evaluating school self-evaluation

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Executive Summary

1. Aims and Objectives

The project reported on here was carried out during 1999 and 2000 and was funded by the Local Government Association Educational Research Programme. The main aim of the research was to conduct a critical examination of what schools, in many cases supported by their local education authorities (LEAs), were doing in terms of self-evaluation and self-review, given the developing policy focus on these activities. Further aims and objectives included the following:

♦ To identify the **driving forces** for getting involved in school self-evaluation. What motivates school staff and LEA officers to devote time, energy and resources to these processes?

♦ To identify some of the **main benefits** for schools and LEAs of carrying out and supporting school self-evaluation. What are the advantages of self-evaluating in terms of pupil performance, teacher development and school improvement? How might self-evaluation become 'embedded' in school culture?

♦ To find out more about the **issues and difficulties** facing schools and LEAs as they attempt to plan, implement and act upon self-evaluation strategies. To identify and consider ways in which these difficulties might be overcome.

♦ To identify **factors which promote (or inhibit)** the development of effective approaches to school self-evaluation. What are the barriers to self-evaluation and what are the factors that assist in the successful implementation of such processes?

♦ To assess where the **'ownership'** of school self-evaluation lies and, in so doing, to explore the relationships that exist between schools and LEAs in the context of such processes.

♦ Where possible, to identify **common trends** in the implementation of self-evaluation at school and LEA levels.

2. The Policy Context and Key Issues in School Self-Evaluation

During the mid-1990s and certainly from 1993, the year in which OFSTED first started to carry out school visits, external inspection was seen as the main driving force in terms of the evaluation of school and pupil performance. Several years on, however, it is apparent that the processes

and frameworks used as a basis for inspection have been modified so as to take greater account of a growing drive for internal, *self*-evaluation, arising from the desire of schools and teachers to assess for themselves how well they are doing.

Self-evaluation, however, generally has several functions, and such activities can be seen as being shaped by at least four sets of influences: (1) the impact of **Government initiatives**, such as the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Hours and national requirements for target setting; (2) the demands of **OFSTED inspections**; (3) the role of **the LEA** in supporting school improvement; and (4) the purposes of school self-evaluation as defined by **schools** themselves. Any attempt to identify the key issues underlying processes of self-evaluation has to take account of this variety of influences. The key issues that we attempted to address during the course of our research are outlined below:

♦ What are the impacts of school self-evaluation on the culture of a school (and what *should* the impact be)? How does self-evaluation influence staff relationships, staff attitudes to pupils and the decision-making processes of a school? What, if any, changes in the ethos and culture of a school need to be encouraged if fully-fledged self-evaluation is to become a reality?

♦ Where does the ownership of school self-evaluation lie? Within schools, what are the relative advantages of, and problems associated with, 'bottom up' and 'top down' models of ownership? Should self-evaluation be predominantly in the control of the headteacher and the senior management team, or should ownership be more widely spread across the school?

♦ Linked with this is the issue of the extent of LEA intervention and control: what is the appropriate extent of LEA involvement in these processes? What roles can the LEA play in helping schools to become better at self-evaluation and action planning? What training and support can LEAs most usefully offer?

♦ For what purposes is self-evaluation being used? What is (or are) the rationale (or rationales) for self-evaluation and who are going to be the main beneficiaries? To what extent are the different purposes of self-evaluation mutually compatible and consistent?

♦ What is, and should be, the relationship between 'internal' self-evaluation, carried out with the goals of the individual school in mind, and 'external' inspection, carried out as part of a requirement to be independently assessed by an external body with 'national' standards of teaching and pupil performance in mind? To what extent should self-evaluation be kept separate from preparation for an OFSTED visit?

3. Methodology

The methodology of the project involved a review of key documents and reports relating to school self-evaluation and self-review. In addition, a programme of case-study work was carried out involving in-depth interviews with LEA personnel and with senior management teams and selected teaching staff in schools that were in the process of doing self-evaluation. Nine LEAs were featured in the review, with documentary evidence collected from a further five. These were authorities that appeared to be 'very active' in the field of school self-evaluation, as indicated by the number and contents of relevant documents held in the NFER's *Educational Management and Information Exchange* (EMIE) database. Care was taken to ensure that a range of different LEA types was featured in the review. A senior officer or adviser, with direct responsibility for school self-evaluation, was interviewed in each of the nine LEAs, and a total of 27 school staff, from 23 primary and secondary schools, were also interviewed.

4. The Research Findings – LEAs

Positive Outcomes

Despite the fact that the implementation of school self-evaluation was in its early stages in some areas, many of the LEA officers reported how useful self-evaluation had been, both for the authority and for schools. The main positive aspects of school self-evaluation, as described by these officers in the interviews, can be summarised as follows:

♦ The need for monitoring and evaluation provides the LEA with a **useful 'way in' to their schools**. In other words, the requirement for school self-evaluation provides a vehicle for initiating and maintaining close contact on the part of LEA advisers with schools and their staff.

♦ The implementation of school self-evaluation helps the LEA to develop **an overview of how their schools are performing.** There is a dual purpose to self-evaluation in this respect. Firstly, there is a professional development function – LEA personnel, in working with schools, can help to train staff in methods of data collection and analysis. Secondly, the collection of evaluation data is, in itself, useful to the LEA. Such data can be used not only to see how pupils and teachers in a particular school are doing, but also to develop an overall picture of how schools in the authority are performing.

♦ School self-evaluation processes help **to facilitate the development of positive working relationships between LEAs and their schools**. The great majority of LEA officers interviewed had a clear view that they were working *with* schools. School self-evaluation was a relatively new, but very useful, mechanism for the encouragement of good working relations, sometimes in areas where

there had previously been difficult relationships between schools
and the LEA. The key to these good working relationships appeared
to be the use of consultation and the maintenance of dialogue
between school staff and the LEA.

♦ From 1998, as a requirement of the *School Standards and
Framework Act*, LEAs found themselves having to write
Educational Development Plans (EDPs). Some authorities have had
concerns about how schools' targets can fit in with LEA aims and
goals as expressed in the EDP – and school self-evaluation, for
many advisers and officers, represents **an important link or bridge
between the Education Development Plan and School (or
Institutional) Development Plans.**

♦ Several LEA interviewees indicated that school self-evaluation had
the effect of **informing and supporting the OFSTED inspection
process.** Sometimes evaluation was directly linked to inspection
requirements, but, whatever form of self-evaluation or self-review
was adopted in an authority, it usually had a '*knock on*' effect of
helping a school to '*know where it is at*' prior to an inspection.

Issues and Difficulties for LEAs

Although there were many positive aspects to school self-evaluation
processes for LEAs and there was evidence of a growing culture both in
LEAs and schools towards adopting self-evaluation and self-review, for
the longer term there remained a number of problems and issues to be dealt
with. A major source of tension was **the need for the LEA to achieve a
balance between 'managing' and 'supporting' schools.** Just how far
could LEA management and intervention in these processes go? To what
extent could the schools be relied upon to carry out rigorous and demanding
self-assessments?

Similarly, there was an issue of **whether school self-evaluation processes
should be LEA-driven or school-driven.** Whilst many LEA personnel
expressed a desire for schools to have 'ownership' of the process of self-
evaluation, and that such evaluation should be from the 'bottom up', several
also acknowledged that self-evaluation is, in practice, largely LEA-led.
There were also some **resourcing issues.** How should the provision of
such support by the LEA be funded or organised?

5. The Research Findings – Schools

Positive Outcomes

Interviews with staff in schools revealed that self-evaluation, in its various
forms, has been a positive experience for headteachers and class teachers
in a number of ways. The benefits to schools of self-evaluation were reported
as being that:

♦ School self-evaluation can help bring about a **change in the culture** of a school, helping to formalise and to extend existing methods of evaluating teaching and learning and data analysis. One aspect of changing school culture was an increased willingness to use methods of evaluation that had not necessarily been used previously including, for example, classroom observation by peers.

♦ Teachers' **professional development** can benefit from a school's commitment to self-evaluation, particularly in an institution where staff are encouraged to share expertise with colleagues and to take up training opportunities. Some schools had adopted an explicit approach, using packages such as 'Investors in People', while for others, professional review took place within a more general framework.

♦ For some headteachers, particularly those recently appointed, school self-evaluation has provided a mechanism with which to learn about their school and to **organise change**. In other words, these processes provided school senior managers with a framework (and 'levers') for the management of change.

♦ Schools can **develop their own agenda** for self-evaluation, enabling teachers to focus on identified areas for improvement. Furthermore, the internal agenda set within schools can also help promote **ownership** among teachers of their self-evaluation activity. While it was clear that much of the impetus for self-evaluation was generated by headteachers, particularly in the early stages, a number were keen to encourage teachers to become involved in the strategic planning of self-evaluation programmes and activities.

♦ Many headteachers said that they had benefited from having the support of a **'critical friend'**, whether an LEA adviser, a consultant or a fellow practitioner. A critical friend who is external to the school can help teachers identify areas for development, meet the demands of a timetable for implementing activities and, where necessary, can ask challenging questions.

♦ School self-evaluation can be used to encourage **community involvement**. Parents, pupils and governors can provide useful feedback, inform classroom practice and help to set the agenda for change. There was evidence that self-evaluation had afforded some schools the opportunity to involve pupils and parents in the process, and several school interviewees said that their planned next step was to seek the views of parents or pupils. As one teacher commented: *'children know what helps their learning and what doesn't'*.

♦ Self-evaluation packages and programmes, whether they be commercial or developed 'in-house' by LEAs, can provide schools with a range of **tools** for implementing evaluation activities. These may take the form of questionnaires for parents and pupils,

observation checklists, files for recording data, or some other format. 'Toolkits' for schools avoid the need for teachers to '*reinvent the wheel*' and can facilitate the sharing of information across institutions.

Issues and Difficulties for Schools

Although it is clear that self-evaluation can have a positive impact on many aspects of school life, self-evaluation also presents school communities with a variety of difficulties. For example, the degree to which schools have **ownership** over their self-evaluation activity, and the extent to which ownership is **embedded** in everyday practice and planning cycles, vary among schools. It is clear that much of what happens in schools relating to self-evaluation has not, to date at least, followed a 'bottom-up' model. Ownership has, to a considerable extent, been confined to the headteacher or members of the senior management team, despite many headteachers' acknowledgements that they needed to '*have the staff on board*'.

Anxiety about the impact of self-evaluation on teachers' **workload** was a widespread concern. Staff in some schools felt that they were suffering **initiative fatigue**. Further, the levels to which schools commit **resources** to self-evaluation, in the form of time, training and material support, often presented a difficulty. In some schools, staff have been required '*to fit school self-evaluation in around existing commitments*'. Teachers in primary schools reported that the lack of non-contact time available has restricted their self-evaluation work, particularly the organisation of classroom observation, which often requires cover to be arranged.

On occasion, school self-evaluation can present difficulties for schools' **relationship with their LEA**. Some school staff felt that their LEA had not yet developed a coherent approach. Conflicting messages from different departments or services were felt by some teachers to hamper their efforts to implement self-evaluation. One headteacher described the overall support she had received from her adviser as '*brilliant and exceptional*', but she was critical that there was '*no joined-up thinking in the LEA*'.

A further issue, highlighted in a good proportion of the school interviews, was an apparent dichotomy between 'official' and 'unofficial' or 'internal' and 'external' aspects of school self-evaluation. Sometimes school staff experienced difficulties in trying to resolve the **tensions** between the school-based needs of self-evaluation and **preparation for an OFSTED inspection**. Some teachers displayed a degree of uncertainty in terms of the extent to which they should link the OFSTED framework with the focuses and timing of their own evaluation activities.

6.   Recommendations for Action

Our interviewees were asked to consider how school self-evaluation activities and the support provided by LEAs could be improved. Their thoughts and comments have been used as a basis for the recommendations for action outlined below. These suggestions for action are made with the intention of raising ideas and possibilities for LEA and school personnel who are considering adopting self-evaluation, or those already engaged in the process who are thinking about future directions for their evaluation work.

Recommendations for Action by LEAs

◆   To ensure that the central purpose of school self-evaluation is clearly understood by all the relevant parties.

◆   In the early stages, for LEAs to negotiate with schools about the best ways of implementing self-evaluation: for example by involving school staff in the development of LEA packages.

◆   To be clear about where, and with whom, the ownership for school self-evaluation does and should lie: with teachers, school managers, LEA personnel or a combination of these? To ask 'how can ownership in schools be encouraged?'

◆   To ensure that schools are provided with regular, ongoing, interactive support from link advisers (or an equivalent).

◆   To consider how to further relate school self-evaluation to other functions (such as school improvement) and services within the LEA, in an effort to minimise the potential for 'mixed messages'.

◆   To provide schools with some form of 'toolkit' for doing self-evaluation – whether as part of an LEA-developed approach or within a 'bought in' package, in the form of exemplar materials, questionnaires, evaluation sheets and so on.

◆   When possible, to provide training for relevant LEA personnel, school managers and teachers, so as to equip them to support and carry out their self-evaluation programmes.

Recommendations for Action by Schools

♦ To be clear about why the school is doing self-evaluation, so that all staff can see clearly the direction and the rationale for such processes.

♦ To ensure that self-evaluation activities are practical, manageable and focused: and that they have an impact upon teaching and learning.

♦ To think about how to deal with and to mediate the tensions arising from the requirements of the school, external agencies and national policy influences.

♦ To encourage as many members of the school community as possible (teachers, governors, parents, pupils, support staff) to take part in self-evaluation in an effort to develop a sense of ownership and to enable these processes to become embedded in the culture of the school.

♦ To consider the possible advantages of engaging a 'critical friend' in the process: perhaps an LEA adviser, an educational consultant, a supportive academic or a teacher from another school.

♦ To evaluate self-evaluation activities in terms of their impact on teaching and learning, to inform future planning and to identify new areas for development.

♦ To ensure, as far as other commitments and initiatives will allow, that headteachers, senior managers and teachers are given the time to plan, develop, implement and *use* self-evaluation activities to inform their practice.

Whatever form school self-evaluation takes, it is certainly here to stay: there are numerous indications that, once practical difficulties have been overcome and national and local priorities have been clarified, self-evaluation can make a key contribution to school, teacher and, potentially, pupil development.

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1. INTRODUCTION:
REVIEWING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION STRATEGIES

1.1 Aims and Objectives of the Review

This report sets out the findings of a National Foundation for Educational Research project on school self-evaluation. The project, funded by the *Local Government Association Educational Research Programme* and carried out in 1999–2000, was an attempt at 'evaluating school self-evaluation' in the broadest sense. The main aim of the evaluation was to conduct a critical examination of what schools, in many cases supported by their local education authorities (LEAs), were doing in terms of self-evaluation and self-review, given the developing policy focus on these activities. Further aims and objectives included the following.

♦ To identify the **driving forces** for getting involved in school self-evaluation. What motivates school staff and LEA officers to devote time, energy and resources to these processes?

♦ To identify some of the main benefits for schools and LEAs of carrying out processes of self-evaluation. What are the advantages of self-evaluating in terms of pupil performance, teacher development and school improvement?

♦ To find out more about the issues and difficulties facing schools and LEAs as they attempt to plan, implement and act upon self-evaluation strategies. To identify and consider ways in which these difficulties might be overcome.

♦ To identify factors which promote (or inhibit) the development of effective approaches to school self-evaluation. What are the barriers to self-evaluation and what are the factors that assist in the successful implementation of such processes?

♦ To assess where the 'ownership' of school self-evaluation lies and, in so doing, to explore the relationships that exist between schools and LEAs in the context of such processes.

♦ Where possible, to identify any common trends in the implementation of self-evaluation at school and LEA levels.

The context of these specific objectives was the overriding practical aim of finding out what was 'going on' in terms of self-evaluation, in both school and LEA contexts, and to present these findings to the relevant audiences in a way that would help to inform the future planning and implementation of school self-evaluation and review.

1.2 Methodology

Researchers undertook a review of key documents and reports relating to school self-evaluation and self-review. This included the scrutiny of the OFSTED framework for school self-evaluation, and of various LEA packages and strategy documents for self-evaluation. In addition to the desk-based study, a programme of case-study work was carried out involving:

♦ interviews with LEA personnel – to understand how they were using and helping schools to use self-evaluation materials, and to identify the main issues or problems for both the LEA and for schools in understanding what is required and how to do it;

♦ a programme of interviews with senior management teams and selected teaching staff in schools that were actively involved in processes of self-evaluation and self-review;

♦ attendance at selected conferences and presentations on school self-evaluation.

As a first stage in the selection of LEAs the research team scrutinised a large collection of documentary material made available by staff at the *Education Management Information Exchange* (EMIE) unit within the NFER. EMIE staff were asked to identify as many LEAs as possible that appeared to be recently active in the field of school self-evaluation, as indicated by the number and contents of relevant LEA documents.

Care was taken to ensure that a range of different LEAs was featured in the review: predominantly urban, predominantly rural, new unitary authorities, established 'shire' counties and so on.

