

# DCSF/OfSTED: Indicators of a school's contribution to well-being consultation

## Consultation response from the General Teaching Council for England

### Introduction

1. The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) is the independent professional body for the teaching profession. Its main duties are to regulate the teaching profession and to advise the Secretary of State on a range of matters concerning teachers and teaching and learning. It is tasked with contributing to the raising of standards of teaching and acting in the public interest.

### Background

2. The GTC welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation proposals for the use of school-level indicators to be used to measure Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes. The Council acknowledges and supports the role of maintained schools, primary, secondary, special and pupil referral units (PRUs) and academies in promoting the well-being of their pupils. The GTC welcomes an acknowledgement of the work schools already do in fulfilling this role. There has been widespread concern that a narrow focus on attainment has been an impediment to schools contributing to these wider outcomes.
3. Research undertaken by the GTC with key stakeholders shows that teachers are subject to a high and increasing number and range of expectations. The integrated children's services agenda was felt to be playing a key role in increasing expectations and changing the teacher's role. However, teachers generally expected more of themselves than others expected of them. Responses reflected the broader aspirations of the ECM agenda. Teachers in particular saw themselves as having an important role to play in helping to ensure the five ECM outcomes are achieved.<sup>1</sup>
4. The GTC has advocated the proportionate approach to inspection that has been developed since 2004 as part of the wider New Relationship with Schools (NRwS) framework. The adoption over the past three years of the self-evaluation form (SEF) by schools, as an integral part of the single conversation may have helped schools to evaluate the systematic contribution they make towards achieving the five ECM outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> *Expectations of teachers: the views of key stakeholders - Exploratory research to inform the revision of the Code of Conduct and Statement of Standards and Value; Report for the General Teaching Council April 2008*

5. The proposed 'well-being' profile for the local area, populated with appropriately targeted data relevant to children and young people as prioritised in the Local Area Agreement, could provide some localised context and background to support each school's analysis. However, social and economic factors often vary within a 'local area' and data which is not related to the specific population of the school could be misleading.
6. The GTC agrees that schools cannot be held accountable for well-being outcomes over which they have limited and indirect influence such as child obesity levels or rates of teenage pregnancy. In considering a school's contribution to well-being the influence of parents/carers needs to be taken into account. The contribution made by schools to wider well-being can be even more effective if there are strong levels of partnership working with families and other agencies such as local authorities, children's trusts as well as children and young people.
7. The GTC welcomes the recognition that effective teaching and learning, leading to attainment and achievement, influences other ECM outcomes e.g. increasing resilience, raising aspirations and reducing disaffection.
8. The GTC has considerable concerns about the proposed indicators being used invalidly to compare schools.

### **The indicators and their use**

9. The key test of the efficacy of these indicators is stated clearly in the first paragraph of the executive summary of the consultation document. They are intended to evaluate *the school's contribution* to promoting pupil well-being. They stand or fall by the extent to which they achieve this purpose.
10. The fifth paragraph of the summary states with equal clarity that "parents have the biggest influence on their children's well-being". It follows that, for any indicator to measure the school's contribution, it must first factor out the effect of the parents' influence.

It is possible that some of the proposed indicators might provide background for the school's more nuanced analysis in the SEF. However, it is evident that many of the indicators proposed will be 'proxy indicators' with an indirect relationship to ECM outcomes and will have inherent limitations that will not provide direct evidence on which to base or determine judgements.

11. The set of indicators f to k contained within paragraph 23 provides a partial picture of pupils' well-being. An over-reliance on what is quantifiable can devalue insightful analysis based on qualitative data which is often used to improve school ethos and the quality of teaching and learning.
12. Schools need to evaluate their progress in promoting equality and tackling discrimination across all equality strands. The set of indicators proposed in this consultation might, within the context of a SEF, have some potential to provide

a more rounded picture of pupil participation, enjoyment and engagement with school, their health and their prospects of achieving economic well-being. This broader agenda for promoting well-being provides scope for shaping and advancing the personalisation agenda in schools.

