



what are schools' perceptions of local authority school improvement support?

annual survey of trends in education 2007

This is one of a series of papers reporting the findings from the Annual Survey of Trends in Education 2007, carried out by the NFER on behalf of the LGA. During the summer term of 2007, 347 primary schools and 854 secondary schools in England took part in the survey covering a range of topics: school improvement was one of the topics explored.

1 What are School Improvement Partners?

The Education and Inspections Act (England and Wales, Statutes, 2006) requires Local Authorities (LAs) to assign an accredited school improvement partner (SIP) to each of its schools, with the aim of providing challenge and support to schools, and helping leadership teams to evaluate performance and deliver improvements. SIPs have been introduced into all secondary schools and are being introduced into primary schools between January 2007 and April 2008. The SIP is the main channel of communication between LAs and schools regarding school improvement.

The primary and secondary surveys aimed to gauge the impact of SIPs, to rate other forms of LA support for school improvement and to assess how effectively support was being delivered to schools.

2 Have School Improvement Partners contributed to school improvement?

Headteachers participating in the primary and secondary surveys were asked to rate the extent to which their SIP has contributed to improvement in their school (see Table 1). The key points to emerge were:

- About 95 per cent of headteachers in secondary schools and 53 per cent of headteachers in primary schools indicated that they had been assigned a SIP.
- The vast majority of respondents in primary and secondary schools indicated that their SIP has contributed to improvement in their school (only nine per cent of secondary schools and 14 per cent of primary schools indicated that their SIP has *not contributed* to school improvement).
- About a third of primary schools and a quarter of secondary schools indicated that their SIP has contributed *to a great extent* to improvement.

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Table 1 Extent to which SIPs have contributed to school improvement

To what extent has your SIP contributed to school improvement?	% of primary schools	% of secondary schools
Great extent	32	24
Some extent	38	42
Small extent	16	26
Not contributed	14	9
N=	183	812

Responses of schools indicating that a SIP had been assigned

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

The headteachers who said that their SIP had contributed to school improvement to a *great* or *some extent* were asked to give an explanation of how SIPs had contributed. The main points made were as follows:

- they are very supportive
- they are helpful with challenge and advice
- they help to focus and prioritise key issues for development.

Headteachers who said that their SIP had contributed to school improvement to a *small extent* or *not at all* provided

the following explanations for SIPs' limited contributions:

- there is limited time for the SIP to work with the head-teacher
- it is too early to assess the impact
- the SIP was only just appointed (primary only).

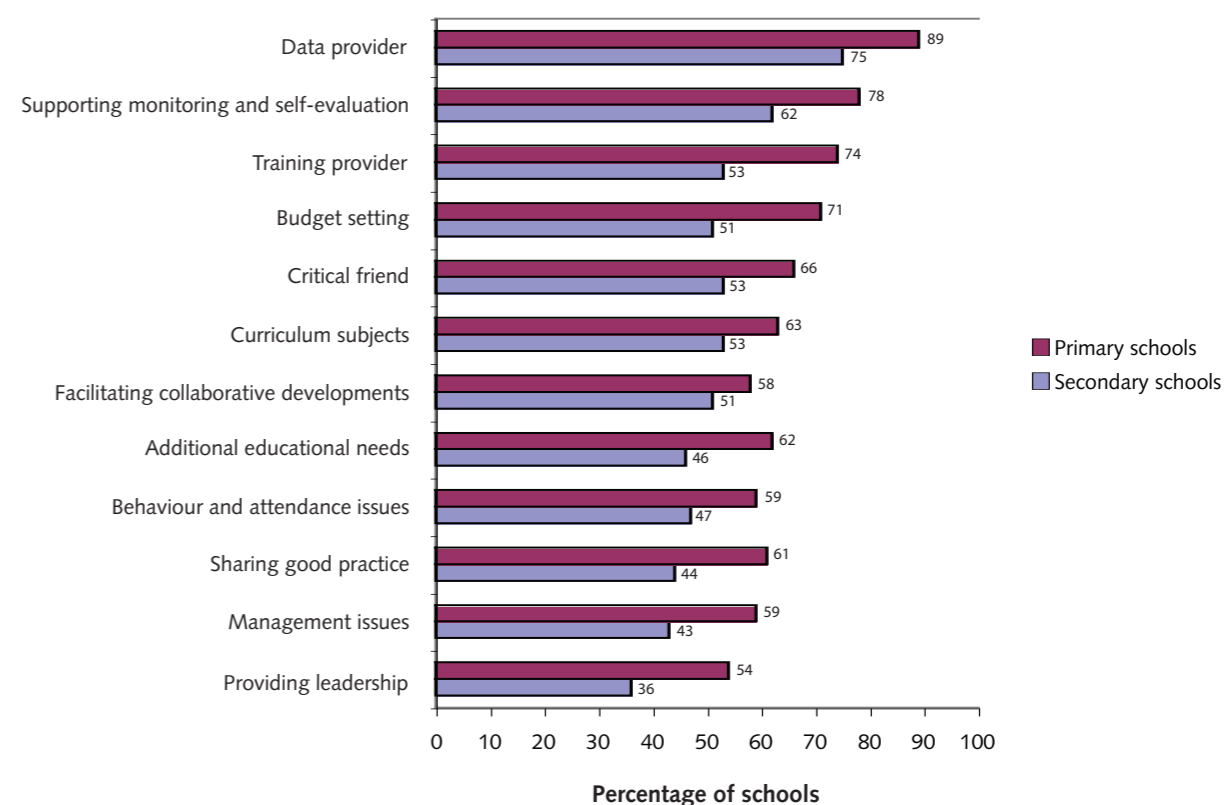
3 How do schools rate local authority support for school improvement?

