



Tuag at Ragoriaeth
Towards Excellence

GwE Challenge and Support Towards Excellence

Programme

for schools in support category 'Green' and those recognised as strong or well established 'Yellow' schools



Core Challenge and Support Programme [CCSP]

2015-16

Towards Excellence

A programme in the first instance for all schools in Overall Support Category 'Green' and those recognised by the Challenge Adviser as strong or well established 'Yellow' category schools.

Overview

Peer evaluation and development is based on the belief that the best form of support is rigorous, timely and provides valuable challenge focussing on improvement. It is a partnership between highly regarded peers and an essential next step in a school's improvement journey. Schools are the heart of the national model which sets out clear guidance for school to school support arrangements and an annual cycle for school improvement.

The ethos within this model and the Welsh Government's National Model for Regional Working is about increasing the autonomy for our best schools. The Welsh Government publication '*Qualified for Life*' sets out an education improvement plan for 3 to 19 year old in Wales. As a region, GwE intends to implement a model of working that meets the requirement of Strategic Objective 4: '*Leaders of education at every level working together in a self-improving system, providing mutual support and challenge to raise standards in all schools*'. This is an indication of a commitment to the concept of a self-improving education system, and encapsulates the vision of school leaders working together, taking charge of their future and development. Whilst those within our schools must take responsibility for raising standards within their own establishments, GwE is trying to nurture a mentality of mutually celebrating the achievements of an entire system. This is an opportunity for schools to be innovative in their collaboration and to push the boundaries in the way they challenge and support each other.

The model will involve leaders of schools working together in groups with the Challenge Adviser to sustain and grow excellence by:

- Developing a system of co-challenge and co-support
- Empowering school leaders
- Providing professional development opportunities
- Sharing excellent practice and key documents
- Benefitting from opportunities to work together to develop robust systems within each other's schools
- Acting as a springboard for self-review and improvement planning that leads to a journey of innovative and inspirational practices for all pupils
- Taking ownership of the National Model for Categorisation as a springboard for continued improvement.
- Allowing co-ownership and co-responsibility for improving standards, provision and leadership in each other's schools

This co-dependent model will:

- Further empower school leaders to challenge and support other school leaders to lead their schools even more effectively
- Ensure that every child and young person benefits from excellent teaching and learning
- Lead to improved learner outcomes
- Develop increased autonomy through the National Categorisation process
- Build a stronger resilience at all leadership levels in our schools

International research based on initiatives such as the London Challenge informs us that where schools undertake peer evaluation and support they:

- Continue to strive for excellence and allow schools in the partnership to share and move knowledge around
- Develop sustainable models and produce case studies that will enhance professional development of school leaders.

The process will run as a pilot for the first year and will consist of two formal face to face meetings, with additional support and challenge visits agreed according to need. Such follow up meetings could involve whole group sessions or smaller groups of schools working in pairs/triads, etc. A further meeting will be held in September 2016 in order to confirm the schools capacity to improve.

Specific independent reviews will be carried out during the year and the outcomes will be incorporated into the next phase of the programme and the documentation will be updated accordingly. Each group will contain 5-7 schools with a Challenge Adviser present to guide, challenge and support the work and ensure quality assurance.

At the launch, schools will be asked to identify their strengths and aspects for improvement. The effective grouping of schools will be critical to ensure the success of the peer reviews. The first meeting will take place during the Autumn Term with the second meeting in the Summer Term. During the year, schools will be expected to participate in 'school to school' support provided for an aspect that has been identified in the autumn meeting as an area for improvement.

Schools will be expected to share their current School Improvement Plan [SIP], Self-evaluation Report [SER] and performance targets including tracking data with each other and the GwE Challenge Adviser. For the first visit in the Autumn Term, schools will be required to present a thorough analysis and evaluation of their performance during the previous year as well as sharing their performance targets and their priorities for improvement for the current year. Pairs/triads will be created from within the main group to challenge and support each other. Each headteacher within the group will be responsible for writing the report for one nominated school and these will be quality assured by the respective Challenge Advisor. Templates for report writing are included in the appendices.

