planning for action

Part 2:
A GUIDE TO POST-INSPECTION ACTION PLANNING

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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PREFACE

In September 1995, the NFER embarked on a 15-month research study called 'The Impact of Inspection and Action Plans'. The project was part of the NFER's 1995/6 Membership Programme of research, which is funded mainly through local authority contributions. The research was in two phases: a national questionnaire survey; and detailed case-studies of ten schools. Two reports have arisen from the research, each focusing on one of these phases.

The report from the first phase: *Planning for Action, Part 1: a Survey of Schools' Post-inspection Action Planning* was published in April 1997 (NFER, £5). It is based on the questionnaire responses of more than 200 primary, middle and secondary schools nationwide, and provides quantitative evidence of the process and outcomes of post-inspection action planning. It is anticipated that the report will be of wide general interest, particularly to those working in education at the strategic and policy level, and to OFSTED inspectors.

This report is based on the findings from the *second phase* of the research. It has been written for schools as a practical guide to action planning and the issues surrounding it. It is based on detailed case studies of the inspection and action-planning experiences of five primary and five secondary schools. Drawing on the different perspectives of headteachers, teachers, chairs of governors and parent governors, it focuses in detail on the practical aspects and issues relating to each of the stages of action planning. The report also contains a documentary analysis of 178 schools' action plans, sent in by schools responding to the questionnaire survey during the *first phase* of the research (see above).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the headteachers, teachers and governors in the ten case-study schools, without whose cooperation this report would not have been possible. Their generosity in giving us so much of their time and in sharing openly with us their experiences of inspection and action planning is greatly appreciated.

We would also like to thank each member of the project's advisory group (Appendix 1) for their help in shaping the research and commenting on draft versions of this report. Their experience, guidance and painstaking attention to detail have been invaluable.

Within the NFER, we would especially like to thank Dr Wendy Keys, the Project Director, for her continued guidance and support during the second phase of the research. Our thanks also go to David Harris and John Kimber for their help in carrying out the case-study interviews, and to Peter Dickson for his valued comments on draft versions of this report.

Karen Maychell
Shalini Pathak

Once again, in this second report, my personal thanks go to my friend and colleague Shalini Pathak for her major contribution in guiding the project through its formative stages and data collection phases while I was on maternity leave, and for her unfailing teamwork since my return. It has been a great pleasure to work with her.

Karen Maychell

1. RESEARCH OUTLINE

After an OFSTED inspection, schools have a maximum of 40 days to draw up an action plan. How do schools set about this task? What is their reaction to the inspection findings? Who draws up the action plan? Is it a collaborative process? What role do school governors play in action planning? Moreover, what happens to the action plan once it has been written and a copy sent to OFSTED? What factors affect whether it is implemented? How closely do school staff or governors monitor the implementation? Finally, how positive do schools feel about the outcomes of inspection and action planning?

In order to answer these questions, the NFER undertook a 15-month research project to investigate schools' perceptions and experiences of action planning. The study was carried out in two phases: a national questionnaire survey; and detailed case studies. These are outlined below.

Phase 1: questionnaire survey

In February 1996, a questionnaire was sent to headteachers in 394 schools (199 primary and 195 secondary) that had been inspected in spring or summer 1995. The schools were identified using the OFSTED database of inspected schools, from which a random sample of schools were drawn. The findings from this survey were published in May 1997 in the report: *Planning for Action, Part 1: a Survey of Schools' Post-inspection Action Planning.*

Phase 2: case studies

The second stage of the research, on which *this* report is based, took place between May and July 1996. It involved case studies in five primary and five secondary schools. These were chosen to reflect a wide range of approaches to action planning, with the emphasis on schools that had been successful in producing a good action plan, and had made good progress in implementing the plan. The case-study locations also incorporated variations in school size, age-range of pupils, metropolitan/non-metropolitan LEAs, socio-economic background of pupils, grant-maintained status and denominational status.

Across the ten case studies, a total of 67 interviews were carried out. In each school, interviews were held with the headteacher, a sample of teachers, some of whom had been closely involved in the action planning process, as well as interviews with school

governors — usually the chair of governors and a parent governor. Through detailed one-to-one interviews, a profile of how each school had conducted its post-inspection action planning was built up. This included what working groups had been set up, what tasks were included, which members of staff had been involved, the extent of individuals' involvement, the degree to which the plan had been implemented, factors helping and hindering this, and, finally, the impact the whole inspection and action-planning process was perceived to have had on school development. Chapters 3 to 9 provide details of the substantive findings from this case-study phase of the research. Each chapter concludes with a checklist that schools might find useful when tackling the different phases of action planning. For ease of use, these summaries have been drawn together in Appendix 3 as a checklist guide to successful action planning for school staff and governors.

Phase 2 also included a documentary analysis of 177 schools' action plans. These action plans had been sent in by schools that participated in the questionnaire survey (see details of Phase 1). The findings from the analysis of these action plans are presented in this report (Chapter 2).

2. ANALYSIS OF ACTION PLANS

Schools responding to the NFER questionnaire survey in Phase 1 of the research (see Chapter 1) were asked to enclose a copy of their action plan with their completed questionnaire. From the 207 schools that responded to the survey, 177 sent in action plans. These were analysed, with the emphasis on finding out how schools had responded to the key issues for action in their action plans, as well as identifying useful formats and common headings. The main findings are outlined in this chapter; Appendix 2 presents tables summarising the main aspects found.

Unravelling and analysing *key issues for action*

- Of the 177 schools, almost three-quarters (72 per cent) did *not* identify aims or objectives in their action plan for each of the key issues for action, i.e. those identified by the inspectors (Appendix 2, Table 1).
- Of the schools that *did* include aims and objectives for key issues (27 per cent), most did so for *all* key issues. (Example 1 illustrates how this was done in one school.)
- Circular 7/93 (GB. DFE, 1993) recommended that schools break down their *key issues* into smaller or more specific targets in their action plan. All but two of the 177 schools had done this: three-quarters of them for *each* of their key issues; the remainder for some of their key issues (Appendix 2, Table 1).
- These specific action points under a *key issue* were often related to other categories, such as personnel, timescale, monitoring or resources. More than half the schools (56 per cent) used this strategy for *all* of their key issues for action (though not necessarily for each aspect within a key issue). However, a small minority of schools (17 per cent) did not approach *any* of their key issues in this way (Appendix 2, Table 1).

Identifying personnel involved in implementation

- Circular 7/93 recommends that schools identify personnel in their action plans who will be responsible for specific actions. The vast majority of schools (92 per cent) did so, although this included schools that simply said responsibility was allocated to 'the whole staff', rather than identifying individual teachers or governors (Appendix 2, Table 2).

Example 1: Showing how aims, objectives and specific action points were specified in an action plan

Key issue: Secure the full and consistent implementation of the homework policy and continue to stress to pupils and parents the importance which the school attaches to homework

	Plan of action	Action by whom	Completion dates	Financial implications	Criteria for success
Aim: To secure full and consistent implementation of existing policy	**1.** Reiterate requirements of policy to staff and publish new timetables	Head + RAN and HOFs	8.9.95 15.9.95	Central printing £20	Publication of new timetable
Objectives: • To remind all parties of its importance • To remind all parties of expectations and requirements • To be aware of its relationship to independent learning — issue 4 • To be prepared to eventually integrate issues	**2.** Assemblies to all yr. groups *re* homework and homework club	**A.** Senior staff leading assembly **B.** HOY	22.9.95	Nil	Completion of task in assemblies
	3. Homework T/Ts in all subject/form rooms	**A.** HOFs **B.** Tutors	22.9.95	Printing + Laminating £75	Visible presence of T/Ts
	4. Follow-up letter to parents to check homework	Head	October half term	Printing £20	Publication of letter
	5. Weekly checks of home-link books by tutor and subject tutors	**A.** Tutors **B.** Subject staff	From mid October weekly	Time from tutorials	Evidence of dates of checks
	6. Random checking of students and staff to see policy fulfilled	**A.** HOFs > subject staff **B.** HOYs > tutors **C.** DirKS > HOFs /HOYs	Weekly Weekly Fortnightly	Nil	Written evidence in dates of checks. Lists of staff/ students steadily shrinking
	7. Random review of parents as to how much homework done	DirKS	Half termly	Printing (£20) + postage (£75)	Increasing growth in statistics showing policy working
	8. Review of policy in light of Key Issue 4 and above measure	D/H learning + DirKS	31.5.96	Nil except time	Emergence of new ideas and integration
	9. Develop policy	D/H learning + DirKS	31.8.96	Any recommendations	New policy or amendments

- Some schools went further than this by appointing someone to take the lead on specific key issues. This applied to two-thirds of schools: just over a third allocated named people for *each* of their key issues; the remainder did so for some of their key issues (Appendix 2, Table 1).

- Eighty per cent of action plans showed school governors having a role in *implementing* parts of the plan.[1] This was separate from governors with a purely monitoring role.

- Further analysis of governor involvement in implementing action plans was carried out (Appendix 2, Table 3). One in three action plans indicated that they would be involved in key issues concerned with *school development planning*. One in four action plans identified a role for governors in implementing changes associated with *meeting statutory requirements*. This was mainly in relation to a daily act of collective worship, but also included such aspects as ensuring that National Curriculum requirements were being met. One in five action plans linked governors with *whole schools issues*, such as reviewing the length of the school day, or examining issues associated with class size or grouping of pupils. A similar proportion linked governors with plans associated with *pastoral issues*, e.g. behaviour policy, home/school links, school attendance. Also, just under one in five plans indicated that governors had responsibility for implementing key issues pertaining to *staff roles, responsibilities and training*. (In some cases this related directly to them, i.e. the target was to increase governor involvement in the management of the school.) Finally, about one in five action plans indicated that governors would be involved in implementing changes in *curriculum planning*, usually reviewing schemes of work.

Specifying a timescale

- Circular 7/93 recommends that schools set target dates for action points in their plan. This analysis of 177 action plans revealed that virtually every school (97 per cent) did this for at least some of the actions: 50 per cent did so for *each* of their key issues, while 47 per cent did so for *some* of their key issues (Appendix 2, Table 1). This usually took the form of indicating a start and completion date for each key issue or target (see Example 2).

[1] *Governor involvement in implementation may even be slightly higher than this, since a further six per cent of action plans specified only names and not posts, thus making it impossible to distinguish governors from other personnel. These six per cent were excluded from the percentage figure given above.*

Example 2: Showing how timescales and resources were specified in an action plan

Action planned	Start date	End date	Resources required	Cost
Appraise deputy head, enhance whole school role and clarify roles and responsibilities	Oct 95	Jan 95	Supply teacher	£115
Review subject coordinators' responsibilities and redistribution of key roles	Oct 95	Jan 95	Supply teacher to release subject coordinator Additional point for staff One training day	£8000 £850 GEST
Identify coordinators' tasks with review dates	Jan 96	Feb 96 £115	Supply teacher to release subject coordinator	

- A small proportion of schools (15 per cent) included a summary timetable for the whole four-year period prior to the next inspection. (Examples of these from the case-study schools can be seen in Chapter 6.)

Identifying resource implications

- Circular 7/93 suggests that schools should include resource implications in their action plans.
- More than two-thirds of schools (69 per cent) listed in their action plans the *material* resources (i.e. distinct from staffing resources) that were needed to implement their key issues for action (e.g. textbooks, PE equipment). However, 30 per cent of schools did not specify any of the material resources that would be needed (Appendix 2, Table 2).
- Most action plans (92 per cent) specified *staffing* resource implications of implementing their key issues for action (e.g. LEA advisory support, INSET for staff, non-contact time, time for meetings) (Appendix 2, Table 2).
- Schools were evenly divided between those that specified costs of the resources they had listed (47 per cent) and those that did not indicate any actual costs (53 per cent) (Appendix 2, Table 2).

Specifying monitoring procedures

- Just over half (57 per cent) of the action plans that were analysed indicated procedures schools intended to set up to monitor the implementation of their plan (Appendix 2, Table 2.)

- Headteachers, teachers and governors were the individuals most commonly identified in the action plans as being responsible for monitoring progress. Each of these was mentioned in about 60 per cent of school action plans (Appendix 2, Table 3). In about a third of schools, the senior management team (SMT) had a role in monitoring the implementation of the action plan, while in about a quarter of schools, deputy headteachers were mentioned in connection with this task. A similar proportion of schools (26 per cent) indicated that the LEA was involved in a monitoring role. Parents were mentioned in 11 per cent of schools as having responsibility for monitoring implementation of some key issues.

Example 3: Showing how one school identified procedures to monitor the implementation of the action plan

Action to be taken	Monitoring
To review the current topic plan and produce a four-year programme that will facilitate full curriculum entitlement	Key stage co-ordinators to monitor planning termly. Subject coordinators to carry out termly monitoring of subject-specific implementation. Year leaders to carry out day-to-day monitoring.
All post holders will make annual bids for their responsibility based budget. Post holders will become budget holders. This will ensure that financial resources are matched to needs.	Bids for funding to be considered by senior management team and governors when appropriate. Post holders will keep an ongoing record of their spending. This will be reviewed by head or deputy termly.

Specifying success criteria

- Circular 7/93 recommends that schools should identify success criteria for each action in their plan. More than half the schools did this for *each* of the key issues for action. A further 14 per cent did this for *some* of the key issues for action. However, a third of schools did *not* specify success criteria for any of their key issues for action (Appendix 2, Table 1).
- The success criteria that were noted in action plans tended to be subjective and difficult to assess. Only about a third of schools specified objective, quantifiable success criteria, and even in these schools, the majority of the success criteria they identified were. Analysed another way, it emerged that of the 3,000+ success criteria that were listed (in 115 action plans), fewer than five per cent were quantifiable measures of success.

Example 4: Showing how one school's action plan had success criteria identified for each action point under a key issue

Actions to be taken	Success criteria
Complete work already begun on curriculum	Whole curriculum content reviewed, defined and agreed by all staff
Develop schemes of work for all curriculum areas including RE and PSHE	Schemes of work written
Review and improve the common format for planning	New planning format ready
Monitor medium term plans against schemes of work each half term in advance	Rigorous monitoring undertaken
Monitor standards of achievement, particularly in key stage 1 and 2.	Standards improved

This concludes the documentary analysis of 177 schools' action plans. However, many of the aspects that have arisen in relation to formats and headings are explored in detail in Chapter 6, while issues pertaining to implementation and monitoring are addressed fully in Chapters 7 and 8.

3. IMPACT OF INSPECTION EXPERIENCES

This report is about the action planning, not inspection. However, interviews in the case-study schools revealed that to a great extent the willingness and commitment that teachers felt towards action planning were greatly influenced by their experiences during the various stages of the inspection process, from the announcement of the date for inspection and the preparation that followed, through to the receipt of the final written report from OFSTED inspectors. Each of these phases is, therefore, examined briefly in this chapter, drawing on the actual experiences of the headteachers, teachers and governors in the ten case-study schools. It should be borne in mind that these schools were not necessarily representative — they were chosen to illuminate different approaches to the *process* of action planning, and allow an exploration of what constituted a good *outcome* in terms of the format and content of their action plans.[1]

Before the inspection

The first round of OFSTED inspections was reported by all of the case-study schools to have been an onerous experience. In particular, the build-up prior to the inspection was felt to have been very demanding. Often this period was reported to have been the worst part of the inspection, clouding views about the forthcoming inspection process and resulting in very negative feelings by the time the first day of the inspection arrived.

> ***I felt that the preparation for the inspection was in many respects worse than the inspection itself... it was more stressful... you were being asked to produce too much paperwork.*** **Teacher**

The main feature of all this extra work was the assembling of documentation required as part of the inspection process. Some of the case-study schools spent many months in working groups reviewing and revising policy documents and drawing up new ones. Even in schools where most of the documentation already existed, a major overhaul was usually felt to be needed. This was why, for many teachers, this was felt to have been the most trying period of the inspection.

A second feature of the pre-inspection build-up was that many teachers felt uncertain about what to expect from the inspection process itself, and uneasy about how they would cope. For some, having inspectors observe their teaching was an unfamiliar

[1] *It should also be remembered that the case-study schools were inspected in the first phase of OFSTED inspections, i.e. before the revised framework for the inspection of schools was introduced.*

and daunting prospect. Others, particularly those who were newly qualified and therefore had been observed quite recently, felt this aspect was not something that worried them.

