

Tackling the new SEF

Ofsted school inspection project

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The underlying philosophy of the new self evaluation form

The new self evaluation form (SEF) is formatted to help schools briefly summarise their evaluations. The emphasis is placed on justifying as concisely as possible the grades which the school decides it merits. It is not intended that the SEF be used as a store for all of the school's evidence.

The SEF mirrors the evaluation schedule of judgements used by inspectors. Schools are strongly encouraged to use the grade descriptors in this document when doing their self-evaluation. The on-line version of the SEF has help-button guidance which brings up the relevant descriptors for each judgement.

To get the most benefit from the evaluation schedule, schools should refer to the outline guidance for each judgement. It lists the type of evidence which inspectors may wish to see and gives schools a straightforward way to check whether they can make convincing self-evaluative judgements.

Schools should not attempt to write about each of the separate points in the outline guidance when they are filling in the SEF. This is likely to result in a descriptive and dense SEF rather than one which is tightly focused and sharply evaluative.

The following pages take you through one suggested approach to using the new SEF effectively. The judgement about the school's engagement with its parents and carers is used as an example. This six-step approach is applicable to all of the judgements.

1. What is the judgement about? Identify key words and/or concepts in the wording of the judgement and in the main bullet points which are headed 'inspectors should evaluate'.
2. Decide on an initial provisional grade based on what you know of the school's performance.
3. Underline key words and phrases in the grade descriptor for your provisional grade.
4. Make a bullet point list of the most pertinent evidence you have which is relevant to those key words. Do not include a lot of detail, but make references, if relevant, to where supporting evidence is held.
5. Do you know enough about your school to be able to present it in its best light and to drive improvement? Look through the outline guidance for inspectors and identify if there are any ways you could develop monitoring and evaluation.
6. Does your provisional grade still feel right? Look at the descriptors above and below your grade to confirm your judgement.

Step 1

What is the judgement about?

Identify key words and/or concepts in the wording of the judgement and in the main bullet points which are headed 'inspectors should evaluate'.

Discuss with a partner and then underline the words and phrases which are central to a good understanding of what the judgement below is about.

The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers

Inspectors should evaluate:

- the extent to which the school takes account of parents' and carers' views and how well they are involved in contributing to decision making about whole-school matters
- the extent to which the school enables parents and carers to support, and make decisions about, their own children's learning, well-being and development
- the quality of the school's communication with parents and carers.

Step 2

Decide on an initial provisional grade based on what you know of the school's performance.

For the purposes of this exercise, agree with your partner that 'your' school is likely to be good in terms of this particular judgement. Without looking at the grade descriptor, list below three invented features of your hypothetical school's engagement with parents which might support a judgement of 'good'.

Step 3

Underline key words and phrases in the grade descriptor for your provisional grade

Look at the grade descriptor below for 'good'. Discuss with your partner and underline the key words and phrases which describe the essential elements of a good school in terms of this judgement.

Good (2)	The school has a highly positive relationship with most groups of parents and carers. The school regularly asks parents and carers for their views and ensures that these are used to inform important decisions about whole-school matters. Parents and carers are kept well informed about their children's achievement, well-being and development. The school helps parents and carers to support their children's learning in different ways. The effective liaison with parents and carers contributes to improvements in pupils' achievement, well-being and development. There are clear and accessible channels for parents and carers to communicate with the school which the school actively encourages parents to pursue. The school's systems for keeping parents informed about aspects of its work run smoothly.
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Step 4

Make a bullet point list of the most pertinent evidence you have which is relevant to those key words. Do not include a lot of detail, but make references, if relevant, to where supporting evidence is held.

Look back at the hypothetical 'good' features you listed in Step 2. Do any of them provide convincing evidence to support the key features you identified in the descriptor for grade 2?

Make a list below of ways in which hard evidence, that is figures, percentages, tangible evidence, might be gathered to support assertions.

Step 5

Do you know enough about your school to be able to present it in its best light and to drive improvement? Look through the outline guidance for inspectors and identify if there are any ways in which you could develop your processes for monitoring and evaluating.

Look at the outline guidance below and underline where there is the potential to gather 'hard' evidence.

Outline guidance

Inspectors should take account of:

- the effectiveness with which the school communicates with all parents and carers with parental responsibility, including those who may be reluctant or unsure about approaching the school, such as mothers and fathers not living with their children, those accessing additional services and those whose children have learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the views expressed by parents and carers through the Ofsted survey carried out at the point of inspection and any survey information provided by the school
- the frequency and quality of the school's communications with parents and carers regarding the achievement, well-being and development of their children, including, for example: reporting arrangements; parent/teacher consultation arrangements; clarity of lines of communication; response rates and complaints procedures
- the frequency and quality of the school's communications with parents and carers regarding important school developments, including the ways the school has used the views of stakeholders to influence the school's priorities
- the mechanisms for helping parents to support their children's learning, for example, through information provided, activities for parents and carers and support for specific groups and individuals.

Step 6

Does your provisional grade still feel right? Look at the descriptors above and below your grade to confirm your judgement.

Look at the grade descriptor for outstanding and identify one or two ways in which this descriptor identifies superior performance to that which is described in the descriptor for grade 2.

<p>Outstanding (1)</p>	<p>The school has a highly positive relationship with all groups of parents and carers, particularly those groups of parents and carers who might traditionally find working with the school difficult. Parents and carers are heavily involved in decision-making on key matters through well-established procedures. Parents and carers are exceptionally well informed about all aspects of their own children’s achievement, well-being and development. The school provides tailored guidance and information about precise ways parents and carers can support their children’s learning across a wide range of subjects. All groups of parents and carers are able to communicate with the school through a wide range of media. Consistent and productive partnerships ensure that parents and carers are strongly engaged with their children’s learning and the school’s work. The school’s systems for keeping parents informed about aspects of its work ensure parents and carers have co-ordinated, up-to-date, accurate and timely information.</p>
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School A. An example SEF

This is only one way. It is not a template. Other ways are encouraged.

	1	2	3	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers		√		

Briefly list your major reasons for deciding on this grade. If you judge that the school is close to a grade boundary, briefly say why you did not select the other grade.

Highly positive relationship

- Annual parental questionnaires supplemented by consultations indicate very positive relationship (92% think school consults appropriately).
- Parents strongly encouraged to comment on our performance, including on individual subjects. Findings reported to the gb & parent governors encouraged to monitor our response to concerns (e.g MFL issue).

Regularly seeks views

- Two examples: 1) last year we consulted on the introduction of metal detectors to respond to concerns in the community about knife crime. 2) this year, we used student translators to do a mini-questionnaire for parents of Eastern European students (see school's work to eliminate discrimination).

Uses views to inform decisions

- The 2007 annual questionnaire revealed that only 45% of parents thought their children were physically active enough during the school week (despite 2.25 hours of PE for every year group including the sixth form). We asked the school council to suggest how we might improve this figure. The whole school and parents voted on the ideas and we are funding the provision of covered bike stands to encourage more pupils to cycle to school.
- Form tutors have picked up that parents don't understand why we have invested in new video and messaging links with a school where the intake is of far greater diversity. We have decided to do more work on explaining the importance of this through newsletters. In hindsight, we probably could have done more to prepare the way.

Quality of communication

- Last year, we received only three significant complaints about communication and these concerns have been resolved (letters available on file).

What do you think of this example? There are some important areas missing. Can you identify them?