classrooms and in the day-to-day conduct of the school. Feedback loops, diaries, logs, examples of work, photographs and other artefacts are generated and tell a continuing story.

Tools

Question: What are the tools for the job?

The tools of the trade come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some of these are complex and cumbersome and people shy away from using them because they require time to read and digest. Tools that teachers and pupils are most likely to use are simple and accessible but at the same time powerful. Such tools need to be amenable to use on an ad hoc basis, spontaneous and suited to the task in hand rather than as a ritual process at a given time. The most simple example of such a tool would be the thumbs up, thumbs down or traffic lights, which a teacher can use to check out pupils' responses to teaching. Such a tool can then become part of the pupil repertoire and used by them rather than instigated by the teacher. As with all tools there are dangers of overuse. So selective use and variety is the touchstone here.

Product

Question: What does the final product look like?

The final product may take the form of a written report, a video, a PowerPoint presentation, a set of photographs with commentary, a website or a combination of some or all of these. In a sense however, self-evaluation has no final product as it is ongoing and developmental. It may take the form of a sequence of reports or an open portfolio which goes on being added to and refined as understanding and insight grow. A website is a conducive medium for the progressive unfolding of the continuing story. The Ofsted self-evaluation form requires a set of grades on a four-point scale to which the labels 'unsatisfactory', 'satisfactory', 'very good' and 'outstanding' are attached. As a product, these say little about the quality of a school, or aspects of it, but there may be value in the dialogue through which differing groups of stakeholders negotiate their grades and support their arguments with evidence. In other words, the real value lies in the process rather than the product.

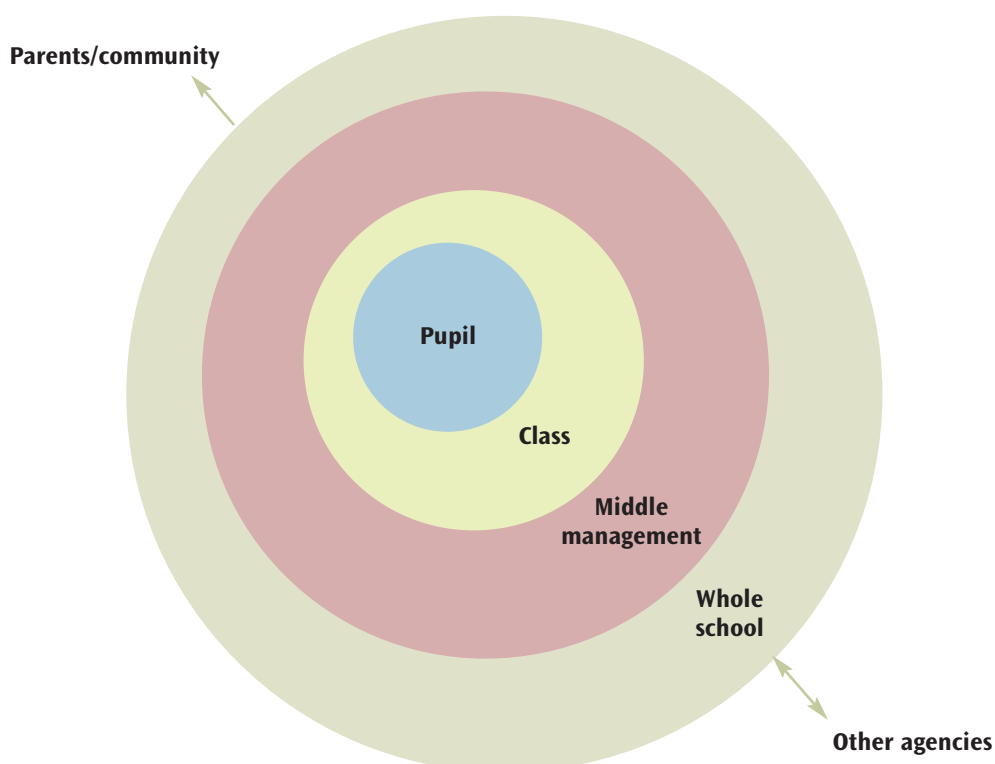
NAHT (2002) offers eight procedural guidelines which may be summarised as:

- 1 Be clear about what you want to find out, why, how you will go about it and what you will do with information gathered.
- 2 Demystify the process and make clear responsibilities for staff in their differing roles.
- 3 Keep the process as open and transparent as possible.
- 4 Use systems and processes you already have for gathering information.
- 5 Be realistic about the time constraints and use strategies you can manage effectively.
- 6 Think small and be specific. Don't try to review everything.
- 7 Ensure there is time to induct staff and provide ongoing support.
- 8 Work to ensure that the process of self-evaluation is sensed as a tool and not a weapon.

This realistic counsel is grounded in the real day-to-day life of schools, acknowledges the pressure and anxiety self-evaluation can create for staff, and reinforces the importance of having a sense of purpose together with processes that arise naturally from the work of headteachers, teachers and their pupils.

Circles and wedding cakes

The focus of self-evaluation is often described in terms of circles with the pupil at the centre and evaluation processes rippling out to the classroom, the department, the school and the community.



The inner circle

At the centre of the circles is the individual pupil, now widely recognised as the primary locus of evaluation. As data collection has become more sophisticated, it has furnished schools with individual pupil data intended for use both summatively and formatively. More importantly though, pupil level data signals the importance of the individual and is congruent with the emerging policy emphasis on personalised learning.

As one of the intrinsic purposes of school education is to help children and young people become more self-aware and better equipped to evaluate their own progress, it follows that teachers should be concerned with the extent to which pupils are able to identify the factors that help and hinder progress, and are enabled to assume responsibility for their own learning. Successful pupils know where, when, how and with whom they learn best. A pupil focus enables them not only to be knowledgeable as to their own learning preferences but also equips them to appraise critically the conditions that support effective learning, including factors such as the quality of teaching. So tools of self-evaluation are, in the first instance, for use by the pupil to inquire into learning and progress and to explore the degree of congruence between teaching and learning.

The second circle

Self-evaluation offers the possibility of a more sophisticated understanding of what happens in classrooms, and can help to unravel some of the complex interplay of influences on learning and teaching. Learning is a social activity and the class, an aggregated and usually arbitrary group of individuals, provides the context in which individual achievement needs to be located. It is important then that self-evaluation is able to probe the social group, the peer group influence and the nature of social and collective learning. In a context where assessment is highly individualised, self-evaluation needs to cast the net wider so that it is able to understand ways in which group processes affect knowledge acquisition and what light can be thrown on classroom dynamics.

How much of what happens in classroom learning relies on the teacher is a matter of continuing debate. Individual teachers have historically been the focus of inspection and in many countries still tend to be the only focus of external evaluation. They have, in recent years particularly, been held largely responsible for achievement at classroom level, although we know clearly from research, and the appliance of some common sense, that peer group pressures, parental influence, diet and a myriad of factors also account for achievement.

This does not undermine the accountability of teachers for the young people in their charge but the tools of self-evaluation can lend them a more refined understanding of the teaching task.

The third circle

The quality of teaching relies in turn on support from middle management. In secondary schools effectiveness research has identified the extent to which improvement effects may lie at departmental level and there is now much greater transparency in exposing the differential between secondary school departments. Whether in secondary or primary, middle management is recognised as highly significant as the mediating tier between senior leadership and the classroom, and is the rationale for the NCSL programme *Leading from the Middle*. In secondary schools, tracking individual students' work across departments illuminates the highs and lows and the nature of progress as students move from one subject area to another. Self-evaluation clearly has a role in this respect.

