

Making data work

**Report of the Teacher Workload Advisory
Group**

October 2018

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Foreword from Chair, Professor Becky Allen



Teaching is a complex job that draws on enormous amounts of information stored in heads, on paper and in electronic records. Technological change has already altered how this information is processed, which is why it is time to step back and evaluate whether the time spent managing pupil attainment and pastoral data is proportionate to its educational benefits. This report does not, and cannot, tell schools how best to manage data in their own context. Schools are too diverse in the size and nature of communities they serve to employ catch-all rules. Instead we give you a set of guiding principles that we recommend you use when thinking about your own setting.

We do think there are changes that can be made by the Department for Education and by Ofsted to give schools greater flexibility in the choices they make about how data is used. We have therefore made a number of recommendations to both organisations.

Of course, this report cannot be the last word on data management in schools. Continued technological and assessment-driven innovation are likely to change how we operate in ways that we cannot begin to imagine. Our job is to ensure that change works in the interests of pupils and helps make the job of teaching more, and not less, manageable.

Professor Becky Allen

Director of the Centre for Education Improvement Science, UCL Institute of Education

Problem definition

Working hours in England are significantly higher than other countries (TALIS 2013) and the Teacher Workload Survey 2016 shows that teachers still work long hours. Workload is consistently cited as one of the most important factors for teachers who are leaving the profession. The Workload Challenge (2014) identified unnecessary tasks linked to assessment and data with 56% of respondents citing tasks around 'recording, inputting, monitoring and analysing data' as burdensome, and noted a range of drivers for this¹.

Time associated with data collection and analysis is not as significant as other parts of a teacher's job, such as marking and planning. However, it is most frequently cited as the most wasteful due to a lack of clarity amongst teachers as to its purpose. Clearly the way that data is used across schools varies considerably by phase, size of school, experience of teaching staff and subjects taught. However, some common themes in its use have emerged, particularly around the lack of understanding about reliability of data and suitability for the use to which it is put. Data is often used too much for monitoring and compliance, rather than to support pupil learning and school improvement. This audit culture can lead to feelings of anxiety and burnout in staff.

This report was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education, following on from his commitment to tackle workload and strip away tasks that do not add value.

The Department for Education (DfE), Ofsted and the profession have all started to address the workload challenge. Ofsted has clarified what inspectors do not expect schools to produce, and monitor inspection reports to ensure no particular methods of marking or planning are praised as exemplars. The Department has introduced the workload protocol and committed to a period of stability for the curriculum, assessment and qualifications, with no further changes beyond those still working through the school system, and will consult on their principles for a simpler accountability system in the autumn.

The Department also established the three independent reviews of planning and resources, marking and data management, which published reports in 2016, and published a workload reduction toolkit in July 2018. Many schools are taking action to tackle workload² with 67% of teachers and leaders saying their schools had reduced or changed their approach to marking and 49% that their schools had reduced or changed their approach to planning. However, data collection and management remain an issue, so it is right that this is an area to look at again. This report makes recommendations for how DfE, Ofsted and other organisations can support schools to adopt proportionate and sustainable approaches to data management.

¹ [Workload Challenge: Analysis of teacher consultation responses](#)

² [The School Snapshot Survey: Winter 2017](#)

Principles for evaluating data use in schools

All schools use huge amounts of data to support them in the work they do. Information on pupil attainment and progress is the most complex part of this, but data systems also document attendance, behaviour, individual pupil needs, personnel and finance. When establishing data systems - whether paper or technology-based - schools should use these principles, which build on the findings of [the independent report on data management](#):

- **The *purpose* and use of data is clear, is relevant to the intended audience and is in line with school values and aims.** Start with the intended action in mind and evaluate whether or not it is necessary. What are the greatest possible benefits of using the data and is there any other way to achieve the same ends? Who will see and use this data, is it relevant to their role and do they understand how the data relates to the possible intended actions?
- **The *precision* and limitations of data, and what can be inferred from it, are well understood.** For example, we can never know exactly what all students have learnt and are capable of at all times, even with the best designed assessments. Does the data you are collecting provide you with an accurate enough picture of what you are trying to find out? Is the cohort size too small to be able to make inferences from the data?
- **The amount of data collected and the frequency with which it is collected is *proportionate*.** You should consider whether the data collection and analysis is realistic within normal working hours, given staffing and resources available, and judge whether the time spent is worth the outcome.
- **School leaders review *processes* for both collecting data and for making use of the data once gathered.** School leaders have a duty to evaluate the time costs for each stage of collecting and analysing data. Decide on whom the burden of collection and analysis should fall and ensure they have the capacity to complete this, be explicit about what time spent on data collection and investment is displacing, and have a means of deciding when a data collection process is no longer necessary.