For a number of schools, these two aspects seemed to be exacerbated by the very long period of notice they had of the forthcoming inspection — sometimes a whole year. Having for months been preoccupied with reviewing policy and practice, amassing and redrafting documentation, and dealing with feelings of anxiety, many teachers said they felt drained by the time the inspection even began and found it difficult to pick up the necessary momentum to set about action planning. In these schools, staff clearly felt that a shorter period of notice would have been better. Rather than experience such extreme levels of stress and anxiety for so long again, some teachers said that in future they would prefer *no notice*. Moreover, some teachers felt that 'on spec' inspections would facilitate more realistic impressions — some said they had deliberately prepared very 'safe' lessons for the new policy documents and inspection period, rather than more exciting ones that ran a higher risk of children misbehaving.

During the inspection

Inevitably, some teachers had found the inspection a more positive experience than others. However, a surprisingly high degree of consensus emerged *within* each school about this aspect.[2] This seemed to be greatly influenced by the way in which the inspection was *conducted*, rather than the *outcome* in terms of the judgements made in the inspection report.

What factors were at work during the inspection that so coloured teachers' opinions of their inspection? The answer to this question seems to revolve around two aspects of *communication*. The first centres on the notification given to heads and teachers during the inspection about whose lessons are to be observed. In some schools, inspectors arrived on the first morning with a timetable of observations for the whole inspection. In other schools, inspectors told the head/staff each morning whose lessons would be visited that day. In others, no notice was given and inspectors just arrived in lessons unannounced.

Notice that a particular lesson was to be observed was something that teachers very much appreciated. Some said it helped to calm their nerves during the period of inspection, knowing

[2] *This emerged from individual interviews with headteachers, teachers and governors; no group interviews took place.*

when their 'slot' was to take place. Others found it reassuring to know that the inspectors clearly had a plan which they were following. In other schools, where no notice was given, some of the teachers said they had felt under mounting pressure as two or three days of inspection passed, waiting for the knock on the door and an inspector to walk in. There was also sometimes the feeling that the inspectors were trying to catch them out. Moreover, some teachers felt frustrated that only partial lessons were observed and yet judgements were being made on the basis of what had been seen.

> ***The unexpectedness of it... the fact that you can be part-way through a lesson and someone can walk in; they won't necessarily see the whole continuity, they won't see where the whole build-up has come from, and therefore they are making snap judgements based on partial experience.***
>
> **Teacher**

The second, even more vital communication issue concerns discussion and feedback between inspectors and teachers during the inspection. Again the case studies revealed that inspection teams varied in their approaches. In some inspections, one-to-one feedback sessions were the norm, either at the end of the observed lesson or at the end of the day. Many teachers were pleasantly surprised to find that inspectors were willing to provide personal feedback. Three main benefits were commonly identified:

- it was useful to know what the inspector thought about *their* work, regardless of how the school overall might be judged at the end of the inspection
- it was a useful means of clarifying information between inspectors and teachers, so that any misunderstandings could be quickly rectified (many examples of this were provided)
- it fostered a positive attitude towards the inspectors themselves; the inspectors seemed to be trying to be constructively helpful.

Where this one-to-one feedback did not happen,[3] teachers were far less happy about the way the inspection had gone and indicated much more negative perceptions of the process as a whole. Lack of any focused comment on their particular lesson(s) left teachers feeling 'in limbo'. Many of them were uncertain if general criticisms in the report applied to them or not.

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[3] *The OFSTED guidelines recommend that inspectors take opportunities to give individual feedback to teachers after lesson observations, but also say they are not obliged to do this.*

> *The way* [feedback] *was given was fine... I had chats with both inspectors outside the classroom, and it was done on a nice, personal level. It was about my own personal teaching and also about the syllabuses... I had four geography lessons visited and three history. There was one major feedback for both* [subjects], *and we also had indirect chats at the end of lessons. We had time for an informal, friendly chat afterwards...* **Teacher**

> *I received no feedback at all... only via my head of department... that annoyed me intensely...* **Teacher**

Some teachers said found it impossible to feel at ease during the inspection. Unlike those in receipt of personal feedback, it did not get easier as the days went by and the inspection progressed. An 'us and them' attitude prevailed and they were left at the end feeling deflated, still stressed or even angry.

While some inspection teams had made it clear that they would not provide one-to-one feedback, staff in one school were annoyed that they only found out once the inspection was over that they could have had individual feedback, had they asked for it.

After the inspection

Headteachers in 86 per cent of primary schools and 94 per cent of secondary schools found the oral feedback provided by OFSTED inspectors was 'useful' or 'very useful' for planning purposes.
Source: *Planning for Action, Part 1: a Survey of Schools' Post-inspection Action Planning* (Maychell and Pathak, 1997).

The feedback at the end of the inspection is, of course, vitally important in preparing schools for action planning. The way in which heads, governors and teachers receive and interpret this feedback is crucial to any future action planning that takes place. The OFSTED system of inspection provides both oral and written feedback to schools, though within the ten case-study schools there was a wide range of practice in relation to how it was delivered and to whom.

♦ *Oral feedback*

Some inspection teams provided *oral feedback* to *every* teacher they observed as part of the day-to-day work of the inspection process (see previous section: '*During the inspection*'). Other teams only provided *oral feedback* at the end of the inspection — sometimes to the whole staff, but more commonly to selected members of staff. There was wide variation in the staff that were involved, as the following examples show.

School 1:
- Oral feedback was given to the headteacher, other members of SMT and chair of governors.

School 2:
- Headteacher and chair of governors received oral feedback together.
- Whole staff, including headteacher received more general oral feedback.

School 3:
- Headteacher received oral feedback.
- Heads of department met as a group with inspectors to receive oral feedback on the work of their respective departments.
- Governing body received oral feedback at the end of the inspection.

School 4:
- Governors received no feedback until the written report was officially presented to them, some weeks after the inspection.

This range of practice raises three main points. First, the schools had assumed, to a greater or lesser extent, a *passive* role with regard to feedback. They generally accepted whatever system the inspectors set up. Secondly, despite this passive role, many of the individual heads, governors and teachers had their own views on what would have been preferable alternatives. The purpose of the oral feedback is to provide schools with a useful opportunity to share inspectors' experiences and impressions before the written report is finalised. It seems that schools need to be more proactive in shaping the type of feedback sessions that they would find most useful. Thirdly, those teachers that received oral feedback on their own teaching were very positive about its usefulness, providing as it did focused information on their own performance. Many of those that did not have this opportunity were very unhappy that, having had several lessons observed, they received no individual feedback, but had to rely on close scrutiny of the written report and, in some cases, on second-hand feedback via the head of department.

♦ *Written feedback*

In case-study schools, the most common criticism of written inspection reports was that they tended to be somewhat bland, often using stock phrases which tended to make the report less useful than it could have been. What appeared to be most

> ***The language that they use is ridiculous to be quite honest. It is nothing more than a smokescreen in the way that they put it down... it would be far better to spell it out, as it is, and be more specific. The comments that they tend to make are 'Satisfactory', 'So many per cent more than satisfactory', 'Some are adequate'. In my opinion, it fudges it... they are sitting on the fence making this sort of comment without being too clear. And yet at the same time, to make those comments clearer it may well be necessary to explain what could be done...***
>
> **Headteacher**

irritating to the recipients were the veiled references to issues and people which left them uncertain where in the school the problems lay. Also, problems sometimes arose because inspectors were careful not to make comments which could be interpreted as giving advice to schools. Three other aspects were raised as minor points in some of the case-study schools, but were of greater concern for some schools that returned questionnaires in Phase 1 of this study (Maychell and Pathak, 1997). First, the written report was felt in places to be understating, or overstating what was reported in the oral feedback. Secondly, some individuals felt it was important to get started on the process of action planning once the inspection and the oral feedback had been received, rather than waiting for the written report, which could follow the oral feedback by several weeks. Thirdly, the key issues for action were not necessarily the only issues that schools included in their action plans. There were occasions cited where the written report had drawn attention to aspects of the school in the main body of the report that the school wanted to act on, even though inspectors had not identified these as key issues for action.

There seems little doubt that the various aspects of communication that have been raised in this chapter were very influential in terms of how teachers felt about action planning. If their day-to-day feelings during the inspection had been negative —ongoing uncertainty, misunderstandings, and lack of feedback — even a good report at the end of the inspection did not seem to lift their spirits. Evidently, there is scope for improvement in communication and conduct of inspections to help alleviate some of these difficulties. What can schools do to prepare for the task of action planning? Although much of the inspection process is outside their control, there are still some practical steps that can help. Above all, it is important that those being inspected are not left with the feeling that they have been *done to.* A feeling of *participation* and common purpose between inspectors and teachers seems to be important in maintaining the edge needed to successfully embark on the next phase once the inspection itself has ended.

CHECKLIST: THE IMPACT OF INSPECTION

Teachers' experiences of inspection can be very influential in how prepared they feel to set about action planning. The more positive their inspection experiences, the more likely it is that action planning will be viewed as a useful part of the process. It is therefore worth taking steps to try to make the inspection as positive an experience as possible.

Prior to the inspection

- ❑ How long does everyone need to prepare for the inspection? In deciding this, you should aim for a balance that allows plenty of time to accomplish what must be done, but does not turn a week-long inspection into a year-long process.

- ❑ It is worth considering how much paperwork really needs revising. Is all the work necessary? Will it be useful after the inspection? If not, what is the minimum that needs to be done?

- ❑ Some schools might find a pre-inspection meeting with the inspection team useful in allaying fears and explaining details. If this is to take place, it is a good idea to draw up a list of key questions in advance, such as:
  - Will inspectors provide a timetable for the inspection beforehand?
  - Will inspectors keep the head informed of their plans on a day-to-day basis during the inspection as to which lessons are to be observed?
  - Will teachers be notified prior to an inspector arriving in their classroom?
  - Will only *full* lessons be observed?
  - Will any discussion take place between inspectors and teachers during classroom observation?
  - Will any discussion take place before or after classroom observation between inspectors and teachers?
  - Will inspectors speak to pupils during the inspection? In lesson time?
  - Will teachers receive any personal one-to-one feedback from inspectors?
  - How will the oral feedback on the inspection findings be presented, to whom and when?

- Even if a pre-inspection meeting of this cannot be arranged, or is not deemed desirable, teachers need to know what to expect in terms of how the inspection will be conducted and what feedback they can expect. A telephone call between the head and registered inspector can suffice.

During the inspection

- During the inspection it is important to address any obvious misunderstandings or potential 'gaps' in inspectors' knowledge as soon as possible. Waiting until the feedback at the end of the inspection can be a mistake, since to resolve an issue inspectors may need to carry out further observation or check additional documentation. Obviously this becomes much more difficult once the inspection is over.

- Teachers might find it helpful during the inspection to monitor inspectors' activities. For example, you could note down the times when inspectors enter and leave the classroom, the number of children that are spoken to, the gender of these children etc. As well as undermining the feeling of 'being done to', the information could prove useful in cases of disagreement over inspection findings.

- Don't allow yourselves to feel persecuted because you are being inspected. Remember that inspectors are in your school because it is the law: every school has to undergo the same inspection process. Try to be positive and see it as an opportunity to improve the school that you care about.

Receiving oral feedback

- It is not unreasonable to ask that every teacher who has been observed receives some personal, oral feedback. Contact the registered inspector about this *prior to* the inspection, so that staff know beforehand what to expect. If the response is negative, it might be useful if teachers think about the one or two aspects they would most like personal feedback on, e.g. teaching style, pupil behaviour, and ask if inspectors would be willing to comment just on these.

- If oral feedback is given to individual teachers, the recipient might find it useful to take some written notes. This is especially important if the feedback is to a head of department who must then relay the comments to other members of staff. Alternatively, recipients of oral feedback might find it useful to have a colleague present who could do the notetaking, leaving them free to ask questions.

- ❑ Prior to the inspection, the head, teachers and governors ought to give some thought to what they think would be suitable arrangements for oral feedback, in particular the session at the end of the inspection. Ideally everyone should have the opportunity to hear this, but since this is unlikely to be practicable, consideration must be given to who should be present during the final oral feedback session. The following might help to inform your decisions about this:
  - Which school staff and governors are essential?
  - Who else would it be advantageous to include if there is room, e.g. would it be helpful to include the attached LEA inspector?
  - Where will the session take place? Will everyone fit in?
  - Are governors available during the daytime — when the session is likely to take place?
  - Have individual teachers had their own feedback?
  - How critical is the report likely to be, and of whom?
  - What are the inspection team's views/suggestions about the audience for the oral feedback?

- ❑ The oral feedback sessions *during* and *at the end* of the inspection are an important part of the OFSTED inspection process. The following ideas might help to make the most of them:
  - See the oral feedback sessions, both during the inspection and at the end, as a chance for everyone involved to ensure that the written report is as accurate and meaningful as possible.
  - Recipients of oral feedback should question anything they do not understand *fully*. Also, where they feel that inspectors have misunderstood something, they should explain and illustrate these aspects as much as they can.
  - Teachers and governors may need briefing before oral feedback about what to expect in terms of how the sessions will be conducted. In particular, they should be forewarned not to be put off if the oral feedback at the end of the inspection turns out to be the registered inspector simply reading out the draft of the written report.
  - Be prepared with strategies for making the oral feedback session suit your wishes. Have strategies ready for opening up discussion, e.g. ask if the inspector would mind interruptions for questions or allocating a time at the end for these.
  - Jot down notes as the feedback takes place as an aid to later questioning.

- Make sure you write down positive comments as well as negative ones.
- Perhaps you would find it useful to allocate an 'official' note-taker for the session. However, if only two people are present you might decide its best that you both take some notes.
- If not all staff are present in the inspectors' oral feedback, think about how the information is going to be passed back to the rest of the staff.
- Depending on the timing of the inspection, you might want to ask if the final oral feedback could be postponed by a day. Would the recipients be too exhausted to make the most of the session, e.g. late on a Friday afternoon? Is the time feasible for the key personnel that you have identified as needing to be present? Has the session been allocated enough time, e.g. on the last afternoon of the inspection? Would it be better the next working day?

Responding to the written report

- ❑ If points in the written report are not clear, you might be able to contact the inspectors to ask for further clarification. Perhaps the meeting with the governing body is still to come and this occasion could be used to seek clarification.

- ❑ You might find it helpful to have your LEA adviser present at the governing body feedback session. This person could be useful in asking questions, or in helping to explain to governors points arising in the written report.

- ❑ Do not feel that you must be totally passive in receiving the report. Although you cannot suggest modifications to the judgements included in the report, you may need to correct errors of factual accuracy. Also, your comments on how useful you find the report as an aid to planning are relevant and there is no reason why you should not give inspectors feedback on this aspect.

4. PREPARING FOR ACTION PLANNING

An early start

One in four schools claimed to have started action planning *before the inspection*, one in five schools did so *after receiving the oral feedback* and one in three schools waited until *receipt of the written report.*

Source: *Planning for Action, Part 1: a Survey of Schools' Post-inspection Action Planning* (Maychell and Pathak, 1997).

Starting action planning at an early stage (even before the inspection begins) may have considerable advantages without necessarily involving any written outcome. Discussions in some of the case-study schools revealed that an awareness of the kind of issues likely to arise in the inspection helped to prepare the school and made dealing with the findings in the report easier. Knowing that their schools were due to be inspected, some of the headteachers had undertaken their own informal audit of the school as part of their preparation for the inspection. They found that it helped to have an opinion on what the inspectors might focus on, in terms of the school's strengths and potentially weaker areas. Above all, it gave them their own recent assessment of different aspects of the school against which to measure the inspectors' comments. It also allowed for some prior thinking about what strategies might be adopted to address issues.

Coming to terms with inspection findings

Coming to terms with the inspection findings is an important step towards a positive action planning phase. In some of the case-study schools, most staff seemed to have had little or no difficulties in doing this. However, in others, the findings had been a contentious issue for the staff. Indeed, in some cases it was evident that even a year after the inspection there were still unresolved concerns among staff over some of the inspection team's findings.