The fourth circle

Departmental effects are in turn embedded in whole-school policy and leadership. Inspection, while working at all levels within the circles, ultimately evaluates schools in the round and delivers a judgement on the school as a whole. Self-evaluation often tends to operate in a similar way and indeed may be compelled to do so by the final self-evaluation judgement that a headteacher is required to submit to Ofsted. However, self-evaluation may be seen in two different ways – top-down and bottom-up – and in two differing forms of measurement, one quantitative and one qualitative.

Top-down measures start with the school as a unit and then disaggregate progressively by department, year group and then individual class unit. The measures tend to be quantitative in nature, for example, percentages of A-C grades overall, followed by relative ratings department by department or class by class. A bottom-up approach using the same quantitative measures would start with individual pupil data, work towards whole-class data and then build towards a whole-school picture.

On the qualitative dimension, self-evaluation focuses more on aspects of learning, teaching, culture or leadership, which lend themselves less easily to quantitative measures. From a top-down perspective, the departure point is with whole-school indicators of quality such as the nature of the school as a learning organisation, moving down through the hierarchy to classroom or individual pupil and teacher level. The bottom-up perspective stays much closer to the pupil experience, taking as its primary focus learning processes and contexts, exploring how knowledge of those micro-experiences informs strategic thinking at year, departmental or whole-school level.

We might portray a further outer ring, or rings, which place the school in a community context, which refer to parents and, in recognition of Every Child Matters, evaluates the impact of other agencies.

The fifth dimension: beyond the school walls

The term school self-evaluation is now so well established that it tends to ignore the learning that goes on beyond the school walls, learning which is more pervasive and influential on attitudes and life chances than what takes place within classrooms. Little has been published on self-evaluation as applied to community or home learning although there is a considerable body of research on home and community effects (for example Bastiani, 1987; MacBeath et al, 1996; Wolfendale and Bastiani, 1999; Weiss and Fine, 2000).

Homework is one area in which self-evaluation is highly relevant. It puts to the test the ability of pupils to be self-managing, self-assessing and self-evaluating when there is no longer a dependency on teacher direction. Homework often takes the form of a piece of work to be duly completed and returned to the teacher for comment rather than being subjected to critical appraisal in terms of its content (self-assessment) and in terms of the learning style and context in which it was undertaken (self-evaluation). Family learning in which peers and parents engage in common pursuits of learning is also an arena for self-evaluation.

Out-of-hours learning has expanded rapidly in the last decade, generally known as study support but encompassing a whole range of activities to which the term study sits uneasily, such as sports and other outdoor activities. Ironically it is in many of these that self-evaluation has the longest history and is most critical to success. Goals, target-setting and performance review are integral to most sporting activities. Likewise in music, dance, drama and the visual arts, qualitative evaluation is often at its most rigorous and demanding.

The Code of Practice for out-of-hours learning, first developed by The Prince's Trust and now distributed by DfES (DfES, 2005), provides models for study support centres, libraries and community and resource centres to use to evaluate their own provision, inviting pupils, students or other participating adults to ask questions and seek evidence for their judgements. Under each of three headings – emerging, established and advanced – it poses questions for pupils, teachers, volunteers and other involved parties to answer to validate their stage of development. Examples of practice are provided in each of the three categories to illustrate what an 'emergent' or 'established' or 'advanced' centre would look like.

Community and networks

Self-evaluation may extend its compass beyond the school as the unit of inquiry, locating itself as an agency within a wider community and attempting to view itself through the eyes of others.

As extended schools and full-service schools come into their own, the nature of their improvement and accountability inevitably broadens its focus in tune with its extended aims. As the effectiveness of a school's work with other agencies assumes greater significance so the need for collaborative self-evaluation strategies increases.

As inter-dependence and learning exchange among schools grows, so the 'self' becomes more diffuse and complex. The fact that some networked learning communities thrive while others dissipate is an argument for evaluation not simply by external sources but as embedded within the thinking and practice of the community.

The self-review process support framework published by NCSL is in the form of a simple grid which asks for comments on key achievements and next steps at six levels from individual pupil to network. These are:

- pupil
- adult
- leadership
- school-wide
- school to school
- network to network

Examples of learning, changes and outcomes are asked for in support of judgements made.

Leadership level

NCSL, in extensive consultation with headteachers, has developed a self-evaluation tool with a focus on learning. It is structured around six areas that school leaders say are essential to learning-centred leadership. It allows leaders to reflect on developments in pupil and professional learning through key questions, which enable them to place their school in one of three categories as emerging, establishing or enhancing in its work in learning-centred leadership. The three stages are presented as a continuum of development and the descriptions are designed to illuminate rather than to categorise. As one moves through the three stages of development, new elements are added to the descriptors.

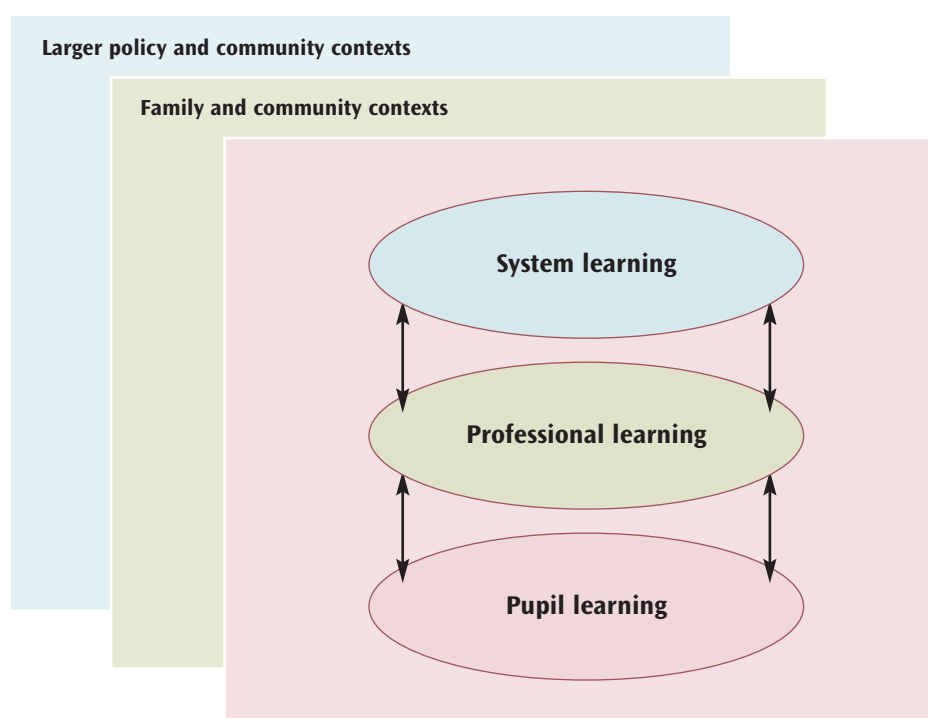
Aims, values and culture	Impact on Learning	Knowledge	Professional dialogue	Systems and processes	Involvement
Do the school's aims, values and culture provide a focus on teaching and learning for pupils, teachers, governors and the wider community?	How do leaders have an impact on learning?	How does the school build its knowledge about effective teaching and learning?	What part does professional conversation play in influencing classroom practice?	What systems and processes do we use to improve teaching and learning?	How does the school engage pupils, parent or carers and the wider community as partners in teaching and learning?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aims and values • people • environment • learning teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • classroom visits • leadership at all levels • resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff learning • focused visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning partnerships • language and principles • monitoring and evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • resources • roles and responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pupils • parents and carers • community • additional strategies

Source: www.ncsl.org.uk/mediastore/image2/randd-lcl-dev-tools.doc

The wedding cake

The wedding cake model comes from the University of Washington and while similar to the circle model it is the vertical supporting structures of the three-tier 'cake' (see figure) that add a further vital element. These illustrate the upward and downward flow through the levels, implying that without professional and system-wide learning, student learning is necessarily impoverished and that student learning in turn informs and shapes professional and system learning.

