

Strengthening governance: knowing your school

The questions surrounding the cycle are linked to each of the core elements that need to be in place to support school improvement. The responses to the questions should provide governors with a detailed picture of the progress that children are making in school and how well the school is doing. You can use these questions in your role as governor to support the school to review its practice and make any necessary changes. They will help you to act as a critical friend, by supporting the work of the school, and offering an element of challenge through your monitoring and evaluation.

Pupil progress meeting

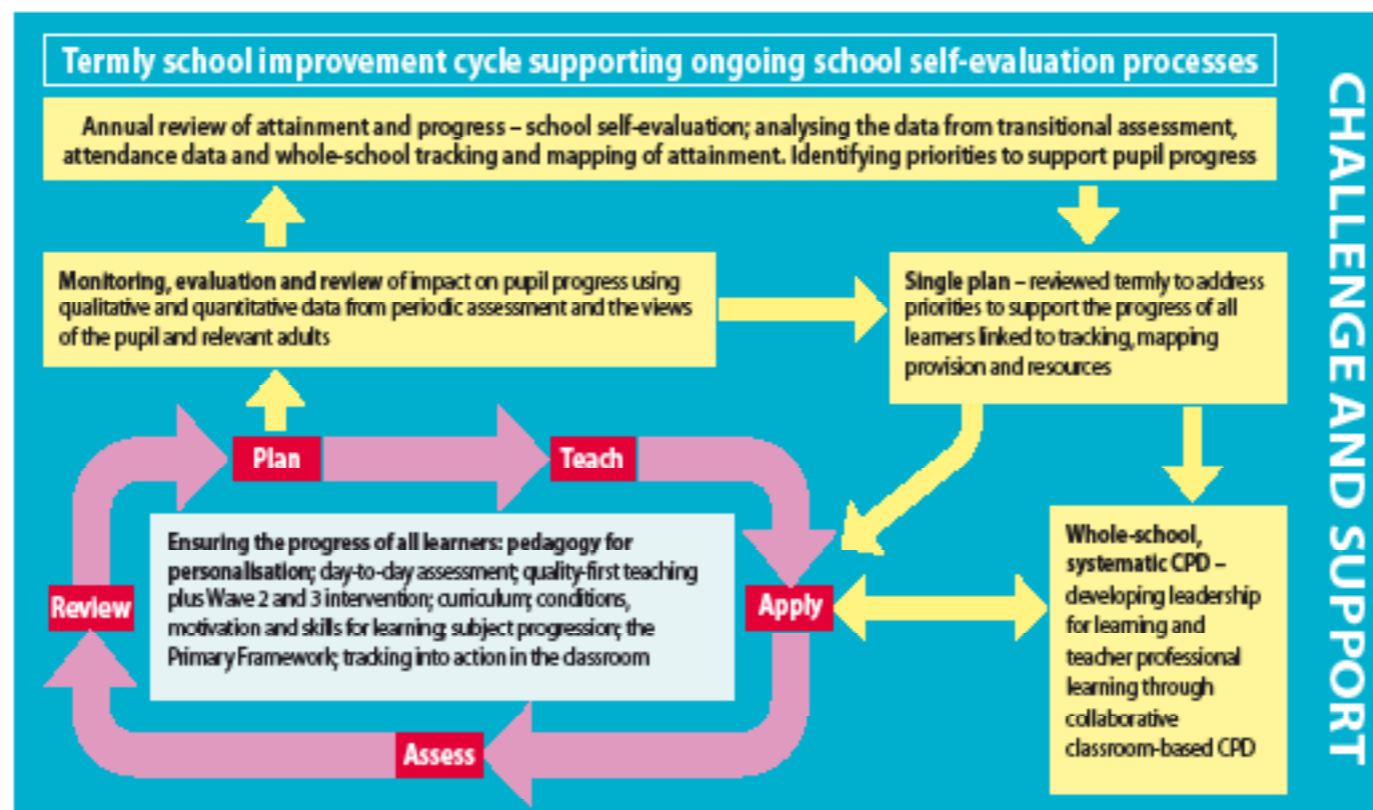
- Why do we have pupil progress meetings?
- What happens in a pupil progress meeting?
- What happens as a result of the meetings?
- What is being done to improve progress?
- How do the findings impact on classroom practice?

The school improvement cycle

- How do we use the termly school improvement cycle to set our priorities?
- What are the focuses for monitoring/scrutiny and how will it be done?
- What are the systems for reporting and assessing progress?
- How does the headteacher's report to governors reflect the priorities and progress against them?
- How does the governor's role fit into the cycle?
- What happens if we don't meet our priorities?

Tracking

- What does the tracking tell us?
- Who are the target pupils in e.g. Year 4? Are they making adequate progress?
- What action does the school take from looking at tracking information?
- How many children are reaching age-related expectations and above at the end of the year compared with the starting point at the beginning?
- How does that compare with other schools nationally and in the LA?