Accepting criticism of one's work or aspects of the school is inevitably a challenge, and a certain period of coming to terms with the findings is understandable. However, the case-study interviews suggested that sometimes 'blocking' strategies were employed which prevented the individual from coming to terms

with the findings indefinitely. The three most common arguments were:

- that the inspection was 'only a snapshot', or that the inspectors did not see the 'real' work of the school in action
- the expertise/experience of the inspection team was somehow questionable
- that the background and context of the school or its pupils ought to have been taken into account when inspectors reached their conclusions about the school
- the inspection team was not prepared to modify its findings in the light of comments from staff.

These concerns were very real, and no doubt many schools will identify with some or all of them to varying degrees. However, such feelings need to be addressed if staff are to feel prepared for action planning. If in their own minds teachers invalidate inspection findings, they will naturally be less enthusiastic about tackling the action planning phase that follows the inspection.

> *The inspector went down a list... talked about things that should be in place that were not in place and tended to qualify with 'If you had the base...', 'If you had the funding...', 'If you had the time, I know you would do that...', 'But at this moment in time you have none of those'.* **Teacher**

Understanding the findings and key issues for action

> *There were times when we had to sit down and try to clarify ... 'Now do they mean this?' That's totally wrong. If we're not sure, then they are failing in what they are doing.* **Headteacher**

A problem arising in several of the case-study schools was difficulty understanding some of the inspection findings. Usually one or both of two reasons appeared to be the cause. First, in some schools headteachers and teachers felt that the findings in the report had been too general to be meaningful — some said that the report fudged the issues and left them uncertain what was expected of them. Indeed, some of those interviewed felt that the report had been deliberately vague because inspectors wanted to avoid identifying individual teachers. Others thought the reason was that the inspectors must not appear to be offering advice as to how to act on their findings. This caused a good deal of frustration in some case-study

> *The findings were quite clear, but the recommendations as to what to do about it, which is particularly the reason of the inspection, weren't helpful...what they said was fair enough, but some of the key issues were very complex and it wasn't actually easy to tease out what was they were saying in terms of helping us to do something about it.* **Teacher**

schools. Staff in one school found that their questions during the feedback session with the inspectors could not be answered for this reason. Yet in another school, teachers said that inspectors had given a lot of advice and support as well as straightforward comment, which they had welcomed.

The second difficulty identified with inspection findings in some schools related to the complexity of some of the key issues for action. Some of these were perceived as highly complex. In some schools, a good deal of reflection and discussion took place among the staff and governors *before* the actual process of drawing up the action plan started. Though time-consuming, this was felt to be vital because at first individual perceptions about what the key issue for action actually meant varied considerably.

What and who will be involved?

> ***It is important to be ready, for management to be prepared to respond to the key points immediately after inspection and make maximum use of the 'hot' time while people are still energised by the inspection and the report.*** **Deputy headteacher**

There is much that can be done before the inspection in terms of thinking about how to approach action planning. Schools can think about who to involve and in what capacity, when and how frequently meetings will take place and what arrangements will be needed to ensure that time is available. These sorts of decisions can be mapped out, to some extent, before the inspection, so that individuals are already looking ahead to the action-planning process and know what role they will be expected to adopt during this phase.

CHECKLIST: PREPARING FOR ACTION PLANNING

It seems vital that after the inspection and receipt of the oral feedback some time is spent preparing the groundwork for the actual process of action planning. Examining positive and negative feelings from the inspection and being absolutely clear about what the findings mean is important. It is not necessary to wait until receipt of the written report to do this. The following suggestions might be helpful in getting started:

Coming to terms with the findings

- ❑ You need to build in some time before you start the actual business of action planning to review everyone's experiences of the inspection. This is likely to be particularly helpful where there is a general feeling of anti-climax, disappointment or even anger.

- ❑ Channel feelings into a positive debriefing exercise involving all staff. Through this, seek to provide some useful ideas and alternative perspectives. Questions that everyone could consider include:
  - What lessons have been learned from the whole inspection experience?
  - What would you do differently next time?
  - What would you do the same next time?
  - What was the funniest moment?
  - What was the worst moment?
  - Was everyone happy with how they had reacted to the inspection?
  - What proportion of the report is positive — would it help to go through the report highlighting these sections?
  - Try looking at the report through the eyes of: a) a pupil; b) a parent; c) a governor; d) a member of the general public. How would the school appear to each of these?
  - Did inspectors fail to see everything, or do you feel that you could have done more to present some important aspect of their school?

- ❑ In relation to any key issues for action that are contentious with all or some teachers, consider the following questions:
  - How strongly does everyone feel about the problem?
  - Did inspectors miss seeing something which might have altered their view?
  - Would it help the school/individuals to have an external opinion, e.g. by asking the LEA advisory team to examine the issue and give their view?
  - Rather than expect teachers to devise strategies to implement what they are convinced is already taking place, could the action plan define the action to be taken as one of needing to *demonstrate* what is happening?

Understanding the findings

- ❑ Some of the suggestions above will inevitably have led to discussions about the interpretation of the findings. This should be helpful — given the constraints of ongoing teaching responsibilities and post-inspection fatigue, the number of meetings has to be kept to a minimum, yet the more discussion that takes place the better.

- ❑ Getting the balance right between pre-action planning discussion and work on the action plan itself can be difficult. Spending too long on the 'post-mortem' is not advisable — one or two sessions at most. After that, the discussion should be firmly focused on tackling what the key issues for action mean.

- ❑ If discussion of the key issues for action is not leading to a clearer understanding of them, or if it is fuelling disagreement, you need to act fast. Are some of you still using blocking strategies? Do you feel that some external advice could help you to decide what is needed? Ought this to be tackled with individuals? Is it time to deal with this in working groups that could lead into the next phase, i.e. that of actually drawing up the plan?

- ❑ If external advice is needed, but is not affordable in terms of time or money, could you draw on the help of colleagues in neighbouring schools? Would it help to give these key issues a lower priority to enable them to be addressed in the next financial year?

- ❑ Although time is of the essence in drawing up the action plan, understanding what the issues are is vital and time spent discussing these will almost certainly help when it comes to the implementation stage.

5. DRAWING UP THE ACTION PLAN

The next stage in the inspection process for the school is to produce an action plan addressing the *key issues for action* highlighted in the report. The action plan must be submitted to OFSTED within 40 working days (eight weeks) of receiving the inspectors' written report. This period excludes holidays of more than one week, but includes holidays of one week or less.

This chapter looks at various approaches to drawing up an action plan. It follows on from the suggestions in the previous chapter about preparing for action planning. The first section discusses personnel involved and the logistics of meeting to draw up the plan, and the following section explores the issue of training and advice for action.

The dynamics of drawing up the action plan

Interviews in the case-study schools demonstrated that deciding how to go about drawing up the action plan and who to involve in this process was affected by several factors:

- **Historical reasons** — schools might choose a particular method simply because this is the same approach as school development planning, or weekly planning.
- **Staff exhaustion** — where headteachers were concerned about putting additional pressure on already tired staff after an inspection, they often took the decision for a small group of senior staff, or the head alone, to draft the plan.
- **40-day deadline in which to produce the action plan** — some headteachers cited this as a reason for not involving more staff in initial consultations.
- **Importance of involving all staff and governors** — despite possible difficulties such as lack of time and educational jargon, some headteachers believed it was imperative that the whole school was involved in formulating the action plan, as it had implications for everyone.

The main difference between the different strategies was in terms of who was involved in *initial discussion* and who was involved in *drawing up the first draft* of the action plan. In *all* the case-study schools, once the first draft had been produced, staff were approached for comments, and necessary amendments were made. Governors' involvement varied, but at the very least they were consulted for their views and these were taken into account before submitting the final plan for their approval.

Schools may wish to consider one of the following approaches to initial discussion and drafting of the action plan:

- whole-school action planning
- management team action planning
- staff/governor action-planning groups
- specific staff designated responsibility for considering certain key issues.

Each of these four approaches was adopted by at least one of the case-study schools and is described in the following four sections.

1. Whole-school action planning

Two case-study schools used an approach whereby the whole school had considerable input in the initial stages of drawing up their action plan. For both headteachers (one primary, one secondary), the overriding reason for this approach was their belief that everyone should be involved in the process as the action plan and its implementation would affect the whole school. The specific method used by each school is outlined in the following examples.

One primary school took the following approach to the initial drafting of their action plan:

- A 'brainstorming' evening was held where the whole teaching staff, governing body, headteacher and LEA link inspector were divided into groups of five or six people.
- Each group looked at a particular key issue.
- Their task was to decide on what action should be taken, the timescale involved and resources needed.
- Each group was given a blank pro forma to help formulate ideas. It had headings to prompt discussion such as *'Where are we now?' 'Where do we want to be?' 'How do we get there?'* and *'How do we know we are there?'*

At the end of the evening, ideas were discussed among the whole gathering of staff, head and governors and a realistic timeframe for implementation decided upon.

After more staff meetings in school, the headteacher and deputy drafted the action plan using the completed pro formas produced at the 'brainstorming' evening.

> ***I felt that it was important*** [to involve everyone]. ***I feel that you should involve everybody in whatever you are doing. It shouldn't just be my own ideas because if it's just*** [me] ***doing it, it never actually gets implemented. It has to be everybody.***
>
> **Headteacher**

This approach to discussing the action plan was felt by all involved to have been very effective. Governors in particular, said they had been pleased to have been given this opportunity to participate fully and to work alongside teachers.

In one secondary school, involvement of staff, governors, parental groups and pupil representatives on the school council was through a combination of informal and formal approaches to discuss issues for action and to formulate the action plan. These included:

- staff meetings
- training days
- departmental meetings
- heads of year meetings
- meetings of the senior consultative group and
- governor meetings.

Although involvement on this scale inevitably took a lot of time, the headteacher felt that this approach had been very successful and she would use the same process again.

2. *Management team action planning*

In two schools (one primary, one junior), a senior management team took responsibility for discussing and drafting the action plan before the draft was shown for consultation to staff and governors.

Primary school

- The approach to action planning followed the school's usual pattern of school development planning.
- The action-planning group consisted of the head, deputy head and the head of the infants. Each took a key issue relating to the curriculum and drew up a plan for action, discussing it together as a group before producing a final draft after a number of weeks.
- Governors had a large input into the plan once it was drafted — in particular, governors' subcommittees on 'health and safety' and 'premises' had a substantial involvement in responding to a number of the key issues.

The head explained that this approach to action planning was chosen in order to minimise the pressure on an already exhausted teachers. However, he said that next time he would like to involve more people.

Junior school

- The format for discussions and consultations followed the method of weekly school planning.
- The action-planning group was quite large, consisting of the head, deputy, the subject coordinators for English, mathematics and science, the SEN coordinator and an 'interested' senior teacher.
- This group met regularly until they had drawn up action points under the key issues. The head and deputy then wrote the action plan using notes from these meetings.
- Governors had a large input into the plan once it was drafted — the governors had set up an action plan subcommittee to look in detail at the action plan.
- The plan was also shown to the LEA adviser.

Drawing up the action plan in this way was very different to the usual method of writing the SDP, which would have been produced by the head and the deputy. Teachers commented that team planning had meant that there was more ownership of the action plan than of the SDP.

In a third school (secondary), although the senior management team were involved, this was not until after the headteacher had produced the initial draft of the action plan. This was then reviewed by the senior management team, amended and then circulated among staff and governors. When asked their views on their involvement in action planning, staff in this school said they would have preferred to have been more involved in discussions at an earlier stage.

3. *Staff/governor action planning groups*

Three case-study schools chose to set up working groups consisting of staff and governors to draw up the school's action plan. These groups were responsible for initial discussions about action to be taken under each key issue and for drafting the plan, although other staff were consulted as part of the process before the final plan was approved by the full governing body. The compilation of the working groups varied in each of the three schools, and is summarised below.

	Composition of working group
School 1 (infant):	Headteacher, deputy head, chair of governors and another governor
School 2 (secondary)	Headteacher, three deputies, chair of governors, chair of the governors' finance subcommittee, chair of the curriculum subcommittee, chair of the staffing subcommittee, chair of the buildings subcommittee and two teacher governors.
School 3 (secondary)	Eight members of staff, with considerable input from governors and other staff through three-day schedule of open meetings.

Each school had its own reasons for adopting its chosen method of action planning:

- The same working group had been steering the school's management plan for some years and had therefore played a large part in planning previously (*School 1*).
- A restricted timescale to produce the action plan; therefore it was felt that senior management and governors should take the bulk of the workload (*School 2*).
- A desire to involve all staff and for the plan to be drawn up with the consensus of staff and governors (*School 3*).

4. *Specific staff designated to produce plans for individual key issues*

In two case-study schools, individual staff were chosen to take the lead on consultation and drafting of specific key issues; however, each resulted in a different situation.

Infant school

- A meeting was held between the new headteacher and staff to discuss previous developments on key issues.
- Members of staff who were chosen to draw up plans for key issues were awarded responsibility points.
- Strategies and approaches suggested by individuals were then agreed by all staff at staff meetings.

Secondary school

- The headteacher decided which specific staff would concentrate on drafting certain areas of the plan.
- The overriding consideration in deciding which staff would take the lead depended on staff's teaching obligations and the headteacher's confidence in their ability.
- Staff with designated responsibility suggested strategies after consultation through small group meetings, departmental meetings and, in the case of one key issue, through a meeting of all staff and parents.

Teacher involvement in action planning

As the previous examples have illustrated, there can be varying levels of teacher involvement in initial discussions relating to the action plan. In general, headteachers appeared to put a high value on their teachers' input into the action plan and, while they involved teachers to varying degrees, each of them indicated they were reasonably happy with the way in which their school had approached action planning. Despite this, several headteachers commented that next time they would like to involve more staff in the actual drafting of the plan, as this time the *writing of the plan* had been solely by senior teachers. This was supported by views of other staff in these schools. For example, in one school where staff were not involved in initial discussions about the content of the action plan, a deputy head felt the action planning process would have been better if it had been more like the usual approach to school development planning, where a 'bottom-up' approach was used.

Where staff had been involved in the initial discussions concerning the action plan, headteachers emphasised how important they felt this had been. In one school where brainstorming sessions were used, the headteacher believed this had been very successful in generating good ideas through an energetic and enthusiastic staff. In another school where a whole-staff approach had been used, the headteacher had decided not to restrict discussions to more senior teachers, even though time was pressing, because she felt that it was more important to consult with the whole staff. This is the challenge of action planning for schools: to find a balance between wanting to involve all staff in discussions on one hand, while keeping such discussions manageable and being able to fit them into a realistic time schedule on the other. The issue of timescales was often mentioned in interviews and is discussed more fully later in this chapter.

What do teachers get out of action planning?

> *In some ways it's quite daunting* [being involved] *but in other ways it's really good to be given a lot of responsibility so you know what's going on. It makes you want to pitch in and help anyway rather than being told what to do all the time.* **Teacher**

Interviews with teachers revealed that where they were involved in action planning, they generally found this to be a very useful experience. The following reasons were commonly mentioned:

- It increased teachers' *general awareness of what would be taking place in the school* in the short and long term.

- Some teachers indicated that being involved early on with the action plan had a *bearing on their interest in implementing the plan later on.*
- Some teachers suggested that involvement in planning *contributed to a sense of belonging* to a team. This was particularly the case in one school where a poor inspection report had the effect of galvanising teachers into setting up an action-planning group consisting of teachers and governors which took the lead in developing the action plan.
- Involvement in action planning provided teachers with *broader perspectives* on teaching than usual, which many found helpful.

> ***I found*** [action planning] ***quite useful... it allowed me to look at things in a quite structured fashion and try to get ideas in an organised way. It also gave me an opportunity to have more say in school planning.*** **Teacher**

- For some teachers, it was an opportunity to put forward their views and be *involved in decision making*, when they would not normally have done this.
- Some teachers had chaired special meetings and working groups in the action-planning process, sometimes enabling them to *increase their profile within the school* and broadening their experiences.
- *Working together* was also mentioned as leading to *greater communication* within a school.

Governor involvement in action planning

> ***We felt that the head is responsible for the organisation of the school, he is the professional... and therefore the governors make the policy but the actual detail... we just don't know enough... at the end of the day, one is fortunate in one's senior management.*** **Vice-chair of governors**

Governors are officially charged with responsibility for drawing up a school's action plan. However, as lay people, they may not consider themselves to have the necessary knowledge or expertise in educational matters to participate fully in drawing up the action plan. To a large extent, governors will look to the senior managers of the school for leadership and guidance.