What lies behind the model are further layers that refer self-evaluation to the external environments. So a further layer is described as 'Family and community contexts' and behind that the 'Larger policy and professional contexts'. The figure below shows the wedding cake: pupil, professional and system learning.



Section 4: Self-evaluation and inspection: a developing relationship

The Norwegian academic Trond Alvik identified three predominant models of the relationship between self-evaluation and inspection which he called parallel, sequential and co-operative:

- **parallel**
in which the two systems run side by side each with their own criteria and protocols
- **sequential**
in which external bodies follow on from a school's own evaluation and use that as the focus of their quality assurance system
- **co-operative**
in which external agencies co-operate with schools to develop a common approach to evaluation

Each of these three models reflects the policy context in which they are embedded. It is difficult to fit any one national scheme neatly into one of these three categories as policy thinking around external and internal evaluation tends to be in a continuing state of flux and transition. Few, if any, administrations have resolved the relationship between what schools should do autonomously and what support or intervention should come from without. Few, if any, have come to terms with the divergent purposes that inspection and self-evaluation serve; nor have they succeeded in marrying improvement and accountability. Owing to the impact of globalisation and international comparative performance tables, in all OECD countries difficulties in this relationship persist and live in uneasy tension.

The history of self-evaluation and inspection may be seen as one which has evolved from a parallel system to a sequential one but is some way still from a genuinely co-operative model. For most of the last two decades local authority schemes or school-initiated schemes have run in parallel with inspection. It is only in the last few years that thinking has turned to a sequential notion. A genuinely co-operative model may lie somewhere in the future but such a development would rely on schools having a much greater degree of ownership of purposes, criteria and processes, and Ofsted, for its part, assuming more of a learning partnership role.

Ofsted's new relationship between self-evaluation and inspection is one model, as yet untested, still on trial. It may be seen as a stage in an evolutionary process that will develop over the next decade and beyond. Its key features are:

- shorter, sharper inspections that take no more than two days in a school and concentrate on closer interaction with senior managers in the school, taking self-evaluation evidence as the starting point
- shorter notice of inspections to avoid schools carrying out unnecessary pre-inspection preparation and to reduce the levels of stress often associated with an inspection. Shorter notice should help inspectors to see schools as they really are
- smaller inspection teams with a greater number of inspections led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. Furthermore, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector will publish and be responsible for all reports

- more frequent inspections, with the maximum period between inspections reduced from the current six years to three years, though occurring more frequently for schools causing concern
- more emphasis placed on the school's own self-evaluation evidence as the starting point for inspection and for the school's internal planning, and as the route to securing regular input and feedback from users – pupils, their parents and the community – in the school's development. To facilitate this, schools are strongly encouraged to update their self-evaluation form on an annual basis
- a common set of characteristics to inspection in schools and colleges of education from early childhood to the age of 19
- a simplification of the categorisation of schools causing concern, but retaining the current approach to schools that need special measures and removing the categories of 'serious weakness' and 'inadequate sixth form', replacing them with a new single category of 'improvement notice' for schools where there are weaknesses in the progress of pupils or in key aspects of the school's work

HMCI David Bell has made it clear in his talks to headteachers that the new approach to inspection is not simply a review of the school's own self-evaluation but that self-evaluation is a substantial element of what is examined by the Ofsted team. This may be a staging post on the way to a model in which external review becomes an even more cursory check on the robustness of a school's own approaches. Alternatively, policy could move in the direction of a more genuinely co-operative model.

A co-operative model would be the hallmark of a mature system with school staff and inspectorate staff working together on the seven elements described in section 3. Purposes would be clarified but also seen as open to renewal and change. There would be agreement as to the primary and secondary audiences, those with their hands on the levels of improvement, and those to whom an account needed to be rendered. The framework would be negotiated locally not imposed nationally, with criteria developed by common agreement as to educational priority and reflection of core purposes. There would be an open tool exchange, testing, refining and evaluating tools as fit for purpose and context. The process would have as its centrepiece an exploratory dialogue, informative rather than judgemental, supportive but challenging. The nature and form of the final product would be individualised rather than standardised, developed from a shared understanding of, and respect for, its primary and secondary audiences.

Section 5: The players: who tells the school's story?

Who tells the school's story? Who knows best about what happens in classrooms? Who is best placed to judge the quality and effectiveness of teaching? The responsibility for the final account of school quality and progress rests with the senior leadership team. This has often in the past been translated in practice as the head or the senior team carrying out the evaluation with little or no consultation. That is undergoing progressive development as schools have been required to extend the franchise and involve a wider group of stakeholders. Over time this has begun to include teachers, all school staff, and gradually extending to parents and governors. Progressively pupils have played a greater role and Ofsted now expects their views to be taken into account.

Teachers

Teachers are self-evaluators in their own classrooms and have an important and complex story to tell, one not easily reduced to a number between one and four. In their day-to-day work they employ a range of tools to make judgements about the quality of learning, seeking evidence of their own impact, often asking their pupils for feedback on their own teaching. This is sometimes a teacher-initiated activity and can remain privatised, within the bounds of their own classrooms. However, when these insights are shared and there is an exchange of findings they provide a rich and continuing narrative.

There is also a growing trend for teachers to observe one another and provide collegial feedback. These are learning opportunities for the observer as well as the observed, and as practice grows observation becomes more systematic and less impressionistic. Teachers develop their own schedules or focus for what is to be observed and fed back. It may be the start of lessons, endings, handling of plenary or questioning, for example. These are formative in nature but feed into the developing story of the school. In terms of accounting to external bodies it is the process and rigour of the shared learning process that count rather than the content or detail of what has been observed and critiqued.

Teachers may be involved peripherally or centrally in whole-school evaluation. They may, at worst, have a marginal input into the self-evaluation profile presented to Ofsted, or at best contribute ideas, furnish evidence and take initiative in shaping the narrative. How teachers can play a leading role is exemplified in a Sheffield primary school where the youngest member of staff took the initiative in making a video of the school, a self-evaluation exercise with vivid illustration of quality from a wide range of stakeholders.

Self-evaluation is a collective as well as individual activity. It is now increasingly common for a school to institute a cross-disciplinary group of staff such as a school improvement group, a teaching and learning group, or a school evaluation group, entrusted with the task of evaluating, planning for and implementing change. A group of six to eight staff may include learning support assistants and other school staff such as caretakers or catering staff. Such a group, representing different experiences and viewpoints, can serve as a reservoir of expertise and tools of evaluation and an important lever of school improvement.