The expectation is that schools within the programme utilise their Education Improvement Grant [EIG] to fund any meetings and prioritise this work as a key school improvement strategy.

Arrangements for schools within the 'Towards Excellence' programme

In implementing this increased autonomy, this approach represents a very different and more effective working model for both schools and GwE.

All schools in the programme will have an allocated 'link' Challenge Adviser who will be:

- responsible for offering guidance, challenge and support and quality assuring the process
- the key link for any matters that need to be addressed within the schools e.g. advice, brokerage
- responsible for ensuring that the headteacher's Performance Management is carried out accordingly
- responsible for writing the pre-inspection letter when the school receives notification of Estyn inspection. In order for this to be written the Challenge Adviser will contact the school to arrange a visit to discuss the content of this report. The Challenge Adviser will also ensure input from partner schools within the group. The information from the peer review activity will play a key part of this information. The Challenge Adviser will be responsible for ensuring that any school falling into an Estyn Category [e.g., Local Authority Monitoring] is appropriately supported.

Timescales and Deadlines

Summer - Autumn Terms 2015

Date	Activity
Summer term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-construction and programme launch.
By 16.09.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final groupings published. • Protocols for initial meeting to be agreed.
16.09.15 17.09.15 18.09.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness and guidance sessions for headteachers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Flintshire/Wrexham ➢ Gwynedd/Ynys Môn ➢ Conwy/Denbighshire
21.09.15 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start date for the process. • Initial meeting arranged by the Challenge Adviser to commence and follow the guidance contained in this document. • Pairs/triads to be created from within the main group to challenge and support each other. • Peer review meetings to be arranged and conducted accordingly [dates should be shared with Challenge Adviser]. • Final peer review report should be completed by the nominated head and shared with all schools within the group and GwE [LA] within 10 working days.
By 16.11.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All peer review meetings need to be completed by this date and priorities for partnership working for the year to be confirmed.
By 18.12.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First independent review and evaluation of the process completed.
By end of term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written report to be shared with Governing Body. • Headteacher's Performance Management to be completed.

Spring – Summer Terms 2016

Date	Activity
During spring term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to further develop school to school collaboration. • Schools to meet as a group or pairs/triads (including Senior Leadership Teams) to work on common themes and areas for improvement.

By 11.04.16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief update shared with Challenge Advisers and fellow headteachers within the group on progress and initial impact of school to school collaboration [using template from Appendix 3]. The Challenge Advisers will also attend some of the school to school collaborative sessions [sample only] to offer support and quality assure the process during the year.
During summer term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities to further develop school to school collaboration.
Towards the end of the summer term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review meeting facilitated by Challenge Adviser to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the progress against the priorities of the School Improvement Plan with each school expected to complete an evaluation of impact beforehand. Schools will also be required to present their priorities for development for the new SIP. Evaluate the process and impact of their school to school activities, and identify future partnership working. Determine an initial judgement regarding the schools capacity to improve. Peer review reports to be submitted to the Challenge Advisers within 10 working days following each school meeting so that the GwE can keep an overview of activity.
By end of term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written report to be shared with Governing Body to include initial recommendation for Step 2 of the categorisation process.

Autumn Terms 2016

Date	Activity
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting to determine a final judgement regarding the schools capacity to improve and support category.
By 30.09.16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final first year independent review and evaluation of the process completed.

Protocol for Peer Activity

In order for this programme to be successful it is essential that all headteachers are aware of the protocols that should support this process. There are a number of 'non-negotiables' that will underpin the approach. At the end of the pilot approach these aspects will be reviewed and updated as required.

Non-negotiables

1. Confidentiality

- The process needs to grow respect and trust between the schools in the group.
- Groups will run for a minimum of two years and a maximum of three years.
- All discussions are confidential and that the final report is owned by the school to be shared with governors, GwE and the Local Authority.
- The leadership team will be involved in the process with opportunities to include Middle Leaders and Governors at different stages.

- If any safeguarding issues arise during the school visit these should be dealt with under the school's safeguarding protocol.