In a number of schools, there are data practices that are not helpful for pupil progress and that increase teacher workload. Schools should question their existing practice to change this.

Overarching recommendations

- The DfE should find out how school and multi-academy trust (MAT) leaders currently evaluate their use of data. By Spring 2019 the DfE should test with school staff whether there is a need for further support for schools to do this (such as an audit tool or checklist). Following this testing the DfE should commission experts to develop the final product if needed.
- The DfE, Ofsted, unions and professional associations should reflect these principles in their guidance, in training for schools, officials and members, and through their networks.
- The DfE should evaluate to what extent schools are aligned to the principles set out in this report, including through existing quantitative surveys with a representative sample of schools. If this evaluation reveals significant levels of non-adoption, the DfE should work with stakeholders to ensure that more schools incorporate the outcomes of the report into their policy and practice.
- Ofsted should monitor the consistency of inspection practice relating to the principles of this report.
- Unions and professional associations should disseminate the principles of this report, and collect and share case studies of where schools have made changes to their data practices.
- School, MAT leaders and governors should review their data processes according to these principles, using the tools provided by DfE.

Case study: Saving time through process improvement in the Ark network of schools

Ark has a network of around 40 schools. Though the data they hold is broadly consistent, the way in which this is processed varies. This led to some inconsistency in the quality of data across the network and highlighted opportunities to reduce the time spent on administrative tasks.

To understand the scale of these inconsistencies an annual data audit has been introduced for all schools in the Ark network. Taking up to half a day, this ensures data management activities are proportionate in terms of the burden placed on school staff. It encourages staff to think through the processes within the school, with an assessment of the time taken to complete each activity. The audit is also an opportunity to ensure all the data collected is formatted consistently so that it can be collated and compared across schools. The audit includes:

- Identifying who performs various data processing activities within the school.
- Ensuring key data processing activities are carried out correctly and efficiently.
- Checking key personnel have been trained to perform their role.
- Ensuring processes to support better data collection and management are automated where possible.

In the first year of the data audit we have:

- Transformed school absence tracking processes - designed and scheduled automated reports to notify parents of absences and consequences. In one school, this replaced a paper-based process requiring input of five members of staff which took the equivalent of an entire school day to complete.
- Automated detention registers – creating behaviour workflows within the MIS to trigger automatic scheduling and notifications of detentions. In one school, this replaced administrators verbally asking teachers which pupils had missed detentions.
- Improved data quality – by ensuring consistency of personnel across various tasks, we have been able to ensure that processes are followed properly, that data quality has improved, and that the time taken to complete tasks has reduced.

Pastoral data management

Schools should have simple systems that allow behaviour incidents, detentions and other pastoral information to be logged during the normal working day, rather than at break and lunchtimes, wherever possible. Central collection of this information allows schools to run centralised detentions, which can reduce teacher workload. The right technology can support straightforward data entry using codes, and can automate many of the processes identified in a school behaviour policy, including issuing detentions and reporting behaviour incidents to parents. These behaviour codes should align with a school's behaviour policy and should be limited in number. Teachers are less likely to find recording incidents burdensome if they don't have to write extensive text, or select from a long list of behaviour codes that cannot be easily memorised or are too specific to be able to choose from. There will be situations where serious or complex incidents require detailed explanations but, given that teachers will have to write these outside lesson time, they should be the exception rather than the rule.

One consequence of this approach to behaviour logging is that parents and pastoral leaders cannot know the details of every single behaviour incident. This may create an additional burden on pastoral leaders in situations where they find they need details of the situation (e.g. for a meeting with parents or carers). There is a role for school leaders to manage expectations of parents and carers about the detailed reporting of behaviour incidents, to limit the overall burden on staff. This could be done as part of the behaviour policy or other communications with parents.

Recommendations

- The DfE should add a new section on behaviour management to the workload reduction toolkit, with amended guidance to reflect this, and they should test this content with schools in the autumn term.
- Ofsted should provide further clarity to schools to assure them that inspectors will not expect to see detailed logging of every single incident and detention, and that schools should use their own judgement of what constitutes a 'minor' incident.