Learning support assistants

A group such as this should be in possession of the means to evaluate itself. This same principle applies to any collective with a school-wide remit, for example a student group such as a school's council. Any formal group within a school needs to be informed as to how it is viewed by others, and has to be aware of its own usefulness and impact. These are all facets of the self-evaluation experience and make their own contribution to the rendering of the account.

A headteacher described learning support assistants (LSAs) in his school as the 'candid camera' of learning and teaching because he or she often enjoys a continuity with pupils but is witness to a range of different teachers and teaching styles. This may, in some schools, be a hidden treasure which leadership does not consider calling on, or because LSAs do not feel confident enough, or are not encouraged enough, to express their viewpoint. In a climate of self-reflection and mutual trust the LSA perspective has much to offer by way of adding a further element to the recounting of the school's learning story.

Parents

The voice of the parents tends to be restricted to surveys and questionnaires although group interviews or focus groups appear to be a growing trend. These formal mechanisms are not the only source by which a school or outside body gains a parental perspective. Ongoing feedback through face-to-face conversation, telephone calls, letters to and from home, parent meetings and workshops all help to provide a parental perspective.

The area in which parents have most to contribute is in relation to home learning, home study and homework. It is through their children's work in the home that parents can offer the most helpful insights to the school and the school can, in return, help parents to monitor or support their children's learning more effectively. A continually developing home-school dialogue is one of the most significant levers for enhancing learning and raising standards of achievement. For example, home learning logs in which pupils and parents jointly record their observations provide a bridge between school and home learning. In some special schools video-recordings of children's learning in school are sent home and cameras are provided for parents to record home learning which then travels back to school.

These insights are not only valuable but essential in helping learning to travel from one context to another. As research has persistently demonstrated, it is only when there is traffic across that home-school bridge that schools improve. The incidents, the dilemmas, the success stories all feed into the portrait of what a school 'is' and how multi-faceted are its aspects.

The governing body

The inside story of the governing body is one seldom told. Few people are likely to read the minutes, dry documents which rarely offer an insight into the issues and tensions that a governing body has to deal with. Governing bodies have a statutory duty to co-manage the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement but the way in which this is achieved, or might be more skilfully achieved, tends not to be subject to systematic self-evaluation.

Yet, effective governing bodies have a direct impact on the success of the school, helping to set the climate for improvement. This is now recognised by Ofsted in the inspection framework. In judging how well a school is led and managed, inspectors are required to evaluate and report on how well the governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities and how effectively it accounts for the performance and improvement of the school. This can, of course be a mechanistic and dutiful exercise, or alternatively can offer a vital opportunity for governors to address some of the key issues of what schools are for, what they do, what they do well and less well, and the kind of support they need to do it better.

Self-evaluation offers governors a valuable learning and development opportunity. It is one that can take them to the nerve centre of the school, bringing to that a uniquely informed lens.

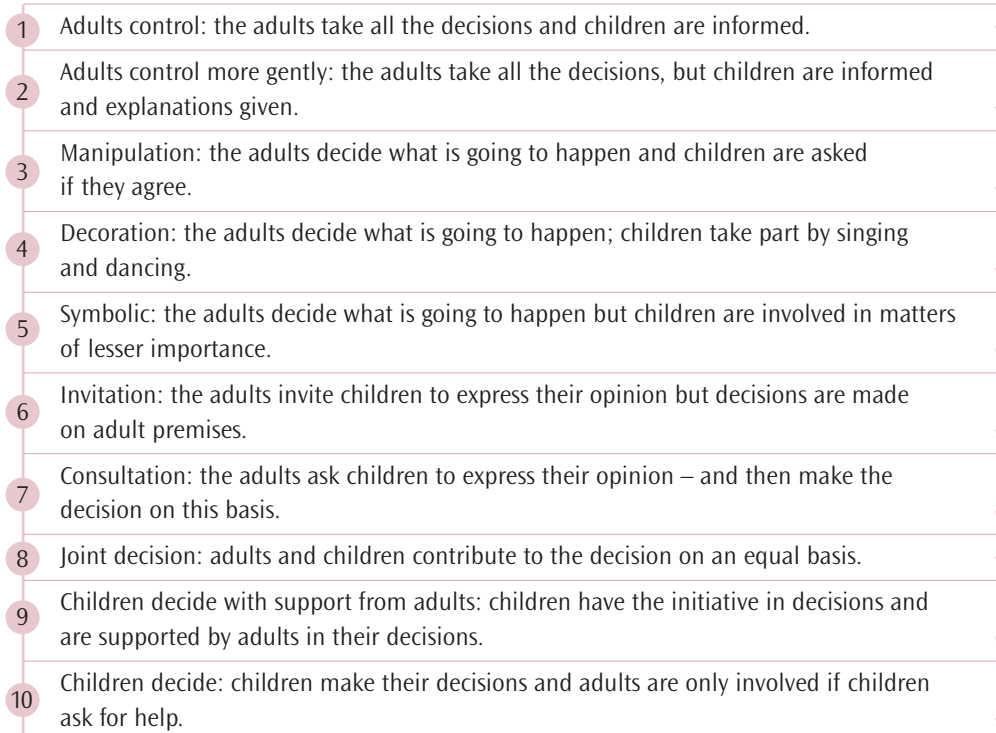
The pupils

In answer to the questions ‘who knows best about what happens in classrooms?’ and ‘Who is best placed to judge the quality and effectiveness of teaching?’ many would argue that it must be those who are closest to the action - the pupils. They are informed insiders with a close and detailed knowledge of the inner workings of school and classroom. They are immersed in its culture. While teachers, with a bird’s eye view, are able to plane over a whole class and to see patterns in classroom behaviour, pupils have a worm’s eye view. They see the class and the teacher from where they habitually sit. They rarely get the overview that the teacher has but they see more of a hidden life of the classroom and above all, they are unique experts in their own feelings, frustrations and triumphs.

Pupils are the school’s largest untapped knowledge source, described by one researcher (Soo Hoo, 1993) as ‘the treasure in our own backyard’. As he argues, a school that overlooks that intelligence source is inevitably poorer as a consequence.

Much has been written about pupil voice, the role pupils can play as researchers into their own learning and as commentators on school. Historically, they have been the last to be consulted about school quality and effectiveness and yet, as this developing literature attests, they may get closest to the heartbeat of the school and have the most compelling stories to tell.

Those schools that do put pupils at the heart of the self-evaluation process have discovered just how rich pupils’ insights can be and what can happen when that trapped energy is released. Teachers, almost unfailingly, testify to the honesty, fairness and acuity of pupils’ views, giving them greater confidence in enlisting pupils in development planning and school improvement. Including their voice in self-evaluation can also be a risky business. While pupils are usually fair they are almost always honest critics too. They challenge assumptions with counter evidence that may not always be immediately welcome. Per Schultz Jorgensen, the Danish educator, suggests a ladder of involvement from adult to pupil decision-making.



(Jorgensen, 2004 p 119)

This somewhat radical taxonomy is a useful theoretical frame through which to review and challenge current practice. A further development sequence worked out in the practice context in the classroom comes from a Cambridgeshire teacher who was involved in the ESRC project on consulting pupils. She describes the six stages she went through with her class.