2. Process

- Leadership teams are given every opportunity (as appropriate) to be an integral part of the review process and meetings.
- Specific meetings will be facilitated by a Challenge Adviser who will offer guidance, support and challenge and also take on a Quality Assurance role.
- All school will be an equal partner in the process and fully involved in the meetings.
- Pairs/triads will be created from within the main group to challenge and support each other. These challenge and review meetings will be arranged by the participating headteachers and the dates shared with the Challenge Adviser. Each headteacher within the group will responsible for writing the peer review reports for one nominated school [Autumn and Summer Term report templates Appendix 2 and 5].
- The final report will be completed by the nominated head and shared with all schools in the group and GwE within 10 days.
- The autumn meetings will be followed up with a summer meeting to discuss progress against areas for development.
- Each school will be required to write a progress update on the 'school to school collaboration'. The Challenge Adviser will also attend some of the school to school collaborative sessions [sample only] to offer support and quality assure the process during the year.
- The process should be reciprocal with all schools benefiting from the support and challenge.
- All schools in the group need to provide full access to relevant data. Current School Evaluation Report and School Improvement Plan are required as a starting point for the process to be fully effective. **No names of individual pupils should be shared during the process.**
- There is no requirement that formal classroom observation forms any part of this process unless at the specific request of relevant staff [and with trade union support]. However, undertaking non-judgmental peer observation has obvious benefits re: cascading best practice across the group. The group will use a wide range of additional sources of evidence when discussing the quality of teaching and learning and sharing best practice.

3. 'Towards Excellence' groups

The groups will consist of between 5 and 7 schools. All members of the group need to agree to work together and agree to maintain the ethos of the programme and the 'non-negotiables'. GwE Challenge Advisers will support participating schools in co-creating the sub-groupings. The Challenge Adviser and Senior GwE Officers will attend a sample of peer review meetings in order to quality assure the process.

4. What can schools expect?

- Forging genuine partnerships
- Effective peer challenge and support
- Supporting a collegiate approach
- Developing leadership pathways
- Timetabling of activity throughout the year
- Opportunity for celebrating success and moving effective knowledge around
- Meet Strategic Objective 4 [Qualified for Life]: *'Leaders of education at every level working together in a self-improving system, providing mutual support and challenge to raise standards in all schools'*.

The process will:

- Challenge and support schools to self-improve and strive to achieve excellence
- Identify and share areas of excellence and effective practice.
- Provide detailed actions and school to school collaboration to assist schools to further improve.
- Strengthen the region's school to school support mechanisms and develop new partnerships.
- Build capacity for developing a self-improving system.
- Provide an opportunity for schools to be innovative in their collaboration and to push the boundaries in the way they challenge and support each other.
- Contribute to determine the National Categorisation of the schools (Steps 2 and 3).

5. Moving forward

- The peer review group will be the first point of contact in providing or brokering support for improvement.
- School to school sharing of effective practice will be explored within the group as a sustainable approach towards achieving excellence.