13. Nevertheless, the GTC has significant concerns about the indicators proposed in the consultation. These concerns arise largely from their failure to meet the criteria set out in paragraphs 9 and 10 above:
  - i. The correlation between attendance and attainment is strong and well evidenced. Understanding this, schools take a strongly positive role in encouraging pupil attendance. However, school attendance is a statutory responsibility of parents. It is therefore difficult to see how attendance rates can measure the *school's* contribution to well-being (though it may in some cases effectively measure the parents' contribution). Any analysis of attendance, for whatever purpose it is used, should include a narrative that gives an insight into the complex mix of reasons for the levels and patterns of attendance and/or persistent absenteeism.
  - ii. The same considerations need to apply to the take-up of school meals. "Take-up" is difficult to define and in any case depends on a wide range of geographical, social and economic factors which will significantly outweigh the effect of "the school's contribution" to well-being. The extent of entitlement to free school meals (FSM) is still sometimes used as a proxy indicator for income poverty in families. The take-up levels of FSM might provide some useful information about the health and well-being of children and young people from specific backgrounds.
  - iii. In a similar manner, while post-16 participation is so strongly linked to social factors. Equality monitoring of post-16 participation within a school is likely to provide more useful information than the overall participation rate of its pupils.
  - iv. Using the level of participation by pupils in high quality physical education (PE) as an indicator would require a clear and agreed definition of what is meant by high quality PE and sport. Critical to evaluating participation in PE is monitoring by ethnicity, gender and disability, and analysis of the accessibility of PE to particular groups such as Muslim girls and students with disabilities or special education needs. The indicators used to measure participation should be discussed and shaped with pupil and parental input: a crude percentage indicator would be inadequate.
  - v. Permanent exclusion is an extreme sanction which may have a long term and lasting impact on the individual excluded. However, in many cases where it is applied the well-being of others in the school is itself a significant factor. Rates of permanent exclusion in schools are strongly related to the rates of admission of pupils at risk of exclusion.
14. The breadth of factors affecting all of the proposed indicators is such that the publication of "national benchmarks" can serve little purpose. The existence of

such benchmarks would invite the conclusion that useful inferences can be drawn by placing schools in a comparative rank order using these indicators. Invalid conclusions would be further encouraged if Ofsted were to publish “some of the indicators in school inspection reports together with national benchmarks”.

15. Some of the data suggested in the proposed indicators may be considered as enabling schools to improve the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process, provided that it is not open to misuse for crudely ranking schools. It is important that in the process of engaging stakeholder interest the complexities of the process are publicly acknowledged and that the desire to simplify difficult and contentious issues is not allowed to dominate.
16. In the light of the foregoing it is difficult to see how a school’s contribution can effectively be evaluated by outcome measures of the type proposed. While some of them may give an indication of pupil well-being they fail in identifying the school’s contribution. It may be that evaluating the input which the school makes in order to promote well-being could provide a more useful way forward. Paragraph 26 provides a list of some areas in which schools can make a contribution and paragraph 11 refers to some ways of observing and recording this input. Schools should be encouraged to monitor these inputs and record them regularly in the SEF.

### **Additional Consultation Issues**

17. There is a need for schools and other providers within the system to elicit the views and perceptions of pupils’ and parents’ as well as other stakeholders. This may help to ensure that the culture and ethos of the organisation is inclusive and enabling and provide important evidence in determining development priorities. Schools are already becoming adept at collecting, assessing and using such information. This is part of the school’s self-evaluation process. It is therefore for schools themselves to determine which data they need to collect and the use to which they put it. Ofsted’s role is to judge whether the data is being put to effective use by each school. National benchmarks are particularly inappropriate in this context.
18. The use of existing surveys (such as Tellus) alongside school-level surveys of pupils and parents perceptions is welcome provided that it does not add to the administrative burdens of schools. The principle that data should be ‘collected once and used many times’ is one that the GTC has consistently supported in its responses to school improvement policy developments since 2004.

### **Conclusion**

19. The GTC continues to argue for the Government ‘*to focus squarely on the most intractable of education issues, the attainment gap and to raise standards for all especially amongst the least advantaged*<sup>2</sup>’ and to support teachers to play a full part in contributing to the delivery of the ECM outcomes. However, the

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<sup>2</sup> *Higher Standards: Better Schools for All (White Paper) – November 2005*

proposals outlined in this consultation will need further consideration if they are to reduce concerns about the proposed indicators being used indiscriminately in the comparison of provision.

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