Stage 1	Delivering the curriculum. Fitting with the traditional role of the teacher as passing on curricular content from she who knows to those who don't know.
Stage 2	Beginning to discuss with pupils the purposes and objectives of what they were learning. What is the objective of your learning?
Stage 3	Involving pupils in considering and writing down indicators by which to measure their achievement. How will you know when you have learned something?
Stage 4	Involving pupils in assessing their own and others' work. How good is this piece of work? What criteria can be used to judge it?
Stage 5	Pupils become determiners of learning. They make decisions about the where, when, how and what of classroom learning.
Stage 6	Collaborating with pupils as learning partners. What shall we do together to improve the conditions, processes and evaluation of our learning?

A useful compendium of articles on pupil voice nationally and internationally is contained in Forum Volume 43 Number 2, Summer 2001. It contains 14 articles on voice.

The following grid may be used by a school to reflect on the hidden social and intellectual capital, what is there and how it might be further developed and make a substantive contribution to school self-evaluation.

	What do they know?	What should they know?	How can they contribute?	What support do they need?	What support can they offer to others?
Pupils					
Parents					
Learning support staff					
Teachers					
Key stage co-ordinators					
Heads of departments					
Senior leaders					
Governors					
Link advisers					

Section 6: What can we learn from international experiences?

The international experience

This section begins with a broad overview of self-evaluation in an international context and then describes three models that have relevance for policy and practice in England. The first of these, from Hong Kong, illustrates a process very similar to the New Relationship with Schools promised by Ofsted. The second, from the United States, typifies a more collegial and less high-stakes approach. The third example from the Australian state Tasmania is an example of an approach which takes as its focus home and school.

School self-evaluation is now seen as a matter of priority in most economically advanced countries of the world. It flows from a shared concern for quality assurance and effectiveness, fuelled by international comparisons which rank countries on a range of common indicators. It is a logical extension of an international move to devolve decision-making to local school level, as much a political and economic motive as an educational one.

In European countries such as Norway, Denmark and Sweden where central government plays a leading role in quality assurance, self-evaluation has acquired a sense of urgency. It is largely in response to pressures from international comparison and is integrally related to other reforms in school structures and leadership.

In more decentralised administrations, such as Italy, Germany or Switzerland self-evaluation is a more localised issue. Individual states, provinces or cantons are developing their own approaches, tending to draw on models from elsewhere, often supported by a higher education project. This is also true of new accession countries. In Poland for example, the University of Warsaw supports a network of 50 schools drawing on the Socrates European model.

In the Baltic states, self-evaluation has been given impetus by a UNESCO project in which seven states have worked together to devise a self-evaluation toolbox, aimed at introducing the concept and the practice to schools where there had been no previous experience of evaluation from the inside.

The US, Canada and Australia all reveal a patchwork of different initiatives according not only to the state or province but often to even more localised projects. In Rhode Island, for example, *School Accountability for Learning and Teaching* (SALT) is a scheme that takes as its focus teachers' practice evaluated by teachers. The review team is composed of practicing Rhode Island teachers together with a parent, an administrator and a member of university staff. The team spends four to five days in the school and writes a report which is negotiated with the school, the process of which can be lengthy but is highly valued in teasing out evidence and the basis for judgements made. The team then draws up a compact for learning, the purposes of which are to ensure that school staff have the capacity to implement improvement.

An example of an approach at school district level is in Trenton, New Jersey where Strategic Inquiry is the name given to a co-operative process in which members of the external team act as critical friends, spending an intensive week in the school, suspending judgement, getting to know the school by shadowing students, taking lunch with students and staff, observing in classrooms and participating in professional development sessions. They report back to the school with a set of questions to stimulate further dialogue and planning for improvement.

In Quebec province in Canada, a project at McGill University, Schools Speaking to Stakeholders, took as its starting point the key concerns of the stakeholders – teachers, students and parents – and built the model from the bottom up. The pilot schools involved in the process benefited from their sense of ownership of the project and the authenticity of the focus on what mattered. This initiative was overtaken by a more top-down model from the Quebec Ministry, a theme that is repeated over and over in many areas where a state or province, in the search for uniformity, compels schools along a more compliant path.

These local initiatives often find it hard to survive in a more directive climate but where no such central direction exists a space is created for wider national movements and models. So in the US for example the National Central Educational Laboratory (NCREL) publishes an approach and a self-evaluation tool. These hinge on four key areas:

- learning and teaching
- governance and management
- school improvement and professional development
- parent and community involvement

It offers six principles for consideration by schools, each accompanied by a key question:

Quality

How good is ... (something) and/or How well is ... (something) done?

Equity

How fair and impartial is ... (something) and/or How fairly and impartially is ... (something) done?

Alignment

How well do ... (things) fit together?

Integration

How well is ... (a key practice) embedded in the broader context and purpose?

Support

To what extent are individuals in favour rather than neutral or against self-evaluation?

Engagement

To what extent is there individual commitment to, and ownership of, the process?

At national level the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) sets criteria for a professional model of self-evaluation and accountability:

- Teachers are responsible for possessing a current subject and pedagogical knowledge base, using this knowledge base to make decisions in the best interest of students, explaining these decisions about student learning to parents and the public and working to improve their practice.
- Quality classroom-based assessment must be the central feature of educational accountability.
- Accountability must reflect the multiple goals of public education and the diverse nature of students, schools and communities.
- Accountability should be focused on supporting and enhancing student learning.
- Parents have a right to clear, comprehensive and timely information about their child's progress.
- The public has a right to know how well the system is achieving its goals.

As in North America, Australia has no national system but individual states develop their own self-evaluation models in accordance with state policies. In Victoria, for example, *Quality Assurance in Victorian Schools* is described as a low stakes approach because it is undertaken by school personnel together with external review and there is no public reporting of failure, but feedback to the local community stakeholders. School self-evaluation is conducted within guidelines developed by the Office of Review.

School councils made up of parent, community and staff representatives have significant control over school policy within broad government frameworks. The triennial school review is a verification process, conducted by a panel including members of the school's community and the external reviewer. Typically, members of the school panel include the school's council president, the principal and several senior teaching staff. Using 'like with like' benchmarks, schools are encouraged to set reasonable and achievable improvement standards.

Unlike Australia, New Zealand has a consistent country-wide approach to school self-evaluation and external review. State schools are required to undertake a process of self-evaluation which feeds into the Schools Charter, described as a living document, since it is kept under constant review. The Ministry of Education, for its part, has a responsibility to support schools by providing tools and information to support teaching and learning in New Zealand schools. By examining copies of each school's planning and reporting documentation, it can determine what kinds of support or advice may be most useful and necessary, and where further support may be needed. The Education Review Office's (ERO) external evaluation role is complementary to the self-evaluation that schools carry out. Through an in-depth look inside the school every few years, ERO is able to provide assurance that the issues identified and prioritised by schools have been the right ones. Schools then are expected to use ERO findings in refining their goals and in identifying future planning.

In Hong Kong and Singapore, self-evaluation is also a matter of government policy, and integral to self-managing schools, curriculum reform and continuing professional development. Both of these Asia-Pacific countries have looked outward to their Australian neighbours, as well as to the UK and the United States and Canada in order to learn what to do and what not to do in matching internal and external evaluation.

Self-evaluation and school review in Hong Kong

The newly developed Hong Kong model is worth examining as it is exemplary of the sequential model, one that lies closest to the New Relationship in Schools in England and one that offers some pointers to both the strengths and potential pitfalls of shorter, sharper inspection centred on the school's own internal evaluation.