Supporting the creation of high quality pupil attainment information

Teachers need to be able to understand how pupils are doing, and if teaching has or has not been effective, but the overproduction and misuse of pupil attainment information can cause unnecessary and unsustainable workload.

Centralised collection of teacher assessments

Whilst teachers regularly choose to record quick, holistic judgements of whether a pupil can complete a set task, these judgements have limited value to schools in assessing the quality of teaching. Statements of whether or not a child can complete a task sufficiently well can never invoke language that is precise enough to ensure they are used in a standardised way across settings, unless a process of cross-school moderation is in place, as it is for end of key stage teacher assessments.

Key performance indicators or descriptions of a child's attainment that are produced by teachers without reference to a particular assessment or test can be used to roughly indicate to parents or leaders whether pupils have adequately learnt the topics taught. However, they should not be used to hold teachers to account or measure their performance: this is like asking teachers to judge themselves. Teacher assessment can only be used to decide whether a class or school is on track if a system of robust moderation across schools is in place. This can be valuable if it can be managed without adding burdens on staff, and where cohorts are large enough (for example, across a large MAT or other group of schools). **Given the limited circumstances under which teacher judgements of pupil attainment are useful to leaders, the number of pieces of information teachers are expected to compile should be minimised or eliminated.** Less is more – think about quality. Asking a teacher to provide up to 30 data points for 30 pupils introduces spurious precision into a system that will ultimately contain more data points, but no more information, than a system with fewer data points per pupil.

In-house versus externally procured tests

Teachers need to be able to understand how pupils are doing in order to plan for future instruction and provide responsive teaching. **Unless school leaders understand the quality and purpose of the assessments being used in their school - including details of their reliability and validity in relation to the curriculum - it is impossible for them to ensure that reasonable inferences are being made from the test data.** Assessments provided as part of curriculum materials, or in-school tests written by teachers, can be very useful in providing a relative performance of students and identifying individual difficulties, but they cannot be used to determine the quality of teaching or to predict future school results. Standardised tests that are available from assessment or curriculum companies can be used to check if school attainment is at an

expected standard, but leaders should recognise that these tests are being set by other schools for a variety of purposes, where school curricula might be more or less well-aligned with the test itself.

Whilst tests can inform teachers about pupils' relative attainment, a short classroom test is rarely precise enough to measure annual changes in pupil progress (note that key stage exams are more reliable, not least because they are held over multiple days). The exceptions to this are pupils who experience significant individual changes in their attainment, compared to their peers at school, who in any case should be identifiable without elaborate monitoring processes. Documenting whether a student has or has not made 'expected progress' is not necessary or particularly meaningful, since there is huge variation in rates of learning between students with the same baseline attainment.

If schools have the infrastructure (such as the right hardware and broadband), online testing can have a positive impact for workload, by reducing the burden of planning, marking, and data input/analysis.

Recommendations

- The DfE should work with the Chartered College of Teaching, teaching unions, Teaching Schools, professional and subject associations, and the National Governance Association to promote the development of teachers' understanding of assessment as a key feature of teacher expertise.
- School leader unions should support this by organising events and training for their members.
- The DfE's work in ensuring schools have suitably robust infrastructure for cloud working should be expanded to support other technologies that reduce workload, including the wider use of online testing in schools.

Compiling student attainment information

Teachers collect student attainment information every day in their classroom. It is rarely desirable to standardise this process across a school because the costs and benefits of approaches vary considerably depending on subject, age of children, frequency of teacher contact and pedagogical teaching styles. We would therefore encourage leadership teams to engage in professional conversations to decide whether it is optimal, given associated time costs, likely data quality, and possible actions arising from the data, to require all subject and phase teachers to submit data on the same timetable and with the same frequency.

Attainment information should only be compiled centrally as frequently as it is possible for others to act on it. Without actions, it is not possible for collation of student attainment information to play any part in the work of a school. We recognise the external pressures and uncertainty surrounding best practice that have led leadership teams to request frequent attainment information and take a “belt and braces” approach to compilation of data. Attainment data is often not the best data to act on since it is a lagging indicator, which confirms that there was a problem with a child’s learning, so always consider what pre-existing non-attainment information (such as attendance) can help leaders intervene with a student or class before pupils start to fall behind.