6. Process for Quality Assurance and Moderation

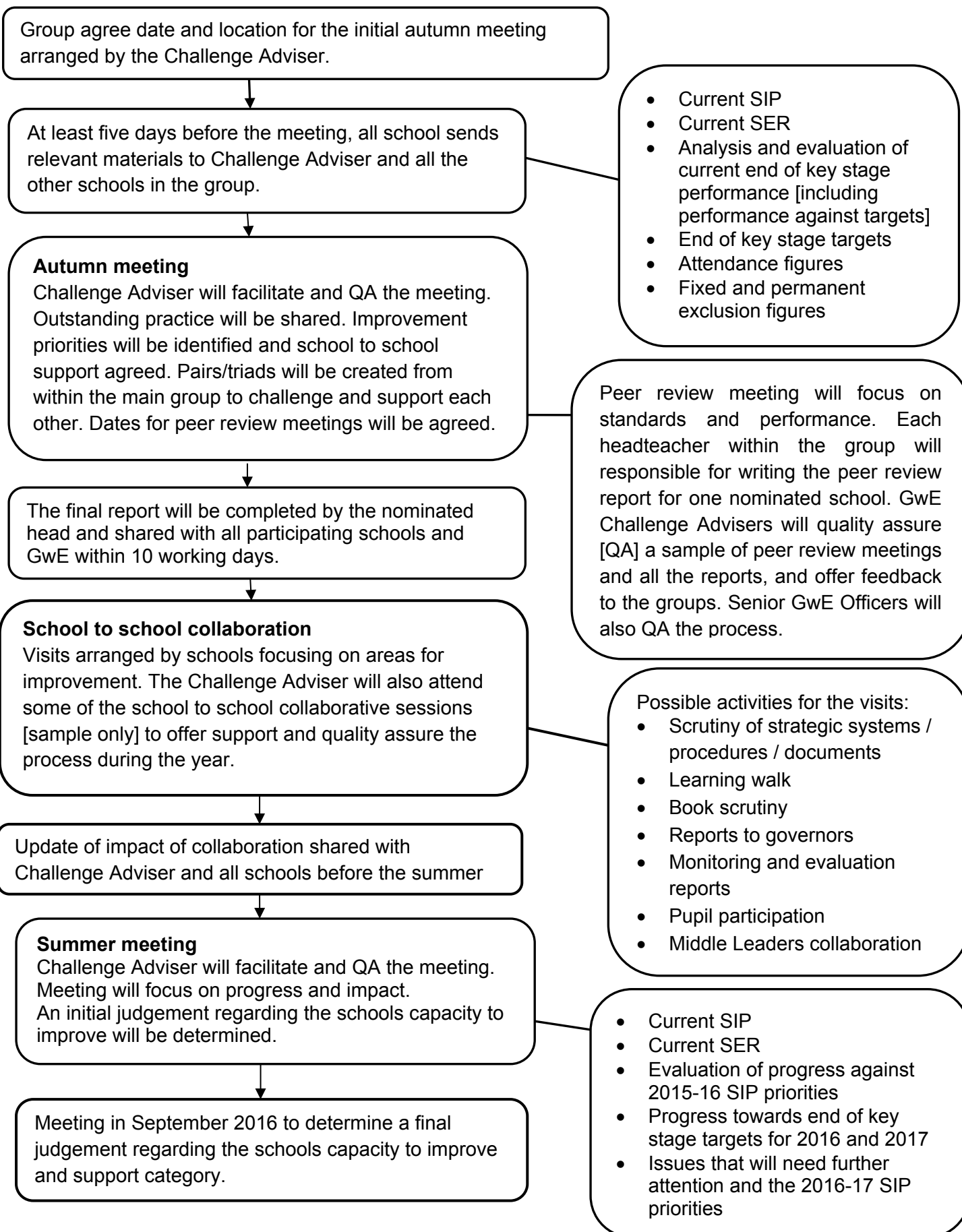
- All reports relating to National categorisation will form part of the requirements within the national and regional moderation processes.
- GwE Challenge Advisers will quality assure a sample of peer review meetings and all the reports and offer feedback to the groups. Senior GwE Officers will also quality assure the process. The Challenge Adviser will also attend some of the school to school collaborative sessions [sample only] to quality assure the process during the year.
- In the unlikely event that the peer review group are unable to reach a consensus, the Challenge Advisers will offer guidance and support and make the final decision.

7. Additional aspects to note

- If the Peer Review Group is to be truly working towards excellence and improved outcomes for all learners, then there will be an expectation that the headteachers take co-ownership for all the schools in the group and work together to offer support and guidance to each other as and when required. This will facilitate the development of a self-improving school system for the benefit of every child and young person.

Overview for the peer review process

The information below gives a detailed overview of the process each group should follow. There is room within this process for groupings **to personalise their approach** and ensure that there is maximum benefit for all schools to gain from the process.



TOWARDS EXCELLENCE SCHOOL SUMMARY [AUTUMN TERM]

School Name	
Headteacher	
Deputy Headteacher(s)	
Assistant Headteacher(s)	
Chair of Governors	
Local Authority	
GwE Challenge Adviser	

Please provide the following to be shared with Challenge Adviser and all schools in the group at least 5 days prior to the meeting

- Current School Improvement Plan
- Current School Self-evaluation Documents
- Analysis and evaluation of current end of key stage performance [including performance against targets]
- End of key stage targets for 2016 and 2017
- Attendance figures for 2014-15 and performance compared to family schools
- Fixed and permanent exclusion figures for 2014-15

Please list below your school's main strengths and the reasoning/evidence to support your views

What are the key areas for improvement or challenges over the next year and the reasoning/evidence to support your views?