Overall, school self-evaluation processes in 14 local education authorities were featured in the review. LEA senior officers were interviewed in, and documentary evidence was collected from, nine of these authorities. In the remaining five LEAs, the review was based upon scrutiny of documentary evidence combined with previous personal contact with the authority on the part of staff from the NFER's *School Improvement Research Centre*, usually in connection with ongoing related projects. Overall, school self-evaluation processes in 14 local education authorities were featured in the review. The interviews were conducted using a detailed schedule (see Appendix A), organised on the basis of the following broad headings:

• the LEA context

• approaches to school self-evaluation

• implementing school self-evaluation

• outcomes of self-evaluation.

Some of the LEA interviewees were very experienced in the fields of school inspection, monitoring or evaluation and others were relatively new to this

kind of work. All were very willing to talk about their approaches to school self-evaluation, both as an individual and as a local authority, and about how such evaluations were implemented at authority and school levels. Many were also very helpful in terms of supplying relevant documentary materials to the research team.

During the course of these interviews, LEA officers were asked if they could recommend any schools that were, or recently had been, closely involved in self-evaluation and which would therefore be of interest from the perspective of this project. The general pattern for this evaluation was to set up visits to one primary school and one secondary school within the authority.

In the schools, the person (or persons) with primary responsibility for overseeing school self-evaluation or self-review was (or were) interviewed. Usually this was the headteacher or a deputy headteacher, but occasionally it was a member of staff in a less senior position. Again, a detailed interview schedule was used (see Appendix B), covering the following areas:

- the school context
- approaches to school self-evaluation
- implementing school self-evaluation
- involvement in specific initiatives
- the LEA
- outcomes of self-evaluation.

1.3 Structure of the Report

The next chapter of this report sets out the policy context within which school self-evaluation was and is taking place. It provides a brief history of school self-evaluation and identifies a number of key issues, including issues to do with the relationships between LEAs and schools and the relationship between contemporary self-evaluation activities and the more traditional, external, demands of school inspection.

Chapter 3 introduces the empirical findings by providing a general picture of school self-evaluation, and the evaluation packages used, in the featured LEAs. Brief details of four case studies give a flavour and an overview of self-evaluation activities within a range of different settings.

The middle chapters of the report bring together the detailed fieldwork findings of the project: Chapters 4 and 5 summarise the perspectives of the LEA officers interviewed, and Chapters 6 and 7 are based on the views of headteachers and other senior school staff responsible for school self-evaluation. Illustrative comments from the interviewees, supplemented by

documentary evidence, are used to support the points made. These chapters present the views and experiences of those most closely involved in, and affected by, these processes. For clarity, for each set of respondents, there is one chapter reporting on the positive aspects of school self-evaluation and another relating to issues and difficulties.

The final chapter provides an overview of the research and identifies a number of recent trends in school self-evaluation. The chapter finishes with a number of practical recommendations for consideration by the key stakeholders involved in processes of school self-evaluation.

2. THE POLICY CONTEXT AND KEY ISSUES IN SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

2.1 The Policy Context

There seems to be fairly widespread agreement that schools' capacity and responsibility for self-evaluation is now at the forefront of UK educational policy. However, it should be noted that the idea (and the practice) of self-evaluation is not new. There are documented examples referring back at least to the early 1980s, and the Technical Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) Extension phase, for example, included a mandatory requirement for all secondary schools to carry out a process of self-review (Saunders, 1999b, p.414).

Since the days of TVEI there have been many more requirements on schools to monitor and evaluate what they have been doing: there have been a number of influences, external to schools themselves, which have had an impact on school self-evaluation. These can be described as threefold: recent Government guidance has highlighted the link between evaluation and target setting, the work of OFSTED and the introduction of new 'light touch' inspections can be seen to have influenced *why* and *how* schools are doing self-evaluation, and finally the changed relationships between schools and their LEAs have also shaped the ways in which schools are approaching self-evaluation. This section considers each of these three sets of influences in turn.

Government initiatives   In recent years, a range of new initiatives and guidance aimed at raising standards in schools has been introduced. The White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (GB. Parliament. HoC, 1997) and related policy documents on school improvement, target setting and benchmarking have together provided guidance for a five-stage cycle of review and target setting by schools (GB. DfEE, 1997). This consists of:

♦ a review of quality of performance, pedagogy and management;

♦ diagnostic comparisons with other similar schools;

♦ the setting of specific school-based targets focused on raising pupils' achievements;

♦ development planning to implement targets;

♦ the evaluation of action taken and impact on pupils.

This five-stage cycle of target setting can be seen to have influenced the development of a number of self-evaluation packages produced by LEAs. The cycle of improvement focuses on pupil attainment and encourages

schools to evaluate their achievements though the analysis of a range of performance data, and also against that of other, similar schools. In addition, the launch of the Autumn Package in 1998, produced by the DfEE, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and OFSTED, provided a range of national, benchmarked and value-added information to help schools evaluate their current performance and to inform target setting (GB. DfEE, 1998).

Thus the literature emanating from policy bodies in the mid to late 1990s (e.g. GB. DfEE. 1996, 1997) made it clear that the context for school self-evaluation was school improvement – and that 'improvement', in turn, should be defined as raising standards of pupil performance. This led to an agenda based primarily on target setting. The White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (GB. Parliament. HoC, 1997) acknowledged, however, that setting targets would not by itself be sufficient to bring about improvements in performance (Saunders, 1999b). By 1997 there was a developing recognition that external inspection along with the use of target setting would not necessarily provide a fully effective and comprehensive framework for school improvement: consequently school self-evaluation, as a crucial 'missing element', was officially brought in to the school improvement equation.

The drive to encourage schools to collect, analyse and use data to inform self-evaluation and to set targets has at the same time been coupled with new demands on the curriculum, notably the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Hours. The impact of these new initiatives can be seen to have influenced not only *how* schools are doing self-evaluation, but also which aspects of schooling they are focusing on as part of their evaluation activity.

OFSTED   As the cycle of OFSTED inspections was put in place, so there was another important development in the way that schools were evaluated. This was based upon an acknowledgement that the best ways for schools to move forward were to have a degree of ownership of the evaluative process and to look at themselves *from within*. It became increasingly recognised, by academics, practitioners and policy makers alike, that evaluation and/or inspection worked best when the drive for improvement came from schools themselves.

It is now apparent that, to some extent, the processes and frameworks used as a basis for inspection have been modified so as to take greater account of this growing drive for internal, *self*-evaluation, arising from the desire of schools and teachers to assess for themselves how well they are doing and to make improvements upon the basis of what they find: and by 1999 the introduction of 'light touch' inspections for some schools had been announced.

Recent publications from OFSTED such as *School Evaluation Matters* (OFSTED, 1998) focus directly upon self-evaluation and include advice

for schools about the processes involved in carrying out evaluation using the OFSTED 'framework'. It is clear that OFSTED views external inspection and self-evaluation as complementary. However, the model put forward may be characterised as one of 'internal inspection' rather than of 'self-evaluation'. The *Handbook for Inspecting Series* (OFSTED, 1999a, 1999b) states that '*OFSTED is committed to promoting self-evaluation as a key aspect of the work of schools*' and includes a section entitled 'Using the Handbook for School Self-Evaluation'. The OFSTED view of the nature of the relationship between external inspections and school self-evaluation is set out in the Handbook as follows:

> *It is advantageous to base school self-evaluation on the same criteria as those used in all schools by inspectors. A common language has developed about the work of schools, expressed through the criteria. Teachers and governors know that the criteria reflect things that matter.* (OFSTED, 1999b)

In addition to the Handbooks for Inspection, OFSTED have also put together a three-day training course, which builds upon *School Evaluation Matters*, aimed at school managers. The purpose of the training is outlined as being to:

> *provide you* [school managers] *with the competencies to carry out continual, systematic self-evaluation of your school based on the criteria, concepts, and techniques contained in OFSTED's Framework and Handbook for the Inspection of Schools.* (OFSTED, n.d.)

It is worth noting that the Handbook describes the relationship between inspection and self-evaluation as complementary but different:

> *It can be a mistake to 'do a self-evaluation' of the whole school, treating it as one event like 'having an inspection'. It is far better that inspection complements a process of identifying and nibbling away at priorities through regular monitoring and evaluation.* (OFSTED, 1999b, p.139)

As already indicated, the nature of school self-evaluation and the relationship between self-evaluation and the external inspection process has been brought further into focus with the introduction of the new 'light touch' or differentiated inspection process. From January 2000, schools able to demonstrate sustained success in previous inspections, test and examination results have been eligible for a shortened version of the traditional inspection.

Local education authorities Before the 1990s, the main responsibilities for regulating and inspecting or, perhaps more accurately, *advising*, schools, lay with local education authorities. However, since the 1988 Education Reform Act, the role of the LEA, along with the shape of LEA–school relationships, has been redefined. There was a new emphasis on financial accountability and 'value for money' issues also became more important. The 1988 Act 'changed the ways LEA teams worked. LEAs

were under pressure to change their practice from support to teachers and schools through advisers to inspectorial approaches – to check that the National Curriculum was being implemented' (Goddard and Leask, 1992, pp.57–60).

At the same time as LEA roles were being redefined, competition between schools and 'accountability' were being encouraged, through the introduction of different types of schools (grant-maintained, city technology colleges and so on) along with a new regime of testing, key stage comparisons and the use of 'league tables'. The idea was that parents should be able to choose schools within an educational 'marketplace'. Within this ideological context, it was deemed that external regulation of schools, carried out by a body independent of LEAs, was necessary. From 1993, the year in which OFSTED first started to carry out school visits, external inspection was seen as the main driving force in terms of the evaluation of school and pupil performance.

The School Standards and Framework Act (1998) has redefined the LEA's role and relationship with schools as part of the wider 'standards agenda'. In some respects the capacity of LEAs to intervene in their schools has been constrained. The 1998 Act, however, requires LEAs to prepare an Education Development Plan (EDP) which includes LEA and school targets for improvement and a school improvement programme. In addition, the Act sets out new guidelines requiring LEA intervention into schools to be in 'inverse proportion to success' (based on the assumption that the more successful a school is, the less likely it is to need external assistance). The response of LEAs to this legislation, as the evidence presented in subsequent chapters will show, has largely been to support schools to carry out some form of self-evaluation. However, it is important to note that some LEAs have worked for a number of years prior to these changes in an effort to establish a process of self-evaluation in their schools.

Further to the changes of the role and function of LEAs as outlined above, LEAs, like schools, are now subject to OFSTED inspections. One of the key areas of focus for inspection is described in *LEA Support for School Improvement* (OFSTED, 1997, 1999c; see also Derrington, 2000).

2.2 Key Issues in School Self-Evaluation

The project reported here was primarily concerned with finding out what happens in schools and LEAs in terms of school self-evaluation processes and to identify some of the advantages and issues arising from self-evaluation. It was not possible to examine in detail the developing academic literature on self-evaluation and related areas.[1] However, in planning and carrying out the research, we tried to take into consideration the main issues

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[1] Interested readers are referred to the bibliography provided at the end of this report.

relating to school self-evaluation, as identified in our project discussions and informed by the literature. In this respect, the key issues can be summarised as follows.

♦ What are the impacts of school self-evaluation on the culture of a school (and what *should* the impact be)? How do such processes influence staff relationships, staff attitudes to pupils and the decision-making processes of a school? What, if any, changes in the ethos and culture of a school need to be encouraged if fully-fledged self-evaluation is to become a reality?

♦ Where does the ownership of school self-evaluation lie? Within schools, what are the relative advantages of, and problems associated with, 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' models of ownership (see MacBeath, 1999)? Should self-evaluation be predominantly in the control of the headteacher and/or the senior management team, or should ownership be more widely spread across the school?

♦ Linked with this is the issue of the extent of LEA intervention and control: what is the appropriate extent of LEA involvement in these processes? What roles can the LEA play in helping schools to become better at self-evaluation (and action planning)? What training and support can LEAs most usefully offer?

♦ For what purposes is self-evaluation being used? What is (or are) the rationale (or rationales) for self-evaluation and who are going to be the main beneficiaries from the process? To what extent are the different purposes of self-evaluation mutually compatible and consistent? These are crucial questions for self-evaluators (and they are given further consideration in section 2.4).

♦ What is, and should be, the relationship between 'internal' self-evaluation, carried out with the goals of the individual school in mind, and 'external' inspection, carried out as part of a requirement to be independently assessed by an external body with 'national' standards of teaching and pupil performance in mind? How closely should the two be linked? To what extent should self-evaluation be kept separate from preparation for an OFSTED visit?

♦ Linked to the last point, there are also developing issues related to the resources needed for, and the costs of, self-evaluation. Certainly the move towards self-evaluation has been influenced to an extent by debates about the costs of inspection, both in financial terms and in terms of the possible negative effects of the inspection process upon teachers and schools. Self-evaluation carried out by schools is in some ways less expensive than paying for a team of external contractors to carry out a full OFSTED inspection.[2]

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[2] Research carried out by a team at Brunel University, commissioned by *OFSTIN* (Office for Standards in Inspection), estimated the costs of an inspection for an average-sized primary school to be £11,500 and, for an average-sized secondary school, to be around £40,000 (CEPPP and Helix Consulting, 1999; Maden and Kogan, 2000).

2.3 Defining School Self-Evaluation

A consideration of these issues reveals that in any review of school self-evaluation much depends upon how 'self-evaluation' is conceptualised. The perceived functions of self-evaluation will depend upon the definition used by those implementing these processes: and, of course, as indicated in the following section, there may well be institutional, local and national pressures operating in this respect, so the purposes of self-evaluation may be complex and multi-layered.

For the purposes of the present research, the 'self' was mainly deemed to be the school. However, it was obvious even before the research commenced, that there would be considerable LEA involvement and assistance, especially given the legal requirement for LEAs to assist with school improvement. Therefore, we planned to research both LEA and school contexts.

The research framework allowed schools and LEAs to define self-evaluation *in their own terms*. Schools tended to define '*evaluation*' in terms of any activities that constituted part of their planning, monitoring, assessment and implementation processes related to school improvement.

Self-evaluation, as conceptualised for the purposes of this research, therefore included *both* activities that were being carried out for the benefit of the school which went beyond the needs of external requirements *and* activities that constituted preparation for external inspection. This distinction is not always clear cut, but it helps in the identification of those activities that are seen by the school as being useful and going beyond nationally identified requirements for school development and pupil achievement. What were individual schools doing? What history of (and plans for) implementing school self-evaluation did the LEA have? What packages were being used and which elements of these went beyond the requirements of the OFSTED framework for inspection? The importance of these questions encouraged us to take a broad definition of school self-evaluation, and to allow for a multiplicity of purposes of self-evaluation, as identified and detailed by our respondents.

2.4 Rationales for School Self-Evaluation

From the above it can be seen that to say that there is a *single* rationale for school self-evaluation is misleading. It is clear from previous research and from our own investigations that there can be several purposes to school self-evaluation and that there are several sets of interested parties.

Firstly, there may be, as with other educational initiatives, *personal* rationales or motives for carrying out self-evaluation. A particular LEA officer or adviser might have a personal interest or desire to improve a particular school or a particular aspect of schooling within an area, or to develop his

or her own area of specialist knowledge. A headteacher or other school manager might have particular goals in mind – to improve literacy levels, to address boys' underachievement, to make special needs provision more effective, for example – and evaluation may well be geared to achieving these goals. Within a school or an LEA there may be conflicts or tensions relating to different perspectives on what needs to be evaluated. In addition, the emphases of an evaluation (and the format of an evaluation package) may change from year to year, especially if the personnel involved are transient.

The *institutional* rationale for self-evaluation is fairly obvious. The school – and in particular the management and teaching staff of the school – wish to improve the quality of teaching, levels of pupil performance, the public perception of the institution and possibly other aspects of the school too. Some of the goals of self-evaluation may be unique to a particular institution and of relevance to *that particular school* only. It goes without saying that a part of successful evaluation is to identify where weaknesses are and to do something to address these difficulties – so specific focuses within an institution will exist, and these may or may not be in conflict with other, broader rationales for self-evaluation.

The school also has to take account of, and indeed may very much be influenced and directed by, the *local* – or *LEA* – rationale for self-evaluation. Often these are in harmony but there can be inconsistencies and tensions. The LEA's rationale is likely to embrace the need (1) to improve the performance of all local schools; (2) to meet the needs of the Education Development Plan; and (3) to fulfil its general obligations for school improvement (and, where necessary, intervention).

Finally, there is the broader rationale stemming from the *national* context. As discussed in previous sections, this context is largely shaped by the influence of Government initiatives (and DfEE publications and guidance), along with the continuing requirement for external inspection. The relationship between inspection and evaluation, as already noted, is of particular importance to schools at present, and this is clearly a relationship that is still being shaped at a number of institutional and policy levels.

In many cases, what a school is doing in terms of self-evaluation is consistent with the requirements of an OFSTED inspection – the school, the LEA and the 'national' inspector may well all generally agree on how a school is doing and what should be done about any areas for development. However, there can be disagreements centred around evaluation as preparation for inspection and evaluation as a more general activity for the benefit of the school – and these can sometimes be very significant. Most tensions are not dramatic, but tensions do definitely exist and there is an issue here that merits further consideration: namely, to what extent *should* self-evaluation be for the purposes of (preparation for) inspection and to what extent should it have a broader rationale than this, embracing the many very broad and diverse needs of staff, pupils and parents?