The development of inspection in Hong Kong has a similar history to that of UK countries perhaps unsurprisingly given its close ties to Britain and a longstanding tradition of looking beyond its own boundaries to learn from practice elsewhere. In 2004 the Education and Manpower Bureau began a pilot project to test a system to be known by its abbreviation SSE/ESR – school self-evaluation and external review. One hundred schools participated in an external evaluation conducted by a Cambridge team.

For some Hong Kong schools self-evaluation had been in place for a number of years, stimulated by initiatives from higher education. For others self-evaluation was something new, while in others again there were practices implemented by individual teachers or departments (for example, getting student feedback on teaching) but without endorsement from senior leaders or even awareness that such practice existed.

Implementing a system of review therefore had to be accompanied by support and guidance for schools on SSE. This did not prevent teachers experiencing a high degree of anxiety prior to review as it tended to be viewed as inspection and the purpose of self-evaluation seen as a prelude to inspection rather than being of value in its own right.

Each school has a school improvement team of six to eight members representing a cross-section of staff. This group has the task of supporting its colleagues in carrying out self-evaluation, using tools offered by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) and participating in training for its task. Over a preparatory period of three months there are briefings by EMB staff and school-wide development sessions conducted by the principal or the school improvement team, or both. Much of this is devoted to alleviating anxiety and helping staff move from an inspection or quality assurance model to one in which the focus is on their own internal self-evaluation.

A whole-school staff then undertakes the exercise of grading 14 aspects of school quality on a 4-point scale, trying to reach agreement. Inevitably there are differing opinions and in some cases the final grade is decided by a vote among the staff, while in other cases, the final decision rests with the principal. These gradings are then presented to the review team who negotiate with the senior leadership team on the basis of evidence, but the ultimate decision rests with the ESR team. Downgrading generally causes disappointment and often resentment but in most cases tends to be combined with an acceptance of the ESR team's professional judgement. This may reflect a cultural acceptance of, and deference to, authority but it raises an issue which lies at the heart of any sequential or co-operative system. In other words, who knows best? And whose views count?

KEYS to Excellence in Your Schools

The evaluation in the Hong Kong model is useful in pinpointing some of the potential, as well as the potential pitfalls, of the New Relationship:

- The purpose of external evaluation has to be clearly communicated, clearly understood and clearly reflected in practice.
- Self-evaluation should be driven by a widely shared commitment to improvement and not as preparation for inspection.
- The move from inspection to review requires a different set of skills on the part of the review or inspection team and a system of professional development and feedback from schools need to be an integral part of a paradigm shift in thinking and practice.
- The principle of reciprocity implies that inspection teams listen and learn and are as open to criticism as they expect school staff to be.
- Inspection teams need to be open to creative surprise and alternative approaches used by schools.

KEYS is an example of a self-evaluation programme that schools can buy into. Schools in nine US states took part in this initiative by the National Education Association. KEYS' aims are to help schools improving their effectiveness by offering a tool and a process rather than a package. School staffs are given 35 research-supported indicators of school effectiveness to help them review their progress in five core areas:

- shared understanding and commitment to high goals
- open communication and collaborative problem-solving
- personal and professional learning
- continuous assessment for teaching and learning
- resources to support teaching and learning

KEYS aims to provide for schools a reflective and honest appraisal through self-reflective renewal activity. This process attempts to work with, and try to reconcile, a wide variety of stakeholders and vested interests, such as teachers' unions, the school district and the community as well as school leadership and the individual interests of staff members. The inherent conflict between these differing interests are taken into account, bringing the micro-politics of the school to the fore in ways that differ markedly across settings.

The KEYS framework holds a mirror to the school, opens up issues of traditional pre-existing beliefs and patterned behaviour and invites staff to reconsider the assumptions on which they rest. A strength of the KEYS approach is its factoring in of the changing context and dynamic of school leadership turnover, community conflict or previously engaged projects, trying to create conditions that pave the way for new ways of working. Participants' capacity to carry out renewal plans reflects, in part, what staff know and are able to do, or are able to learn to do. Members of staff who take on leadership roles are also likely to be significant factors in the success of KEYS as it depends heavily on such individuals to take on the responsibilities of a design team to carry out action steps based on the survey results.

Setting this process within national policies means helping staff to see KEYS as enhancing improvement efforts rather than as an extra burden. Across the nine states engaged in KEYS, accountability measures and testing have been the dominant presence and high-stakes testing seen as likely to divert or minimise energy for self-reflection. Local union activity, school district mandates and community pressures can also compromise the focus on self-evaluation and renewal. In each school in each state all of these external forces come into play to one degree or another, but certain elements do tend to assume a more prominent role in each different setting. So each school's experience highlights different interactions, which account for the reform outcomes in these schools.

The fit between the process-focused nature of the KEYS initiative and the outcomes-dominated surveillance and reporting culture provides a central tension to be managed. The culture, history, leadership, and micro-politics of the school figure prominently in the way school staff are able to make sense of their circumstances and prospects for renewal. In some cases the initiative has been set aside, drowned by external pressures, workloads and other priorities. Inadequate preparation and too many improvement goals have overwhelmed schools' attempts to link KEYS to an already existing reform initiative, while support from other external agencies has proved, in many cases, not adequate to the schools' needs. Where KEYS has succeeded it is because staff were able to see ways in which it could build on and enhance ongoing initiatives and there was support to help them deal with the myriad challenges they were facing.

What the evaluation of the KEYS initiative has shown is that participation in a self-reflective process can provide a school with extra impetus to support renewal efforts already under way, or to help get incipient efforts off the ground. The process by itself cannot carry the whole weight of renewal but can provide an initial impetus, direction and conditions to move a school staff down an improvement path. However, without partners from outside the school, and fuel for ongoing development, it cannot be sustained.

There is a salutary postscript:

A renewal process that relies on the internal will of the staff and that starts with measures of school functioning — which are likely to both look bad and convey a sense of the school's failure — has little chance of engaging staff energy and opening doors to new ways of serving young people. Add to that schools in which leadership is exercised in a non-participatory way by principals or others who have authority to guide their colleagues' work. Leaders who are not at home with participatory processes will not be comfortable with KEYS or similar approaches to school renewal, and are likely to reject the process before it can get very far. (Portin et al, 2003 p 195)

Self-evaluation: a practice for 'smart schools': Evaluating family-school and community-school programmes in Tasmania, Australia

The purpose of school self-evaluation in Tasmania is described as developmental, helping the school community discuss and debate where and how it is going.

School self-evaluation is not a magic solution, nor does it produce a blueprint for action. It really has no beginning and no end. It builds on what is already there and does not seek to impose something entirely new. (Parent Participation Project Team, undated)

The premise is that if schools are to become effective learning organisations, then they must have intelligence and act intelligently. This implies that a school has the means to see itself more clearly. Because school communities consist of multiple stakeholders with diverse values and perspectives, they need evaluation tools that not only help people look for evidence, but also recognise their local micro-politics and take into account the following:

- a range of different points of view
- the interconnections between issues
- challenges to existing beliefs, values and knowledge
- avenues to transform random information into patterns, flows and processes
- the means to order debates; and therefore
- the parameters for decision and further investigation

Telephone survey: school communication

One key aspect of the self-evaluation process is the relationship between home and school. One of the tasks of the evaluation team (the catalyst for whole-school evaluation) is to select a random sample of families from the school roll. A member of the school evaluation team then rings to speak to a parent or caregiver. He or she then introduces themselves, ask if it is convenient to speak for a few minutes, explains the purpose of the survey and outlines what will happen to the information given. Five open-ended key questions are then asked and noted on a check sheet. The check sheet does not have the name of the family on it. There are five key areas for discussion with the family member:

- 1 Are the newsletters arriving home?
- 2 What does the family member think of the style and content?
- 3 Is the school report OK? How could it be improved?
- 4 What is the communication with the class teacher? Is the family happy with it? How could it be improved?
- 5 What could the school do to improve general communication?

