



## Principles for a clear and simple accountability system

Accountability is a key component of our school system. However, we must ensure that school leaders have clarity on how accountability will operate. This is vital if we are to bear down on unnecessary workload and improve pupil outcomes by empowering school leaders to drive our system forwards with confidence.

This statement sets out high-level principles for how the accountability system for educational performance will operate, and how the different actors fit within it. We will work through the detail of how this is implemented with the sector by Autumn.<sup>1</sup>

### Overarching Principles

- **Accountability matters - every child deserves a great education.** We have a responsibility to ensure all pupils are getting a great education, and we will be unapologetic in acting where pupils' education is suffering.
- **However, school leaders need clarity and transparency on:**
  - **When they will and will not be subject to action as a result of the accountability system.** At present, it is not always clear how we determine what acceptable performance is. The vast majority of schools are doing well and those school leaders should know that they will be given space to do the best for their pupils without interference.
  - **The consequences of the accountability system.** At present, it can be unclear to school leaders what will happen as a result of Ofsted judgements or performance data. It should be clear when we will broker a school into a multi-academy trust (MAT), and when we are solely offering support to the existing leadership team.
  - **The roles of different actors.** At present, school leaders can feel accountable to multiple masters, with different demands placed on them. We will remove duplication and be clear which actor - Ofsted; the Department for Education through Regional School Commissioners (RSCs); local authorities; MATs; and schools themselves - is playing which distinct role.

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<sup>1</sup> The statement does not therefore cover government's other roles in, for example, building the capacity of the sector as a whole, supporting new free schools, overseeing academy trusts' financial performance and governance, and making decisions about the fair running of the system.

## Intervention Principles

- **We will only mandate academy conversion, leadership change or re-brokerage of a school on grounds of educational underperformance if Ofsted has judged it Inadequate.** It is right that we act robustly where there is failure, focussing our efforts where problems are most acute. However, significant change must only be done on the basis of the soundest possible evidence. Ofsted is the only body that can provide an independent, rounded judgement of a school's performance - data alone cannot tell the whole story.
- **The RSC's role in intervention is to ensure the Inadequate school is matched with an academy trust that can support it to improve.** This will be a strong MAT that can provide the benefits of collaboration and support from stronger schools.
- **We will not pursue forced conversions to academy status other than in instances of school failure as judged by Ofsted.** Hundreds of schools each year voluntarily convert to academy status. We want this to be a positive choice for more and more schools, enabling them to enjoy the benefits of autonomy and of working in collaboration with other schools as part of a MAT.

## Support Principles

- **We will also identify schools that are underperforming and would benefit from an offer of support.** We need to identify those schools that have not failed, but are showing the warning signs that suggest they may need support. We will be proactive in helping the existing leadership team find and access that support.
- **These schools will be identified based on transparent and objective criteria.** We will set a clear threshold that will trigger an offer of support. We will not have both floor and coasting standards as this can be confusing - we will replace this with a single, transparent data standard. We will consult on how this will operate, and consider whether an Ofsted Requires Improvement judgement should also be part of the trigger for an offer of support.
- **The support will come from a MAT, an accredited system leader such as a teaching school, or a school improvement provider using evidence-based programmes.** The RSC role will be to help identify and commission this support if needed – but it would be for academies and schools to make the final decision about the support they want.
- **School leaders above the threshold will know they have the freedom to do the best for their pupils without interference.** However, we will ensure that high quality school improvement provision is available in the system for these leaders to choose to access for themselves.

## Ways of Working with Schools

- **There will be no more 'inspections' of schools by representatives of RSCs.** Ofsted is the only body that can form an independent judgement about a school through inspection. RSC representatives going into schools and performing visits that can feel a lot like inspections can be confusing for schools, and can add to workload where there are additional requests for data. This will end.

- **We will always approach academy trusts and local authorities, not individual schools (unless the school is a single academy trust).** RSCs will work with academy trusts on their leadership and oversight of their schools, and with local authorities if they want help to access support. The RSC role is not to carry out the improvement activity themselves, but to help identify and commission it from an approved provider. Where relevant, approaches will be made in conjunction with the Education and Skills Funding Agency, to ensure that there is a joined up conversation between government and academy trusts or local authorities.
- **We will be more transparent about how we take decisions about schools, and the role of Headteacher Boards in particular.** Headteacher Boards are made up of outstanding system leaders who know their local area. They advise RSCs on their decisions. We will make available records of their discussions, and advance notification of which schools they are discussing, in order to make the system more transparent.

## Next Steps

We will work with the sector over the coming months to refine the principles above and to turn them into detailed proposals for consultation in the Autumn. We will also work with school leaders and others on a simpler, more accessible system of school improvement support.

Alongside this, we will develop a parallel regime that will allow for more rigorous oversight and challenge on financial performance of academy trusts. And we will focus on how we can improve the effectiveness of governance in the sector more generally, including at MAT level. As MATs grow in number and size it will be important to keep pace by evolving how we hold them to account.