Please note below any aspect that you are developing and want to further develop with others

Please email completed form and relevant documents to Challenge Adviser and headteachers of all schools in the group 5 days prior to the initial meeting

Important: do not include individual pupil names in any documents shared.

PEER REVIEW REPORT: AUTUMN TERM

To be completed by a nominated headteacher [peer reviewer] on behalf of the full group in draft at the end of the meeting. The final report should be agreed by the headteacher of the recipient school.

School		Headteacher	
Link Challenge Adviser		LA	
Group schools			
Peer reviewer [name and school]		Date	

STEP 1 : STANDARDS GROUP CATEGORY [1> 4]

STEP 2 : IMPROVEMENT CAPACITY CATEGORY [A/B/C/D]

STEP 3 : SUPPORT CATEGORY [GREEN/YELLOW/AMBER/RED]

Brief commentary on the quality and accuracy of the school's evaluation of its performance		
Brief commentary on end of key stage performance and on performance against targets		
Commentary on the appropriateness and level of challenge of 2016 and 2017 targets		
Commentary on attendance		
Commentary on behaviour and exclusions		
Brief commentary on the appropriateness of the School Improvement Plan and how likely it is that the determined action and the detail of the planning will lead towards the desired outcomes [reference should also be made to the use made of SEG/PDG and any school balances to drive improvements]		
Provide details of how the school will collaborate with group members [and others if relevant] to develop and improve [include names of partners]		
ACTION AGREED	WHO?	BY WHEN
QA comments by Challenge Adviser		

The final report should be completed by the nominated head and shared with all participating schools and GWE [LA] within 10 working days.

Appendix 3



UPDATE ON SCHOOL TO SCHOOL COLLABORATION

To be completed by each school in the group and shared with Challenge Adviser and all schools in group before the beginning of the summer term.

School	
Headteacher	
Partner School (s)	
Date of Report	

Details of school to school collaboration activities to support areas for improvement

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Progress and impact

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Further Actions	Timescale and Review

Important: do not include individual pupil names in any documents shared.

TOWARDS EXCELLENCE SCHOOL SUMMARY [SUMMER TERM]

School Name	
Headteacher	
Deputy Headteacher(s)	
Assistant Headteacher(s)	
Chair of Governors	
Local Authority	
GwE Challenge Adviser	

Please provide the following to be shared with Challenge Adviser and all schools in the group at least 5 days prior to the meeting

- Current School Improvement Plan [secondary schools to also share examples of Departmental Improvement Plans]
- Current School Self-evaluation Documents [secondary schools to also share examples of Departmental Self-Evaluations]
- Evaluation of progress against 2015-16 SIP priorities
- Progress towards end of key stage targets for 2016 and 2017
- Issues that will need further attention and the 2016-17 SIP priorities

Final review of progress and impact of actions undertaken to address areas of improvement

What are the key areas for improvement or challenges for the next year?

Please note below any aspect that you are developing and want to work on with others

Please email completed form and relevant documents to Challenge Adviser and headteachers of all schools in the group 5 days prior to the meeting

Important: do not include individual pupil names in any documents shared.

PEER REVIEW REPORT: SUMMER TERM

To be completed by a nominated headteacher [peer reviewer] on behalf of the full group in draft at the end of the meeting. The final report should be agreed by the headteacher of the recipient school.

School		Headteacher	
Link Challenge Adviser		LA	
Group schools			
Peer reviewer [name and school]		Date	

STEP 1 : STANDARDS GROUP CATEGORY [1> 4]	
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STEP 2 : IMPROVEMENT CAPACITY CATEGORY [A/B/C/D]	
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STEP 3 : SUPPORT CATEGORY [GREEN/YELLOW/AMBER/RED]	
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Evaluation of progress against School Improvement Plan [SIP] priorities [including reference to the use of SEG/PDG/school balances to drive improvements and to the quality of the school's final evaluation of progress].