Given this diversity of purposes for self-evaluation, the central question that needs to be asked by school managers and staff is 'who or what is school self-evaluation for?' (Saunders, 1999b). Is the purpose of self-evaluation to prepare for inspection, to assist in the process of achieving performance targets, to 'raise standards', to assist teachers' professional development, or, as is often the case, some combination of these things? The views of our respondents, summarised in the next four chapters, raise questions of this sort and also provide some indications of the directions in which schools and LEAs think self-evaluation should be going.

3. CURRENT ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

The previous chapter mapped out the policy context and some of the key issues and rationales behind self-evaluation. This chapter identifies the types of materials and packages produced by LEAs and other organisations and used to support schools in their self-evaluation work. Case studies are included to provide a flavour of how individual schools have been carrying out self-evaluation, what they have been focusing on and how their LEA has supported them in their work.

All of the 16 schools in the nine LEAs visited for this research were using an explicit package or model as a framework for their self-evaluation work. For the most part, schools had adopted a single package (such as an LEA-produced package). A small number of schools, however, were using a 'pick and mix' approach. An example of the latter was a school using a combination of the OFSTED framework, *Investors in People* guidelines and the 'Strathclyde model' developed by John MacBeath.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the types of approach used by schools. From this it can be seen that customised LEA-produced packages were the most popular, followed by the OFSTED framework.

Table 1.   Broad types of school self-evaluation packages used by schools[3]

Model	Number of schools
LEA model	10
OFSTED framework	4
Consultant	2
Basic Skills Quality Mark	1
Business Excellence Model	1
Investors in People	1
Strathclyde model	1

[3] Note that some schools used more than one package; hence the total number of schools adds up to more than 16.

3.1 The General Picture: LEAs

Scrutiny of the documentary evidence made available by LEAs and schools made it clear that much of what is produced by LEAs follows a similar pattern. All of the packages produced by LEAs drew upon recent guidance from the DfEE, most notably the five-stage cycle for school improvement

as outlined in 'From Targets to Action' (GB. DfEE, 1997). Several of the packages also appear to have been influenced by research on the key characteristics of effective schools, conducted by staff at the Institute of Education, London (Sammons *et al.*, 1995). In addition, and perhaps not surprisingly, a number were influenced by the OFSTED framework for self-evaluation and made explicit reference to the relationship between self-evaluation and preparation for OFSTED inspections. A small number of LEAs had developed their packages in consultation with representatives (usually headteachers) from schools. In three or four of the authorities featured, the involvement of practitioners was seen as being a crucial element for the development of a local self-evaluation package.

Another common feature of LEA packages was to provide schools with 'toolkits' for carrying out self-evaluation, or other exemplar materials to help provide a starting point for schools. Commonly these included sample questionnaires for staff, pupils and parents, or guidance schedules to help structure classroom observations.

The packages described above provided schools with detailed and, to varying degrees, prescriptive support for a school carrying out self-evaluation. In contrast, other authorities had chosen not to collate research evidence, information and exemplar materials themselves, in favour of 'buying in' packages such as the OFSTED framework, or the Investors in People procedures, or were supporting their schools to work with external consultants. The OFSTED framework and other commercially available packages represent a particular understanding of the purpose of self-evaluation (using Investors in People to focus on staff development, for example). The schools working with an educational consultant appear to have been afforded greater individual autonomy in developing focuses for their self-evaluation on a school-by-school basis rather than choosing elements of, or working systematically through, a particular 'package'.

In addition to the packages described above, staff interviewed in schools (generally headteachers) and their education authorities identified a selection of key publications that have influenced and helped shape their approaches to school self-evaluation. These included *School Evaluation Matters* (OFSTED, 1998), *How Good is Our School?* (GB. SOEID, 1996), *The Intelligent School* (MacGilchrist *et al.*, 1997) and *Schools Must Speak for Themselves* (MacBeath, 1999).

3.2 The General Picture: Schools

On the whole, schools expressed satisfaction with the packages they were using. A headteacher of a school in one of the city authorities was enthusiastic about the LEA's package because it linked the cyclical process of self-evaluation with their School Improvement Plan. She described the package as a '*working document ... one of the few documents that is used* [in

school]!' Similarly, there was broad satisfaction about another authority's framework, though the headteacher of a primary school in this LEA stressed the need to be clear about the purpose of adopting such packages: *'People must not become so tangled up doing it* [self-evaluation] *that they lose sight of the bigger picture: what is happening in classrooms.'* This particular headteacher was a member of a working group set up to review and refine the package, and described the framework as *'a faulty vehicle, but the best shot we've got!'*

The starting points for the most frequently used approaches (namely LEA packages) were in essence very similar. Following statements relating to the broad principles behind self-evaluation, as interpreted by each LEA, the packs were organised to enable or require schools to consider their practice in a range of areas of school life. Some LEAs focused on specific age groups (e.g. early years) and/or areas of the curriculum (e.g. numeracy, literacy) whereas others adopted more a more generic approach, making use of broad themes such as 'teaching and learning'.

It was usual for schools to identify particular areas and to set specific targets for development within each of the more general areas as outlined above. These activities reflected the diverse needs, and the strengths and weaknesses, of individual organisations. The most popular areas of focus for self-evaluation were linked to central government initiatives, particularly the Literacy and Numeracy Hours, or to meeting the needs of the National Curriculum, such as school-level provision for information and communications technology (ICT). However, it was also clear from interviews with teachers that embarking on self-evaluation had provided schools with the opportunity to evaluate, in some detail, other areas of school life, such as leadership and management, staff development, pupil behaviour or the school's relationship with parents.

3.3 The Case Studies

Chapters 4 to 7 of this report set out the advantages and issues associated with school self-evaluation as perceived by our interviewees. These elaborate on the brief general picture that has just been provided of what was happening in schools and LEAs in terms of the use of self-evaluation packages.

It can be seen from the previous two sections that there were some differences of approach and emphasis across LEAs, but there were also areas of commonality. In order to develop this picture, further overviews, or case studies, of self-evaluation activities within particular LEAs (and their schools) were put together. The following four case studies provide illustrative accounts of the types of activities undertaken by the schools as part of their self-evaluation and also chart the relationship between schools and their education authorities.

Case Study A

This inner-city authority has a relatively long history of developing strategies and frameworks for school self-evaluation. The drive for self-evaluation has come from both schools and the LEA itself. The authority was in its fourth year of developing a package for self-evaluation at the time of the research. Influences included MacBeath's 'bottom-up' Strathclyde model and a tradition of professional development programmes being shaped by headteachers and teachers themselves. Teachers appreciated a collaborative programme, and the main strength of this authority's approach, according to one of the senior advisers, was that, '*When it works well, staff can see the importance of their role, they are partners in the process. It is not something that is "done to them"*'.

The main focus of the self-evaluation package is on school performance data and pupil attainment data (including attendance). There is also an emphasis on teacher performance as assessed through classroom observation. Leadership and management is always part of the review, as are pupil attitudes and behaviour. The basic package used is an LEA one developed through consultation with the city's headteachers. The purpose of the package is for '*improving teaching and learning: everything must be geared to raising standards*'. School self-evaluation, according to officers in this LEA, is about spreading expertise, good ideas and good practice. It was recognised that this sometimes depended, within a school, upon departmental strengths, so the evaluation framework contained a developing emphasis on departmental expertise.

The two headteachers interviewed were very supportive of the LEA's work in this area. The primary school staff interviewed had a firm belief that evaluation had actually assisted them in the task of raising the quality of children's work: initially in literacy, but also in numeracy. The culture of the school had changed when a new headteacher brought with him/her an emphasis on the importance of continuing self-review. She claimed to have been doing school self-evaluation before the LEA had even thought of the idea. In this school, at first, the merits of self-evaluation were not immediately obvious to the staff, but once they saw the benefits they 'warmed up' to the idea and then positively embraced self-evaluation techniques. They could see the benefits for the children.

The secondary headteacher was also pleased with the framework that was in place. He was particularly pleased with the way in which practitioners had been involved in the development of the LEA framework. He was positive about the way in which the school's staff had used and acted upon evaluation processes, especially from the perspective of professional development: there was a healthy, developing culture of peer review and support amongst the teaching staff.

Case Study B

This metropolitan authority is characterised by a polarisation of socio-economic backgrounds and about a quarter of pupils are from ethnic minorities. The LEA had been actively involved in self-evaluation for 18 months at the time of the interviews and saw its role as *'leading and facilitating schools to self-evaluate'*. To this end, they have supported schools in the use of any one or a combination of four packages:
- the OFSTED framework
- Investors in People
- Basic Skills
- the Strathclyde model.

Although the LEA interviewee conceded that self-evaluation has been management-led, he also felt strongly that schools should have ownership of their work and that evaluation needs to become part of the school's ethos. It was felt that providing a choice of approaches would encourage teachers to engage in the process rather than self-evaluation being seen as a *'paper exercise'*. The OFSTED package has been the most popular in schools, though there was concern that schools were adopting it because of the requirements of inspection processes rather than as a more general tool for self-evaluation and school development.

The first primary school visited was about to implement the Basic Skills and OFSTED packages and was critical of Investors in People on the basis of a feeling that it was unsuitable for schools. Staff were already engaged in self-evaluation and particular attention had been focused on the Literacy and Numeracy Hours and science teaching. As a result of lesson observations, feedback was shared with teachers, and the headteacher and targets were negotiated. In addition, staff have been gathering information about internal and external perceptions of the school.

A headteacher in another primary school in this LEA described self-evaluation as being *'part of the fabric'* of the school. They had adopted a mix of the OFSTED framework, Investors in People and the Strathclyde model to help focus on different aspects of the school. Focuses for this year were in part shaped by the demands of the Literacy and Numeracy Hours, particularly extended writing in Year 2 and mental mathematics. In addition, the provision of a new ICT suite has required teachers to attend to the development of pupils' basic ICT skills. Self-evaluation has also impacted on professional development. There is now an appraisal scheme in place for support assistants, and more training is available to them. There has been some resistance, however, among non-teaching staff, who have been reluctant to take up training opportunities.

These schools were broadly supportive of the LEA and were particularly positive about assistance from their link advisers. Staff have welcomed the *'mix and match'* approach, which has enabled them to choose a package (or packages) suited to their school's individual needs.

Case Study C

In this large authority embracing both urban and rural areas, the main stimulus for school self-evaluation came from the LEA. The aim is to evaluate how a school's improvement strategies impact on classroom practice and raising standards. The self-evaluation framework was developed by the LEA itself and used the LEA school monitoring cycle as a basis for action. However, the evaluation pro forma used is partially based upon the OFSTED criteria and anticipates the need for a post-inspection action plan.

A further aim in this authority has been to 'change the culture'. In this respect the process of evaluation is seen as being more important than the outputs. Rigorous monitoring 'flags up the issues' and allows comparison of schools across the county. Beyond these general aims, three particular focuses seemed to have developed: assessment, literacy and 'good classroom practice'. The important point, stressed a senior adviser, is 'What do you do in classrooms to make things better? This is the gap'. You need a 'very limited range of strategies...schools need key things. Translate it into practicalities. Provide an easy guide through'.

Each school receives an 'academic profile' produced by the LEA. When producing this, LEA and school staff ask 'How does this help your school?' The profile contains a structured checklist of questions – and it ranks aspects of a school on a scale of 1 to 4. In this way the profile identifies a school's strengths and areas for improvement.

The two schools visited were generally very supportive of this self-evaluation framework. The primary school headteacher indicated that the process had been really useful in terms of 'getting to know the children'. Whilst it was generally felt that there was still too much paperwork and a sense of 'initiative fatigue', evaluation processes had helped with staff development and the identification of children's strengths and weaknesses. This headteacher agreed with the LEA's focus upon classroom practice.

The secondary school headteacher interviewed was mostly positive about the LEA's assistance with school self-evaluation. He particularly appreciated the timing and planning of the evaluation cycle, which assisted greatly with preparing for inspections and planning staff development. Lesson observation was also useful. This headteacher, however, was not impressed with the county monitoring visit: this appeared to have more to do with the individual adviser involved than with the LEA's evaluation framework as a whole. The process of self-evaluation had helped the school to identify areas for improvement and to build upon those areas where there have already been successes.

Case Study D

The LEA is large, serving a mix of schools: rural and urban, large and small, with some areas of deprivation. The representative from the LEA described the authority as a '*late arrival to school self-evaluation*' and felt that they were still grappling with the changed expectations of LEAs resulting from the 1998 Act. In addition, the authority was described as being '*a data rich county*', but one that '*doesn't necessarily use it to create school-friendly profiles*'.

At the time of the interviews, a small number of schools had been working with an educational consultant on a pilot programme to develop clear processes and procedures for carrying out whole-school self-evaluation. This programme had been organised by and received support (though not financial input) from the LEA. However, the authority was planning to withdraw support for the pilot project amid criticism that the impact had been '*patchy*' and that some schools had not been rigorous enough in evaluating themselves. Instead, the authority was planning to 'buy in' a package developed by another LEA for use in all its schools, which would enable the LEA to fulfil its own responsibilities and to provide an overview of all schools' performance.

The two schools visited were enthusiastic about their self-evaluation work, but also critical of the lack of financial support from the LEA and of the decision to withdraw support for the pilot scheme. One of the strengths of working with the consultant in both schools was the sense of 'ownership' generated, of having the space to identify 'what matters' in their schools: '*it makes staff feel it's about their own agenda and about kids in your school!*'

The primary school had identified 'learning' as the main focus for the first year of their self-evaluation work, with particular consideration given to improving pupils' general skills rather than focusing on particular areas of the curriculum. In addition, an unintended consequence for the school has been a positive impact on teachers' professional development, both individually and within teams, despite initial scepticism amongst the staff.

The main focuses for the secondary school had been related to leadership: revising the management structure, developing middle managers' skills, improving communication systems to support learning in the classroom. Teaching staff have generally been enthusiastic. However, the headteacher was disappointed that in some respects progress was slow: this was attributed to the low expectations of some teachers.

The value of having a 'critical friend' was an important aspect of both schools' work. An external consultant (or another colleague) was seen to be important in enabling schools to develop a focus, set a timetable and to ensure that the evaluation was rigorous. There was concern that the LEA's withdrawal of support for the pilot scheme in favour of a different package could limit schools' autonomy to set their own agendas for self-evaluation.

These brief case studies have been presented to give an overall flavour of what was happening within particular LEAs. They serve to illustrate that school self-evaluation is a broad process that is shaped by both the LEA and by schools and which can impact upon both teachers and pupils.

The next four chapters focus upon issues rather than areas or particular evaluation frameworks. They set out in more detail some of the advantages of self-evaluation and some of the difficulties that arise from such processes, drawing upon appropriate examples from the research findings.

4. THE LEA PERSPECTIVE
Positive Aspects of School Self-Evaluation

This chapter examines school self-evaluation from the perspective of LEA officers with responsibility for this area, focusing upon what they see as the positive aspects of such processes. The following chapter presents some of the issues and difficulties associated with school self-evaluation, as perceived by these LEA interviewees.

Many of the LEA officers reported how useful school self-evaluation processes were, both for the authority and for their schools and headteachers. The main positive aspects of school self-evaluation, as described by these officers in the interviews, can be summarised as follows.

♦ The need for monitoring and evaluation provides the LEA with a **useful 'way in' to their schools**; in other words, the requirement for school self-evaluation provides reasons for initiating and maintaining close contact, on the part of LEA personnel, with schools and their staff. Self-evaluation provides a requirement for general advisers, subject advisers and link advisers to establish new relations with their school contacts, or to build upon existing relationships.

♦ The implementation of school self-evaluation helps the LEA to develop **an overview of how their schools are performing.** Self-evaluation processes can be conveniently linked, for example, with the production and analysis, by the LEA, of performance data for schools. Through these processes, LEA officers can 'train' school staff in the use of such data and analyses. In addition they can develop a useful overview of the relative performance of the different schools within the authority, in order to inform decisions about the support and management of schools.

♦ School self-evaluation processes help **to facilitate the development of positive working relationships between LEAs and their schools.** Assisting schools with self-evaluation procedures involves, by the very nature of these processes, *'working with'* schools and not *'doing things to'* them. This can be seen in examples of documents that have been completed by both school and LEA staff following a joint process of evaluation and monitoring. Such collaboration often lays the foundations for good working relationships between the various partners.

♦ Some LEAs have had worries about how schools can feed in to their aims and goals as expressed in the Education Development Plan – and school self-evaluation, for many local education authorities,

represents **an important link or bridge between the Education Development Plan and School (or Institutional) Development Plans**. The requirement for school self-evaluation provides a mechanism with which the LEA can ensure that individual institutional plans are geared up to the aims and objectives of the LEA as well as those of a particular school or school senior management team.

♦ Several LEA officers indicated that school self-evaluation had the effect of **informing and supporting the OFSTED inspection process**. Sometimes evaluation was directly linked to inspection requirements, but, whatever form of self-evaluation or self-review was adopted in an authority, it usually had a *'knock on'* effect of helping a school to *'know where it is at'* prior to an inspection.