The single plan

- Is there a single plan or RAP for the school that focuses on the priorities for children's progress? How does it relate to the SDP?
- Can you explain/tell me about the priorities? How do they link to the SEF?
- Who writes our plan? Who helps, or what help is available, to ensure we achieve our priorities?
- How do we know from the review meeting that the plan is making a difference? How are we doing?

An explicit focus on teaching and learning

Questions for the headteacher:

- What percentage of teaching and learning is good or better? How do we know this?
- What are we doing about teaching and learning that isn't consistently good?

Questions for teachers:

- How does your classroom environment help children to learn? What did the children learn in this lesson? How do you know?

Questions for children:

- What are you learning in today's lesson? How do you know? Tell me about your target (in maths, reading and writing).

Whole-school systematic continuing professional development (CPD)

- What is the whole-school focus for CPD?
- How will we know whether this has made a difference to children's learning and your teaching?
- How can the governors learn more about this? What should be our own CPD?
- How has good practice been shared? What opportunities are there for working together and learning from each other?

The Improving Schools Programme (ISP)

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Some activities that governors have found useful to support improvement

Teaching and learning

- Take part in a planned learning walk.
- Attend a pupil progress meeting.
- Take part in pupil interviews/surveys.
- Talk to children about their learning.
- Observe a scrutiny of work.
- Join in a class visit.

The single plan/RAP

- Attend a review meeting.
- Discuss the single plan at a governors' meeting.

Tracking children's progress

- Ask a class teacher how the school's tracking system works in the classroom and how it shows the children's progress.

Whole-school professional development

- Attend a staff meeting (professional development meeting - PDM) – bring the biscuits!

If something is not quite clear to you, the school would always like you to ask.

Some ways governor services have supported school improvement through ISP

Local authority governor services have supported school improvement by working with governors to:

- explain the school's RAISEonline report and other data about attainment and progress
- clarify the school improvement cycle and its usefulness for governors
- discuss and review the single plan
- develop clear roles for governors linked to priorities on the school's single plan
- discuss the implementation of pupil progress meetings
- interpret tracking systems and how they make a difference to learning in the classroom
- identify what they need to know about the effectiveness of their school.

Below are some of the most used abbreviations linked to school improvement.

AfL	assessment for learning	PPA	time planning, preparation and assessment time
APP	assessing pupils' progress	SLT	senior leadership team
ARE	age-related expectations	SDP	school development plan
CPD	continuing professional development	SIP	school improvement partner
LA	local authority	RAP	raising attainment plan
PDM	professional development meeting	SEF	self-evaluation form
PPM	pupil progress meeting		

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This leaflet provides information to support governance in schools in the Improving Schools Programme (ISP).

The leaflet is for:

- governors
- governor services
- headteachers
- school improvement partners
- schools that are focusing on strengthening governance.

The purpose of this leaflet is to help governors in their role as critical friends, supporting the work of the school. It suggests ways in which governors can find out about the progress children are making in school and also offer an element of challenge through their monitoring and evaluation of this progress.

What is the Improving Schools Programme?

ISP is a supported whole-school improvement programme. The programme focuses on children's learning and the skills, knowledge and understanding that teachers and headteachers need to enable all children to make good progress and achieve success as learners.

ISP builds on effective school self-evaluation processes and is based on the cycle of audit, target-setting, tracking, planning, action and review. The starting point is pupil attainment data. The core elements of ISP support the school to enable all children to make expected or accelerated progress so that as many children as possible are working at age-related expectations or above.

ISP can be tailored to the specific needs of any school. It has been particularly targeted at schools where attainment is low and (or) groups of children are underperforming or making slow progress.

To find out more about the detail of the programme and see case studies from schools and LAs who have been involved in ISP visit:

www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies, click on 'Primary' and select 'Improving schools programme'.
www.whatworkswell.standards.dcsf.gov.uk

The governor's role in supporting school improvement

The governing body is responsible for the overall performance of the school. As a governor you have an important role in helping schools to promote high standards of achievement for all children. In ISP a key role is to support the school's involvement in the programme and to evaluate its effectiveness with the school's leadership team.

You can do this through:

- getting to know the cycle and core elements and finding out how they are being implemented in your school
- using the cycle and core elements to get a detailed picture of the progress children are making in school
- having a standing agenda item at governors' meetings linked to children's progress
- making sure that the allocated funding is used to support the programme in school.

The centre pages suggest some ways in which you can use the cycle in your role as governor.

The school improvement cycle

Schools are responsible for their own improvement. In ISP the school improvement cycle and the core elements of that cycle are central to putting in place the good habits, systems and structures that support improvement. The cycle is straightforward. It builds on what we know about effective school improvement and provides a common language to discuss this.

The cycle and its elements include:

- an audit, using data and the school's self-evaluation, to establish priorities for children's progress
- a termly single plan to map how the priorities will be achieved
- a focus on the priorities for learning and teaching
- a system of pupil tracking to support progress in class and provide a picture of progress across the whole school
- pupil progress meetings to review children's progress
- a review of the termly single plan to evaluate the impact of actions taken and plan the next steps.