Progress towards end of key stage targets

Initial SIP priorities for 2016-17

Step 2: Improvement Capacity 2016/17

The Challenge Adviser and the peer review group recommends that the improvement capacity of the school for 2016-17 should be:

STEP 2 : INITIAL JUDGEMENT REGARDING IMPROVEMENT CAPACITY CATEGORY [A/B/C/D]	
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Evidence to support the recommendation for Step 2:

FURTHER ACTION AGREED	WHO?	BY WHEN

QA comments by Challenge Adviser

The final report should be completed by the nominated head and shared with all participating schools and GwE [LA] within 10 working days.

Appendix 6:

Matrix for determining Step 2 – School’s improvement capacity

A	B	C	D
Leaders and staff have developed a shared vision and there is a very clear strategy that has improved outcomes for nearly all learners.	Leaders and staff have a shared vision and a clear strategy that has improved outcomes for most learners.	The school’s leaders have established a vision and strategic objectives. However, there are inconsistencies in how these are shared and understood and their impact on the outcomes learners achieve.	Work to establish an agreed vision is underdeveloped. As result there is a lack of clarity in the school’s strategic direction and in how this is understood and insufficient impact on improving learners’ outcomes.
Leaders demonstrate a very strong capacity to plan and implement change successfully and to sustain improvement as a result. They engage staff and other partners very effectively in the change process.	Leaders plan and implement change and sustain improvement successfully in most respects. They enable staff and other partners to participate well in the change process.	Leaders manage change successfully in a few areas. In other areas change is not embedded successfully and so does not lead to sustained improvement. The change process does not always engage staff and other partners sufficiently.	Leaders do not demonstrate sufficient capacity to plan and implement change successfully. Management of the change process does not engage staff and other stakeholders effectively.
Self- evaluation is robust, systematic and well established.	Self- evaluation is regular and thorough in most areas.	Leaders have developed processes for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school but these are not implemented consistently.	Leaders have developed a few processes for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school but these lack rigour and breadth.
Leaders and staff are highly effective in their use of the available performance data and evidence about the quality of learning and teaching and pupils’ work to identify strengths and set improvement priorities.	Most leaders and staff make good use of performance data, evidence about the quality of learning and teaching and pupils’ work to identify strengths and improvement priorities.	The evaluation of performance data and evidence about the quality of learning and teaching and pupils’ work is not always used well enough to inform planning for improvement.	There are wide variations in how performance data and evidence about the quality of learning and teaching and pupils’ work are used to secure improvement.
Leaders and staff have a relentless focus on raising standards. Targets reflect high expectations for the	There is a clear emphasis on raising standards. Through its targets the school has high expectations for the	There is a clear understanding of the need to improve outcomes but expectations and targets are not	There is an acknowledgement of the need to improve outcomes but expectations and targets are too low