> ***I must admit, I really enjoyed being a part of it because it makes*** [it] ***so much easier to understand what's going on in the school. It makes it easier when decisions are being made and things are happening in the school and some parents don't understand why — because I've been involved right from the beginning, I'm able to tell them.*** **Parent governor**

Nevertheless, on the whole, discussions with governors who had taken part in drawing up the action plan in their school found that they and their colleagues had been happy with their involvement in the planning process. In particular, one of the rewards of involvement was a sense of

participation as well as increased knowledge and understanding of why certain action was taken in the school.

Overcoming governors' lack of expertise

In nearly all the case-study schools, governors played a considerable role in action planning. While several of the governors who were interviewed described themselves as 'lay people', and expressed concerns about their ability to contribute to the action planning process, the headteachers in these schools felt that their involvement had been very worthwhile. Indeed, some of the headteachers and teachers interviewed felt that they had benefited from governors' lack of educational knowledge because it made them examine fundamental objectives within their school and helped them think more clearly about addressing the issues. Also, some interviewees spoke of the benefit of governors' wider expertise as complementing the curriculum knowledge of teaching staff. The following examples help to illustrate how two schools approached governors' lack of educational experience and overcame their hesitation to participate in the action-planning process.

♦ *Fostering positive attitudes towards governor involvement*

Establishing an environment where governors do not feel afraid to ask if they do not understand is essential in encouraging governor involvement, as illustrated in the experience of one primary school in the study. Here, the chair of governors explained that lack of educational experience did not prevent people from participating fully in the initial discussion of teachers and governors. The parent governor in this school confirmed that the attitude of teachers towards the governors enabled them to ask very basic questions without feeling embarrassed and commented that although in her view she had not contributed significantly to ideas for the action plan, she had greatly appreciated being involved in the initial brainstorming evening and at all times had been made to feel welcome and as significant as any other participant.

> ***I think they were taking part because we have a very open atmosphere where people feel comfortable about asking questions and saying '... I didn't know about that, could you explain it to me?' So, I think, in that regard, we're quite lucky so I think they were able to get involved even though a lot of them aren't in education as such.***
>
> **Chair of governors**

♦ *Delegating specific tasks to governors*

If governors are uncertain as to how they can contribute to action planning and equally look to the headteacher for leadership, headteachers can make the most of this by isolating specific tasks that governors might like to be involved in, which

We've a super group of governors, very, very positive, very active but they obviously look to the head to tell them what they can practically contribute. In using that format, I deliberately left the column on who is going to do what fairly blank and said 'I'm actually looking for volunteers here.'...In just a few minutes, governors were saying 'Okay, I'll do that', 'I'm on [the] *premises* [sub-committee], *I'll see to that'. That was really practical and useful. I felt that at that particular meeting, the governors felt 'good, I'm actually making a direct practical contribution' and we didn't spend all evening discussing it... Looking back, that's worked really well.* **Headteacher**

would also free up staff time to concentrate on key issues relating to the curriculum. For example, if there are key issues for action relating to aspects of health and safety, governors could take responsibility for drafting this section of the action plan, particularly if a governors' health and safety subcommittee or premises subcommittee already exists. An effective way to do this is to encourage governors to help by suggesting aspects in which they might become involved. For example, in one case-study school the headteacher presented governors with the draft action plan, but had left parts deliberately blank in order to encourage them to volunteer their services. He felt this had been a positive approach to getting governors practically involved in a specific aspect of the action plan.

Time factors and action planning

... we had to do all of this within 40 days... the quality of teaching and learning, assessment... I mean, that is what school is basically about... What we were being asked to do was put the school right, on paper, in 40 days and then get on with it. It was all rather rushed **Headteacher**

Regardless of whichever method was chosen to draw up the action plan, there was one difficulty experienced by all case-study schools: the pressure of time. This was mentioned repeatedly by various interviewees in all schools. It was generally felt that the timescale of 40 days in which schools had to produce their action plan, was unrealistic, bearing in mind that discussions and drafting of the plan took place in addition to normal school activities.

As reported earlier, time constraints were sometimes cited as a reason for not being able to involve all staff in initial discussion, an approach which some headteachers said they would want to take in the future. Where this did take place, interestingly, the drafting had to be divided between the headteacher and deputy head despite wanting to involve others at this stage.

There was the mental problem as it were, of doing it after school... after a day of teaching, getting our minds around some incredibly complex issues, trying to get something sensible to write down... to turn what we wanted to do into actual statements of what we were trying do. **Headteacher**

Another aspect relating to time was that in nearly all schools, action planning took place in individuals' personal time, in addition to normal duties. Due to the cost of supply cover and lack of non-contact time, most meetings took place after school. Not

surprisingly, this put additional strain on those involved and made it harder to focus on such a major task.

With the benefit of experience, some headteachers felt that it would have been a good idea to have saved up and used consecutive staff development days for action planning, instead of holding initial discussions and brainstorming sessions after school. They felt this would have facilitated wider staff participation, better concentration and, argued one deputy head, staff would have been more motivated if these had been organised as soon as possible after the inspection.

Advice and support for action planning

Some schools chose to approach local authority advisory services or external consultants for help in action planning. In these schools, most of the advice and support received was in the form of discussions which were mainly used to:

- clarify the meaning of the key issues for action in schools' inspection reports
- help senior management to develop ideas to address the key issues and move the school forward
- discuss realistic timeframes for implementing the strategies identified in the school's action plan.

Usually, headteachers discussed these issues with the school's link adviser/inspector in their LEA, although some headteachers had discussions with the chief inspector in the LEA, others sought the advice of external consultants (ex-LEA) and one headteacher of a grant-maintained school discussed the school's action plan with an adviser from a neighbouring LEA.

In a few schools, the LEA adviser had more direct involvement in the action plan. In one school, the adviser was present during the oral feedback from inspectors and also acted as a neutral chairperson in action-planning meetings. In another school, the LEA inspector had a major role in planning, coordinating and participating in a brainstorming evening for staff and governors to discuss the action plan.

Local authority advisory services and external consultants could also be used to provide support in more specific areas during the action-planning process, as was found in some of the case studies:

- training courses on action planning — either general courses, or specific sessions on-site for governors and staff

- documentation on action planning, including examples of formats of action plans
- comments on drafts produced.

Perhaps a less obvious source of advice and information on action planning is from headteachers who have already been through the process themselves. They are in a position to draw upon their own experience of planning and the benefits and disadvantages of particular approaches. One of the headteachers interviewed did just this and found it to have been a valuable experience. In his particular case, a group of local headteachers got together informally and talked about their OFSTED experiences to headteachers who had not yet been inspected.

> *Before the OFSTED inspection came, a group of us local heads got together with colleagues who had been through the process to explain to us the process of what would go on.* [That was] *very useful — they were super. We arranged to have lunch and an afternoon working session and they brought their reports and action plans and they were very very frank... Those were really useful* [sessions], *being able to talk to someone else. It wasn't a formal meeting and was extremely good. That was before OFSTED so I had that very much in mind when we came to work on our* [action] *plan.*
>
> **Headteacher**

Some headteachers mentioned that, with hindsight, they felt they would have benefited from speaking to headteachers of inspected schools before they started their action planning.

CHECKLIST: DRAWING UP THE ACTION PLAN

Drawing up the action plan is inevitably time-consuming and can be something of a challenge. The following points might help you to think about what approach would best suit your situation.

Consultation with teachers and governors

- ❑ Have you weighed up the advantages and disadvantages of involving as many teaches and governors as possible in consultation over the plan?
- ❑ Can decisions taken to limit the number of people involved be justified? Is saving time the only consideration? Are there potentially longer-term benefits of involving more people that override the time factor?
- ❑ Do some teachers have a disproportionate level of input into the plan compared to others? Are there good reasons for this?

- ❑ Are junior teachers being adequately consulted? Do they feel they have 'ownership' of the plan or do they see it as a senior management document? Are you aware of how teachers feel about the level of their involvement?

- ❑ Have governors been given the opportunity and encouragement to participate in *early* discussions? Are you intending to bring them in only to 'rubber-stamp' decisions at a later stage? If so, why?

- ❑ Could the need to draw up an action plan be a useful opportunity to discuss with the governing body their level of involvement in school management generally?

- ❑ Are there specific areas of the plan that could be drafted by a governors' subcommittee rather than by teachers? If so, how are you going to approach this? Do you expect them to volunteer? How might they be encouraged to become more involved?

Time factors

- ❑ When are action planning meetings going to take place?

- ❑ Would it be possible to use development days to discuss ideas for the action plan?

- ❑ Can you afford to purchase external supply cover to allow some teachers to work on the action plan during school hours? Are there alternatives, such as teachers providing classroom cover for each other? What would be the repercussions of this?

Advice and support

- ❑ Would it help to discuss your plan with member(s) of the LEA advisory team? If so, at what stage would their involvement be most useful?

- ❑ Would it be useful to have other external comments on the plan before it is finalised, e.g. from staff from schools that have experience of drawing up and implementing an action plan?

6. FORMAT AND CONTENT OF THE ACTION PLAN

Action plans are the main tool for development after an OFSTED inspection. It is therefore important that the action plan should be a working document that will guide the school's development in response to the inspection report — a clear, concise plan that can be referred to at a glance, from which it is explicit what will be taking place in the school, who has specific responsibility for an area and when it will happen. This chapter focuses on various components that go to making up a good action plan.

Official guidelines

Circular 7/93 recommends particular criteria which schools should include in their action plans:

- the specific action to be taken under each key issue
- personnel responsible for specific action should be identified
- setting target dates for action points.
- resource implications of implementing the action plan
- success criteria for each action.

The revised *Framework for the Inspection of Schools* (OFSTED, 1995a) introduced modifications in the reporting of key issues, stipulating that these should be ordered in priority of importance in improving pupils' attainment. These changes should assist schools inspected under the new framework, by helping them to determine the scale of work to be undertaken, and in drawing up a timetable for improvement. The new framework was introduced after the case-study schools in this study were inspected.

Setting clear targets

To derive the maximum benefit from the action plan and its implementation, it is important for schools to be absolutely clear about what they are trying to achieve. This means not just responding mechanically to the statement in the inspection report. They need to spend time thinking about why the key issues need addressing and how doing so will benefit pupils' education.

One of the ways that some of the case-study schools did this was to identify what *objectives* lay behind each of their key issues for action. Once the objectives were clarified, it was easier to itemise the actions or tasks that were necessary in order to fulfil them.

By analysing the key issues for action in this way, they were able to draw together a common goal in what were on the face of it separate tasks. The terminology varied between schools, sometimes appearing as an 'objective' in the action plan and sometimes as a 'desired outcome'. Also, some schools identified specific tasks first, showing what the overall objective for these was, while other schools described the overall objective of the key issues. However, the result was much the same: key issues for action had been analysed in terms of goals that *the school* was seeking to achieve for its pupils. The following two examples illustrate two different approaches to analysing key issues for actions:

Example 1: A school that identified a desired outcome for each key issue

Key issue:	*The school should further develop the management of the school by governors and senior staff to bring about more effective and more comprehensive curriculum development.*
Desired outcome:	The governors will be fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. In particular with the senior management team they will have a greater role in the strategic planning and overall direction of the school. Through the established committee structure, the governors will be able to make informed decisions on curriculum development and other whole-school issues. This will help foster the partnership between the wider community and the school.

Example 2: A school that chose to include both an aim and objective for each key issue, before itemising the specific action this would entail

Key issue:	*Review planning systems to ensure that all staff interpret them in the same way and define more precisely what children are to learn.*
Aim:	To review existing practice and build on strengths within medium and daily planning.
Objective:	Review collaboration policy. Define more clearly learning outcomes in daily planning. Help children to understand the purpose of their learning.

Success criteria

The objective, or desired outcome, is of course closely linked to the *success criteria* a school may identify in their action plan as a way of monitoring subsequently whether implementation of the action has taken place. Indeed, some schools used their 'desired outcomes' as both their objectives and as their success criteria.

However they are presented, success criteria are a crucial component of any good action plan. However, the difficulty with success criteria is in determining whether or not they have been met. Is it possible to *measure* successful implementation? In many cases it is certainly not easy because the success criteria are necessarily subjective. While subjective judgements will inevitably play a part in gauging success, where possible, schools should try to think of an objective way of assessing whether the objectives relating to a key issue have been implemented. Two case-study schools (both secondary) had a key issue that concerned *raising the standards of education* and *achievement of pupils* in their school. However, there was a striking difference in the success criteria each school identified in its action plan to measure whether standards of teaching had been raised — see examples 3 and 4.

Example 3: A school that specified *quantifiable* objective indicators of success

Key issue:	*The school should take steps to raise the standards and the quality of education for pupils of less than average ability*
Sucess criteria:	1. Any future inspection will identify the quality of teaching as satisfactory or above in 90 per cent of lessons observed. 2. The quality of learning will be identified as satisfactory or above in 90 per cent of all lessons observed in any future inspection. 3. The standard of achievement will be such that there will be a five per cent increase in the number of pupils gaining five A-C grades at GCSE in 1996 and a further five per cent increase over the following two years. 4. There will be an increase of one point in the overall A-level grade score by students in 1996 and a further one point increase in the next two years. 5. The level of achievement of pupils with special educational needs will be raised in line with the stated school SEN policy.

Example 4: A school that identified *subjective* success criteria

Key issue:	*Develop more precise management strategies for raising expectations and standards of achievement throughout the school*
Sucess criteria:	Better match of expectations between home and school. Improved pupils' self-esteem. Consistent application of standards among teaching staff.

Breaking down key issues

Schools should aim to itemise specific tasks or strategies that they will use to address each key issue. By doing this, key issues will be more manageable and should enable all those involved to see exactly what action will be taking place. Again, the value of taking time to discuss the specifics of what action will actually be taking place must be emphasised. Some case-study schools had already had initial discussions in working groups on particular key issues as part of the action-planning process, and so were much more specific about what action needed to be taken to move the school forward (Example 5).

Example 5: Illustrating the large number of detailed actions that were identified to addresss one key issue

Key issue:	*Improve the quality of classroom management, planning and teaching in some classes, most particularly in Years 1 and 2 and in some classes in the juniors*
Strategies:*	Reorganisation of staff and classes, reverting to one-form entry — extra welfare support. Inset training on classroom organisation 4.9.95. Policy drafted. Policy written and in operation. Curriculum policies. Schemes of work. LEA initiative with regard to Dearing. Teaching and Learning policy written and in operation. Set up common planning processes and review. SMT monitoring practice. Policies agreed and published. Implementation of new curriculum. Professional development training for all staff. Linked closely to key issues 5 and 7.

* *The action plan included other components such as completion dates, personnel involved, monitoring strategies, etc. These have not been included in this example.*

Outlining who will be involved in addressing key issues

It is important that each specific task in the action plan has a designated person(s) who will be involved in implementing specific tasks in the action plan. Some schools preferred to name the person who would have overall responsibility for making sure a particular action was taken, under the heading 'person responsible'. Where possible, schools should avoid a 'top down' approach to disseminating ideas and suggestions for good practice, and consider adopting a more whole-school approach to introducing change in current practice.

Timescale

It is important that schools decide upon a realistic timeframe in which they will be able to implement the key issues in the action plan, bearing in mind that certain key issues can be implemented in a relatively short time, whilst others may take a number of years before all aspects have been addressed satisfactorily. Again, having a clear idea of exactly what action will take place to address each key issue will help in calculating how long it will take to implement the various aspects of the plan. This in turn will enable schools to decide on when certain action should take place, and how it fits in with what else is being addressed in the school at that time.

It may be the case that a particular key issue is better implemented over an extended period of time in order for the school to derive maximum benefit. For example, the key issue in one school's inspection report was '*to improve the provision of physical education for all pupils and to take steps to raise standards in this subject, particularly at key stage 2*'. After considering the various aspects of PE that they felt should be addressed, and having spoken to their LEA adviser, they decided that this issue would need four school terms to really give it the attention it needed to ensure improved standards in the long term. In this way, they were able to implement the issue in detail and to great effect.

Prioritising key issues for action

Several headteachers commented on the importance of prioritising key issues and tasks at the outset of implementing the action plan.[1] Although different factors had been used by schools to decide on the *order* of priority, the overriding

[1] *The revised OFSTED Framework for the Inspection of Schools requires inspectors to list key issues for action in order of priority in their inspection report.*

impression was that when it came to actually implementing the action plan, having an order of importance and an agreed pace of implementation made it much easier to begin putting the plan into practice.