The following sections elaborate upon these perceived useful and positive functions of school self-evaluation, making use of illustrative examples from the LEAs featured.

4.1 School Self-Evaluation as a 'Way In' to Schools

Since the role of a local education authority has been redefined (by, for example, the Education Act 1998) some LEA officers have found that their reasons for keeping in close contact with schools have been rather limited. In this respect the requirement for school self-evaluation is a very useful mechanism for facilitating and maintaining contact with schools. It is a kind of 'excuse', albeit a very important one, for LEA staff to access schools, to initiate good working relationships with school senior and middle managers, and to keep an eye on what is going on in the schools. At a time when the role of the LEA has been limited in some ways, this is a very important aspect of self-evaluation processes and its significance should not be underestimated.

There are several possible reasons why an LEA might need a 'way in' to its schools. It may be that, for a large, rural authority, the requirement for school self-evaluation sets in place a useful common framework which links large numbers of small, geographically dispersed schools. This was an important factor in one authority, which has over 300 schools, mostly in rural locations and with a high percentage having fewer than 100 pupils. There are many small primary schools and the issue of how a small school self-evaluates, a senior adviser suggested, is an important one: *'self-evaluation is very difficult for them'*. Although this adviser had to be mobile and needed the energy required to make a considerable number of school visits in the course of an evaluation cycle, she was clearly pleased that new evaluation processes represented a way of maintaining regular, sustained contact with widely dispersed, sometimes geographically isolated, schools.

A senior officer at a new urban unitary authority also stressed the importance of establishing a 'way in' to schools, but this time the need was for access in a short space of time rather than for maintaining access geographically. This authority had found itself placed towards the bottom end of the 'LEA league tables' (and, subsequently, it was obvious that fairly rapid change was necessary). The senior officer described how self-evaluation was used as a way of urgently and rapidly accessing schools in the borough. In trying to focus on school improvement *'we tried to identify key levers. We really had to identify a lever for change'*. Three things were identified: (1) the National Literacy Strategy; (2) the National Numeracy Strategy; (3) self-evaluation. Self-evaluation was seen as a key lever for change, a way of getting into the schools and *'making things happen'*. In this authority there is now an annual cycle of self-evaluation, with termly visits to schools by link advisers and other LEA staff. These visits ensure that schools are regularly *'challenged'* and are based upon the following substantive emphases:

- autumn term – performance data and target setting
- spring term – improving teaching
- summer term – leadership and management.

The idea has been to get schools moving on, even if they only *'move slightly further each year'*. The LEA's school self-evaluation file, which provides a common documentary basis for these processes, is reviewed on a regular basis – it is very much a dynamic document and new things can be inserted at any point. The aim was to provide *'more than a framework – we needed something that would galvanise the schools'*. This senior adviser was pleased with the way the self-evaluation package had been developed and with the way it had been embraced by the schools: *'it hits all the right buttons'*. The process of becoming involved in school self-evaluation has, in the view of the adviser, changed the way that staff view their professional practice: *'There is now monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice. This was a big shift in culture – they all do it and can see the point of it.'* The feeling was that this raises self-esteem and discourages dependency on the LEA; indeed the LEA may now have *'to start pulling back'* a little.

Another urban authority featured in the project has used school self-evaluation as a 'way in' to schools over a longer period of time: here the need for change was not as dramatic as that required in the LEA previously described. This LEA has a programme of school self-review that has been operating in one form or another for around three years. In this time an LEA-wide plan, not dissimilar to an Education Development Plan, has been implemented. The principle of using school self-evaluation (which is a *'fundamental principle'*) was developed through two pilot projects, and there has been a history of strong theoretical support for school self-evaluation. There has generally been a movement *'from theoretical/ documentary support to material support for schools'*. Intervention and support have occurred at a number of levels: in addition to a school self-review scheme for nursery, primary and first schools and a scheme for secondary schools, there is a scheme for subject departments (two

departments identified by the school – and not necessarily the lowest performing departments) in secondary schools. In addition to all of these, a programme for the review of school management processes has been piloted.

Not all authorities are large enough to develop and carry out their own 'freestanding' programmes of this sort. Some have had to use and adapt either national packages or programmes used by other LEAs. This was the case with one of the smaller unitary authorities featured in the study – this authority made a decision to use school self-evaluation partly to access schools 'causing concern'. The current programme of school self-evaluation was launched in 1999 at a *Raising Standards* conference for headteachers and governors. This authority has not developed its own package for school self-evaluation, due to its relatively small size and lack of time, but has adopted and adapted an existing model as used and developed by a larger LEA with a well-established record of good quality activity in this area. The *Raising Standards* conference was used by this LEA as a way of setting up access, via the self-evaluation package, into schools 'causing concern'. This was a first step in implementing self-evaluation, when time was limited, and there is little doubt that at a future point the scope of the package will be extended so as to include LEA work in all schools. The new unitary's initial drive, understandably, has been to intervene where there is most concern about standards of pupil performance.

4.2 Developing an Overview of How Schools are Performing

In addition to the use of school self-evaluation as a way of accessing schools, many LEAs find that this process, linked with the use of performance data, is a very useful way to maintain an overview of how schools are performing. There is a dual purpose to school self-evaluation in this respect. Firstly, there is a professional development function – LEA personnel, in working with schools, can help to train staff in methods of data collection, evaluation and analysis. Secondly, the collection of evaluation data is, in itself, useful to the LEA. The relevant officers can use such data not only to see how pupils (and teachers) in a particular school are performing, but also to develop an overall picture of how the borough's schools are performing. Often, because of this latter function, evaluation is linked in with the use of value-added or benchmarking data.

A typical example was outlined by one of our interviewees: each school receives an '*academic profile*', produced by the LEA. This contains several graphs and charts and uses the Autumn Package as a starting point. When producing the profile, LEA and school staff ask '*How does this help your school?*' Increasing numbers of schools are making good use of this profile, but perhaps they '*need tying in to the cycle* [of school improvement]'. The profile contains a structured checklist of questions – and it ranks schools on a scale of 1 to 4. The profile identifies a school's strengths and areas for improvement.

Another interviewee noted that teachers were showing an *'increasing awareness of data sets... Schools are much better with data now'*. This LEA has used both the DfEE target-setting guidance and the OFSTED framework for inspection (but, in passing, complained that the OFSTED categories are *'limited, a bit superficial. It needs more depth'*). This particular LEA also carried out analyses using the Autumn Package and provided training in this.

Another LEA, one of the urban areas mentioned in the previous section, has a long history of using evaluation data with schools. As well as using national data it has utilised Suffolk Reading Test scores, PIPS information and value-added packages such as YELLIS, ALIS and QUASE. The data for a school are all put together to produce an *'annual analysis of performance'* and, through the use of school self-review processes, *'the analysis of data is intensified'*. This process has strong data-based elements (though the data can be both quantitative and qualitative), and schools are supported by the LEA's Research and Statistics branch: *'The majority of schools now view data positively... there has been a change in the last three or four years... Schools can see the impact on pupil achievement.'*

The main focus of the review process in this authority has been on school performance and pupil attainment data (including attendance), but there has also been an emphasis on teacher performance through classroom observation. The common core of the review process, as identified in an LEA guide, had four elements:

- teaching quality
- pupils' response and behaviour
- overall attainment and pupils' progress in lessons
- leadership and management.

Leadership and management are always part of the review, as are pupil attitudes and behaviour. A central aim of the whole process, said one of the senior advisers interviewed, is to have *'accurate, moderated information in order for the LEA to monitor its schools'*.

This adviser further noted that there had been changes in the process of school self-evaluation over the last few years, though this *'varies by school. Some schools are better at planning for the future. In some schools there is a very useful gathering of information'*. The LEA framework *'provides high-quality information and sets up a framework for improvement. Some headteachers and deputy heads have found the data "a revelation"'*. But, to a large extent, school self-review has *'strengthened processes already in place. It validates what the schools are already doing'*.

Another respondent, in one of the shire authorities, described the LEA as being part of a *'data rich county'*, but one which *'doesn't necessarily use it to create school-friendly profiles'*. She noted that there is a need for a framework to create more professional discussion and to move the *'comfort level'* upwards. The LEA needs to continue playing the role of *'overviewer'*, *'having the jigsaw lid rather than bits of the jigsaw'*.

LEA officers, whilst acknowledging the need to involve schools, were usually fairly explicit about the need for an overview of school performance. For example, an adviser in a London borough, when asked what he thought was the main purpose of school self-evaluation, responded by saying that '*the short-term purpose is to have a clear picture of schools' strengths and weaknesses*'. This particular authority has made use of a number of relevant frameworks including the Business Excellence Model and the OFSTED framework. The latter, in particular, has provided schools with a '*structure for self-review*' – this framework has the advantage of being well known in schools.

A minority of LEA respondents expressed frustration about schools' inability or lack of understanding in using performance data, both at the level of the individual institution and at a broader, LEA level. The adviser in the London borough mentioned above said that '*Staff are not always good at understanding performance data*'. He felt that although some schools are '*good at looking inward*', others are surprised, for example, at their benchmarking position. It was also noted, however, that some advisers (including those who help to set targets) are themselves not always '*up to speed*' in understanding data!

The head of school improvement in one of the larger shire authorities explained that the use of performance indicators received a good reception from schools because a variety of indicators were used. This interviewee made much of the usefulness of a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures: '*Performance data is only one piece of the evidence. There are lots of indicators, pastoral as well as academic.*' The various elements of 'success' are not always easy to measure. Qualitative indicators should be included as well as quantitative measures. Although '*schools like numbers*', they also like to be evaluated on a broad range of measures. The authority made good use of this range of indicators.

4.3 Developing Positive Working Relationships

The great majority of LEA officers interviewed had a clear view that they were working *with* schools. School self-evaluation was a relatively new, but very useful, mechanism for the encouragement of good working relations, sometimes in areas where there had previously been some hostility between schools and the LEA. The following comments illustrate this point well:

- '*The idea is to work with schools – we want improvement from within... We put school self-evaluation at the heart of our work... Monitoring is based around school self-evaluation.*'

- '*The LEA is supportive, working with schools. Not just going in and out. Schools love it – they think it's so helpful.*'

The key to these good working relationships appeared to be the use of consultation and the maintenance of dialogue between school staff and LEA personnel.

This point was made particularly effectively by a senior LEA officer in a newly created urban authority, recently separated from a 'shire' authority. She described how the reorganisation of the LEA, along with the developing requirement for schools to evaluate themselves, provided important new opportunities for the development of positive working relationships. Schools that were previously hostile to the LEA were now working very closely with LEA staff, and a new '*culture of self-evaluation*' was emerging both at school and at LEA level.

Schools in this authority '*came on board very quickly*', and there was an attitude of '*we're all in this together*' and a real willingness to contribute to self-evaluation, partly arising because many of the city schools were resentful of the old LEA. For the actual process of self-evaluation each school has to produce an '*annual school improvement plan*'. There is a termly cycle of visits and an annual review of the school improvement framework. The LEA and school staff are now working on a similar pack for middle managers and '*for every teacher*': the aim is '*to replicate this model at teacher level*' (the programme had actually '*put teachers in the frame*'). This interviewee was quite proud of the fact that the LEA strategy was now '*encompassing all staff*'. The main thing the LEA had learnt from the process was the need to '*involve people*'. Further, '*school self-evaluation is now a part of the culture of this* [education] *department*'. Different branches of the department want to make use of the self-evaluation tools.

In several other authorities, the views of teachers have been built into the cycle of evaluation. In the city authority with a well-established programme of school self-evaluation, the officers interviewed stressed the need to take account of the views of headteachers and teachers and the requirement for a strong feedback element in the model. The main strength of this LEA's approach is that, '*When it works well, staff can see the importance of their role, they are partners in the process. It is not something that is "done to them"*'. The classroom observation element of the process '*works well...the focus on the classroom has practical benefits*'. Teachers have given the process '*a positive response. They may feel that it is a mini-inspection, but they are involved. Schools want to learn about themselves*'. The whole thing is a '*useful collaborative activity*' and there is always helpful discussion.

In the large south-eastern shire authority school, self-evaluation is '*an agreed process*'. Consultation is '*fundamental*'. Headteachers, deputy heads and governors have all been consulted, and a new round of consultations was about to commence at the time the research was being carried out. '*All the usual steering groups*' support the process. '*Schools have been very positive about the framework.*' The goal has been to help schools to put in place a system of self-evaluation – '*all have engaged with it*'.

Many of the LEA interviewees, when asked 'who should have ownership of the process of school self-evaluation?', responded with comments such as 'we want schools to be owners'. A need for LEA involvement was usually acknowledged, but there was a strong feeling that the most successful models of school self-evaluation were primarily school driven.

Even in the new unitary authority which was concentrating on 'schools causing concern' it was stressed that LEA advisers were working towards developing 'genuine partnerships' with schools, with the aim of building capacity for schools to carry out self-evaluation. The senior officer in this authority felt that school self-evaluation activity to date had brought headteachers together in a 'professional dialogue of sharing, warts and all'.

In another authority, a northern shire county, new school self-evaluation programmes provided a welcome opportunity to introduce coherence and a shared framework of understanding: 'the LEA and schools use the same language', for example there is an understanding of what is meant by a 'good school'. Both the LEA and the schools wanted to pull together the fragmented schemes that had been in place in the 1980s and 1990s.

In another LEA, schools 'tend to work as a body, working closely with the LEA'. 'Planning-partnership' is the local policy-making framework, and a model for supported school self evaluation was agreed through this. Although there was 'a small undercurrent of inherited suspicion', school self-evaluation was seen as being mutually advantageous. There was a vested interest for both sides in maintaining the positive working relationship between schools and the LEA.

4.4 Linking the EDP and School Development Plans

School improvement is one area where both LEAs and schools have reasonably clearly defined responsibilities; but an authority may be concerned that, whilst the school may carry out internal evaluations, set targets and draw up action plans, this will be directly related, understandably, to the needs of the individual institution and not necessarily to those of the LEA.

New pressures for school improvement and for school self-evaluation have been developing just at the time when LEA roles and responsibilities were also being reshaped and refocused. With respect to the latter, from 1998, as a requirement of the School Standards and Framework Act of that year, LEAs found themselves having to write Education Development Plans (EDPs). Several of our LEA interviewees mentioned the importance of school self-evaluation as an important dimension within the EDP and as a mechanism for linking individual school plans with broader LEA goals.

In the authority that found itself near the bottom of the LEA 'league tables' in 1998, it was recognised that there was a need for a consistent approach

to planning for school improvement across the authority. A headteachers' conference was called with the remit of producing a practical school improvement framework (six headteachers had a one-month secondment to produce this). Involving the school managers, importantly, helped to ensure a commitment to a common approach – and in addition the involvement of LEA personnel enabled them to ensure that this framework required schools to plan in line with the city's EDP priorities. The EDP identified eight school improvement priorities – and one of these was to '*support school self-review*'.

It is clear that, for many LEAs, school self-evaluation is a '*dedicated activity/priority*' in the EDP (and for some it may well also have been a priority before EDPs existed). One senior adviser in a unitary authority noted that the major focuses for school self-evaluation in the LEA in recent years were (deliberately) exactly the focuses that drove the EDP. Broadly defined, these were (1) pupils' attainment; (2) quality and consistency of teaching and learning; and (3) school leadership. This respondent stressed that standards, both in individual schools and across the authority, could not improve if issues relating to the quality of teaching and learning were not addressed. LEA and school plans have created a situation where all pupils have personal targets which are simple and attainable – and as an indicator of their importance, these targets are displayed on classroom walls.

In another authority the senior adviser interviewed stressed that school self-evaluation '*features throughout the EDP*'. This officer, at the time of the research, had the job title of 'senior developmental adviser' and, as such, represented a fundamental link between the schools and the LEA's broader aims. She assisted schools with their School Development Plans and linked these in with the broader goals of the authority's Education Development Plan.

4.5 Informing and Supporting the OFSTED Process

As indicated in earlier chapters, the relationship between internal self-evaluation and the preparation and action required for an external inspection is a complex one (and is explored further in other sections of this report – see especially section 7.5). There are many overlaps, and both sets of activities can be seen as having 'quality control' and/or 'raising standards' functions, but there are clearly some important differences too. The most obvious of these is that external inspection is organised on the basis of a clear, predefined national framework – the OFSTED framework – whereas schools (and to a lesser extent, LEAs) have more say in how and why internal evaluation should be implemented.

From the evidence collected from the LEA officers who took part in this research, it is apparent that processes of school self-evaluation often had the (direct or indirect) effect of assisting staff in preparing for inspection. For LEA officers, one decision that had to be taken in this respect was

whether their own model or evaluation package should be based upon the OFSTED framework or elements of that framework.

In the course of the interviews, several of the LEA officers stressed that, in their opinion, school self-evaluation activities had positively aided the processes of preparing for an OFSTED inspection. Whatever form of self-review was adopted in an authority, it usually had a 'knock-on' effect of helping a school to identify its strengths and weaknesses prior to inspection. For example one officer reported that there had been 'a *'knock-on' into OFSTED reports – primary schools have had good inspection reports'*, suggesting that this had occurred partly as a result of the use of a school self-evaluation framework put together by the LEA.

