

Core school improvement activities

In January 2022, the DfE announced that the School Improvement, Monitoring and Brokerage Grant paid to local authorities would be reduced by 50% for financial year 2022/23 and then removed completely from 2023-24.

At the same time, local authorities (LAs) were given the power to fund all improvement activity, including core activity, via de-delegation with the agreement of schools forums or the Secretary of State.

Rationale for maintaining core school improvement activities

During the Summer term, the LA worked with a group of school and academy leaders to refresh its Quality Assurance (QA) Framework. A key objective of the LA is that all children will attend a school this is judged to be Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. To support the maintenance of high standards, all LA maintained schools will be included in the QA cycle.

Following the pattern set by Ofsted of inspecting Good or Outstanding schools every five years, the LA proposes a five-year cycle of QA where schools retain a judgement of unreservedly Good or Outstanding. If graded Requires Improvement following a Graded Inspection, or the evidence gathered during an Ungraded Inspection suggests that the grade may be lower than Good if a Graded Inspection was to be carried out, then the school will become subject to 'Requiring Additional Support and Intervention' by the LA in the case of maintained schools.

For maintained schools (and academies by election), where a school is considered vulnerable and 'Requiring Additional Intervention & Support', the school relevant LA officers will discuss the situation fully with the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher/Principal and the Chair of Governors.

Where a school is judged to be 'Requiring Additional Intervention & Support':

- Progress Review Meetings (PRMs) will be implemented following an Ofsted grading less than good, or suggestion that it will be less than good following an Ungraded inspection.
- If significant risk is identified, this will lead to a full school or area review, and the school will be subject to regular PRMs.

The purpose of PRMs is for the LA to:

- oversee the implementation of action plans to secure rapid and sustained improvements, so are likely to be 'front-loaded' with more frequent meetings at the outset.
- monitor progress of actions taken to ensure they have maximum impact.
- commission additional resources when needed to support rapid improvement.
- monitor the impact of brokered support, including partnership support.
- where possible, gather direct evidence of progress for LA monitoring and reporting to Schools' Funding Forum' and for Ofsted.

Prior to the pandemic an average of 12 schools have been designated as a 'School Causing Concern' (or as 'Requiring Additional Intervention & Support' under the revised QA

Framework) in each academic year. Of these, an average of 8 schools have been maintained schools, and therefore have been subject to regular PRM's. In addition to PRMs, these schools have also received in-school support, including a full school or area review. These have ranged from reviews of the whole phase, such as Early Years, to targeted areas such as SEN or Reading.

This number of schools subject to PRMs and direct intervention fell due to the pandemic, and the subsequent reduction in Ofsted inspections and QA visits in schools. With increased inspection activity and focus on Ofsted in schools, we are expecting the number to increase to around 14 schools 'Requiring Additional Intervention & Support' and therefore subject to PRMs and/or further in-school support.

When schools are subject to PRMs, this is generally because they are at risk of not retaining their 'Good' or better Ofsted judgement at their next inspection. Over the past five years, the PRM process has proven to be effective, with currently 100% of maintained schools being graded as 'Good' or better by Ofsted. This includes schools which have been subject to PRMs and have been inspected over the period they have been under some form of intervention.

The offer for LA-maintained primaries

PRMs will be resourced for maintained schools by the LA as part of their statutory QA offer and funded from Core Council funding.

However, further in-school support such as a full school review, or review of an area of the school's practice, would be chargeable if deemed that the school is a vulnerable school, and it is proposed that this would be charged to the de-delegated 'School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant' (subject to Schools' Funding Forum approval). Spend will be reported to Schools' Funding Forum in the same way as the Schools Partnership and Schools Causing Concern Fund has been in the past.

Any underspends at year end can be carried forward, or re-distributed, subject to Funding Forum approval.