Some key issues will inevitably take longer than others to implement because of the their very nature. Also, in reality, complete implementation of the plan may not be achieved for a number of years as teachers need to absorb recommendations fully and make them part of their everyday classroom practice. Therefore, it makes sense to think about the different timescales needed for each key issue, and plan to address these in an order that will spread the workload for everyone involved and maximise energy and effort on each key issue as it is addressed.

Schools may wish to consider the following approaches used by some of the case-study schools to decide on the order of implementation of key issues in their action plan.

- ***Simplest first approach.*** Start the implementation process by working through the most straightforward key issues, i.e. those that can be addressed quickly, easily, cheaply or with the need for little or no consultation (e.g. health and safety issues). However, a cautionary note should be added here, since obviously the very key issues that are more challenging may well be ones that, once implemented, will have the greatest benefit on the *education* of the children in the school.

- ***Existing priorities from the outstanding SDP.*** Start by addressing those key issues that relate to ongoing areas for improvement as identified in the school development plan. Key issues that reflect the staff's own interests and priorities are more likely to be tackled enthusiastically and with commitment.

- ***Look for logical progression and linked key issues.*** The key issues for action may suggest a logical order in which they should be addressed. For example, a school may decide to work on a key issue intended to improve curriculum planning at the same time as an issue to improve the quality of teaching, as the first issue may be so interwoven with the other as to render them difficult to tackle separately in any case. A key issue concerned with assessment could follow at an appropriate time after.

- ***Some key issues were found to require work in the short, mid and long term.*** In some cases, schools may find it more useful to devote several terms to just one key issue. This

may be because there is so much work to be done on it, e.g. gathering information and advice from external sources or revising detailed schemes of work, or because the whole staff needs to be involved, e.g. in peer observation, departmental meetings or INSET.

Costing resources

Time spent thinking through what resources will be required to implement each aspect of the action plan, and costing these resources, will enable schools to plan how to spend their school budget, and decide whether they will need to prioritise spending on certain items in favour of others.

As well as material resources such as text books and equipment, practical resources should also be listed. These may include:

- development days
- LEA adviser time
- supply cover
- external professional development
- staff time for meetings
- individual staff working on specific tasks
- governor meetings
- secretarial and ancillary time.

Several case-study schools identified the cost of resources. To some extent, the level of detail achievable depended on the particular key issue. However, as the following Example 6 illustrates, at times it was possible to itemise all probable expenditure, with the source of funding.

Example 6: Showing how one school not only specified the amount of funding needed, but also identified the source

Key issue:	*The school should review the structure and organisation of classes for pupils in Y9 and at KS4 with a view to ensuring equality of access in the curriculum for all pupils.*		
Resources:	1. Additional course material for Spanish	£1500	School budget
	2. Supply costs for staff visiting other institutions and for investigation	£600	GEST
	3. Time to investigate options and banding	20 hours	Directed time
	4. Time to investigate underachievement and develop strategies	4 hours x 4	Directed time

A summary of the action plan

A summary document or timetable of action will provide an immediate indication of what action will be taking place over the given period of implementation. The summary is intended to present information in such a way as to enable people to know what is happening in the school at a glance. Details relating to personnel involved, resources needed, monitoring and success criteria should not be included in the summary. The following examples overleaf, from two case-study schools, show how this can be presented.

An important advantage of creating this type of summary of the action plan is that it helps in highlighting any potential problems with the overall timetable. For example, it may not have been realised that important deadlines for several key issues all end during the same term. If these key issues are the responsibility of the same members of staff, this can be particularly difficult to manage, but even if different members of staff are involved, it might be worth reviewing some of the timetabling, to allow for the possibility that other members of staff will need to become involved, either through expertise, time pressures or staff absence.

Example 7: Showing one school's summary timetable

OFSTED Action Plan 1995/'96

		Week: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Summer '96	*Curriculum*	*15/4/'96*	*22/4/'96*	*29/4/'96*	*6/5/'96*	*13/5/'96*	*20/5/'96*	*27/5/'96*	*3/6/'96*	*10/6/'96*	*17/6/'96*	*24/6/'96*	*1/7/'96*	*8/7/'96*	*15/7/'96*		
		← ***Assessment*** →										← ***Curriculum Planning*** →					
			Maths Portfolio		*3 Core subjects of NC*		*Policy*						*for next term*				
	Premises		*Repair perimeter fence*					***Half term***		*Replace hall lighting*						*Repaint class 2 and practical area*	
											Paint classrooms						
	Policy																
Spring '96	*Curriculum*	*3/1/'96*	*8/1/'96*	*15/1/'96*	*22/1/'96*	*29/1/'96*	*5/2/'96*	*12/2/'96*	*19/2/'96*	*26/2/'96*	*4/3/'96*	*11/3/'96*	*18/3/'96*	*25/3/'96*			
		← *P.E.* →					*Parents' evenings*		← ***P.E.*** →								
		Games teaching		*Quality issues*					*Standards of Achievement Assessment*								
	Premises	*Remove jumping pit*			*Erect safety fencing*			***Half term***		*Level grassed area*							
				Repair slope							*Install protective grill for kiln*						
	Policy	*Prospectus*				*Bullying*				*Finance Auditor's Report*			*Sex Education*				
Autumn '95	*Curriculum*	*4/9/'95*	*11/9/'95*	*18/9/'95*	*25/9/'95*	*2/10/'95*	*9/10/'95*	*16/10/'95*	*23/10/'95*	*30/10/'95*	*6/11/'95*	*13/11/'95*	*20/11/'95*	*27/11/'95*	*4/12/'95*	*11/12/'95*	*18/12/'95*
		← *R.E.* →									*Marking Policy*				← ***Curriculum Planning*** →		
			Guidelines				*Assessment & Recording*						*RoA*		*for next term*		
	Premises		*Flat roof resurfacing*						***Half term***			*Classrooms carpet & curtains*					
	Policy		*Attendance*														

OFSTED Action Plan 1996/'97

		Week: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Summer '97	Curriculum	← Planning		Science		Investigations →			← Assessment			Review of policy & practice →		Curriculum Planning for next term →			
	Premises			Measurement				Half term								Paint classrooms	
	Policy																
Spring '97	Curriculum	←		P.E.		→			← Maths			→		Curriculum Planning for next term →			
	Premises		Dance development					Half term		Assessment tasks							
	Policy		Medical facilities reviewed							Resources	Guidelines		Equal opportunities				
Autumn '96	Curriculum	← Special needs policy		P.E.		→	Classroom Management			← Reading	Handwriting	English →			← Curriculum Planning for next term →		
	Premises		Gymnastics development						Half term			Range of writing	Poetry	Media writing			
	Policy																

Example 8: Showing another school's summary timetable

SUMMARY SHEET AND TIMETABLE

Key Issue	Action Planned (individual targets produced by breaking down key issue)	Person(s) with overall responsibility	TIMETABLE								
			Year: 1995/96			Year: 1996/97			Year: 1997/98		
			Summer	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Spring
5.	1. Draw up curriculum plan for next five years. 2. Review of guiding principles of curriculum. 3. Extend guidance for pupils making choices of either courses or careers. a. Deploy Careers service in year 9 P.S.C. programme. b. Introduce post-16 courses evening. c. Increase frequency of careers convention. 4. Monitor and evaluate curriculum plan and update when required. 5. Inform parents of school priorities through Governors' Report to Parents and Newsletters.	Deputy Head (Curriculum) Governors' Staffing and Curriculum Committee Head of Careers and Senior Management team Deputy Head (Curriculum) and Heads of Departments Governors and Headteacher	↔	↔ Half-termly	↔	↔			↔	↔ Evaluation	
6.	1. As interim measure adapt existing procedures for registration. 2. Consideration of timings of actual day. 3. Inform staff of statutory responsibilities. 4. Publish accurate attendance figures through Annual Report to Parents.	Deputy Head (Curriculum) Headteacher Headteacher and Senior teacher (Pastoral) Headteacher and Chairman of Governors	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔ Evaluation		↔	↔	
7.	1. Discuss present situation with Governors. 2. Investigate accommodation available for Act of Worship. 3. Investigate willingness of staff to contribute to Daily Act of Worship. 4. Present findings to Governors.	Headteacher Deputy Head (Buildings) Headteacher Headteacher	↔	↔	↔		↔			↔ Evaluation	

CHECKLIST: FORMAT AND CONTENT OF ACTION PLANNING

Format

- ❑ In both phases of this research, it was evident that many schools would have welcomed advice about the format of their action plan. For some, deciding on this wasted valuable time. From the case-study interviews and analysis of more than 170 action plans, it appears that the following headings ought to feature if your plan is to be as useful and practical as possible.
  - Key issues for action (from inspection report).
  - Aims or objectives (relating to each key issue).
  - Action points (relating to each key issue).
  - Lead person responsible for implementation of each aspect.
  - Other personnel involved in implementation.
  - Timescale for implementation of each action.
  - Resources needed: practical, material, cost, staffing.
  - Success criteria for each action.
  - Monitoring: roles and responsibilities.
- ❑ If you do decide not to use some of these headings (or similar ones), is it likely to affect the outcome, in terms of implementation?
- ❑ Have you drawn up a summary of the action plan? Would a summary serve as a reminder to teachers about what is supposed to happen and when?

Content

- ❑ Have you spent time in groups or as a whole school analysing the key issues for action, particularly those that are complex, or over which there has been some dispute? (See Section 2 of Appendix 3.)
- ❑ Have school governors been involved in this discussion? Is their perspective on the key issues for action different? Has this been resolved?
- ❑ Have you identified clear objectives arising under each key issue for action?
- ❑ Have you prioritised your key issues for action?

- ❑ Are you satisfied that the prioritising has been done with sound educational reasoning? How does the order of priority relate to existing priorities in your school development plan?

- ❑ Have governors been involved in discussions relating to prioritising? If not, are they happy with your suggestions?

- ❑ Do the deadlines identified in the action plan appear reasonable? Is the work spread appropriately over several terms/years? Do any of the key deadlines come together in one term? Would this be difficult in terms of time or resources? (A summary timetable may help to identify potentially difficult periods.)

- ❑ How are you going to handle the link with the school development plan? Will there be two documents? What will happen to the priorities in the SDP?

Success criteria

- ❑ Your plan needs to include success criteria for each key issue or action. Without them, it is more difficult for those monitoring implementation to establish if the plan is being carried out. You might find it useful to consider the following issues when deciding on success criteria:
  - Are most of your success criteria ones that can be measured?
  - If not, are there any measurable criteria that could possibly be identified?
  - What are the implications of having measurable criteria?

Costing out the action plan

- ❑ You need to think about what the cost implications of your plan will be. Try to answer the following questions:
  - Have resource implications been sufficiently itemised in the plan?
  - Are they realistic? Do you have the resources to implement the plan?
  - What are you going to do about key issues for action that you can't address for resource reasons? Could they be deferred until the next financial year?
  - Have *all* resource implications been considered, e.g. INSET, supply cover, staff time for meetings, governor training, secretarial and ancillary staff time?
  - Have you considered prioritising key issues in relation to resource implications? What would be the educational implications of this?

7. IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION PLAN

Between six months and a year on from inspection, virtually all schools had, at least, begun to implement most of their key issues. About a quarter of schools had gone a good deal further, and had substantially implemented more than half of their key issues.

Source: *Planning for Action, Part 1: a Survey of Schools' Post-inspection Action Planning* (Maychell and Pathak, 1997).

Once schools have drawn up their action plan and sent it to OFSTED, there may be a feeling that the inspection process is, at last, completely over. While in one sense this is true, the real work is in fact only just beginning, because schools need to set about implementing the plan without delay. Many of those interviewed, in particular parent governors, expressed concern that children in the school were not getting the best from their education while shortcomings identified in the inspection remained outstanding. There can be no doubt that some key issues for action are easier to tackle than others, but what are the overriding factors that facilitate the implementation stage? What are the factors that impede the process?

The case-study interviews with headteachers, teachers and school governors, revealed that a number of key elements greatly influenced how successful the school was in implementing the action plan. These were:

- the views of teachers and governors towards the inspection findings and the need for change
- the complexity of the key issues and the need to prioritise
- the advice, support and training, that schools could draw on
- schools' resources: staffing, financial and material.

The influence of each of these elements is explored in the sections that follow.

Teachers' and governors' commitment to change

Headteachers said that the most important factors facilitating implementation were *the commitment of the people involved* and *an understanding of the issues/process of action planning prior to inspection.*

Source: Planning for Action, Part 1: a Survey of Schools' Post-inspection Action Planning *(Maychell and Pathak, 1997).*

Headteachers interviewed as part of the research often mentioned how important the involvement of various personnel had been in the implementation process. In particular, several headteachers commented that the *commitment* of teachers and governors had been a crucial factor in the *extent* to which key issues for action had been addressed successfully.

Teachers' commitment to implementing the action plan

Schools where teachers were said to have shown greatest flexibility and loyalty to the demands of the action plan were those where they felt a distinct 'ownership' of the plan, where they accepted inspectors' recommendations and could see that there would be improvements as a result of implementation and where there was a sense that everyone in the school was working towards a common goal. In the main, this was usually the outcome of a sense of working in a team, both at the outset of action planning and during the process of implementing the plan. As a consequence, it was often the case that teachers were prepared to undertake additional responsibilities to implement the action plan, even where implementation meant forgoing previous priorities for development decided by the school before the inspection, or where initially they had not agreed with key issues identified by the inspectors.

What can schools do to encourage teachers' participation in, and acceptance of, the tasks necessary to implement the action plan? Drawing upon the experiences of the case-study schools, the following suggestions should be helpful:

- ***Involve teachers in the initial action-planning process.*** Teachers who had been involved in the process of drawing up the action plan, whether in discussions or writing the plan, had a stronger feeling of ownership of the plan, and were more prepared to invest energy and enthusiasm during the implementation stages because they had a good understanding of the potential benefits to pupils once the plan had been implemented.

- ***Involve teachers in making decisions about implementation of the plan.*** Teachers' attitudes towards implementation also seemed to be more favourable where the headteacher had taken a consultative approach to implementation — where teachers were involved in making decisions, where they took part in drawing up or amending policies that would affect them in future — i.e. where implementation did not have a solely 'top-down' approach.

- ***Acknowledge teachers' dedication and hard work.*** Where possible, headteachers acknowledged the commitment and additional work pressures on individuals by giving them some non-contact time to address aspects of the implementation process instead of these tasks always having to take place in addition to classroom teaching. In addition, a small number of schools were able to reward individuals with additional responsibility points for their involvement in specific areas of the action plan.

Governors' participation in implementing the action plan

In some schools, governors were found to have played an invaluable role during the implementation of the action plan. Several headteachers commented on how helpful their governors had been, not only in terms of providing moral support or allocating additional resources for implementation, but also in terms of taking responsibility for carrying out the actions associated with addressing certain key issues. In some cases, due to the way the school usually operated, existing governor subcommittees took responsibility for aspects of the action plan that were linked to their existing remit, for example, issues related to health and safety issues or the school budget. However, that is not to say that governors were always consigned to key issues that did not have an educational focus. Several case-study schools set up working groups involving both teachers *and* governors, charged with drawing up or revising curriculum policies. Some governors felt somewhat uneasy about the contribution that they could make, being lay people in a specialist group. Yet in other schools, both teachers and governors felt that the process of being involved in such discussions had moved them forward in terms of their understanding of the educational issues involved and therefore had enhanced the potential contribution that they could make to the school in future. So what can schools do to maximise the involvement of governors in implementing their action plan? A two-pronged approach is likely to be most helpful:

- ***Give governors responsibility for implementing any 'non-educational' key issues for action.*** These might relate to purely administrative tasks, or to skills they have in their own working life, e.g. finance, management. This enables the headteacher and teaching staff to focus on more complex, curriculum-oriented key issues.

- ***Maximise the free resources that governors can offer — their time, encouragement, willingness to be of service.*** The previous point notwithstanding, every effort should be made to see the governors as a resource that requires training to maximise the full potential to the school. Governors ought not to be confined to the limited 'lay' key issues that might come up from time to time in inspection reports. After all, OFSTED gives them the responsibility of drawing up the plan and seeing that it is implemented. (Chapter 5 addresses this aspect in greater detail.)