Sometimes this kind of preparation was deliberate, especially where the LEA relied heavily on the OFSTED framework, or on parts of that framework. At other times, the school self-evaluation process involved only 'indirect' preparation because the emphases of the review process were not the same as those for an OFSTED inspection. When asked if the OFSTED inspection framework was used by the authority, one respondent said: '*We took broad headings from this. We've made it less intimidating.*'

Another interviewee said that the LEA had made some use of the OFSTED framework and the school profile document used by this authority closely matches an OFSTED inspection report: '*We're very confident that schools self-evaluating using this process will be aware of their shortcomings.*' This interviewee was confident that '*a review using our framework gives a fuller picture than an OFSTED inspection*'.

It was quite common for parts of the OFSTED framework to be used, or for this framework to be used in combination with some other evaluation package. One authority indicated that it was not using its own explicit structured approach to school self-evaluation; rather, use was being made of a combination of the OFSTED framework and the Business Excellence Model. It was acknowledged, however, that the motivation for schools might well be external: '*to give a good account of where a school is, as during an inspection*'.

Most LEA officers, then, found self-evaluation useful as one way of preparing schools for OFSTED inspections. This does not mean, however, that they were uncritical of such processes or that they saw this as the sole purpose of self-evaluation: the next chapter highlights some of these criticisms. One LEA respondent raised some important issues about the influence of OFSTED requirements upon school self-evaluation processes, expressing concerns about *why* schools wanted to become involved in self-evaluation. This respondent's own LEA had '*pushed*' the OFSTED package, but was concerned that schools might be adopting it as a preliminary inspection process rather than as a broader tool for self-evaluation and professional development.

5. THE LEA PERSPECTIVE
Issues and Difficulties

Although there were many positive aspects to school self-evaluation processes for local education authorities, and the culture of LEAs and schools was changing towards the increased use of such processes, there remained a number of problems and issues to be dealt with. This is not surprising, given the emphasis until the mid-1990s at least, upon external inspection as the predominant mode for the evaluation of school standards. From the comments made by the LEA interviewees, four main issues in relation to the implementation of school self-evaluation can be identified.

♦ A major source of tension was the need for the LEA to achieve a **balance between 'managing' and 'supporting' schools.** Just how far could LEA management and intervention in these processes go? To what extent could the schools be relied upon to carry out rigorous and demanding self-assessments? Sometimes there was a very fine line between support and over-intervention, and LEA officers had to make some carefully considered judgements about the right amount of involvement.

♦ Similarly, there was an issue of whether school self-evaluation processes should be **LEA driven or school driven.** Whilst many LEA personnel expressed a desire for schools to have ownership of the process of self-evaluation, and that such evaluation should be from the 'bottom up', several also acknowledged that self-evaluation is, in practice, largely LEA led, especially where the implementation of a school self-review package or framework is in its early stages.

♦ There were also some **resourcing issues.** Should the schools be made to pay for supported school self-review? How should the provision of such support by the LEA be funded or organised?

♦ Linked with the resourcing issue was the issue of **coherence and integration** in the delivery of LEA support for school self-evaluation. There was sometimes a need, especially where school self-evaluation frameworks (or personnel) were new, to ensure that the relevant LEA teams and personnel would work together efficiently. This was true from both the school perspective – schools needed a clear and coherent framework to work with – and from the LEA view, where often coordination and consistency of delivery were required across a number of different departments and services.

5.1 Achieving a Balance between Managing and Supporting Schools

Often it is very difficult for an LEA to get the balance right: it must assist its schools, but should not interfere unduly in the running of a successful or improving school. This was a tension that was manifested quite frequently in the interviewees' discussions. Where should the line be drawn between management and support?

One respondent summarised this tension as follows: *'Some schools are cosy, others are rigorous – the approach to self-evaluation is left to the school itself.'* The effects of school self-evaluation upon school improvement are *'patchy'*. Self-evaluation needs *'whole-school commitment and strong leadership'*. It can be a struggle to get schools to look at themselves: there are some *'self-aware'* schools, *'but others think they are better than they are'*.

Actual LEA interventions, as the following comments illustrate, could range from monitoring at a distance to several days visiting and reporting, with advisers working with schools for considerable periods of time.

In one shire LEA, which saw itself as a *'late arrival'* to school self-evaluation, a pilot project with a university education department, involving over 40 schools, has been carried out. This LEA felt that it had *'not been involved enough'* in getting schools to ask *'difficult questions'*. *'The LEA role is to ask key questions'*, but you need to know your schools before you do this. One criticism of the pilot scheme was that its effect on school improvement had been *'patchy'*. The fact that (in the LEA's view) *'not enough of the schools were asking themselves difficult questions'* was seen to be a problem here because the pilot provided only a broad framework, relying on schools themselves to be rigorous in the evaluation.

Several interviewees stressed the widespread and well-known guideline that *'support from the LEA will be in inverse proportion to success'*. This meant that advisers and governors needed to be able to identify schools as average, improving or causing concern as part of the effort to target the neediest schools.

What some officers were asking was *'how light is "light touch"?'* To an extent, school self-evaluation has been used as preparation for light touch inspections, as introduced by OFSTED in March 2000. Some headteachers, however, would prefer a fuller approach: one interviewee said that *'evaluation has been so light touch that it was pretty meaningless'*.

In another authority, this time an urban LEA with a history of using school self-evaluation, the adviser stressed that *'This is an LEA-generated model* [but] *schools were involved in the pilot. Consultation was important'*. However, *'We couldn't allow schools an open choice. We offer support. We list schools where self-review would be timely.* [In this process] *the school has majority participation on the team, the advisers moderate'*. There

was frequent emphasis in this interviewee's comments on the LEA's role as a 'moderator'. The main purpose of self-evaluation or self-review was *'to make schools conscious of the strategies that they themselves can use... Schools must have ownership* [in line with] *the developmental needs of the institution'*. This respondent, when pressed about the role of self-evaluation for schools and the LEA said that *'Schools value self-evaluation; the role of the LEA is to moderate as necessary'*.

In contrast, one adviser in a London borough saw the LEA's role as being to challenge schools who see self-evaluation as a *'paper exercise'*, i.e. as completing a number of checklists and recording information for the benefit of the LEA. He saw the LEA role as *'leading and facilitating'* schools in the process of self-evaluation. He did also stress, however, that there had been a shift towards *'empowering schools to help themselves'*. Although this adviser conceded that school self-evaluation in this authority could be characterised as being management led (this LEA made use of four packages or frameworks), he also felt very strongly that the *'school community'* needs to have ownership of its work and that it needs to become part of a school's ethos.

Another respondent described the 'traditional' LEA-inspectorate role as characterised by *'we* [the LEA] *do to you and you learn'*. In this LEA, the inspecting role had been predominant in the past, but their role in more recent times has been to support and enable schools, an approach which has given the LEA greater credibility with headteachers and their staff.

When asked about ownership of school self-evaluation, one officer stressed the role of the LEA, *'leading and supporting schools in good practice. There is a stress on support, you're working with them... The LEA and its schools are reaching the point where they're using the same language'*.

Another officer, in a shire authority, saw the role of the LEA in self-evaluation as being *'to ask key questions'*: and to do this they needed to know their schools better. Although this interviewee would rather see school self-evaluation as coming *'bottom-up'* from schools, she stressed that the LEA needs to continue to have an overview. She also pointed out that being *'a conduit of dissemination and good practice'* is part of an authority's statutory duty – however, it has taken time to adjust since the 1998 Act. In this county, there was a feeling that schools *'still view the LEA as inspectors rather than as a critical friend'*.

Sometimes LEA personnel were keen to stress that school self-evaluation *'needs to be in both directions'*, top down *and* bottom up. One problem with this, however, was that some schools had been, and still were, operating within a competitive culture, and there was not always a culture of sharing good practice across local schools. The LEA becomes a *'critical co-evaluator...asking confirming questions* [and] *asking hard questions'*. She also said that there is *'less holistic thinking going on than there ought to be'* and that there is a need to involve all stakeholders, including parents and pupils.

5.2 LEA-driven or School-driven Evaluation?

The issue of whether the LEA role is primarily one of managing and directing schools or of providing support for them was very much tied in with the issue of where ownership of school self-evaluation should lie. No evaluation programme was entirely school driven and few were exclusively promoted and implemented by the LEA. All required some degree of partnership working.

The areas where the involvement of an individual school will be most prominent, or where ownership of the process is most obviously in school-based hands, may well be those where either the headteacher or a relevant LEA officer has been influenced by MacBeath's *Schools Speak for Themselves* (SSFT) approach (see MacBeath *et al.*, 1998).

There were two authorities in this study where this approach had some influence. The first of these was a city authority with considerable experience of overseeing school self-evaluation processes. From the start, MacBeath's *Schools Speak for Themselves* publication was used to inform the process of setting up self-evaluation systems for schools. *SSFT* was used as '*an active model*' and the professional associations were involved '*from day one*'. The National Union of Teachers had a high degree of input and, in addition, there were consultations between headteachers, deputy headteachers and advisers. '*All parties are involved and act upon the recommendations*': the LEA had '*a desire to support*' the process. The two advisers interviewed in this authority stressed the '*bottom-up*' and '*collaborative*' nature of self-evaluation, but also acknowledged that it was useful to the LEA too – '*schools have requested it, but it does serve our needs as well*'.

The early stages of the implementation of this programme were characterised by an informal way of working: the LEA gave schools '*documentary and theoretical support*' and classroom observation was introduced. In this process, one of the senior advisers said: '*Advisers are the active link, but the LEA is trying to increase schools' sense of autonomy. The LEA is attempting to embed school self-evaluation in the culture of schools.*'

The self-evaluation procedures established in this authority were informed by the *SSFT* approach, but were not actively designed around MacBeath's detailed suggestions. To a large extent, the basis of school self-evaluation, as it is enacted within a school, is negotiation between the headteacher and the link adviser: there is usually an intensive, two-day review process and the adviser's role '*depends on the school*'. Occasionally there is a need to initiate the culture, to facilitate the implementation of self-evaluation. '*Sometimes a moderating role is necessary*' and sometimes '*challenging*' is required, especially where '*schools should not be satisfied with present performance*': '*We help schools to decide what is most appropriate, we encourage them to plan ahead.*'

The main outcome of the process for the school is a written report. The school's link adviser has overall responsibility for this report, though a section on attainment and progress is written by the headteacher, and an unattached adviser will write the section on leadership and management. Other sections are written by a combination of these people. The school adviser attends staff meetings (especially where there is disagreement about any element of the report) and reports to the governing body and the LEA's Director of Education. Within the report, desired outcomes are identified in detail.

Another authority featured in the project offered MacBeath's package alongside other frameworks. The senior adviser interviewed here described the publication *Schools Speak for Themselves* as a '*watershed*' document. An ex-OFSTED inspector himself, he felt that OFSTED had had to take notice of this in order to keep '*on board*' in terms of school self-evaluation.

The remaining authorities did not make direct use of the SSFT framework, but this is not to say that they did not wish to have school-based or pupil-influenced evaluation frameworks. All were concerned about getting the balance right in terms of LEA involvement and school ownership and influence. One interviewee made reference to '*walking a tightrope between LEA direction and schools' ownership*'. She also developed a particularly interesting line of enquiry: '*What makes schools pick up* [self-evaluation] *and run with it? What makes self-evaluation work better in some schools than in others?*' These are important questions that deserve further consideration: what are the important relevant factors in terms of a school getting hold of a self-evaluation package and making it work? How important are, for example, communication systems, the energy of the headteacher, the commitment of staff and the culture of professional development in a school?

The role of the adviser is clearly important here. The link adviser represents the mechanism by which both the LEA and the school keep hold of some influence in school self-evaluation. The existence of a link adviser who is respected by school staff appears to be an important foundation for programmes of school self-evaluation.

In one authority, although the advisers are '*the active link*' between the LEA and the schools, one of the senior advisers interviewed was keen to point out that they were trying to increase schools' sense of autonomy. In supporting schools' initiatives, the LEA was attempting to embed school self-evaluation into the culture of schools: '*The framework is being developed in partnership with the school. They like it because they feel involved.*' This was, she argued, definitely 'bottom-up' self-evaluation because the ideas came from the schools themselves (or, at least, from a committee of headteachers). This, said the LEA interviewee, gave the schools confidence – morale had been low because of the authority's rather lowly original league table situation: '*It raised morale, more than we had expected. It helped them to clarify the key levers. It also helped to make them feel that they were making a contribution.*'

The deputy chief adviser of another LEA stressed the importance of data ownership and the need for schools themselves to act upon the data – performance and evaluation data must be in the ownership of the school, so that the school itself can act upon it: *'It's no good having an individual whizz-kid. What do the schools do in practice? Data is part of school self-evaluation. Data doesn't raise standards. Teachers in classrooms raise standards.'* This adviser, interestingly, believed that schools with 'serious weaknesses' and schools on special measures, in her locality at least, were better at self-evaluation. This was because, she argued, they had been through the processes and practices of stringent evaluation and know what actions need to be taken: *'They've survived, they've come through it. You have to have an action plan. You implement it and evaluate it.'*

The point about the need for school action as well as ownership was also made by one of the London advisers. He pointed out that when the Numeracy Strategy was introduced, schools were audited and then left to produce their own action plans. However, some were very poor, and the LEA has recognised that these schools will need continuing support: *'School self-evaluation has no purpose if it doesn't bring actions.'* This particular respondent was concerned that there was some suspicion in schools that self-evaluation was being used as a *'stick'*; however, he stressed that there has been a cultural shift within the LEA. There has also been resistance from some of the advisers who do feel that the authority's approach should be led by OFSTED. For these reasons, this adviser was the one LEA respondent who felt that, at the time of the research, self-evaluation was largely external to schools, but feedback from headteachers generally suggests that they were positive about the prospects for school-based and school-driven self-evaluation.

5.3 Resourcing Issues

There were some variations across the LEAs featured in terms of how evaluation processes were resourced. Some charged schools a rate per hour for LEA staff, whereas others took a broader approach, providing a number of standard days for schools, without explicit charges. Several combined these approaches – allocating schools a specified number of adviser days free of charge, but with payment required for additional LEA personnel or services.

In one of the London boroughs, featured training courses and conferences related to self-evaluation were provided free of charge, as they were felt to be *'too important not to be'*. The courses provided at the time of the research were well received by teachers and school managers and were oversubscribed. In one of the shire authorities, however, a different approach was taken. Here it was felt that cost was in some ways indicative of the importance of an LEA service and, whilst there were plenty of free, standard support services, schools could also 'buy in' additional advice and support based on an hourly or a daily rate.

There was some criticism among LEA personnel and teachers alike of the OFSTED framework for self-evaluation: notably, that the licence was too expensive for LEAs to bid for and also that the model lacked some of the practical materials that schools needed. Consequently, some LEAs have devoted time and resources to producing materials themselves, for introduction into their own schools.

5.4 LEA Teams and Services Working Together

Another issue that had varying degrees of prominence in the LEAs featured in this project was that of coherence in the provision of LEA structures and services. Investigations into the provision and support of evaluative processes have revealed that some LEAs lacked coherence in respect to this type of service, with several different structures dealing with school improvement and/or self-evaluation. In others, however, there has been a clear, coherent approach to these issues.

Sometimes, in the past, where there was confusion or a degree of inconsistency in such provision, this occurred because of what one respondent called a *'language problem'* in the field of school improvement, i.e. there was confusion between the terms 'school improvement', 'school effectiveness', 'school self-evaluation' and 'school self-review'. This was evident previously, for example, according to another interviewee, in development planning processes. Different sections of the LEA would each produce plans of what they hoped to achieve and there would be numerous inconsistencies between the aims of different LEA units or sections, as well as some areas of overlap or duplication.

One of the interviewees stated, quite categorically, that, at the time of our research, the different teams and services within her LEA were not yet sending the same messages about school self-evaluation – although she did feel that *'the will is there now to do joined up thinking'*. One was left with the impression from this interview that the respondent saw herself as a 'troubleshooter' – and she described the LEA as *'waiting for an outsider to articulate what people are thinking'*. School self-evaluation, argued this respondent, provides a wonderful opportunity to focus and to integrate LEA services and teams: *'intra-dissemination is needed'*. School self-evaluation makes you think holistically. There is a need to develop a whole LEA-approved package, with different sections of the LEA *'speaking the same language'*. The process of school self-evaluation, she said, will help to break down the *'isolationist culture'* that exists in parts of the country.

In some authorities it is clear that this unifying process and the encouragement of holistic thinking were already beginning to happen. This was consciously encouraged in one of the city LEAs: *'School improvement is the mission of the whole* [education] *department.'* For this LEA, school

self-evaluation was not only a way of developing working relationships between the LEA and the school: it was also a way of ensuring that different divisions *within the LEA* worked together. Initiating and sustaining school self-evaluation activities straddles at least three units within the authority – it also '*straddles advisers and governors*'.