We have not encountered any examples of schools where the actions arising after a half-termly deposit of attainment data justify the time investment required by teachers to facilitate six data collection points a year. Equally, we have observed large schools that successfully manage the process of pupil support and school improvement with one single centralised attainment data collection point in the year. For many teachers in many subjects, there will be routine assessment of knowledge, understanding and performance to inform future teaching, without central data inputting. **Unless attainment information can be collected with no marking or data inputting time outside teachers’ lesson times, we see no reason why a school should have more than two or three attainment data collection points a year, which should be used to inform clear actions. Increasing assessment frequency is not inherently likely to improve outcomes for schools.**

Schools choosing to use more than two or three attainment points a year should have a clear rationale for what interpretations and actions are informed by that frequency of collection, and how much time is taken to set assessments, collate, analyse and interpret the data created from this, and then act on the findings.

The DfE has acknowledged that school leaders can feel accountable to multiple masters, with different demands placed on them. The [new principles](#) for a clear and simple accountability system state that the practice of asking for additional requests for data (e.g. from RSC representatives going into schools) will end.

Recommendations

- Beyond statutory data collections (such as the results of key stage 1 assessment), the DfE should not request regular attainment data from schools unless they meet a trigger for intervention. When this is required this should be in the school's existing format, and should not add to the number of data collections. The DfE should communicate to local authorities, multi-academy trusts and others that they should not ask for this information either.
- The DfE should also continue to promote effective use of education technology to improve the efficiency of attainment data collection, monitoring and analysis.
- Ofsted inspectors should ask questions about whether schools' attainment data collections are proportionate, represent an efficient use of school resources, and are sustainable for staff. They should draw on the responses from teachers to the staff questionnaire regarding SLTs' consideration of workload when implementing policies. If a school's system for attainment data collection is disproportionate, inefficient or unsustainable for staff, inspectors should reflect this in their reporting on the school.

Case study: The Linton Village College approach to data collection and management

Linton Village College is an 11-16 school in the Chilford Hundred Education Trust near Cambridge.

Historic requirements demanded whole-school frequency of marking (every two weeks) and whole-school data drop deadlines (at the end of every half term for core and option subjects and termly for others). We agreed that these requirements were not fit for purpose across the curriculum.

We removed the requirement for frequency of marking and heads of faculty were invited to create their own subject-specific marking policies to articulate what, how and when they would assess. This gave them the chance to make their policies meaningful and manageable.

The senior leadership team reviewed the data management expectations. They decided that it was important to allow subject teams to create their own assessment deadlines to sit in line with curriculum coverage and workload demands. We scrapped whole-school data drops and asked subject leaders to create their own assessment calendars to suit their curricula and in conjunction with marking expectations.

Departments have appreciated the opportunity to establish their own assessment policies and have welcomed the move away from whole-school deadlines. Giving greater freedom and autonomy to subject teams has removed stifling, inflexible demands, and has enabled teachers to have greater control over their workload.

Generating predictions or targets for individual students

Target and predicted grades both report how well a student should perform in the future, but they have distinctive functions. Providing students with target grades has become commonplace in secondary schools. Whilst there is extensive evidence that individuals respond positively to aspirational goal setting, there is not currently any evidence that setting students challenging attainment targets is motivational for them. Remember that targets can be limiting as much as they can be motivating. If you decide to give pupils targets or goals, teachers should modify them to ensure they are suitably motivating, i.e. that they are aspirational and achievable, and within a pupil's control.

Unlike target grades, predicted grades are intended to provide information to others about how well a student is likely to perform in the future. Predictions have a role where information is needed for exam boards, or for a student to understand what sort of future educational opportunities might be open to them. However, students need not be routinely told that they 'should' or 'are likely to' achieve a predicted grade at the end of a key stage. Similarly, 'flight paths' for pupils with similar starting points are not valid,

because they understate the variation in student trajectories of development. Aside from their inevitable inaccuracy, predicted grades are rarely connected to processes that help students learn.

Recommendations

- The DfE should commission research to describe current target setting practice in schools, with a view to testing alternative models of motivating pupils through a randomised controlled trial. This research should also consider the effect of these models on the mental health of pupils.
- The DfE should not request data on pupil targets and predictions to hold schools to account. When this is required to allocate support to schools, this should be in the school's existing format, and should not add to the number of data collections.
- Local authorities and multi-academy trusts should not request data on targets and predictions to hold schools to account. Where this is required to enable, for example, providing additional support to schools, this should not be in a different format to the format the school uses, and should not add to the number of data collections.