- ***Invest in training.*** Governors often lack confidence when dealing with educational terminology and issues. Could any teacher INSET occasions be opened up to include governors? Could teachers provide one-off talks on aspects of the curriculum at governing body meetings? Could these be offered more widely to parents as a way of helping them, too, to understand what the school is aiming to do and how it tackles the teaching of various aspects?

- ***Involve governors in monitoring the implementation.*** Where success criteria had been identified in the action plan, several case-study schools found that governors fulfilled an extremely useful role in visiting the classrooms, observing lessons and talking to teachers about the changes that had taken place as part of the implementation process (see Chapter 8 for more details).

Complexity of the key issues

The very nature of certain key issues for action was itself sometimes a factor hindering implementation. Key issues that were easy to implement did not require too much input in terms of staff time and/or school resources. However, several schools found that some of their key issues were extremely difficult to address for some, if not all, of the following reasons:

- complex issues involved, requiring a good deal of discussion, planning and time for implementation to occur
- elapsed time necessary to assess whether the action taken was going to result in a successful outcome

- difficulty in identifying objective, measurable success criteria, resulting in problems *monitoring* whether implementation has occurred.

(Chapter 6 looks at some of the issues relating to prioritising 'easy' and 'more challenging' key issues.)

Advice, support and training

Training and advice on implementing certain aspects of the action plan were said to have been an important factor in schools' progress on implementing key issues. In the case studies, in general, there was nearly always some aspect of the plan that required INSET, either on an individual or group basis. Advice from advisers or fellow practitioners was also considered to be of great use in evaluating a school's choice of specific methods to address key issues.

Schools may wish to consider the following forms of training and advice used by interviewees in the research, which were felt to have been very helpful in implementing key issues.

- ***Whole-school INSET using development days.*** This can be a very effective method of bringing together the whole teaching staff (and governors if applicable) and using this time to either receive training from an external agency, develop policies or discuss practical ways ahead on a specific key issue. This is a good way of working in a team, helping people accept and understand changes taking place in the school and gathering input from everyone who will be involved in putting the key issue into practice. For example, one school used a development day to focus on aspects of classroom management and planning, which was one of the key issues in their action plan. Part of the day was spent discussing ideas for a new policy on classroom management and planning, while the rest of the day was given over to practical sessions where the teachers went into classrooms and looked at ways in which the rooms could be better organised to aid classroom management.

- ***INSET provided by the LEA.*** Where available and affordable, this is a valuable form of training, as it can be tailored to the school's particular needs.[1] In addition, the LEA might treat the request as a priority if the training need arises from a key issue in the report. Also, schools might be able to use the weight of the key issue to gain a place on a heavily subscribed LEA course, as was the situation in one case-study school.

[1] *Since these schools were inspected, new procedures have been introduced regarding the reallocation of GEST funding to inspected schools.*

- ***Advice from the LEA.*** Schools may be able to approach LEA advisers (or ex-LEA advisers who may offer help on a consultancy basis) for advice on areas of the action plan. This could take the form of one-off advice, for example to ask the adviser's view of the school's new approach to assessment practices, or development work on a more long-term basis. One case-study school was fortunate enough to be offered the chance to take part in an LEA initiative on curriculum planning that was taking place at the time. This meant that LEA advisers worked alongside teachers in bringing the school's schemes of work in line with the National Curriculum. This was of great help to the school, as schemes of work had to be addressed as part of one of the key issues in the action plan.

- ***Advice from other schools.*** It can be very helpful to draw upon the experience of others when implementing certain key issues. For example, before introducing a change in current practice, it could be useful to get in touch with a local school that has been praised in its inspection report for their approach to this area. As was the experience in one school, it may be possible to arrange visits for senior management or coordinators to visit their counterparts in other schools in the area to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of adopting specific practice.

Resources

Inevitably, there were resource implications from at least some of the key issues for action in each of the case-study schools. These included: financial resources; material resources (e.g. books, equipment); and staffing and logistical issues (e.g. staff needing time off for meetings, supply cover, INSET). A range of strategies was deployed to address these needs.

- ***Saving money the year prior to inspection.*** Knowing that the inspection was coming up, one school set aside money in its budget over two consecutive years to allow resources to be deployed on areas of need identified in the inspection. This provided a secure basis on which to begin action planning, knowing that the resources needed would be forthcoming.

- ***Focusing on existing SDP priorities that have already been allocated funds.*** This can be a useful way forward for schools if their SDP priorities overlap with inspectors' key issues for action. One case-study school took this approach, though it was only partly financially motivated; they saw their own previously identified goals as equally important

to those that arose from the inspection. However, it meant that the resources and staff time needed to address that particular key issue for action had already been set aside, and they could reasonably defer other key issues until the next financial year.

- ***Using existing development days to tackle issues arising in the action plan.*** This can be a useful strategy if time to tackle issues, or getting staff together, is a problem. It does, of course, mean that the schools need to plan the use of these days carefully, and to know when the inspection is going to take place. One school saved one of its development days and timed it to take place immediately after the inspection. They used the time together for debriefing — coming to terms with the findings, deciding how they would approach the action planning issues, etc.

CHECKLIST: IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION PLAN

Progress on implementation

- ❑ How do teachers and governors feel about progress on implementation? Has it been too fast or too slow?
- ❑ Are you happy that the implementation is taking place as it was planned? If not, what factors have caused problems or delays? What strategies could be used to offset these difficulties?
- ❑ Is the action plan a working document, i.e. is it used as a planning and/or monitoring tool? Is it useful to SMT, teachers and governors?
- ❑ Are teachers being expected to implement the plan without access to the support, advice and resources that were originally intended?
- ❑ Are teachers and governors feeling adequately rewarded/ appreciated for the extra effort that has been put into the inspection and action planning phase?
- ❑ Are modifications to the plan needed? When are you going to do this? Who will be involved? When will governors be consulted?

Outcomes of implementation

- ❑ Where implementation has taken place, have desired outcomes been achieved? Where applicable, has there been a change in classroom practice? Has implementation made any difference?

- ❑ Do you feel that the inspection has led to substantive improvements in the quality of the education pupils are receiving? Is this a subjective judgement or are there objective measures that can be identified?

- ❑ Has drawing up and implementing the action plan led to other improvements, e.g. teacher satisfaction, improved involvement of governors? Before the next inspection would it be useful to explore these issues?

- ❑ If implementation of action points has not resulted in the intended outcome, what should happen now?

8. MONITORING PROGRESS

If schools intend to capitalise on the time invested in action planning and on the additional workload of implementing these action plans, it is vital to know whether agreed action is taking place, that teachers understand changes in policy and, where applicable, there has been a change in classroom practice.

This chapter begins by identifying the different types of monitoring procedures used by schools, based on the experiences of the case-study schools taking part in this research. The following section discusses issues arising from these monitoring strategies such as difficulties encountered and the practicalities of involving various personnel in monitoring the action plan. Examples of the most effective monitoring systems found in the case-study locations are presented in the final section of the chapter.

Allocating time to monitor

It is vital that schools are realistic about the level of monitoring that can be achieved in the time available. Schools must consider the time implications of the desired level of monitoring and build in time for staff to assess what progress has been made, whether this is through observation work or discussions. Clearly, lack of time is a common difficulty in schools, and the cost of supply cover means that this is often an unrealistic solution to providing much-needed non-contact time.

In-depth monitoring can be a considerable burden, as was the case in one school. A major focus of this school's action plan was classroom management, planning and teaching. To facilitate implementation of new policies, in particular the teaching and learning policy, it was decided that the deputy head would observe classes to ensure that policies and practice were being implemented. Senior staff agreed that this would be a good way in which to support colleagues — three of whom had been identified by inspectors as failing teachers — as well as keeping them in touch with how teachers were coping with putting policies into action. However, in reality, the deputy head found it very difficult to combine the observation work with her other commitments in the school. In addition to her role as deputy head, which included liaising with parents and being in charge of the school when the head

> ***There was a gap between what I had seen myself doing, and what I was actually doing. I had seen myself much more in this role of teacher tutor support, for everyone really — going inside, sitting down with people's plans for the week, planning with them what they were going to do and perhaps team teaching, being a role model for people, supporting them in a non-threatening way if possible, working alongside colleagues to develop their practice and implement the action plan, but that only happened on a rare few occasions. It happened a bit more with the NQTs because that was part of my role for them.*** **Deputy head**

was away, she had several other areas of responsibility. She was also supporting teachers in her capacity as special needs coordinator, which, given a history of neglect in this area under the school's previous headteacher, took up a considerable proportion of her time. She also had a tutor teacher role supporting newly qualified teachers — three out of seven of the teaching staff fell into this category. She was the main teacher to provide cover for absences within the school and, following the inspection, there were numerous absences. Consequently, she was unable to observe colleagues in the manner that had been indicated in the plan.

One way some schools found to manage the additional workload of monitoring was to share this responsibility rather than allocating it to one member of staff. For example, teachers in these schools often shared the responsibility for classroom observations between them. Not only did this ease the pressure of work on one individual but it also increased the awareness and knowledge of a greater number of people in the school. Staff spoke highly of the insight it had given them of colleagues' classroom practice, and this had enabled further discussion of ways of improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school. In addition, to reduce the cost of supply cover, teachers often covered one another's lessons, enabling observation and feedback to take place.

Keeping on track — formal procedures

Having a specific timescale of when particular monitoring procedures will take place will increase the likelihood of this monitoring actually happening. In addition, some case-study schools found that where they had chosen an informal method of monitoring their action plan, such as ongoing feedback from departments, they would have preferred a more formal structure. In one school, for example, the headteacher felt that formal review dates for each particular target would help them keep on track rather than the more general round of discussions and consultations that took place half-termly. The headteacher in another school also commented that while their informal mechanisms of reporting were taking place, she would have preferred a more formal method of monitoring.

Knowing that you have to report to someone external to the school, such as governors or parents, was found to be an effective check on progress. One head explained that writing detailed reports to governors each term focused his mind on what had been achieved in a term, and meant that he was alert to developments that should be taking place in the coming term.

Involving governors in monitoring

Governors need to be clear about the role that they will take in monitoring progress on the action plan. As one parent governor reasoned, there is a difference between getting involved in the day-to-day management of the school and monitoring what has been taking place over a given period of time. The value of governors' participation in monitoring was felt to be that they could provide a form of 'friendly pressure' on the school to meet targets specified in the plan because it was common knowledge that they would be monitoring progress. The application of such pressure should be supportive in manner, non-threatening and not so that it would place the school or individuals in a defensive position. Clearly, it would not be of any benefit for governors or schools to instigate artificial change for the sake of appearing to have met pre-agreed targets.

> ***I think the schools are more than capable of setting their own timescale. In fact, I think its important that they do set their own timescale. I don't think governors should do that.*** **Chair of governors**

It is vital, then, that senior managers set their own targets for implementing key issues in their action plan, and are not pressured by governors to set timescales that are unreasonable.

Inevitably, there are some governors who will see the monitoring process as an excellent opportunity for them to get involved in the school. There will be others, however, who whilst keen to support the school and take part in what is requested of them, will be less confident about their ability because of a perceived lack of educational expertise. Interviews with governors in the study showed that as with the drawing up of the action plan, such individuals felt that they were not knowledgeable enough about the educational system and could not therefore contribute fully to what was being asked of them.

> ***This ongoing monitoring process is not going to be easy for us because we're being asked to judge something that we are really not qualified to do, but nevertheless we're going to give it our best shot.*** **Parent governor**

Examples of governor participation in the case-study schools illustrated that governors do not have to rely upon headteachers and senior staff for information on progress on the action plan. Governors can, and should, be encouraged to find out how the plan is being implemented for *themselves*. It was obvious that some governors believed they could not do this as they did not have the professional knowledge to evaluate standards of teaching or classroom practice. Clearly, evaluation of *standards* should not be governors' responsibility, but what governors on subcommittees, working groups or as individuals can do is talk to teachers, sit in on classes and look through pupils' work to gain a *flavour of the developments* that have taken place. They can ask teachers what part they have played in implementing the

plan, how developments have affected their practice, what difficulties, if any, have arisen in working towards goals and what improvements, if any, have been noticed. This was found to be an important and valuable activity for both staff and governors. It provided teachers with the opportunity to take stock — to review and reflect on what implementation of the action plan meant in practice. Such discussions also acted as a reminder of what developments were taking place because of the action plan and ensured that the plan itself remained a working document.

Active involvement in the monitoring process serves to keep governors informed about what is happening in their school and can improve their knowledge and understanding of issues affecting staff and pupils. Indeed, one head described it as a form of 'professional development' for governors as well as important for the monitoring of the action plan. In this school, prior to the inspection there was a pattern of governors coming in to the school on a very informal basis, and also more formal visits by governors when someone would be nominated to visit the school before the next governing body meeting. However, from discussion with governors, it was apparent that they were not learning very much about the school and classes, even though they thoroughly enjoyed their visits to the classrooms. It was decided that the governors needed to come into school with a focus, with a specific brief in mind, and that these visits would be tied in with the action plan and what action was taking place each term. Time was allocated for the governor to meet with the relevant subject coordinator to go through the overall curriculum plan for that subject, briefing the governor on relevant resources needed to deliver certain aspects of the curriculum. The governor would then observe some classes. It was not felt that governors required any prior subject expertise. In contrast, the headteacher viewed it as a way of increasing governors' knowledge and expertise

> *... Governors* [were] *saying 'We don't know what we're supposed to do in art or what we're supposed to do in science or mathematics or information technology or whatever'.* [This] *is a way of bringing up their knowledge partly — you know, what does the National Curriculum ask us to do? It's really a way of providing if you like, in-service for governors so that it increases their knowledge of what's expected in that subject and how we actually deliver it, so it's a way of passing on information to governors... It isn't at all* [the case] *that they are inspecting mathematics or whatever, they're all saying 'We're not teachers, but we want to know about our school and how our school teaches each subject'. It's been really positive... It's an information point for the governors so that when they sit down to make a decision, they are much better informed about what is going on* [in the school]. **Headteacher**

Monitoring strategies

In addition to identifying key personnel responsible for taking the lead and/or ensuring that action under a key issue takes place, schools will benefit from adopting a wider monitoring policy that follows progress on the action plan *as a whole*, keeping staff, governors and parents informed of changes taking place in the school as a result of the action plan. Monitoring should not be merely an administrative exercise — active monitoring is a crucial indicator of whether what was planned to happen is actually taking place, what difficulties have been encountered in putting targets into practice, and how people feel about any new approaches taken.

Schools can use an assortment of monitoring strategies — nearly all the schools visited used a combination of at least two different approaches. Monitoring within the school or by governors was often complemented by reporting on progress to governors and parents. The following section identifies several practical approaches to monitoring and reporting, based on practice in the schools visited. These are:

- headteacher/SMT reviews
- monitoring by subcommittees
- departmental monitoring
- classroom visits by teachers
- teacher self-assessment
- school visits by governors
- an external review.

♦ *Headteacher/SMT reviews*

Some case-study schools reviewed progress on a half-termly or termly basis, by *setting targets for each term from the action plan and school development plan.* At the start of the next term or half term, developments would be noted, and new targets for the period set. Most commonly, responsibility for monitoring progress lay with headteachers or members of the senior management team. However, in two of the case-study schools (both primary), subject coordinators reviewed their own targets in this manner.

A more effective method of reviewing targets involved wider staff consultation. Through *collective and individual discussions* with staff, headteachers and senior staff gauged the level of implementation more accurately and gained an insight into colleagues' first-hand experiences of putting targets into action. Discussions were found to be most useful when they focused on specific policies, and coordinators or heads of department were asked to provide an update on implementation of the action plan in their subject area.

♦ *Monitoring by subcommittees*

Where schools identified *subcommittees* of staff and/or governors to take responsibility for deciding upon action for particular key issues, these were responsible for monitoring implementation in their given areas. Some subcommittees had a calendar for the development of policies and changes in practice for which they had responsibility, which were used to review progress.

♦ *Departmental monitoring*

Headteachers of secondary schools sometimes chose to delegate ongoing monitoring of the action plan to each department in the school. In such cases, departments reviewed their own progress, and that of other departments. Heads of department played a key role in monitoring implementation of the plan through departmental meetings, informal discussions and observing classes to ensure that practice was consistent within and across departments.