Similarly, another adviser commented that the new initiative meant that '*coherent messages are being given now in a way that wasn't happening a few years ago, seemingly as a result of the fragmented structure of the LEA*'.

On occasions the appointment or promotion of a senior individual has brought about the degree of unity required. This was the case in a large, 'mixed' LEA featured in the project. The thrust for school self-evaluation in this county came from a particular person – the appointment of a new chief education officer: '*School self-evaluation is very high on the agenda. It is very big. The authority has a very positive view – lots of resources, time and energy are committed.*'

Overall, although there were several serious issues for LEAs to deal with, there was evidence that great strides were being made in terms of overcoming difficulties and using school self-evaluation as a unifying force and as a mechanism for encouraging partnerships between LEAs and schools. It was clear from the comments of the LEA interviewees that, despite some inevitable difficulties, there was a will and a desire in most, if not all, of the LEAs featured, to make a useful and practical contribution to supporting school self-evaluation.

6. THE SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE Positive Aspects of School Self-Evaluation

Interviews with staff in schools revealed that self-evaluation, in its variety of forms, has been a positive experience for headteachers and class teachers in a number of ways. The perceived benefits to schools of self-evaluation can be summarised as follows:

♦ School self-evaluation can help bring about a **change in the culture** of a school, helping to formalise and to extend existing processes of evaluating teaching and learning and data analysis.

♦ Teachers' **professional review** and **professional development** can benefit from schools' commitment to self-evaluation, particularly in schools where staff are encouraged to share expertise with colleagues and to take up training opportunities.

♦ For some headteachers, particularly those recently appointed, school self-evaluation has provided a mechanism with which to learn about their school and to **organise change**. In other words, evaluative processes, mechanisms and procedures may provide school senior managers with a framework (and 'levers') for the management of change.

♦ Schools can develop their **own agenda** for self-evaluation, enabling teachers to focus on aspects of the school that they identify as areas for improvement. Furthermore, the internal agenda set within schools can also help promote **ownership** among teachers of their self-evaluation activity.

♦ Schools can benefit from the support of a **'critical friend'**, whether an LEA adviser, consultant or colleague from another school. A critical friend who is external to the school can help teachers identify areas for development, meet the demands of a timetable for implementing and evaluating activities and can 'ask difficult questions'.

♦ **Parents, pupils and governors** can become involved in schools' self-evaluation work: to help set the agenda for change and to benefit from evaluations of school policies and classroom practices.

♦ Self-evaluation packages and programmes, whether developed 'in-house' by LEAs or 'bought in', can provide schools with a range of **tools** for implementing evaluation activities. These may take the form of questionnaires for parents and pupils, files for recording data, observation schedules and so on. 'Toolkits' for schools avoid the need for teachers to 'reinvent the wheel' and can facilitate sharing between schools using the same packages.

The strengths of self-evaluation, as summarised above and as expressed by the school staff interviewed during the course of the project, are explored in greater depth in the following sections.

6.1 Changing the Culture

Many of the school-based interviewees indicated that, in their view, their involvement in self-evaluation had effected a change in the culture of their school. A changed culture, in every case where it was mentioned, was expressed as a positive outcome of self-evaluation. These cultural changes were identified in a broad range of areas of school life, including the following:

- improvements in data analysis and interpretation

- teachers' professional development

- further opportunities for the evaluation of teaching and learning styles

- opportunities to review and update school policies

- opportunities for consideration of management issues

- increased involvement of pupils, parents, governors and non-teaching staff.

A small number of schools in the sample had used self-evaluation for the explicit purpose of organising and managing change. It was notable that in these schools the headteachers were newly appointed when they began their self-evaluation activities. One such headteacher approached self-evaluation as being an important part of a process of strategic planning, *'fundamental to where you are, what you are achieving and where to move forward. If you don't* [do self-evaluation], *you stagnate'*. He described self-evaluation as a means of managing change *'in a way that is not confined to the headteacher's vision'* and was working to create a dialogue among staff, governors and parents.

In another primary school, the headteacher had been appointed prior to an OFSTED inspection which she anticipated the school was likely to fail. This headteacher approached self-evaluation as a way of facilitating both short-term and longer-term change and saw her priority as being to focus on developing a whole-school ethos and relationships among staff, governors and parents: *'Otherwise you're just looking at academic tasks.'* She described self-evaluation as *'challenging, philosophically and educationally'*, and the policies and documents developed since her appointment have built upon the vision and goals that were developed during a lengthy and carefully managed consultation process.

Headteachers and teachers referred to self-evaluation as encouraging a more *'collegiate'* working environment in which teachers were increasingly sharing planning, monitoring of performance data and undertaking

evaluations of teaching and learning. One London-based teacher described self-evaluation as being important *'for teachers to see themselves as learners and as having learning opportunities'*. A further example of the impact of self-review on the culture of a school was one headteacher's embrace of a whole-school approach which rested on the ability to change: *'I believe in a thinking, changing school and a thinking, changing teacher who will develop a thinking, changing child.'*

One of the most popular self-evaluation activities adopted by schools was classroom observation and it was clear that in some schools this was helping to create a culture of peer review and to encourage the sharing of good practice. Headteachers in schools adopting this approach frequently recognised that programmes of classroom observation (either by senior staff or class teachers) needed to be carefully introduced, with transparent objectives and feedback managed in a constructive way, in an effort to allay concerns among staff. A senior manager responsible for observing lessons in a primary school was keen to ensure that teachers didn't feel under threat by being observed; she regarded self-evaluation as a positive process focusing on *'challenges rather than beating yourselves up'* (being punitive or over-critical). She identified good communication and an open dialogue between managers and teachers about aims, vision and priorities as being crucial in enabling teachers to have *'the courage to talk about potentially threatening activities'* such as classroom observation.

In addition to a change of culture within schools, there was also evidence to suggest that self-evaluation had contributed to a strengthening of support networks between schools, particularly among headteachers. At least two LEAs had supported schools in the establishment of a school self-evaluation 'support group', with the aim of encouraging a 'professional dialogue' among headteachers and within which they could share experiences and concerns.

6.2 Professional Review and Professional Development

In addition to the emphasis placed by many schools on features of school life directly related to work in the classroom, for example teaching and learning styles, schools in the sample were also using self-evaluation to address aspects of teaching (and less frequently non-teaching) staffs' more general continuing professional development. Some schools had adopted an explicit approach, using packages such as Investors in People, while for others professional review took place within a more general framework for self-evaluation, such as an LEA package.

It was quite common for a package to be used to identify areas for improvement within a school and for continuing professional development to be planned on the basis of this identification of 'weaknesses'. Evaluation and professional development could be linked holistically, or particular

aspects of teaching could be identified as requiring attention. Examples of the latter mentioned by respondents included training in literacy, numeracy, meeting key stage targets and using performance data.

One of the schools visited had identified professional development and particularly use of the appraisal system as one of the main purposes for adopting self-evaluation. The school was also about to adopt the Basic Skills package and, in preparation, the headteacher had spent time 'laying the foundations' for self-evaluation. The headteacher was critical of the senior management team she had inherited on her appointment as '*hierarchical*' and quick to '*rubber stamp*' decisions, and described her work as being that of a facilitator '*putting the reins back into their hands*'. In addition, she has worked on encouraging the school staff and governors to develop a whole-school ethos. Despite the explicit drive to focus on professional development, this school had not opted to become an Investors in People institution, criticising the latter process for its lack of relevance to schools.

In contrast, another headteacher was considering using Investors in People as part of a combination of packages designed to evaluate different aspects of the school community. In a hybrid of packages for self-evaluation, different elements of the combination were used for different purposes:

- the OFSTED framework to focus on the curriculum and pupil outcomes

- the Strathclyde model to gain an insight into pupil perspectives of the school

- Investors in People to evaluate school personnel and their professional development.

This headteacher felt that these three approaches or models for self-evaluation were compatible with one another and that the adoption of a package aimed at professional development would build upon INSET provision that had already addressed areas for development, such as pedagogy. Furthermore, a non-educational external perspective on the school (such as that offered by Investors in People) was felt to be valuable. The only drawbacks associated with this emphasis on professional development were, firstly, the relatively high cost of Investors in People (although the school had received some funding from their local Training and Enterprise Council) and, secondly, the fact that teachers were leaving the school to gain promotion in other schools.

6.3   Developing a School Agenda

If the 'self' in self-evaluation means the school, then there should be evidence that schools as individual institutions can identify and act upon issues which are important to them. The extent to which schools were able to establish their own agenda varied, both in relation to their freedom to choose (and benefit from LEA support for) a particular self-evaluation package and also

in terms of their chosen focuses for self-evaluation activity. However, there were indications that schools did want ownership of self-evaluation processes and also wanted to use such processes to address issues identified at the institutional level. As one primary headteacher stated, '*I started self-evaluating a long time before the LEA did!*'

Mention has already been made of the London borough where schools were able to choose from four packages supported and partially resourced by the LEA. In contrast, schools in several other authorities have adopted a single LEA approach or package. The extent to which schools have autonomy in choosing a package did not appear, necessarily, to shape schools' ability to set their own agenda. Indeed, teachers in schools in two of the city LEAs, both authorities which provided schools with 'home-grown' packages, valued being part of an LEA-wide programme which staff felt facilitated discussion and support between schools. One headteacher in one of these cities commented that their package served '*as a tool to get us all thinking along the same lines...a unifying tool*'. Indeed, in another school that had not adopted an LEA-wide package, one teacher felt that it would be a useful way of improving consistency among schools, particularly if comparable assessment materials were shared by schools.

The degree to which schools were able to set their own agenda for self-evaluation within the framework of a particular package also appeared to be shaped by the perceived need for schools to negotiate a balance between external demands and internal demands. One teacher described her school's desire to improve as '*coming from outside, but very much coming from inside school too*'. This school gives a good example of how internal and external agendas had to be balanced. External demands were felt to come from central government and LEAs and included:

- the introduction and monitoring of the Literacy and Numeracy Hours
- the introduction of Curriculum 2000
- meeting School Development Plan (SDP) targets
- meeting key stage requirements
- meeting the requirements of SEN 'inclusion policy'
- preparing for an OFSTED inspection
- addressing OFSTED action plans
- working within the framework of self-evaluation packages.

In addition to these 'external' demands, school staff also identified a range of 'internal' focuses for self-evaluation. Areas identified for development that were particular to the school's individual needs included the following:

- developing a whole-school ethos
- teachers' professional development
- improving extended writing in Year 2
- improving ICT skills in Years 1 and 2
- monitoring assessment practices in key stage 4 home economics.

The extent to which teachers feel that they have the capacity to develop their own agenda for school self-evaluation is also linked to the notion of their ownership of the self-evaluation process. There was found to be widespread consensus among personnel in LEAs and schools that ownership should, ideally, lie with staff in schools (see section 5.2). However, it is clear from the research that schools' ownership of school self-evaluation is, at least in part, shaped by their relationship with the LEA and the need on the part of schools to implement new Government initiatives.

The enthusiasm and vision of the headteachers and other senior managers in relation to their perceived purposes of self-evaluation was evident during many interviews. A recently appointed headteacher of an inner-city secondary school was keen to promote a feeling of ownership of self-evaluation amongst her staff: '*When I arrived I felt very powerful. I want to empower staff, to give more satisfaction... There is a need to raise the morale of teachers, make them feel good about the job. Job satisfaction is more important than money.*' Another headteacher recognised that creating support among teachers for self-evaluation was an emotional process which he described as '*creating energy and making people believe in it*'.

Interviews with headteachers revealed that self-evaluation procedures were predominantly being implemented from the top downwards. However, this may partly be due to the fact that self-evaluation is still relatively new to many schools and there was widespread concern to ensure that self-evaluation activity was carefully managed in an effort to encourage support for the process along with a sense of ownership amongst teachers. While it is clear that much of the impetus for self-evaluation was generated (particularly in the early stages) by headteachers, a number were keen to encourage teachers to become involved in more strategic planning in addition to implementation. One headteacher recognised the contribution that curriculum leaders and classroom teachers could make to action planning: '*I don't know enough now – I don't know as much as class teachers* [about what is happening in classrooms].' However, like a number of headteachers, she was also aware of the possibility of overloading teachers and the negative impact that a heavy workload would have on their self-evaluation work, describing her staff as being '*tentative but willing, as long as they can stay sane while they are doing it!*'

In addition, there was evidence from the interviews that the extent to which self-evaluation had become 'embedded' in schools varied considerably. Although a number of headteachers felt it crucial to involve all members of the school community (including non-teaching staff, parents, governors and pupils) this was recognised as being a medium- to long-term goal and one which few, if any, of the schools visited during the research, had attained.

6.4 The Role of the 'Critical Friend'

The importance for schools of having a 'critical friend' became apparent in interviews with staff in a number of the schools featured in our study, and has been noted in the literature on school inspections and evaluation:

> *Schools need critical friends, individuals who, at appropriate times, listen and help them sort out their thinking and make sound decisions, who are not afraid to tell them when expectations for themselves and others are too low and when their actions do not match their intentions.* (Stoll and Thomson, 1996, p.27)

Most frequently the teachers in our interview sample described their LEA adviser as fulfilling the role critical friend, although a smaller number of schools were also working with consultants.

In the majority of schools, headteachers reported that their LEA advisers were supportive of their self-evaluation activity. For example, the headteacher of one school valued *'regular personal contact and feedback'* as an important part of their work: *'It is important having someone objective to look at the evaluation.'* LEA personnel carried out a range of activities, helping to set targets, observing lessons, arranging INSET and so on. Teachers in schools in at least three of the authorities featured stated in interviews that they felt that the support they had received from their advisers had improved in recent years. The headteacher of a primary school in one of these authorities was particularly appreciative of her LEA adviser, saying *'I consider her a partner'*. This headteacher sent her adviser copies of all self-evaluation documentation and data analysis and in addition invited her to a presentation to staff and governors about self-evaluation, in order to elicit feedback about the content and detail of the presentation and to help her gauge the response of staff.

Two schools in one of the shire authorities identified their critical friend as a consultant with whom they were implementing a pilot self-evaluation project. Both headteachers felt that it was not necessary to work on self-evaluation with an LEA adviser, as a consultant or another colleague could also provide the external perspective needed: *'It makes you do it and adds validity.'* Indeed, one headteacher had undergone training in a nearby university education department and had, in turn, become a critical friend to another school. The benefits of taking on an external consultant were described as threefold:

- encouraging schools to embark on, and sustain, a self-evaluation programme: the critical friend as 'facilitator'

- enabling staff to identify their focus for self-evaluation

- improving the validity of school self-evaluation.

Underpinning these benefits, it was stressed that school self-evaluation could only work well in a climate in which there was '*trust and a shared agenda*' between the school and its critical friend.

Meetings with a school's chosen critical friend were largely confined to contact with the headteacher and/or a deputy headteacher of a school, so this approach did not necessarily influence the development of a whole-school culture. However, in a few schools other members of the school community (most frequently teaching staff) had also worked directly with their critical friend.

It is important to note that although a good proportion of the schools visited cited their 'critical friend' as being an LEA adviser, the development of a positive and supportive partnership between a school and its adviser did not always reflect teachers' perceptions of their LEA more generally. Much depended on the personalities involved in the process of self-evaluation.

6.5 Involving Parents and Pupils

As indicated in previous sections, interviews with teachers revealed that, while many respondents wanted school self-evaluation to be 'owned' by the whole school staff, evaluation has actually largely been adopted as a 'top down' model. The impetus has come from the headteacher, and/or the LEA, at least in the first instance. In terms of the process of self-evaluation, rather than the origins or impetus, for the most part, activities appear to have been carried out by school managers and teaching staff. However, there was also evidence to suggest that self-evaluation had afforded schools the opportunity to involve pupils and parents in the process and that the opportunities for this kind of involvement and input were increasing.

It was clear from the research that the majority of schools visited had adopted models of self-evaluation which had at least some degree of external validity, most notably based upon the OFSTED framework. The Strathclyde approach, unlike many of the other packages, does not primarily aim to generate quantitative data or to produce criteria which can be applied to other schools: instead the approach seeks to challenge members of the school community to explore aspects of the school that are important to them. As previously noted, none of the schools in the sample had chosen to explicitly adopt this approach. Two LEAs made partial use of this approach and these described the Strathclyde model as complementary to, rather than a replacement for, external models of inspection.

Sometimes a kind of 'mix and match' approach was used. For example, the headteacher and deputy head of one of the primary schools were enthusiastic about working with their LEA to develop the Strathclyde model (in an effort to gather pupils and parental perspectives of the school) and had also adopted parts of the OFSTED framework in an effort to focus on

the curriculum and pupil outcomes. In another school, the headteacher was keen to include pupils in the process of self-evaluation and viewed the pupils' voice as being as important as that of teachers: '*Children know what helps their learning and what doesn't.*' In addition, the school was in the process of consulting with parents, and clearly placed a great deal of importance on including all members of the school community. The headteacher believed that whole-school involvement in self-evaluation encouraged a sense of ownership over the process: '*We're all holding mirrors up to each other.*'

6.6 Tools for School Self-Evaluation

A further positive aspect for schools of adopting an explicit package for self-evaluation was the provision of a 'toolkit' for carrying out self-evaluation activities. Examples of the kinds of instruments valued by schools included:

- pupil and parent questionnaires

- files for recording pupil data

- exemplar materials from other schools, such as three-year plans

- pro formas for lesson planning and other activities.