Headteachers were asked to rate various forms of LA support for helping to improve schools using a five point scale ranging from *excellent* to *very poor* or *not applicable* (see Figure 1).

The forms of LA support that were more likely than others to be rated as *excellent* or *good* by respondents in primary and secondary schools were:

- data provider
- supporting monitoring and self-evaluation
- training provider
- budget setting
- critical friend
- curriculum subjects.

Figure 1 Percentage of schools rating forms of LA support for school improvement as *excellent* or *good*



The forms of LA support that were less likely than others to be rated as *excellent* or *good* by respondents in primary and secondary schools were:

- providing leadership
- management issues
- sharing good practice
- behaviour and attendance issues.

Differences between primary and secondary schools

A similar pattern of responses was obtained in the primary and secondary surveys, with agreement between the surveys about which forms of LA support were more likely than others to help school improvement. However, for all types of support, primary respondents were more likely to rate their LA as *excellent* or *good* than their secondary counterparts.

Differences between ratings given by primary and secondary respondents were most marked in relation to LA training provision and support for budget setting. A total of 74 per cent and 71 per cent of primary headteachers, respectively, rated their LA as *excellent* or *good*. LA training provision was rated *excellent* or *good* by only 53 per cent of secondary respondents, and budget setting was rated at this level by only 51 per cent of secondary respondents.