No information on specific classes or teachers is recorded. Names of callers with specific problems are referred to the appropriate person in the school. Results are aggregated and made public via the newsletter or school website. A date for further discussion is also advertised. There is some survey etiquette as well as some technical expertise required in survey design and the following guidelines are offered:

- Families want to know what will happen as a result of their participation in a survey. It is important at the outset to tell them:
 - the purpose of the survey
 - how they can find out the results
 - what will happen as a result of the survey
 - how they can be involved in analysis
 - how they can be involved in post-survey discussion and decision-making

These ethical as well as procedural guidelines have wider relevance for practice in relation to parents but also to pupils and teachers. Involvement in self-evaluation carries with it a right to know, the implication being that outcomes will be shared and that decisions, however small, made on the basis of self-disclosure, will exemplify respect for persons.

What can we learn?

All of these examples are helpful in informing practice in English schools and local authorities and their relationship with inspection. All schemes have their frameworks, both important and reassuring. They should neither be so loose as to cause confusion and anxiety nor so tight that people feel hemmed in and disempowered. There is a continuum in models of self-evaluation from open to closed, from the re-invention of the wheel at one end to the detailed step-by-step cookbook at the other. Where there is too great a degree of openness it is very difficult for schools to initiate and sustain self-evaluation. While this is possible in highly self-confident and resilient schools the greater the pressure from the outside the less will be the time and energy invested in invention. Where there is top-down pressure and time is a scarce commodity, off-the-shelf products have considerable appeal. This is likely, however, to lead both to a mechanistic approach and a disempowering of teachers.

It is significant that when the Scottish model HGIOS was adopted by an enthusiastic minister in Norway and translated into Norwegian it was disliked and resisted by teachers. This is not surprising as they had no part in its development, no engagement in the process but were simply presented with a ready-made product. A fundamental principle of self-evaluation, as noted by the European body of inspectors, (SICI) is 'steering oneself in order not to be steered', with schools taking the initiative rather than being reactive to decisions taken elsewhere. As the Hong Kong example shows, it is helpful for the process of self-evaluation to be undertaken by a self-evaluation group drawn from a range of volunteers within the school. This may be complemented by pupil representatives.

Common to many self-evaluation systems is the four-point scale for self-rating against specific indicators or criteria. These are often derived from inspection models and often come with labels such as 'satisfactory' or 'good' attached. In England the term 'satisfactory' has provoked a heated debate within the profession and has been a distraction from other aspect of the process. The less definitive form of terminology - major weaknesses, major strengths, more strengths than weaknesses and more weaknesses than strengths - carries a different kind of message about the balance of evidence, and allows more scope for seeing and negotiating judgements.

As has been found in numerous self-evaluation projects it is into this large middle ground of ambiguity, a rating of 2 or 3, that most self-evaluation judgements fall. The nature of those middle ground judgements do depend to a great extent on 'where you sit', what and how much you see, the preconceptions you bring to that judgement and the context in which you place it. An inspector's judgement of a lesson made in half an hour or an hour is often likely to differ from that of a pupil, the classroom teacher or the headteacher. While such variance is obvious and well documented, top-down evaluation schemas often fail to recognise this, and by bypassing differences miss the very heart of the process, which is the discourse that such mismatches or varying perceptions bring to light.

This is what was so powerful in the European Self-evaluation Project where teachers, pupils and parents together brought their own perspectives to bear and, through the critical friends, were encouraged to listen to alternative ways of seeing and new ways of understanding. This was the strength of McGill's *Schools Speaking to Stakeholders* and the teacher-teacher dialogue in the Rhode Island SALT programme. It is at the very centre of the KEYS programme, recognising rather than turning a blind eye to the multi-faceted perspectives and conflicts that exist. Its sensitivity to context and micro-politics is a salient strength.

The tools that are available to schools play a crucial role in the process. The more economical and user friendly they are, the more they are likely to be used. Their primary purpose is not however to reach a summative judgement or score, but rather to stimulate dialogue, because it is through dialogue that teachers and school leaders deepen their understanding, which in turn leads to more informed planning and target-setting. However, the support and challenge of a critical friend is often essential to steer the process, to remind people of the ground rules. This needs to be a person who is trusted, so that people can be open and self-critical. This means the critical friends cannot be anyone with an accountability or line management role. The notion of the critical friend appointed and accountable to government is problematic.

There is a developing library of research and advice on the role of the critical friend. A number of common qualities and conditions apply. The following are taken from a seven-country international project (Leadership for Learning: Carpe Vitam) in which teachers and school leaders from seven countries identified the do's and don'ts of critical friendship.

In carrying out this role, the critical friend will:

- listen, hear, observe
- learn (about school culture and goals)
- demonstrate positive regard for, and sensitivity towards, the school and its community
- help to identify issues and make creative suggestions to help the school become better at what it does
- offer sources of evidence and expertise
- work collaboratively in exploring alternative approaches
- encourage collegiality, including the sharing of ideas among teachers and schools
- offer a thoughtful critical perspective on learning, culture or leadership as appropriate
- be honest, accessible, flexible, discrete, friendly, patient, communicative, and accountable to schools

The critical friend will not:

- assume a directive role
- offer solutions to problems, or provide quick fixes
- rush to judgement, make assumptions or judge without substantial evidence
- pretend to know the school better than those in the school
- have hidden agendas
- impose agendas of his or her own
- undermine the authority of others
- use school data without consent
- compare invidiously with other schools
- cause problems

Useful sources on the role of the critical friend are:

Critical Friendship in InFORM, Number 3 October 2003, Sue Swaffield with a contribution from John Jones.

This seven-page summary provides a useful introduction to the issues and provides a helpful bibliography on previous research. It examines roles, behaviours, knowledge and experience, skills and qualities of critical friendship and considers how they can support school self-evaluation.

Section 7: The challenge for leadership

Throughout this series of three documents there are messages about leadership and its role in self-evaluation. These are often implicit in that they imply certain leadership priorities and challenges. Sometimes the messages are quite explicit – that self-evaluation needs to be at the very centre of leadership for the learning school. The essential point is that without self awareness, strategy and intelligent accountability action will always rest on insecure foundations.

Reflecting on the seven key components of self-evaluation, the policy context in which they are set, and the repertoire of sources and tools available, a number of challenges for leadership may be identified.

1. Be clear about the distinction between self-inspection and self-evaluation.

A clear danger to be avoided is for a leadership team to become resident inspectors in their own schools. Drawing on research from over a decade and a half on self-evaluation (see references) the following distinction is a useful one to bear in mind.