♦ *Classroom visits by teachers*

Although reviewing targets on paper provides senior managers with an indication of how much of the action plan has been implemented, it cannot provide them with a view of how it is being implemented in practice. Clearly, if inspectors' recommendations are to make a real difference to standards in pupils' education, it is important that implementation of the action plan is not merely an academic activity, but that key issues are adopted in practice, by all those affected.

Visits by subject coordinators or heads of departments to classes to monitor specific aspects of teaching taking place were felt to be an effective method of evaluating how implementation was taking place in the classroom . Time

allocated before and after such visits enabled the staff involved to discuss the objectives of the lesson to be observed, the focus of the monitoring, and to give feedback and advice following the visit. In some cases, schools had drafted a document on guidelines for such monitoring which acted as a prompt for identifying good practice in aspects of planning, recording, reporting and assessment, for example.

♦ *Teacher self-assessment*

On a more individual level, some schools chose to develop *teacher self-assessment* as a form of review. Using this approach, teachers were encouraged to reflect upon their own development as a result of implementing the action plan, and this fed into the school's appraisal programme. As schools became more aware of individuals' strengths and weaknesses, the action plan was tailored to build upon and share good practice, and address weaknesses, thereby raising the expectations of teachers and improving the quality of teaching to pupils.

♦ *School visits by governors*

Some schools were successful in encouraging governors to visit the school to talk to class teachers and coordinators/heads of department about changes in classroom practice that had taken place as a result of implementing the action plan. The primary purpose of these visits was *not* for governors to make a judgement on the quality of teaching or learning, but to find out about changes that had taken place in teaching, or in the curriculum, from teachers themselves, and for teachers to have the opportunity to review developments and discuss these with someone who was not as closely involved in the school as they were.

♦ *An external review*

External evaluation of schools' development by LEA advisers or private consultants was found to be useful in some cases. This was particularly so when it was felt that all key issues had been substantially implemented, to gauge the impact of implementation. On the other hand, some schools may wish to seek an external opinion, having started to implement a particular issue, to ensure that their approach is correct.

Reporting progress

Once monitoring schemes are under way, schools should consider how they intend to keep various groups of people up to date on what developments are taking place in the school in response to the action plan. Governors, parents and, perhaps most importantly, teachers should be regularly updated on what development is taking place in the school and the reasons for it.

♦ *Reporting progress to governors*

Headteachers commonly incorporated any developments on implementation of the plan in their termly report to governors, as part of their overall feedback on what had taken place in school during the term. The detail of feedback given to governors varied between schools. Some headteachers chose to provide governors with an informal description of events, not specifically focused on the action plan. Other schools used a more formal, detailed level of reporting, where the headteacher presented a detailed breakdown of developments on the action plan. Where governors had taken part in monitoring through involvement on subcommittees, the full governing body meeting was felt to be an appropriate forum for them to share their knowledge of implementation.

At times, it transpired that discussion on progress of the action plan was taking up a disproportionate time of governing body meetings. Where this was the case, in some schools, governors decided to meet more frequently; in others, it was decided to hold a more focused meeting specifically to discuss issues arising from implementing the action plan. Rather than having all governors present at this discussion, governors chose to elect a small group who would meet to discuss progress on implementation.

♦ *Reporting progress to staff*

Staff should also be kept informed of progress on the action plan. In the case-study locations, this was achieved in a variety of ways, in keeping with the usual lines of communication within a school.

Most commonly, **staff meetings** were used to update staff on developments in the school, and developments arising from implementing the action plan were mentioned here, even if the action plan was not specifically referred to. Some schools chose to use departmental meetings or heads of year meetings to provide feedback on progress to teaching staff. This relied

upon senior management updating heads of year and heads of department, who then reported back to staff on perhaps a weekly or half-termly basis. The depth of feedback to teaching staff using this approach was reported to be variable, as it was often dependent upon the interest and style of individual year and departmental heads.

Some schools chose to use **staff meetings** as a more participative forum, whereby *working groups, departmental representatives or subject coordinators* updated staff on particular aspects of the action plan that had taken place or would soon be taking place.
In some schools, knowledge of what action was taking place arose from informal communication and because all teaching staff played an active part in implementation. Therefore, teachers' knowledge of implementation came from their direct involvement in all aspects of the action plan. Discussions highlighted the fact that this was more likely to be the case in a primary school, where individual staff were involved in more aspects of the school. In such schools, staff meetings took the form of development sessions, and were used to discuss specific elements of key issues, such as deciding on an assessment policy, or determining what constitutes good teaching practice. Additionally, where a school chose to devote, for example, one term to the development of a specific key issue, or an aspect of a key issue, then staff were more likely to be aware of what progress was being made in that area.

Other methods of informing colleagues were **regular staff bulletins** bringing them up-to-date with wider developments in school, and more specifically those occurring in direct relation to the action plan. Some schools also circulated, or pinned up on a staff noticeboard, minutes of senior management meetings or governing body meetings where progress on the action plan had been discussed. Another method of updating staff was to produce a revised action plan at regular intervals which incorporated a summary on progress so far.

♦ *Reporting progress to parents*

Governors are required to make an annual report to parents about progress on the action plan. Also, some schools used the weekly or termly newsletter to notify them on developments that were taking place related to the action plan. The newsletter did not necessarily discuss the action plan in detail, but relating developments to the plan served to remind parents of the school's commitment to improving standards of education and achievement.

What are the most effective systems of monitoring?

Various monitoring strategies have been discussed in this chapter, and obviously schools should decide which of these will be most appropriate to their particular environment. Nevertheless, follow-up work in the case-study schools revealed specific approaches to monitoring that were more rewarding than other strategies. As reported earlier in the chapter, often schools used more than one approach to monitor the plan, and this appears to be a key element in the most effective monitoring systems. The best monitoring schemes will demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Monitoring is multi-layered and operating on several levels, from SMT to classroom teacher.
- Monitoring involves several members of staff and governors.
- Monitoring is not merely a 'top-down' administrative exercise.
- The process of monitoring heightens awareness of the action plan and maintains the momentum needed to implement and accept targets.
- Monitoring stimulates open discussion of the impact of implementation and sharing of experiences.
- Monitoring not only contributes to a wider understanding of events taking place in the school, but increases individuals' self-awareness and reflection of practice.

♦ *Examples of good practice*

The following descriptions are of two case-study schools where monitoring was perceived to be particularly effective in practice by staff, governors and the research team.

Example 1

Multi-layered strategies for monitoring implementation in one school served to monitor closely how the action plan was being implemented and also to extend communications within the school with the result that everyone was well aware of what action was taking place and what the school was aiming to achieve. The school used both formal and informal methods of monitoring progress and updating colleagues on action that had taken place. The following systems were used:

- The headteacher *set and reviewed targets for each term* from the school development plan and action plan. Subject coordinators would also be monitoring their own termly targets in this way, using non-contact time.
- The headteacher monitored implementation of some key issues *by informally providing advice and support* to staff, e.g. overseeing weekly curriculum plans and suggesting improvements, thereby emphasising the standards expected of staff.
- Staff meetings were used to update staff on developments in school in general, and also to focus on training needs identified in the action plan.
- A variety of communication channels to governors kept them up-to-date on progress:
  - governors received notes of staff meetings, so they were aware of in service training taking place and issues under discussion
  - governors were given a list of dates for staff meetings and encouraged to attend them, particularly in relation to their individual curriculum responsibility
  - individual governors visited the school at intervals to discuss with coordinators what developments had taken place in the curriculum
  - governors were invited to attend presentations and displays occurring as a result of implementing key issues in the action plan, e.g. reorganisation of library space
- Developments were mentioned in a weekly newsletter to parents.

Example 2

In another school, monitoring of the action plan operated on several levels, with governors, individual staff members and senior management all assigned various responsibilities for overseeing development. Monitoring consisted of:

- The headteacher monitoring progress through collective and one-to-one discussions with staff, focusing on the implementation of various policies. Each subject coordinator was asked for a review of implementation in their curriculum area.
- Timetabled classroom observations by different subject coordinators to monitor work on aspects of the curriculum. These included pre- and post- visit reviews between the coordinator and class teacher concerned, using diplomatic feedback strategies outlined by the headteacher and deputy head. Observations were facilitated by the use of a monitoring document developed within the school which highlighted key areas for observation.
- The headteacher compiling written reports for governors on progress on various issues on the basis of the discussions with staff.
- Governor subcommittees reviewing targets, progress and difficulties on the action plan. The senior management team updated each subcommittee on progress and targets via a written report. Each subcommittee then provided a written report to the full governing body, who then sent minutes of their meeting to the LEA.

CHECKLIST: PREPARING FOR ACTION PLANNING

Monitoring is an important part of action planning, and probably the one most easily overlooked. Unless strategies for monitoring implementation of your action plan are built in from the outset, there is every chance that planned improvements will be overlooked, delayed or indefinitely postponed as other competing demands arise. What will be the repercussions of this for the education of pupils in the school? What effect will this have on the outcome of the next inspection in several years' time? The following points should help to start your discussion about monitoring your action plan.

- ❑ Does the plan identify several tiers of personnel involved in overseeing progress on the key issues (e.g. governors, class teachers, SMT)?
- ❑ Is there a clear timeframe within which monitoring will take place?
- ❑ Is the level of monitoring specified in your action plan realistic? Does it take into account the overall timeframe and teachers' and governors' other responsibilities?
- ❑ How will teachers, parents and governors be updated on progress made on the action plan?
- ❑ Will external monitors, e.g. LEA personnel, staff from other schools, be involved in overseeing implementation of the plan?

9. OUTCOMES OF ACTION PLANNING

- What are the outcomes of action planning?
- How far does implementing the action plan contribute to improved standards in a school?

Almost all headteachers identified some positive outcomes from their experiences of inspection and action planning. Only one in five headteachers reported any negative outcomes from the whole inspection and action planning process.
Source: *Planning for Action 1: a Survey of Schools' Post-inspection Action Planning* (Maychell and Pathak, 1997).

On the basis of interviews in the case-study locations, the positive outcomes of action planning would appear to fall into two types: (1) those arising from the actual *process* of action planning and (2) those arising from *implementation* of the action plan. The following sections focus on each of these outcomes.

What do schools gain from the whole *process* of producing the action plan?

For many of the case-study schools, the actual process of action planning was felt to have been a useful experience in itself. Several headteachers and teachers mentioned that due to the action planning in their school, teacher involvement in decision making had increased, communications between teachers had improved and individuals were more willing to share ideas on teaching practice. In some schools, governors had increased their participation in the school as a result of their involvement in action planning. This was something that both school staff and the governors themselves saw as very positive.

In a national survey, six out of ten schools had incorporated the action plan into their school development plan.
Source: *Planning for Action, Part 1: a Survey of Schools'Post-inspection Action Planning* (Maychell and Pathak, 1997).

Several headteachers found that as a consequence of preparing their action plan, they had also improved their school development plan and the process of long term planning in general. The action plan was usually incorporated into their school development plan, which resulted in improvements in the format. Generally where this was the case, the development

the format. Generally where this was the case, the development plan was now more focused, staff knew exactly who would be responsible for taking forward different areas of development and there was a sense of greater openness and ownership of the plan. Incorporation of the action plan usually resulted in a more detailed outlook for the future than the previous school development plan, which had commonly been concerned with development over the coming year as opposed to the next four years.

What improvements result from *implementation* of the action plan?

OFSTED's rationale for the production of action plans is that, through their implementation, schools will improve the standards of education provided to pupils. Clearly, the extent to which standards have improved as a result of addressing key issues for action will depend upon the timeframe involved. Not surprisingly, several headteachers interviewed felt that it was too soon after the inspection[1] to tell whether there had been any real improvement in standards of teaching, and particularly any improvement in pupils' achievement. However, some outlined specific actions they believed would lead to *tangible* improvements, for example, a better policy and improved practice in assessment within the school, improved curriculum planning or improved standards in the delivery of specific subjects. Despite this, most heads found it difficult to say whether there had been an *overall improvement* in the school as a result of implementing the action plan. In some cases, they were clear that there was certainly more *discussion* about good practice in teaching, that teachers were more aware of what was expected of them and that teachers had reflected upon their teaching. It was hoped that these were indicators of improvements in the quality of teaching; however, they felt it was too soon to comment on whether this was actually the case.

Several interviewees felt that their school would have addressed many of the key issues identified in their inspection anyway. In some cases, they asserted that the inspection had actually made little or no difference to priorities already identified by the school, while in others, it had changed priorities which were felt to have been more important. Also, where a new head had been appointed, either just before the inspection or shortly afterwards, it was difficult to establish the extent to which the direction taken was a result of the inspectors' recommendations or due to new leadership. If the inspection itself was felt to have been particularly stressful or demoralising for staff, then this was often felt to overshadow any improvements that had so far arisen from implementation of the action plan.

[1] *Interviews in case-study schools were conducted approximately a year after schools were inspected.*

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APPENDIX 1

MEMBERS OF ADVISORY GROUP

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APPENDIX 2

TABLES SUMMARISING ANALYSIS OF ACTION PLANS

Table 1 Features of action plans (related to all, some or no key issues)

Aspects specified in action plan:	For ALL key issues %	For SOME key issues %	NOT indicated %	Unclear or N/A %	TOTAL %
Aims and objectives related to key issues	19	8	72	1	100
Key issues broken down into more specific actions	76	23	1	0	100
Actions linked to other categories, e.g. timescale	56	26	17	1	100
Lead person with overall responsibility for key issue	37	29	33	1	100
Timescale specified for implementation	50	47	2	1	100
Sucess	54	14	32	0	100

Percentages based on 177 schools' action plans.

Table 2 Features of action plans (present or not for any key issue)

Aspects specified in action plan:	For Any key issues %	NOT featured %	Unclear or N/A %	TOTAL %
Personnel who will be involved in implementation	92	8	0	100
Governor involvement in implementation	80	14	6	100
Resources needed for implementation	69	30	1	100
Staffing implications, e.g. INSET, non-contact time	92	7	1	100
Costs of implementation, e.g. resources, INSET	47	53	0	100
Monitoring arrangements	56	44	0	100
Summary timetable for four-year period	15	85	0	100

Percentages based on 177 schools' action plans.

Table 3 Types of key issues governors involved in *implementing*

Type of key issue	% Schools
School development planning	37
Meeting statutory requirements	26
Whole school issues, e.g. length of school day, accommodation, building improvements	20
Pastoral issues	19
Staff roles, responsibilities and/or training	18
Curriculum planning	18
Provision and/or resources	14
Curriculum delivery	12
Pupil achievement	10
Health and safety issues	8
Budgeting/administration arrangements	8
Subject specific issues	7
Pupil assessment	2

Percentages based on 177 schools' action plans.

APPENDIX 3

CHECKLIST GUIDE TO ACTION PLANNING

This is a checklist for headteachers, teachers and school governors who are involved in drawing up, implementing or monitoring their post-inspection action plans. It is not all-embracing, but focuses on many of the important points that need to be considered after an OFSTED inspection. Hopefully it will help to stimulate discussion and generate more ideas, tailored to suit your school's individual situation and needs.[1]

The checklist is a compilation of the main action points found at the end of each chapter of this report. In compiling these, the authors have drawn mainly on the action-planning experiences of ten case-study schools as well as those of the projects' advisory group (listed in Appendix 1).

1. THE IMPACT OF INSPECTION

Teachers' experiences of inspection can be very influential in how prepared they feel to set about action planning. The more positive their inspection experiences, the more likely it is that action planning will be viewed as a useful part of the process. It is therefore worth taking steps to try to make the inspection as positive an experience as possible.

Prior to the inspection

- ❑ How long does everyone need to prepare for the inspection? In deciding this, you should aim for a balance that allows plenty of time to accomplish what must be done, but does not turn a week-long inspection into a year-long process.

- ❑ It is worth considering how much paperwork really needs revising. Is all the work necessary? Will it be useful after the inspection? If not, what is the minimum that needs to be done?