Differences between groups of schools

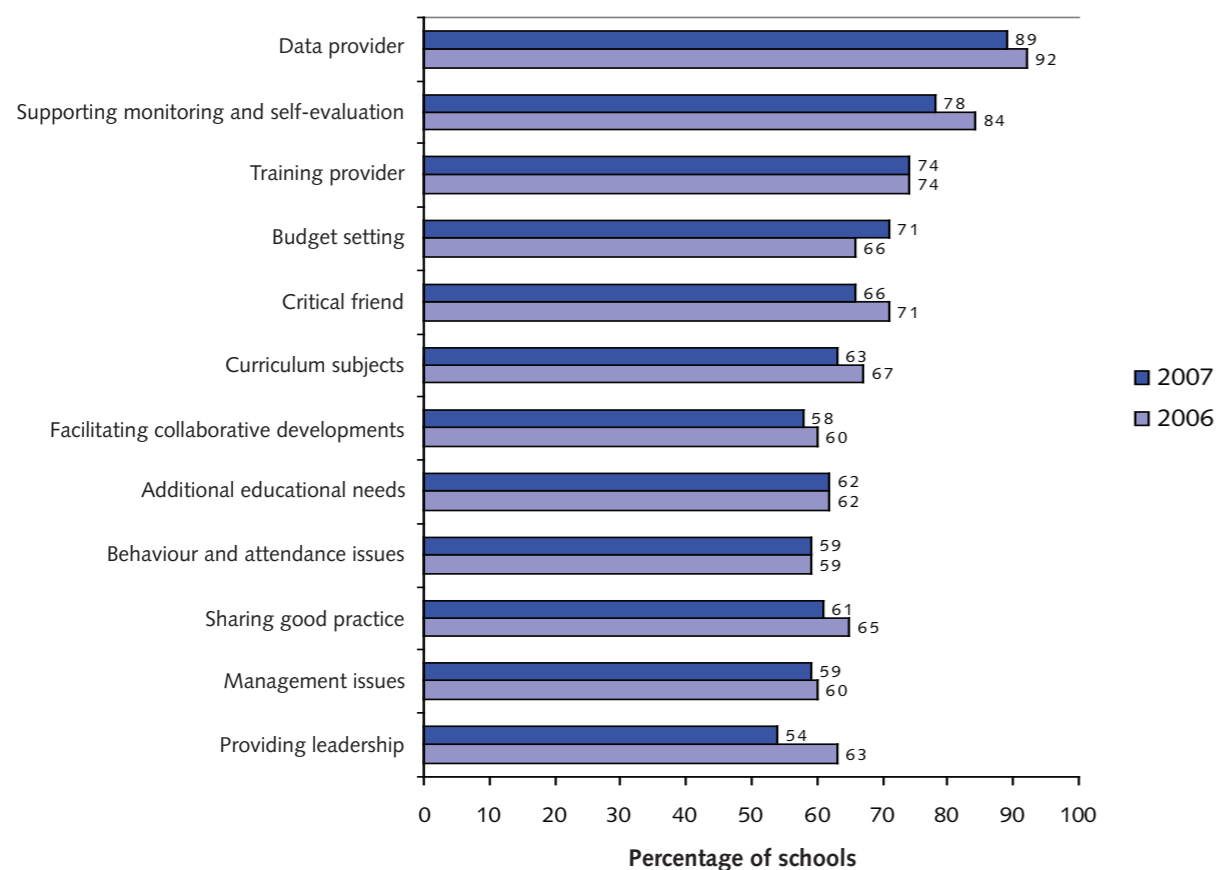
Further analysis of responses from the **primary** survey revealed the following difference that was statistically significant:

- schools in London boroughs were *less* likely than schools in other authority types to rate LA advice and guidance on budget setting as *excellent* or *good*.



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Figure 2 Percentage of primary schools rating forms of LA support for school improvement as *excellent* or *good* in 2006 and 2007



Further analysis of responses from the **secondary** school data revealed that:

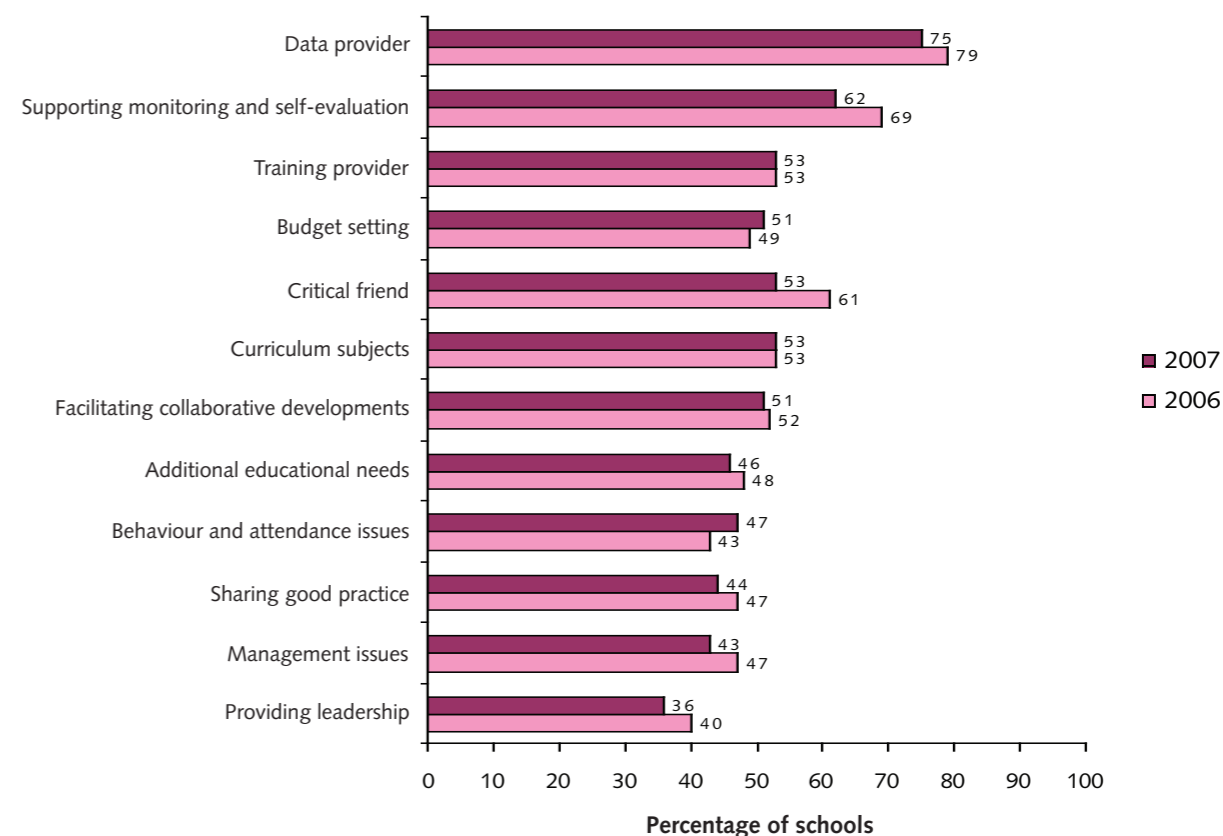
- schools in metropolitan authorities and London boroughs were *more* likely than schools in English unitary authorities and counties to rate LA support for providing leadership as *excellent* or *good*
- schools in metropolitan authorities were *more* likely than schools in other authority types to rate LA support for facilitating collaborative developments as *excellent* or *good*
- larger schools (those with more than 1000 pupils) were *more* likely than smaller schools to rate LA advice and guidance on behaviour and attendance as *not very good* or *very poor*

- the largest schools (those with more than 1300 pupils) were *more* likely than smaller schools to rate LA advice and guidance on curriculum subjects as *not very good* or *very poor*
- comprehensive schools with pupils aged between 11 and 18, and grammar schools were *less* likely than other school types to rate their LA advice and guidance on management issues and on curriculum subjects as *excellent* or *good*.

Comparison over time

Charts comparing the responses of headteachers in 2007 with responses from the equivalent surveys conducted in 2006 are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 3 Percentage of secondary schools rating forms of LA support for school improvement as *excellent* or *good* in 2006 and 2007