Teachers stressed the importance of saving time and energy by '*not reinventing the wheel*' when implementing self-evaluation and this was true for a variety of packages including LEA-based models, frameworks used by consultants and commercial 'bought in' packages. The tools provided by self-evaluation packages and/or frameworks were also described by one headteacher as providing a useful means of minimising anxiety and the impact upon teachers' workload: '*Facing* [school self-evaluation] *can be daunting. Some teachers panic.*'

Teachers and headteachers, then, had many positive things to say about school self-evaluation. Although such processes were often at an early stage of implementation, school staff were already beginning to see some benefits, particularly in terms of the ways in which schools could themselves, at the institutional level, take control of evaluation, monitoring, developmental and planning procedures.

Having outlined the strengths of school self-evaluation as reported by our school respondents, the following chapter explores some of the issues and practical difficulties identified and encountered by schools during the course of implementing a range of self-evaluation programmes. It also gives some indications of how the schools and their staff tried to overcome these difficulties.

7. THE SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE Issues and Difficulties

Although it is clear that school self-evaluation can have a positive impact on many aspects of school life, as discussed in the previous chapter, self-evaluation also presents school communities with a variety of difficulties. The main issues and difficulties, as reported by staff in schools, can be grouped and summarised as follows:

♦ The degree to which schools have **ownership** over their self-evaluation activity and the extent to which ownership is **embedded** in the school vary among schools. Both these processes can take time and since, for many schools, self-evaluation activities were relatively new, these were prominent issues for the interviewees featured in our study.

♦ Anxiety about the impact of self-evaluation on teachers' **workload** was a widespread concern. Some respondents saw school self-evaluation as another initiative, at a time when some schools were reportedly suffering from **'initiative fatigue'**.

♦ Leading on from the last point, the levels to which schools commit **resources** to self-evaluation, in the form of time, training and material support, often presented school managers and the teachers involved with some difficulty.

♦ School self-evaluation can present difficulties for **schools' relationship with their LEA**. Difficulties of this type occur where the LEA package or procedures, or personnel, do not have the full respect of school staff.

♦ Establishing a balance between **'internal'** school self-evaluation and **'external'** OFSTED inspections was raised as an issue for many schools. Schools had to try to find a balance between self-evaluation for their own needs and evaluation (and action) geared to preparation for an external inspection.

♦ There was evidence in a minority of schools **of suspicions among staff** as to the purpose of school self-evaluation, for example related to appraisal procedures or to national plans for the introduction of performance-related pay.

These issues and difficulties, as reported in interviews with headteachers, senior managers and teachers, are examined in more detail in the following sections.

7.1 School 'Ownership' of the Process

Following on from the discussion of the degree to which schools felt they have had ownership of their self-evaluation work in sections 5.2 and 6.3, it is also instructive to explore some of these issues and difficulties from the perspective of schools themselves. Given the rapidly rising profile of self-evaluation in recent times, it is perhaps inevitable that staff in some schools have found it difficult to achieve a balance between implementing external demands (in the form of new Government initiatives such as the Literacy and Numeracy Hours) and focusing on issues identified as important within the context of an individual school's internal needs.

A good number of schools identified the impetus for self-evaluation as twofold, coming both from within their school and to meet external requirements. For some schools this did not appear to present any particular problems. However, staff in other schools had clearly struggled to meet what they sometimes viewed to be competing demands. One headteacher reported that it is '*not easy to keep up with* [school self-evaluation] *because more and more* [Government] *initiatives are coming out*'. It is interesting to note that, even with the relatively high profile of school self-evaluation, none of the school staff visited saw these activities as being wholly for the school's 'internal' benefit.

In addition to implementing new Government initiatives, the self-evaluation work carried out in schools is also shaped and influenced by the relationship between schools and their LEAs, as outlined in section 4.3. For the most part, staff in schools felt that their LEAs, and particularly their advisers, were supportive. However, this was not always the case.

As has already been shown, it is clear from the interviews and scrutiny of documentary evidence that much of what happens in schools relating to self-evaluation has not, to date at least, followed a 'bottom-up' model as outlined by MacBeath (1999). In some instances there has been an explicit process of consultation between LEAs and school senior managers and other members of teaching and non-teaching staff, but, on the whole, the experiences of the research team would suggest that school self-evaluation, at this stage, is largely a 'top-down' process.

As discussed in section 4.1, a proportion of LEAs have employed school self-evaluation as a 'way in' to schools. This approach clearly has implications for the extent to which schools themselves feel they have ownership of their self-evaluation activities. Although this approach is not always perceived by schools as presenting a problem, the extent to which schools are able to exercise choice in their evaluation activities does appear, in some cases, to impact upon teachers' perceptions of ownership.

For example, a number of schools in one of the county shire authorities had chosen to be involved in a pilot project with a consultant from a local university. The LEA, however, was considering withdrawing support for

this work in favour of a model drawn from another LEA, which they felt was a more 'holistic' approach and one which would *require schools to ask difficult questions*'. Headteachers in both the schools visited in this authority were critical of the LEA's plans. One of these headteachers reported that she would value more support and resources from the LEA, but also felt very strongly that the school should retain their autonomy and should be able to choose their own model for self-evaluation, as the school is '*intelligent enough to know* [which aspects of the school they need to focus on]'. Up to the point of the research, the school had had a good relationship with their LEA adviser, with whom the headteacher shared the outcomes of self-evaluation. However she expressed concern that if the LEA did move to support only the new, imported LEA package, the school's own agenda for self-evaluation would be compromised. Further to these concerns, self-evaluation work in the school was described as twofold: 'official' and 'unofficial'. Officially the school was working to respond to their OFSTED action plan and 'unofficially' they were carrying out their own internally driven self-evaluation work.

Ideally, it seemed, many headteachers involved in the research wanted self-evaluation to serve the internal needs of the school, but in practice there were still considerable pressures to prepare for, and to act upon, the requirements of external inspections.

In addition to the possible difficulties facing schools in striking a balance between what are seen to be competing demands, a further difficulty lies in the extent to which school self-evaluation is 'embedded' in the school – in other words, whether or not ownership is confined to the headteacher or senior management team. Once again, there was little evidence to suggest that schools had adopted a genuinely 'bottom-up' approach, despite many headteachers' acknowledgements that they needed to '*have the staff on board*'.

A typical example of the 'top-down' approach was illustrated by the work of a school in one of the well-established city authorities. A teacher described the self-evaluation programme as management led, and suggested that it had been presented to departments as something that *had* to be carried out, though faculties were given the scope to identify a particular area of focus, for example monitoring assessment practices in home economics at key stage 4. Teaching staff were involved in the process through meetings with their heads of department, who were described as being responsible for sustaining self-review.

The role of non-teaching staff within schools was also explored during the interviews with headteachers and other senior managers. A number of schools reported that they had involved non-teaching staff, such as classroom and lunchtime assistants, in their self-evaluation activities. Headteachers in a few schools encountered difficulties involving their non-teaching staff: in one school, for example, lunchtime assistants were reluctant to undergo training.

In addition, a number of LEAs reported that they would require schools to adopt their self-evaluation package or approach if they were identified as 'causing concern'. In some LEAs, schools 'causing concern' were the first to be featured in a programme of school self-evaluation. Although it was not possible during this project to interview staff in such schools, it is clear that the adoption of self-evaluation as a 'lever' for LEAs to fulfil their own responsibilities may well have an impact on schools' autonomy and ownership over the process.

7.2 Workload and 'Initiative Fatigue'

Closely related to the issues and difficulties reported by teachers in the previous section, staff in both primary and secondary sectors raised concerns about managing the increased workload involved in implementing school self-evaluation. In addition to discussing the practical demands placed upon teachers, a number of respondents raised the concept of 'initiative fatigue' as a potential difficulty for schools to manage. There is evidence to suggest that for some teachers, the introduction of self-evaluation (particularly when it is a 'top-down' model) has been seen as *another initiative* to be implemented in the same way as new initiatives such as the Literacy and Numeracy Hours. Staff in the early stages of a self-evaluation programme were particularly concerned about the potential impact on their workload. This is not to suggest that teachers are necessarily hostile to self-evaluation; rather, that some appeared to view it as 'yet another new initiative' which they were being required to implement. Headteachers introducing self-evaluation procedures obviously need to be sensitive to this type of issue – and several of our respondents indicated that this process needed to be *'carefully managed'*.

The research took place at a time when early attempts were being made to reduce levels of 'bureaucracy' in schools, but of course in a system where there are heavy demands in terms of testing, assessing pupil and teacher performance, and for the implementation of local and national initiatives, it is very difficult to find any administrative activities that *can* be cut down! Sometimes school staff saw very clearly the advantages of having self-evaluation processes, but were somewhat exasperated at the difficulties of trying to implement such processes alongside all the other things that have to be carried out in a school that has to constantly strive to 'raise standards'.

There was some evidence, however, that anxieties about workload tended to decrease as school self-evaluation strategies started to become more established and embedded in the school – setting up a system of self-evaluation seems to be more demanding than the maintenance of these procedures. In addition school staff, from senior manager level to classroom teacher, were often very skilful and imaginative in the ways that they implemented self-evaluation activities. Such activities were sometimes organised so as to cover several school requirements. For example,

evaluation could encompass school policy review, preparation for an inspection, staff development and pupil assessment all at the same time!

Whilst there is always room for improvement, schools were generally very efficient in terms of organising their time, managing self-evaluation activities and 'dovetailing' these activities so that they complemented and supported other work requirements. The next section considers in some detail the different ways in which schools have gone about resourcing self-evaluation in terms of time, training and material support.

7.3 Resourcing, Time and Training

The ways in which schools chose to resource (and LEAs chose to offer) school self-evaluation varied. In some schools the expense involved in adopting school self-evaluation has been considerable, with little financial support from their LEAs, but with others, the authority has chosen to provide packages, training and support with minimal cost to schools, usually under the aegis of LEA support for 'school improvement'.

In addition, schools have implemented a range of strategies aimed at sustaining self-evaluation. The research would suggest that schools have adopted two approaches to managing the demands placed on headteachers' and teachers' time. In a small proportion of schools, time has been ring-fenced and allocated specifically to self-evaluation activities. However, in other schools, staff have been required to 'fit school self-evaluation in' around existing commitments, often in an *ad hoc* manner. A teacher in one of the city primary schools found this latter approach a source of frustration: '*There are no extra resources* [and this is] *a great problem; for example there are difficulties freeing up staff for classroom observation.*'

Teachers in primary schools reported that the lack of non-contact time available has impacted on self-evaluation work, particularly the organisation of classroom observation. In some instances, headteachers and senior staff have provided cover themselves or have provided supply staff to enable teachers to plan or carry out self-evaluation activities. This is an indication of the importance they attached to self-evaluation activities. It is also worth noting, however, that while headteachers in some schools have on occasions identified activities as discrete parts of the self-evaluation programme, they stressed that often these activities are part of the professional work that teachers are required to carry out anyway, e.g. sharing good ideas with colleagues.

Opportunities for teachers to benefit from training were sometimes limited in the sample schools. To a large extent, training in evaluation activities provided by an external body (mostly LEAs) had been taken up by headteachers and other senior managers. Opportunities for classroom teachers were on the whole limited and more frequently arranged 'in house', with senior staff 'cascading' information from external training. In some

schools, teaching staff were encouraged to attend twilight courses where these were felt to be appropriate and where funds permitted.

Criticisms of the provision for training were reported more frequently among classroom teachers than from more senior school staff. Most notably, teachers in a number of schools felt ill-equipped to carry out classroom observation or to provide feedback to colleagues. In one school, the teacher interviewed felt that the benefits of lesson observation declined following the first one or two sessions, as teachers did not possess the necessary skills to take this aspect of evaluation forward.

It is clear from the research that school self-evaluation frequently requires schools to make significant commitments in terms of their resources, in the form of material support, time and training. The interviews revealed considerable variation in the levels of resourcing. However, many schools had invested heavily in self-evaluation. The headteacher of one secondary school reported committing significant levels of funding from the school's budget and also set aside time to implement self-evaluation. She was critical of the lack of financial support for the school's work on the part of the LEA. In contrast, another school adopted their LEA-produced, OFSTED-style package as an audit exercise immediately prior to their inspection, which, according to the headteacher, the staff completed 'one afternoon after work'.

It is worth noting that although a considerable number of schools have adopted the OFSTED framework or parts of it, in some form or another, there was some criticism of the lack of evaluation materials available for schools to use. As a consequence, staff in both LEAs and schools have worked to develop customised or adapted 'tools' relevant to the OFSTED framework.

7.4   Relationship with the LEA

The interviews with headteachers and senior managers provided the research team with the opportunity to explore the nature of the relationship between schools and LEAs from a school perspective. Although the LEAs were selected on the basis of evidence about the extent of their self-evaluation activity gathered from the NFER's *Education Management Information Exchange* (EMIE), the levels and types of support for schools were varied. It was evident that schools in a number of local authorities found the strategic approach (in terms of the types of packages developed or 'bought in', provision of suitable training and resourcing) and their relationship with their LEA adviser to be of considerable benefit to their self-evaluation work (see section 4.3). In contrast, however, the research also discovered schools in which the headteacher's understanding of the concept or purpose of school self-evaluation was in sharp contrast to that of the LEA. (For an example of a situation where the LEA and some of its schools possessed conflicting agendas for school self-evaluation, see section 7.1 above.)

The research also revealed that a number of schools felt that the LEA had not yet developed a coherent message, with all departments and services working together. Instead, mixed and sometimes conflicting messages were felt by some teachers to hamper their efforts to implement school self-evaluation. In fact personnel in at least two of the LEAs featured in this study recognised this as a difficulty and were actively working to overcome some of the barriers and to develop a more unified approach.

An example of this issue was illustrated during interviews in one of the relatively new unitary authorities. Although the headteacher of the school described the support she had received from her adviser as '*brilliant and exceptional*', she was critical that there was '*no joined-up thinking in the LEA*'. The LEA appeared to have undergone a significant reorganisation since it became a unitary authority. However, this period of change was described as '*quite a disaster area, which has had a poor impact* [in schools]'. The lack of coherence among different services within the LEA had clearly had an effect on the school's self-evaluation work. While the LEA was encouraging schools to adopt their self-evaluation framework, the headteacher felt that there was insufficient ongoing support, and a lack of coherent messages from all sections of the LEA, to carry through self-evaluation for school improvement. For example, although the LEA promoted the OFSTED framework, school buildings in need of repair had been neglected since the borough had became a unitary authority – the headteacher expressed frustration that self-evaluation could not be a substitute for investment in all aspects of her school.

In a number of schools, teachers did not feel that their LEAs were providing the coherent messages across all departments, or services within the LEA, that were needed to enable schools to fulfil their self-evaluation programmes (see section 5.4 for more details on this issue).

7.5 The Relationship between School Self-Evaluation and Preparation for OFSTED

The relationships between LEA support for school improvement, school self-evaluation and preparation for OFSTED inspections, or between 'internal' and 'external' pressures, have been explored to some extent in earlier sections, particularly with reference to schools' ownership of self-evaluation (see especially sections 4.5 and 7.1).

All of the schools visited reported that the impetus for introducing self-evaluation had come, in part at least, from outside the school. The introduction of the OFSTED framework, or a substantial part of that framework, for school self-evaluation had been adopted by a majority of the schools and was clearly an important feature of current practice. However, the research would suggest that there are difficulties for staff in schools in terms of trying to resolve the tension (whether real or perceived) between internal evaluation and external inspection. A number of schools

had taken on the OFSTED framework in anticipation of their forthcoming inspections. For some schools this had been a positive experience, and self-evaluation had enabled them to identify areas for improvement. However, in others the process had proved damaging.

One of the rural primary schools featured in the study provided an example of the latter scenario. This was an unusual case, but it is significant in that it illustrates how self-evaluation is not always compatible with external inspection. The school had taken on an LEA-produced package based on the OFSTED framework, with the aim of being able to provide inspectors with evidence about their progress. However, the headteacher claimed that the inspection team were suspicious of their self-evaluation programme, taking the view that: '*If it's not statutory, why are you doing it?*' On reflection, the headteacher believed that the school's decision to grade aspects of the school along the lines of an OFSTED inspection was found to be a threat to the inspectors: '*OFSTED saw using number grades as their domain.*'

School self-evaluation had, in this instance, been implemented immediately prior to the school's OFSTED inspection, and staff had attempted to evaluate the whole school with limited time, resources or training devoted to the process. It is clear from this example that this first experience of their LEA package has, to an extent, damaged teachers' morale and that staff saw the use of the self-evaluation model as a reason for their relatively poor OFSTED report. As a result the headteacher said '*we wouldn't look at it* [self-evaluation] *for another year*'. This example highlights the importance of the need for schools to carefully supervise, and to be clear about the purpose for adopting, a particular model of self-evaluation.