- ❑ Some schools might find a pre-inspection meeting with the inspection team useful in allaying fears and explaining details. If this is to take place, it is a good idea to draw up a list of key questions in advance, such as:

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[1] *The OFSTED publication: Planning Improvement: Schools' Post-inspection Action Plans (OFSTED, 1995c) is another useful source of information and guidance on this subject.*

- Will inspectors provide a timetable for the inspection beforehand?
- Will inspectors keep the head informed of their plans on a day-to-day basis during the inspection as to which lessons are to be observed?
- Will teachers be notified prior to an inspector arriving in their classroom?
- Will only *full* lessons be observed?
- Will any discussion take place between inspectors and teachers during classroom observation?
- Will any discussion take place before or after classroom observation between inspectors and teachers?
- Will inspectors speak to pupils during the inspection? In lesson time?
- Will teachers receive any personal one-to-one feedback from inspectors?
- How will the oral feedback on the inspection findings be presented, to whom and when?

❑ Even if a pre-inspection meeting of this cannot be arranged, or is not deemed desirable, teachers need to know what to expect in terms of how the inspection will be conducted and what feedback they can expect. A telephone call between the head and registered inspector can suffice.

During the inspection

❑ During the inspection it is important to address any obvious misunderstandings or potential 'gaps' in inspectors' knowledge as soon as possible. Waiting until the feedback at the end of the inspection can be a mistake, since to resolve an issue inspectors may need to carry out further observation or check additional documentation. Obviously this becomes much more difficult once the inspection is over.

❑ Teachers might find it helpful during the inspection to monitor inspectors' activities. For example, you could note down the times when inspectors enter and leave the classroom, the number of children that are spoken to, the gender of these children etc. As well as undermining the feeling of 'being done to', the information could prove useful in cases of disagreement over inspection findings.

❑ Don't allow yourselves to feel persecuted because you are being inspected. Remember that inspectors are in your school because it is the law: every school has to undergo the same inspection process. Try to be positive and see it as an opportunity to improve the school that you care about.

Receiving oral feedback

- ❑ It is not unreasonable to ask that every teacher who has been observed receives some personal, oral feedback. Contact the registered inspector about this *prior to* the inspection, so that staff know beforehand what to expect. If the response is negative, it might be useful if teachers think about the one or two aspects they would most like personal feedback on, e.g. teaching style, pupil behaviour, and ask if inspectors would be willing to comment just on these.

- ❑ If oral feedback is given to individual teachers, the recipient might find it useful to take some written notes. This is especially important if the feedback is to a head of department who must then relay the comments to other members of staff. Alternatively, recipients of oral feedback might find it useful to have a colleague present who could do the notetaking, leaving them free to ask questions.

- ❑ Prior to the inspection, the head, teachers and governors ought to give some thought to what they think would be suitable arrangements for oral feedback, in particular the session at the end of the inspection. Ideally everyone should have the opportunity to hear this, but since this is unlikely to be practicable, consideration must be given to who should be present during the final oral feedback session. The following might help to inform your decisions about this:
  - Which school staff and governors are essential?
  - Who else would it be advantageous to include if there is room, e.g. would it be helpful to include the attached LEA inspector?
  - Where will the session take place? Will everyone fit in?
  - Are governors available during the daytime — when the session is likely to take place?
  - Have individual teachers had their own feedback?
  - How critical is the report likely to be, and of whom?
  - What are the inspection team's views/suggestions about the audience for the oral feedback?

- ❑ The oral feedback sessions *during* and *at the end* of the inspection are an important part of the OFSTED inspection process. The following ideas might help to make the most of them:

- See the oral feedback sessions, both during the inspection and at the end, as a chance for everyone involved to ensure that the written report is as accurate and meaningful as possible.
- Recipients of oral feedback should question anything they do not understand *fully*. Also, where they feel that inspectors have misunderstood something, they should explain and illustrate these aspects as much as they can.
- Teachers and governors may need briefing before oral feedback about what to expect in terms of how the sessions will be conducted. In particular, they should be forewarned not to be put off if the oral feedback at the end of the inspection turns out to be the registered inspector simply reading out the draft of the written report.
- Be prepared with strategies for making the oral feedback session suit your wishes. Have strategies ready for opening up discussion, e.g. ask if the inspector would mind interruptions for questions or allocating a time at the end for these.
- Jot down notes as the feedback takes place as an aid to later questioning.
- Make sure you write down positive comments as well as negative ones.
- Perhaps you would find it useful to allocate an 'official' note-taker for the session. However, if only two people are present you might decide its best that you both take some notes.
- If not all staff are present in the inspectors' oral feedback, think about how the information is going to be passed back to the rest of the staff.
- Depending on the timing of the inspection, you might want to ask if the final oral feedback could be postponed by a day. Would the recipients be too exhausted to make the most of the session, e.g. late on a Friday afternoon? Is the time feasible for the key personnel that you have identified as needing to be present? Has the session been allocated enough time, e.g. on the last afternoon of the inspection? Would it be better the next working day?

Responding to the written report

- ❑ If points in the written report are not clear, you might be able to contact the inspectors to ask for further clarification. Perhaps the meeting with the governing body is still to come and this occasion could be used to seek clarification.

- ❑ You might find it helpful to have your LEA adviser present at the governing body feedback session. This person could be useful in asking questions, or in helping to explain to governors points arising in the written report.

- ❑ Do not feel that you must be totally passive in receiving the report. Although you cannot suggest modifications to the judgements included in the report, you may need to correct errors of factual accuracy. Also, your comments on how useful you find the report as an aid to planning are relevant and there is no reason why you should not give inspectors feedback on this aspect.

2. PREPARING FOR ACTION PLANNING

- ❑ It seems vital that after the inspection and receipt of the oral feedback some time is spent preparing the groundwork for the actual process of action planning. Examining positive and negative feelings from the inspection and being absolutely clear about what the findings mean is important. It is not necessary to wait until receipt of the written report to do this. The following suggestions might be helpful in getting started:

Coming to terms with the findings

- ❑ You need to build in some time before you start the actual business of action planning to review everyone's experiences of the inspection. This is likely to be particularly helpful where there is a general feeling of anti-climax, disappointment or even anger.

- ❑ Channel feelings into a positive debriefing exercise involving all staff. Through this, seek to provide some useful ideas and alternative perspectives. Questions that everyone could consider include:
  - What lessons have been learned from the whole inspection experience?

- What would you do differently next time?
- What would you do the same next time?
- What was the funniest moment?
- What was the worst moment?
- Was everyone happy with how they had reacted to the inspection?
- What proportion of the report is positive — would it help to go through the report highlighting these sections?
- Try looking at the report through the eyes of: a) a pupil; b) a parent; c) a governor; d) a member of the general public. How would the school appear to each of these?
- Did inspectors fail to see everything, or do you feel that you could have done more to present some important aspect of their school?

❑ In relation to any key issues for action that are contentious with all or some teachers, consider the following questions:

- How strongly does everyone feel about the problem?
- Did inspectors miss seeing something which might have altered their view?
- Would it help the school/individuals to have an external opinion, e.g. by asking the LEA advisory team to examine the issue and give their view?
- Rather than expect teachers to devise strategies to implement what they are convinced is already taking place, could the action plan define the action to be taken as one of needing to *demonstrate* what is happening?

Understanding the findings

❑ Some of the suggestions above will inevitably have led to discussions about the interpretation of the findings. This should be helpful — given the constraints of ongoing teaching responsibilities and post-inspection fatigue, the number of meetings has to be kept to a minimum, yet the more discussion that takes place the better.

❑ Getting the balance right between pre-action planning discussion and work on the action plan itself can be difficult. Spending too long on the 'post-mortem' is not advisable — one or two sessions at most. After that, the discussion should be firmly focused on tackling what the key issues for action mean.

❑ If discussion of the key issues for action is not leading to a clearer understanding of them, or if it is fuelling disagreement,

you need to act fast. Are some of you still using blocking strategies? Do you feel that some external advice could help you to decide what is needed? Ought this to be tackled with individuals? Is it time to deal with this in working groups that could lead into the next phase, i.e. that of actually drawing up the plan?

- ❑ If external advice is needed, but is not affordable in terms of time or money, could you draw on the help of colleagues in neighbouring schools? Would it help to give these key issues a lower priority to enable them to be addressed in the next financial year?

- ❑ Although time is of the essence in drawing up the action plan, understanding what the issues are is vital and time spent discussing these will almost certainly help when it comes to the implementation stage.

3. DRAWING UP THE ACTION PLAN

- ❑ Drawing up the action plan is inevitably time-consuming and can be something of a challenge. The following points might help you to think about what approach would best suit your situation.

Consultation with teachers and governors

- ❑ Have you weighed up the advantages and disadvantages of involving as many teaches and governors as possible in consultation over the plan?

- ❑ Can decisions taken to limit the number of people involved be justified? Is saving time the only consideration? Are there potentially longer-term benefits of involving more people that override the time factor?

- ❑ Do some teachers have a disproportionate level of input into the plan compared to others? Are there good reasons for this?

- ❑ Are junior teachers being adequately consulted? Do they feel they have 'ownership' of the plan or do they see it as a senior management document? Are you aware of how teachers feel about the level of their involvement?

- ❑ Have governors been given the opportunity and encouragement to participate in *early* discussions? Are you intending to bring them in only to 'rubber-stamp' decisions at a later stage? If so, why?

- ❑ Could the need to draw up an action plan be a useful opportunity to discuss with the governing body their level of involvement in school management generally?

- ❑ Are there specific areas of the plan that could be drafted by a governors' subcommittee rather than by teachers? If so, how are you going to approach this? Do you expect them to volunteer? How might they be encouraged to become more involved?

Time factors

- ❑ When are action planning meetings going to take place?

- ❑ Would it be possible to use development days to discuss ideas for the action plan?

- ❑ Can you afford to purchase external supply cover to allow some teachers to work on the action plan during school hours? Are there alternatives, such as teachers providing classroom cover for each other? What would be the repercussions of this?

Advice and support

- ❑ Would it help to discuss your plan with member(s) of the LEA advisory team? If so, at what stage would their involvement be most useful?

- ❑ Would it be useful to have other external comments on the plan before it is finalised, e.g. from staff from schools that have experience of drawing up and implementing an action plan?

4. FORMAT AND CONTENT OF THE ACTION PLAN

Format

- ❑ In both phases of this research, it was evident that many schools would have welcomed advice about the format of their action plan. For some, deciding on this wasted valuable time. From the case-study interviews and analysis of more than 170 action plans, it appears that the following headings ought to feature if your plan is to be as useful and practical as possible.
  - Key issues for action (from inspection report).
  - Aims or objectives (relating to each key issue).
  - Action points (relating to each key issue).
  - Lead person responsible for implementation of each aspect.
  - Other personnel involved in implementation.
  - Timescale for implementation of each action.
  - Resources needed: practical, material, cost, staffing.
  - Success criteria for each action.
  - Monitoring: roles and responsibilities.
- ❑ If you do decide not to use some of these headings (or similar ones), is it likely to affect the outcome, in terms of implementation?
- ❑ Have you drawn up a summary of the action plan? Would a summary serve as a reminder to teachers about what is supposed to happen and when?

Content

- ❑ Have you spent time in groups or as a whole school analysing the key issues for action, particularly those that are complex, or over which there has been some dispute? (See Section 2 of this appendix.)
- ❑ Have school governors been involved in this discussion? Is their perspective on the key issues for action different? Has this been resolved?
- ❑ Have you identified clear objectives arising under each key issue for action?
- ❑ Have you prioritised your key issues for action?
- ❑ Are you satisfied that the prioritising has been done with sound educational reasoning? How does the order of

priority relate to existing priorities in your school development plan?

- ❑ Have governors been involved in discussions relating to prioritising? If not, are they happy with your suggestions?

- ❑ Do the deadlines identified in the action plan appear reasonable? Is the work spread appropriately over several terms/years? Do any of the key deadlines come together in one term? Would this be difficult in terms of time or resources? (A summary timetable may help to identify potentially difficult periods.)

- ❑ How are you going to handle the link with the school development plan? Will there be two documents? What will happen to the priorities in the SDP?

Success criteria

- ❑ Your plan needs to include success criteria for each key issue or action. Without them, it is more difficult for those monitoring implementation to establish if the plan is being carried out. You might find it useful to consider the following issues when deciding on success criteria:
  - Are most of your success criteria ones that can be measured?
  - If not, are there any measurable criteria that could possibly be identified?
  - What are the implications of having measurable criteria?

Costing out the action plan

- ❑ You need to think about what the cost implications of your plan will be. Try to answer the following questions:
  - Have resource implications been sufficiently itemised in the plan?
  - Are they realistic? Do you have the resources to implement the plan?
  - What are you going to do about key issues for action that you can't address for resource reasons? Could they be deferred until the next financial year?
  - Have *all* resource implications been considered, e.g. INSET, supply cover, staff time for meetings, governor training, secretarial and ancillary staff time?
  - Have you considered prioritising key issues in relation to resource implications? What would be the educational implications of this?

5. IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION PLAN

Progress on implementation

- ❑ How do teachers and governors feel about progress on implementation? Has it been too fast or too slow?
- ❑ Are you happy that the implementation is taking place as it was planned? If not, what factors have caused problems or delays? What strategies could be used to offset these difficulties?
- ❑ Is the action plan a working document, i.e. is it used as a planning and/or monitoring tool? Is it useful to SMT, teachers and governors?
- ❑ Are teachers being expected to implement the plan without access to the support, advice and resources that were originally intended?
- ❑ Are teachers and governors feeling adequately rewarded/ appreciated for the extra effort that has been put into the inspection and action planning phase?
- ❑ Are modifications to the plan needed? When are you going to do this? Who will be involved? When will governors be consulted?

Outcomes of implementation

- ❑ Where implementation has taken place, have desired outcomes been achieved? Where applicable, has there been a change in classroom practice? Has implementation made any difference?
- ❑ Do you feel that the inspection has led to substantive improvements in the quality of the education pupils are receiving? Is this a subjective judgement or are there objective measures that can be identified?
- ❑ Has drawing up and implementing the action plan led to other improvements, e.g. teacher satisfaction, improved involvement of governors? Before the next inspection would it be useful to explore these issues?
- ❑ If implementation of action points has not resulted in the intended outcome, what should happen now?

6. ARRANGEMENTS FOR MONITORING PROGRESS

- Monitoring is an important part of action planning, and probably the one most easily overlooked. Unless strategies for monitoring implementation of your action plan are built in from the outset, there is every chance that planned improvements will be overlooked, delayed or indefinitely postponed as other competing demands arise. What will be the repercussions of this for the education of pupils in the school? What effect will this have on the outcome of the next inspection in several years' time? The following points should help to start your discussion about monitoring your action plan.

- Does the plan identify several tiers of personnel involved in overseeing progress on the key issues (e.g. governors, class teachers, SMT)?

- Is there a clear timeframe within which monitoring will take place?

- Is the level of monitoring specified in your action plan realistic? Does it take into account the overall timeframe and teachers' and governors' other responsibilities?

- How will teachers, parents and governors be updated on progress made on the action plan?

- Will external monitors, e.g. LEA personnel, staff from other schools, be involved in overseeing implementation of the plan?

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planning for action

Part 2: A guide to post-inspection action planning

Heads, teachers and governors know that all the hard work is not over when an inspection ends. Their next task is to draw up an *action plan* showing how the school intends to address the key issues for action in the inspection report. This plan must be completed within 40 days and schools need to galvanise themselves for a new period of intense activity.

- What is the best way of setting about action planning?
- Which staff should be involved?
- What role will the governors have?
- Are there resource and training implications?
- How should the plan be structured?
- What information should it contain?
- What arrangements will help to ensure that the action plan is implemented?
- Who should be responsible for monitoring its progress?
- What support can the LEA provide?

These issues are addressed in this action-planning guide for schools. Each chapter takes the reader through a different stage of the action-planning process, starting even before the inspection, through the period of analysing the report's findings and on to drawing up the plan. Moreover, it has useful suggestions for what ought to happen once the action plan has been completed in terms of implementation and monitoring. At the end of each chapter there is a checklist of considerations that need to be taken into account at each stage of the action planning process.

The guide is based on the NFER's 15-month study of post-inspection action planning and draws heavily on the experience of heads, teachers and governors in case-study schools. It also contains an analysis of almost 200 schools' action plans, providing an overview of how schools across the country have approached the main features of their action plans.

Headteachers and inspectors have commented on this action-planning guide's 'school-friendly' style and its relevance to all schools involved in the inspection process. One headteacher remarked: *'It's the sort of guide I wish I had read before my school's inspection.'*

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