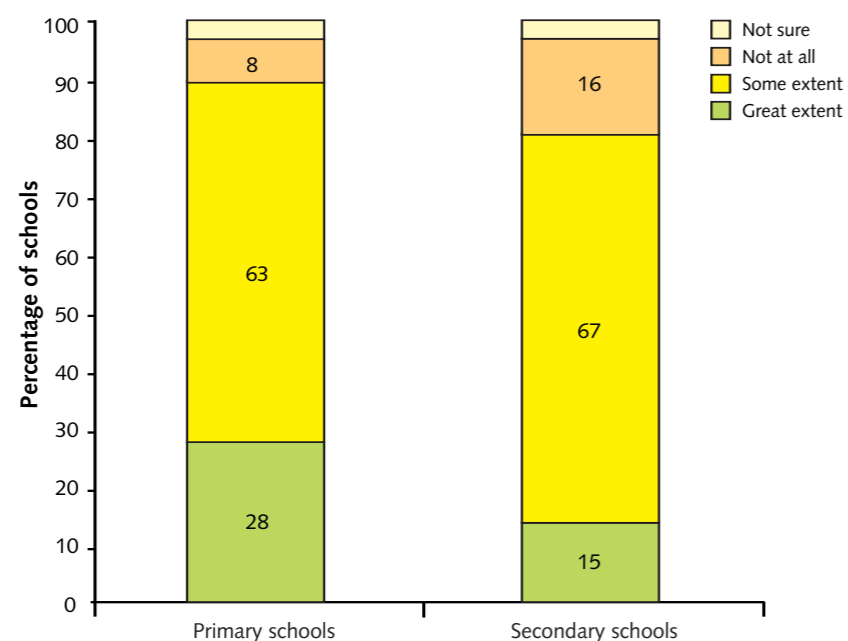


In the primary survey, the proportion of headteachers rating LA support for budget setting as *excellent* or *good* increased from 66 per cent in 2006 to 71 per cent in 2007. There were also decreases in the proportion of headteachers who rated their LA as *excellent* or *good* at providing leadership (down from 63 per cent in 2006 to 54 per cent in 2007), supporting monitoring and self-evaluation (down from 84 per cent in 2006 to 78 per cent in 2007) and as a critical friend (down from 71 per cent in 2006 to 66 per cent in 2007). For other forms of support there was little or no change in comparison with the previous survey.

In the secondary survey, the main differences were in the proportion of headteachers rating LA support as a critical friend and for supporting monitoring and self-evaluation. Both showed slight decreases in positive ratings from 2006 to 2007 of 8 and 7 per cent respectively.

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Figure 4 Extent to which LA functions work together to provide consistent support for schools



A total of 335 primary schools and 813 secondary schools responded to this question.

4 What aspects of local authority support are most useful in relation to school improvement?

Respondents were asked to identify the two aspects of LA support that were particularly useful in relation to school improvement. The responses most frequently provided were as follows.

Primary schools:

- provision of data/school data profiles
- provision of INSET/training
- SIP
- link adviser.

Secondary schools:

- provision of data/school data profiles
- SIP
- Facilitating collaborative developments
- human resource group/personnel support.

5 Do functions within the local authority work together to provide consistent support for schools?

Both primary and secondary headteachers were asked about the extent to which the various functions of their LA worked together to provide consistent support for schools (see Figure 4). The findings indicate that 91 per cent of primary headteachers and 82 per cent of secondary headteachers felt that functions within their LA worked together (to *some extent* or to a *great extent*) to provide consistent support for schools. Primary respondents (28 per cent) were also more likely than secondary respondents (15 per cent) to indicate that functions were consistent to a *great extent*.

6 What further support would schools like from local authorities?

Respondents were asked to identify further support they would like from their LA to help deliver school improvement. The main forms of support identified were as follows.

Primary schools:

- budget support (e.g. a fairer budget formula or total delegation of all funds to schools)
- leadership support for headteacher/SMT
- training/professional development.

Secondary schools:

- budget support (e.g. a fairer budget formula or total delegation of all funds to schools)
- curriculum development support
- support for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools/inclusion.

7 What are the implications for local authorities?

Although the introduction of SIPs is comparatively recent, headteachers in schools where they have been appointed are generally positive about their contribution to school improvement. Only a small minority of headteachers felt that their SIP had not contributed to school improvement and the main explanations offered by these respondents highlighted the short time in which SIPs have been working with schools.

Overall, secondary schools would seem to be less satisfied generally with LA support for school improvement than primary schools. This could be a reflection of the smaller size of primary schools compared to secondary schools. This would be consistent with findings from the analysis of secondary respondents, which identified a negative relationship between the size of school rolls and levels of satisfaction with some forms of LA support. One explanation for this finding may be that schools with larger numbers of pupils face broader and more diverse challenges in identifying and meeting the needs of their populations and consequently have more complex needs in terms of the support they require from their LAs. Another explanation may be that larger schools have the internal expertise or capacity to address various issues and therefore have not immediately looked to their LA for support.



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Perhaps a key challenge for LAs to address is the proportion of headteachers in both primary and secondary schools that rated aspects of LA support as *not very good* or *very poor*. The findings, particularly in secondary schools, suggest that in some areas there is a gap between the support headteachers require for school improvement and existing provision. For instance, secondary respondents highlighted support for budget setting as an area where they would like further support from their LA, but only half of secondary respondents rated existing advice and guidance for budget setting as *excellent* or *good*. Similarly, secondary respondents also highlighted curriculum development as an area for further support, and only a half of them rated existing support for curriculum subjects as *excellent* or *good*. With the recent introduction of the new secondary curriculum, it might be useful for LAs to look carefully at how they might be able to assist schools with new developments in key areas of policy.

Reference

England and Wales. Statutes (2006). *Education and Inspections Act 2006 Chapter 40*. London: The Stationery Office. [online]. Available: <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/20060040.htm> [28 November, 2007].

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