Another school which chose to adopt the OFSTED framework made the distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' self-evaluation: work with the aim to improve their OFSTED report and that which they did internally. The headteacher reported that '*it makes sense if you're going to be inspected*' for action plans, and so on, to follow the framework. However, in contrast to the school described above, the headteacher believed that it would benefit the school to implement the OFSTED framework following, rather than before, their inspection. Although she felt that '*it did take a bit of courage to tackle it at that time*', this strategy allowed more time to be devoted to their self-evaluation work: '*We can do it with great quality and dignity.*' This example illustrates the general issue of the need for schools to consider the timing of evaluation in relation to inspection processes and the other major demands being made of schools.

7.6 Staff Suspicions

Interviews with teachers (rather than headteachers or other members of the senior management team) revealed that one or two had reservations or suspicions about school self-evaluation when the concept was first introduced. Anxieties amongst staff included the following:

- concerns about having their lessons observed by senior managers or colleagues

- having to give feedback on classroom observation after watching a colleague

- managing an increased workload

- oncerns about the relationship between staff evaluation, appraisal and the planned introduction of performance-related pay.

Such concerns were recognised by headteachers, many of whom were conscious of the need to present and manage school self-evaluation carefully so as not to fuel concerns. A headteacher of a primary school had encountered some difficulty in overcoming negative perceptions of self-evaluation amongst staff whom she described as '*battered by inspections*'. However, she felt that initial anxieties had diminished: '*Its OK when teachers realise that it's a mirror rather than a stick.*'

Another primary headteacher detailed how staff were suspicious when she first started self-evaluation, two to three years before this project was carried out, but had '*warmed up*' to the idea more recently. They were suspicious, initially, of the need for the headteacher to check children's exercise books – but gradually accepted that this was necessary because OFSTED had criticised the school for having weak monitoring and evaluation systems: '*There was a recognition that something had to be done. It became accepted that this was the way forward.*' At the same school there was also initial suspicion on the part of teachers of classroom observation – '*they did not understand why we did it*'. The headteacher overcame this latter problem by making observation and feedback more and more sophisticated. Now, '*all subject coordinators are trained in classroom observation... we have very specific observation guidelines... there is detailed feedback*'. By the time of the research, staff were fully in support of classroom observation and could see the rationale behind it: '*They are more accepting. It is seen in a positive light. We look at ways forward. We're becoming more and more sophisticated.*'

The implementation of processes of self-evaluation and linked activities in target setting and, for example, professional development, is clearly not without its difficulties. Teachers and school managers have to find the time and resources to put these procedures into place and to act upon them, when there are other initiatives also making demands of them. There are numerous tensions between self-evaluation for the school, for the LEA, and for the OFSTED process. However, there was also evidence, as outlined in the previous chapter, that, despite the tensions, there are many advantages arising from the use of school self-evaluation, both for teachers and for pupils. The next chapter attempts to summarise these – and makes some provisional suggestions as to how the difficulties associated with such processes might be tackled.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Two key features of school self-evaluation have emerged from the findings reported in previous chapters. The first relates to the context within which school self-evaluation takes place: there is much evidence that this context is complex and that it is shaped by a range of organisations, policies and personnel. The second feature is that, despite the reported difficulties of implementing (and acting) upon school self-evaluation strategies, there is much evidence to suggest that schools and LEAs are well on the way towards positively embracing the principle of school self-evaluation.

This chapter uses the evidence from the interviews with LEA and school personnel as a basis for considering some possible emerging features of good practice and for compiling a set of practical recommendations for action. These suggestions are made with the intention of offering ideas to organisations involved in school self-evaluation in their considerations of the structure and focus of future self-evaluation work.

8.1 Influences upon School Self-Evaluation

Implementing school self-evaluation can be challenging because of the range of direct and indirect influences that may impact upon such processes. There are many interested parties, and this is why underpinning many of the issues raised in this report is the question of 'who or what is self-evaluation for?' The degree to which schools feel they have 'ownership' over their *school self-evaluation* appears to be largely shaped by the success they have in mediating the relationships between, and awarding priority to, the following sets of influences:

♦ the vision and the drive of the headteacher;

♦ the approach adopted by the LEA (and the level of autonomy this affords schools);

♦ the influence of OFSTED (of inspection and of recent literature);

♦ the impact of recent Government policies and initiatives which may limit the time available to carry out self-evaluation and/or influence the focus of evaluation activities.

At the time of this research, the influence of agencies and agendas external to schools appeared to shape *what* schools were doing in terms of self-evaluation, and *how* they were doing it, to a considerable extent. It will be interesting to see whether the degree of influence from external sources will decline in the next few years, as self-evaluation becomes, theoretically at least, more 'embedded' in school and LEA structures and activities.

8.2 Emerging Features of Good Practice?

The LEAs and schools featured in this research organised their self-evaluation work in a variety of ways, and some were in the early stages of implementing such processes. Consequently, it is neither realistic nor desirable to try to identify one simple, 'best practice' model of self-evaluation. It has been possible, however, to extract from the interview comments some common findings relating to the ways that LEAs support self-evaluation programmes and schools implement these activities. These findings can be summarised as follows.

♦ All of the LEAs featured in this research developed or 'bought in' a specific 'package' or set of packages for doing self-evaluation that was then made available to schools.

♦ LEAs which developed their own 'in-house' packages drew upon the expertise of headteachers in an effort to provide schools with a relevant and workable document. Many of these packs took the form of loose-leaf folders, which enabled them to be easily updated and shared amongst staff.

♦ A programme of training often supported the launch of self-evaluation programmes. This was usually aimed at school senior managers and centred around ensuring clarity of purpose. A 'how to' guide was often provided.

♦ LEA advisers often continued to work closely with schools to help identify (new) areas for development, to set timetables and targets, and to help evaluate the effectiveness of the work

♦ Linked to the above, many schools valued the support of a 'critical friend' – such as an LEA adviser, educational consultant or a teacher from another school, to help maintain momentum and provide support.

♦ The provision of ongoing support, training and, crucially, time for staff in schools can help guard against self-evaluation being seen as a one-off exercise rather than as an integral part of the school's review and target-setting processes.

8.3 Recommendations for Action

Since the context for doing school self-evaluation, as noted previously, is complex, with a range of different influences and rationales operating, it is difficult to make direct, universally applicable recommendations. Indeed, a feature of the work being carried out by the LEAs and schools covered in this project has been their adaptability in relation to local and institutional circumstances.

All of those interviewed were asked to consider how school self-evaluation activities and the support provided by LEAs could be improved. The imagination and thoughts of teachers and LEA advisers with direct experience of doing self-evaluation have been used as a basis for the recommendations for action outlined below. These suggestions for action are made with the intention of raising ideas and possibilities for LEAs and schools who are considering adopting self-evaluation, or those already engaged in the process who are thinking about future directions for their evaluation work.

Recommendations for Action by LEAs

• To ensure that the central purpose of school self-evaluation is clearly understood by all the relevant parties.

• In the early stages, for LEAs to negotiate with schools about the best ways of implementing self-evaluation: for example by involving school staff in the development of LEA packages.

• To be clear about where, and with whom, the ownership for school self-evaluation does and should lie: with teachers, school managers, LEA personnel or a combination of these? To ask 'how can ownership in schools be encouraged?' Patterns of ownership may change over time, but these changes need to be prominent in the thinking and planning of school self-evaluators.

• To ensure that schools are provided with regular, ongoing, interactive support from link advisers (or an equivalent).

• To consider how to further relate school self-evaluation to other functions (such as school improvement) and services within the LEA, in an effort to minimise the potential for 'mixed messages'.

• To provide schools with some form of 'toolkit' for doing self-evaluation – whether as part of an LEA-developed approach or within a 'bought in' package, in the form of exemplar materials, questionnaires, evaluation sheets for lesson observations and so on.

• When possible, to provide training for relevant LEA personnel, school managers and teachers, so as to equip them to support and carry out their self-evaluation programmes.

Recommendations for Action by Schools

- To be clear about why the school is doing self-evaluation, so that all staff can see clearly the direction and the rationale for such processes and also, in some cases, to minimise staff suspicions about engaging in this form of evaluation and monitoring.

- To ensure that self-evaluation activities are practical, manageable and focused – and that they have an impact upon teaching and learning.

- o think about how to deal with and to mediate the (possibly conflicting) tensions arising from the requirements of the school, external agencies and national policy influences.

- To encourage as many members of the school community as possible (teachers, governors, parents, pupils, support staff) to take part in self-evaluation in an effort to develop a sense of ownership and to enable these processes to become embedded in the culture of the school.

- To consider the possible advantages of engaging a 'critical friend' in the process: perhaps an LEA adviser, an educational consultant, a supportive academic or a teacher from another school.

- To evaluate self-evaluation activities in terms of their impact on teaching and learning, to inform future planning and to identify new areas for development. To constantly consider and reconsider the focus of self-evaluation in the context of a 'learning organisation'.

- To ensure, as far as other commitments and initiatives will allow, that headteachers, senior managers and teachers are given the time to plan, develop, implement and *use* self-evaluation activities to inform their practice. To allow time for reflection on evaluation outcomes and subsequent action planning.

8.4 Conclusions

School self-evaluation is not new, but the requirement for implementing such activities within particular national frameworks, such as the target-setting agenda, is. In this respect, many LEAs and schools are still relatively inexperienced in terms of implementing self-evaluation. There are, however, numerous indications that, once a number of practical difficulties have been overcome and national and local priorities have been clarified or mediated, self-evaluation can make a key contribution to school, teacher and, potentially, pupil development. Whatever form school self-evaluation takes, it is here to stay. Enacted properly, it can be a central driving force for both LEAs and schools to achieve their goals and, in addition, self-evaluation has the capacity to be a major influence on professional development and the quality of teaching and learning.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interview Checklist
LEA Senior Officer/Adviser

Documentation to be requested:

− Any documentation relating to specific school self-evaluation initiatives which the LEA has developed

− Education Development Plan

− Written evidence, if any, of outcomes from self-evaluation activities.

Begin with brief introduction about the purposes and scope of the project.

1. **The LEA context**

   • Name and type of LEA; location, size, etc.

   • Characteristics of pupil intake and any particular features of the communities served by the LEA which influence its work.

2. **Approaches to school self-evaluation**

   • How do you, as an LEA, approach the whole issue of school self-evaluation and self-review?

   • What has been the main stimulus for school self-evaluation, as far as you are concerned?

   • What has changed in the LEA's approach over the last five years? What have been the major change factors?

   • Would you say that the main/sole purpose of school self-evaluation is to assist with school improvement, raising standards and target setting, or are there other purposes for which self-evaluation is necessary/desirable?

   • How would you characterise the approach used by your schools: e.g. management-led, staff-led, pupil-led? Quantitative/qualitative?

   • Who has responsibility for initiating, and sustaining, school self-evaluation activities in the LEA?

3. Implementing school self-evaluation

- How is school self-evaluation structured and resourced by the LEA?

- Has the LEA developed its own explicit structured approach to school self-evaluation?

- Can you identify the main strengths and weaknesses, for schools and for the LEA, of this approach?

- What sorts of materials and/or action-research activities have been developed as part of this approach?

- How are specific focuses or priorities for school self-evaluation identified? Who is involved in the process of identifying them? Are there any key groups not involved who you think should be?

- What documentation records the process? What role does the school development planning process play?

- What have been the major focuses for school self-evaluation in recent years? For example, pupils' attainment, behaviour, attitudes to learning, self-esteem, attendance, punctuality, extra-curricular activities; staff morale and professional development; quality/consistency of teaching and learning.

- What, if any, specific goals/targets have these focuses led the LEA to formulate? What timescale are you working to for these?

- Do school staff need particular kinds of training and/or support for self-evaluation? If so, how have you resourced/managed this?

- What are the needs for training the trainers in the LEA? How have you met these?

- Are you actively working with other LEAs in developing collective approaches to school self-evaluation?

- If you are involved in the OFSTED package for assisting school self-evaluation, what are the main strengths and weaknesses of this approach? How far have schools been able to implement and develop it?

- How are you helping schools to use, for self-evaluation purposes:
  - the DfEE target-setting guidance
  - the OFSTED framework for inspection *(but see above)*
  - the DfEE/QCA 'Autumn Package'
  - Audit Commission reports and guidance on accountability and best value
  - any other national advice/guidance?

- How well would you say school self-evaluation/review, school improvement, school effectiveness, performance monitoring and target setting are linked through the various LEA teams and services? Do schools perceive the LEA to be giving coherent messages in these areas?

- Where, in your opinion, should the 'ownership' of school self-evaluation lie? Who, in reality, is the 'self' in self-evaluation? What, if any, changes in the culture of schools need to be encouraged if 'self-evaluation' is to become a reality? Are schools building on the principles of teacher-led research and the reflective practitioner model, for example, or is the model more usually a top-down, managerial one?

4. Outcomes of self-evaluation

- What outcomes, in terms of any aspect of school improvement, can you point to at this stage? Do you expect these to be maintained next year/in the longer-term?

- Do you think the process of becoming involved in school self-evaluation has changed the way school and/or LEA staff view their professional practice? How?

- What would you say have been the most valuable aspects of the process for pupils, teachers, senior management, parents, governors?

- Are there areas where you consider progress to have been disappointing? If so, what reasons can you adduce for this?

- What have you as an LEA learnt from the process? Have there been any unintended consequences?

- What are the outstanding issues?

- What will you do differently in future?

- What lessons would you want to pass on to others?

APPENDIX B: Interview Checklist
School Senior Managers and Other Relevant Staff

Interviewees to be determined before fieldwork takes place, but will usually include:

* member of SMT

* lead person on self-evaluation initiative/strategy, if applicable

* selected staff (including non-teaching staff) involved in self-evaluation.

Evidence gathering will therefore probably be spread across more than one visit.

Documentation to be collected:

– Any documentation relating to specific school self-evaluation initiatives in which the school is involved

– Any documentation relating specifically to school self-evaluation strategies

– School Development Plan

– Written evidence, if any, of outcomes from self-evaluation activities.

Begin with brief introduction about the purposes and scope of the project.

1. **The school context**

   * Name, type and status of school; age-range of pupils; staffing profile, etc.

   * Nature of pupil intake and any particular features of the community/ies served by the school which influence its work.

2. **Approaches to school self-evaluation**

   * How do you, as a school, approach the whole issue of self-evaluation and self-review?

   * What has been the main stimulus for self-evaluation, as far as you are concerned?

   * What has changed in your approach over the last five years? What have been the major change factors?

- Would you say that the main/sole purpose of school self-evaluation is to assist with school improvement, raising standards and target setting, or are there other purposes for which you have undertaken, or would undertake, self-evaluation?

- How would you characterise the approach: e.g. management-led, staff-led, pupil-led? Quantitative/qualitative?

- Who has responsibility for initiating, and sustaining, self-review activities?

3. Implementing school self-evaluation

- How is self-evaluation structured and resourced at whole-school level, subject/departmental level, class/teaching group level?

- How are specific focuses or priorities for self-evaluation identified? Who is involved in the process of identifying them? Who is not involved?

- What documentation records this process? What role does the school development planning process play?

- What have been the major focuses over the last year? For example, pupils' attainment, behaviour, attitudes to learning, self-esteem, attendance, punctuality, extra-curricular activities; staff morale and professional development; quality/ consistency of teaching and learning.

- What specific goals/targets have these focuses led staff to formulate? What timescale are staff working to for these?

- How are you using, for self-evaluation:
  - the DfEE target-setting guidance
  - the OFSTED framework for inspection
  - the DfEE/QCA 'Autumn Package'
  - any other national advice/guidance?

  What difficulties, if any, have you encountered in doing so?

- What sorts of materials and/or action-research activities have been developed in-house for self-evaluation? To what extent have these been shared with colleagues in other departments/ years and other schools?

- Do staff need particular kinds of training and/or support for self-evaluation? If so, how have you resourced/managed this?

- Are you actively working with other schools in developing collective approaches to self-evaluation?

4. **Involvement in specific initiatives**

- Is the school involved in any explicit structured approaches to self-evaluation (e.g. through the LEA; through a particular handbook/package; through the OFSTED framework)?

- Can you identify the main strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

- What have been the advantages (and disadvantages) so far for the school of adopting or being involved in this approach?

- How does it compare with what the school was doing before?

5. **The LEA**

- How well has the LEA supported school self-evaluation activities?

- How well would you say school self-evaluation/review, school improvement, school effectiveness, performance monitoring and target setting are linked through the various LEA teams and services? Do you think the LEA is giving out coherent messages in these areas?

6. **Outcomes of self-evaluation**

- What outcomes, in terms of any aspect of school improvement, can you point to at this stage? Do you expect these to be maintained next year/in the longer term?

- To whom are the outcomes of self-review reported?

- Do you think the process of becoming involved in self-evaluation has changed the way staff view their professional practice? How?

- What have been the most valuable aspects of the experience for pupils, teachers, senior management, parents, governors?

- Are there areas where you consider progress to have been disappointing? If so, what reasons can you adduce for this?

- What have you as a school learnt from the process? Have there been any unintended consequences?

- What are the outstanding issues?

- What will you do differently in future?

- What lessons would you want to pass on to others?

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