Case study: monitoring attainment and progress in West Chiltington Community School

At our school we use a straightforward layered process to support attainment and progress. The aim is that everyone has an understanding of how well children do within and across the phases and classes. Above all, the process has to be meaningful and practical, avoiding unnecessary number crunching and elaborate IT programs.

We set targets together based on national data and what we know about our children. We all know them all. I maintain a simple excel spreadsheet with an overview of every child's progress in reading, writing and maths. This is shared with staff so that they can be clear about their expectations of children.

We get together each term to report on how children are progressing in reading, writing and maths. Class teachers use a simple Venn diagram to note how pupils are doing in these three subjects, and our conversation always revolves around what support children need in order to help them progress. Progress here means objective led discussions not algorithms and graphs. We adjust our allocation of adult support based on need.

As headteacher, I sample the work of children in every class against national curriculum rubrics because I need to personally have a feel for how well children are doing. If I don't conduct assessments myself, then the numbers on a bit of paper mean nothing to me. This also helps me to know if a colleague needs support.

We moderate standards together in staff meetings, so that teachers know how reading, writing and maths should develop across all year groups. I also moderate individually with class teachers and subject leaders. To keep workload down, we do this simply by bringing together pupil books with post-it note tabs to highlight discussion points.

Our moderations are quality assured through meetings with teachers from 10 other primary schools in our locality. We decide in advance what the focus of our moderation will be for the year, and the more experienced senior leaders take responsibility for ensuring these meetings are productive.

Reporting on different groups of pupils and spending

The central collection and analysis of attainment data on a particular group of pupils is useful only where a decision or action is taking place beyond the classroom or across multiple classrooms. This analysis should focus on educationally meaningful groups of students, such as those who have poor handwriting or are weak readers. Conducting analysis on pupil premium students or by gender might be straightforward, but is not an

educationally meaningful way to determine interventions and actions because students within these groups do not always share similar needs.

School leaders should consider the most efficient way to collect information needed to decide on a plan of action for groups of pupils. For example, it is not efficient for leadership to collect data on 1500 pupils in a school if they only plan to work with a small group of 30 pupils. In these instances, they should try to find alternative approaches to identify the relevant group. **School leaders should use the data principles set out above to decide what the planned intervention for pupils is, and to minimise the data burden involved in ensuring the pupils are correctly identified.**

School leaders should not assume that group analysis of attainment will be more informative than whole class analysis. The smaller the groups being compared, the more likely that any differences observed are simply statistical noise. The dangers of over-interpreting analysis of small subgroups is very real: for example, in a one form entry primary school with 30 percent pupil premium pupils, you would need a 40 percentage point difference in pass rates between groups to report statistically meaningful attainment gaps.

Supporting disadvantaged pupils to succeed at school is quite rightly a focus, and schools should be expected to make good use of public money. However, the current DfE requirements to report on the effectiveness of pupil premium spend to Ofsted at the point of inspection, and via reports on the school website, have created unnecessary burdens for teachers, as well as school and MAT leaders. There is insufficient evidence to show that the current approach to reporting has a positive impact that justifies the burden on teachers.

Similarly, in the case of the primary PE and sport premium, reporting how it is used and student outcomes can be burdensome and is not aligned with the way we treat almost all other school expenditure. It is not clear how this additional reporting is likely to improve sports outcomes.

Recommendations

- The DfE should speak to a broad and diverse group of schools, to understand the impact and burden of the current reporting requirements for pupil premium and primary PE and sport premium spend (including online reporting, and to Ofsted inspectors) and publish actions to address any issues that arise by Spring 2019.

Teacher performance management

Teachers should have goals that are within their control, that are closely tied to genuinely actionable behaviours, and that are aspirational yet achievable. School leaders should also consider the burden of gathering evidence for performance management, and whether their approach is proportionate for all staff, including trainees and newly qualified teachers.