Self-inspection	Self-evaluation
Top-down	Bottom-up
Is a one-off event	Is continuous and embedded in the nature of teachers' and headteachers' work
Provides a snapshot	Is a moving picture
Is time consuming	Is time saving
Is more about accountability than improvement	Is more about improvement than accountability
Applies a common framework	Is flexible and spontaneous
Uses a set of predetermined criteria	Uses, adapts and creates relevant criteria
Tends to create resistance	Engages and involves people
Can detract from learning and teaching	Improves learning and teaching
Encourages playing safe	Takes risks
Requires consensus	Celebrates difference

Staff need to be helped to understand self-evaluation as what they do every day intuitively, as an integral aspect of their professionalism. Making it systematic, open to critical appraisal and sound evidence means that the larger, episodic process of review is no longer ominous, and inspection loses its threat.

2. Encourage diversity and honest dissent

Self-evaluation is a dialogic process, one of constant challenge and insight, bringing within it a vitality and constant discovery. 'Organizations require a minimal degree of consensus but not so much as to stifle the discussion that is the lifeblood of innovation' write Evans and Genady (1999, p 368). Pupils, teachers and headteachers experience things differently. They see things differently and bring differing perspectives to bear.

Schools that play safe, driven by external mandates and limiting conceptions of improvement set tight parameters around what can be said and what can be heard. They are antithetical to the notion of a learning organisation which, by definition, is always challenging its own premises and ways of being.

3. Encourage creative approaches

The more self-evaluation is associated with standardised and formulaic protocols, the less adventurous teachers are liable to be. It should be a leadership priority to encourage teachers to experiment with different approaches, to extend their repertoire of tools, to involve pupils, to facilitate risk-taking and to convince sceptical or anxious staff that self-evaluation is not antithetical to Ofsted review formats but in fact can feed purposively into external school review.

4. Build from the bottom up

If inspection and review are essentially a top-down process, self-evaluation works from the other end, from what teachers and pupils do. It starts with the individual, the group and the class. It extends from classroom to classroom through peer observation, informal conversations, sharing ideas and strategies, and examining and displaying pupils' work. The task of leadership is to identify and distribute practice through mechanisms and tools that encourage sharing and trust and instil confidence for staff to offer one another collegial and supportive critique.

5. Put learning at the centre

Learning lies at the heart of self-evaluation. It is the DNA of the school and applies to pupil, teacher and organisational (and system) learning (see the wedding cake in section 3). Staff may be encouraged to build their own criteria, or indicators of a learning culture and use this as their guide to monitoring, however informally, what happens not only in classrooms but in staff rooms, lunch rooms and extra-curricular activities and classrooms.

Pupils learn a lot from the classroom cultures around them, cultures which carry the hidden curriculum of conventions and expectations. Because these are hidden, learning and thinking tend to be invisible, as thinking takes place inside the head and so is often inaccessible to others. The Harvard psychologist David Perkins asks what would happen if we tried to learn to dance when the dancers around us were invisible or were to play a sport in which the players couldn't be seen. He argues that something close to this can happen in schools and classrooms when learning is not articulated, shared, made explicit and made open to systematic formative evaluation.

Support for self-evaluation means having processes and structures that help the silent repertoires of cognitive processes to be played out through the social interaction of teachers and pupils, pupils and pupils, staff with staff. It relies on a quality of leadership, both individual and shared, which casts these processes not simply as self-evaluation but as the very nature of what it means to be a school that learns.

6. Identify and celebrate breakthrough practice

One way in which change occurs and takes hold is through an infectious spread of good ideas or innovative practice. One or two people doing something exceptional may be where change takes roots. But its spread relies on two conditions: the 'stickiness factor', that is, the endorsement and championing by prescient leadership, and the opportunity to be infectious because a growth-promoting culture allows it to thrive. This is what is referred to as the epidemiology of change.

7. Remind staff of what matters

It is important to acknowledge the pressures that staff work under, the difficulties faced in achieving a work-life balance and the demoralisation that can spread like a virus through a staff. Self-evaluation can be seen as simply one more pressure, one more duty unless it is seen as concerned with what deeply matters. When staff see it as integral to what they care about, self-evaluation is no longer something alien or onerous.

8. Make self-evaluation an attitude of mind

How many evaluations do teachers make in the course of a day? The answer is hundreds. Teaching involves a constant ongoing series of value-judgements, instant decisions, intuitive evidence as well as seeking out of more formal sources of evidence. Leadership means finding and experimenting with strategies not simply to make these informal processes more explicit but to give teachers confidence in their judgement and make self-evaluation a habit and a way of thinking.

9. Demystify data

Data is a word that tends to strike terror into the breast of many staff because it is equated with statistics, hard maths and arcane procedures such as value added and standard deviations. The apprehension stems in part because data is equated with numbers rather than the many other forms in which it is most typically encountered in the classroom: in conversations, pictures, video and children's writing. This data is the essence of self-evaluation and when collected systematically and selectively contributes to a portfolio of evidence. Seeing data in this way does not come automatically. It relies on support and professional development and modelling of practice. Clarification of terminology and its underpinning concepts is also critical for teachers, not for academic reasons but because it helps to refine their thinking. When staff understand concepts such as criteria, indicators, standards, benchmarks or targets, they are less likely to respond with knee-jerk resistance to top-down initiatives. They are in a better position to offer their own view and to relate these ideas to their own situated practice.

10. Create opportunities for governors to share ownership

Governors are key players in self-evaluation although easily bypassed or simply kept informed of decisions already made. When included integrally in the process, governors can be both an important source of intelligence as well as a vital source of support. One starting point can be with governors' evaluation of their own work and impact. Approached with a predetermined set of criteria, self-evaluation is likely to be seen as threatening. On the other hand, a question such as 'How could we know how well we are doing?' is likely to generate lots of ideas which can then be turned into criteria or indicators which prove to be both owned and useful. The same process applied to the school as a whole has been found to be an enjoyable and invigorating activity for a governing body (see for example MacBeath, 1999).

Section 8: The conduct of the study

This study was commissioned by the National College of School Leadership and carried out by Professor John MacBeath, University of Cambridge and Director of Research, the East Leadership Centre. The study had the following objectives:

- Conduct a systematic meta-study of self-evaluation, drawing out the key features of its purposes, audiences, frameworks, tools, processes and products.
- Examine policy developments in the UK over the last decade or so to identify trends and shifts in thinking as to the role of self-evaluation and its relation to external inspection.
- Examine the wider international policy context and influences on thinking through international agencies such as OECD and the Standing Committee of European Inspectorates.
- Identify the range of resources and instruments available for evaluating school and classroom practice by teachers themselves and by others who work with schools in an evaluation role, eg critical friends.
- Identify specific approaches to evaluating the quality of leadership.
- Categorise resources and instruments in terms of their purpose, use and users, target group and underpinning premises or values.
- Select and evaluate instruments that appear to offer the best fitness-for-purpose.
- Suggest possible uses for these in school-self evaluation and accompanying professional development.
- Draw out key messages for school headship and for school leadership as distributed.

The research took the following form:

- short open-ended questionnaires to 300 primary, secondary and special schools on current approaches to self-evaluation, randomly selected to represent a geographical spread. This produced a 21 per cent return
- questionnaires to 10 selected authorities covering large and small authorities with follow-up conversations
- website search on self-evaluation, self-review, self-assessment, inspection, quality assurance and following new leads as they emerged
- library search for books, conference papers and journal articles dealing with issues in self-evaluation
- reference to published and unpublished work by the lead researchers
- meeting with HMCI David Bell
- meetings with NUT, SHA and NAHT representatives

From this large body of data key themes were identified, fed back to and discussed with schools and local authorities and formed the basis of a conversation with HMCI David Bell.

Acknowledgements and references

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