A	B	C	D
achievement of all pupils and these are met consistently.	achievement of its pupils.	always challenging enough.	and leaders are not always open to challenge or to taking action required as a result.
The school has a very good track record in raising the achievement of nearly all pupils, including vulnerable learners.	The school has good track record in raising the achievement of most pupils, including vulnerable learners.	The school is successful in improving pupils' outcomes in some areas but this is not consistent across the school as a whole.	The school does not have a strong track record in improving outcomes including for vulnerable learners.
Improvement planning at all levels is highly effective in addressing the areas in need of most improvement. Action, including the use of resources, has led to sustained improvement in outcomes in key indicators for nearly all pupils, including those eligible for free school meals.	Leaders and staff are clear about the priorities that need to be addressed in the school's improvement plan. Action, and the use of resources, are effective in securing improvement in key indicators for most pupils including for pupils eligible for free school meals and other vulnerable groups.	Leaders and staff make suitable links between the outcomes of self-evaluation and improvement priorities in a few areas. Planning and the use of resources have greater impact in some areas but less in others, such as the attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals and other vulnerable groups.	<p>Planning lacks detail and does not address clearly enough the specific aspects that require improvement. The pace of improvement is often too slow.</p> <p>Implementation, including the use of resources, has insufficient impact on improving pupils' outcomes in key areas, such as on the attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals and other vulnerable groups. There is an over-reliance on external support.</p>
The school has a very strong track record in implementing successfully national and local priorities.	The school gives good attention to national and local priorities and in general implements these effectively.	The school's leaders take account of national and local priorities but planning does not always have sufficient impact on standards, learning and teaching.	Although account is taken of national and local priorities planning to improve standards, learning and teaching is of too variable a quality and has insufficient impact.
Leaders and staff work very successfully with schools and other partners to enhance significantly their own and others' capacity to bring about improvement.	Leaders and staff take advantage of opportunities to work with schools and other partners. Collaboration is developing well and makes an important contribution to capacity building and improvement.	Leaders and staff participate in school improvement activity with schools and other partners but the impact of collaboration on standards and provision requires further development.	Leaders and staff have limited involvement in worthwhile collaborative activity with schools and other partners and the capacity to benefit from partnership working is underdeveloped.

A	B	C	D
Governors have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and are highly effective in supporting and challenging the school's performance.	Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Their work to support and challenge the school's performance is strong.	Governors support the school. They receive relevant information but require support to be fully effective in how they challenge the school to make improvements.	Whilst governors are supportive of the school as a body they do not have sufficient capacity to challenge the school to make improvements with the urgency needed.
Leaders and staff have well defined roles and responsibilities and exhibit high professional standards.	The roles and responsibilities of leaders and staff are defined and communicated clearly and professional standards are met successfully in the main.	The roles and responsibilities of leaders and staff are defined clearly for the most part but there are some inconsistencies in the extent to which professional standards are met and accountability exercised in practice.	The requirements of roles are responsibilities are not defined clearly enough. The school's leaders do not hold staff to account effectively and there are wide inconsistencies in the extent to which professional standards are met and accountability fulfilled.
The school's leaders give a high priority to developing the workforce: performance management and professional development are highly successful in fostering effective practice and in dealing with underperformance.	Performance management and professional development make a strong contribution to improving practice and raising standards. The school's leaders and governors challenge underperformance effectively and are largely successful in securing the required improvement.	Performance management and professional development are not always linked closely enough to priorities. The impact on improving performance varies. The school's leaders and governors do not always challenge underperformance effectively.	Performance management and professional development have limited impact on improving performance. The school's leaders and governors do not challenge underperformance effectively.
The quality of teaching across the school, and the impact on nearly all pupils' learning and progress, is consistently good and often excellent.	Most of the teaching, and its impact on most pupils' learning and progress, is consistently good.	Systems to lead and improve teaching and learning are developing but are not fully embedded. Variations in the quality of teaching limit pupils' learning and progress in a few areas.	Work to lead and improve teaching and learning is not planned effectively and lacks coherence. There are significant variations in the quality of teaching that limit pupils' learning and progress in key areas.
All staff have a shared understanding of the characteristics of excellent and	Most staff have a shared understanding of the characteristics	The characteristics of good and excellent teaching are well defined	There is little shared understanding of the characteristics of excellent and

A	B	C	D
good teaching.	of excellent and good teaching.	but applied inconsistently.	good teaching.
Processes to lead, identify, validate and share effective practice achieve continuous improvement.	Strategies to identify and share effective practice are generally successful in improving learning and teaching across the school as a whole.	The identification and sharing of effective practice is not yet systematic enough.	Good practice is not identified effectively or used to improve teaching across the school as a whole.
There are robust and effective processes to track pupils' progress.	Processes to track pupils' progress are effective in most cases.	Tracking lacks rigour in some areas and so does not always have sufficient impact on the progress pupils make.	Tracking is of very variable quality and has little impact on the progress pupils make.
Teacher assessment is consistent and accurate.	Teacher assessment is consistent and accurate in the main.	There are some inconsistencies in the reliability and accuracy of teacher assessment.	There are significant inconsistencies in the reliability and accuracy of teacher assessment.