Individual performance of pupils in tests is due to a range of factors and this should be recognised. Assessments are designed to evaluate, measure and report the progress and attainment of pupils, rather than evaluate the performance of teachers. Trying to hold teachers to account for assessments that they typically administer themselves undermines effective assessment and risks unduly distorting curriculum and classroom practice. The performance of a single exam class should also not be used as a principal measure of teaching quality in a performance management system, not least because it can distort the focus of teachers away from other classes. The exam performance of a class depends on many factors, most of which are outside the control of the person who happens to have them in their final year. **This is why pay progression should never be dependent on quantitative assessment metrics, such as test outcomes.**

While data based on commercially produced predictions can play a helpful role in informing professional conversations about pupil achievement and the work of teachers, these systems produce ranges of grade estimates and inaccurate grade targets, and should therefore not be treated as accurate targets. Ofsted have clarified that inspectors do not expect school leaders to set teacher performance targets based on commercially produced predictions of pupil achievement, or any other dataset, from which they would then hold teachers to account.

Current practice in using pupil attainment data in teacher performance management systems is often poor. Research demonstrates that using quantitative metrics to judge teacher performance is difficult since few of the practices that we can straightforwardly codify and measure are highly correlated with teacher quality. Pupil assessment scores, grades in lesson observations, and scores following book scrutiny are all quite poor proxies for whether or not somebody is teaching well.

Suitable teacher performance goals include those related to their classroom instructional practices, their contributions to the development of school curriculum and the relationships they uphold with pupils, colleagues and parents. If teachers are held to account for things that are largely outside their own control, such as a pupil's test performance or progress based on flight paths, it is not only unfair, but induces high levels of stress and is likely to lead to burnout and ultimately attrition from the profession.

Recommendations

- The DfE should amend performance management guidance to clarify that objectives and performance management discussions should not be based on teacher generated data and predictions, or solely on the assessment data for a single group of pupils.
- Ofsted should continue to ensure that inspectors do not ask to see performance management targets based on assessment data during inspections.

Reporting to multi-academy trust (MAT) boards and governing bodies

Boards and governing bodies can find it a challenge to discern where their stewardship role stops and operational management starts, for a variety of reasons. In the case of MAT boards, trustees have frequently been a school and MAT leader or worked at a management level in another sector themselves in the past and so need to adjust to seeing less detailed information in their new oversight role. By contrast, many school governors have never worked in a school and their inexperience may lead them to request information that is beyond their remit. They are likely to rely on the school and MAT leader to guide them as to their remit.

Governors should be prepared to receive information in whatever form it is currently being used in the school. They should agree with school leaders what data they need, and when, in order to fulfil their role effectively and to avoid making unreasonable, ad hoc data requests during the course of the school year. Governors should not routinely see teacher judgement tracking data and in-school testing data if it has no external reference, as it is of limited use to them.

Governors should also consider whether data is proportionate, how school leaders are collecting it, and the frequency and time costs of data collection. They should understand the limitations of attainment, progress and target setting data, and be able to access training on the effective use of data on pupil performance.

Recommendations

- The DfE should revise the governors' handbook, competency framework and other guidance to reflect the principles of this report, and speak to governors to test what guidance and training they need.
- The DfE should incorporate myth busting for governors into the teacher workload toolkit or other guidance, to address misconceptions of what is required by the DfE or Ofsted and where policy has changed.
- The DfE should also continue to improve the content and usability of Analyse School Performance based on feedback from schools and governors, and place emphasis on supporting governor needs. The DfE should ensure schools are able to access comparative performance information as soon as possible.

Communicating with parents and carers

Reporting to parents and carers should remain a fundamental part of the educational process, to encourage, engage, motivate and ultimately move pupils on. Parents' involvement in their children's education is also consistently associated with better pupil performance. Schools have a statutory duty to report to parents and carers on general progress, the brief particulars of achievements (highlighting strengths and developmental needs), how to arrange discussions about the report, the attendance record, and grade achieved in GCSEs or other qualifications.

Some schools have, however, adopted practices that are incredibly burdensome for teachers, which go beyond their statutory duties, without proven benefits for pupils. Lengthy written reports to parents and carers are usually burdensome for teachers to produce, and there is insufficient evidence to suggest that this is the best or only way to engage parents and carers in education. Schools should remember that the [statutory duties on what schools must report to parents and carers](#) are relatively lean, and that there is limited evidence of impact for producing written reports that go beyond these.

School leaders should review their approach to producing the annual written report, to inform parents and carers of their child's performance and behaviour at school in a way that is manageable for teachers. The right technology should be used to automate reporting where possible, and more regular information on attendance and updates for parents and carers. Schools should be aware of technologies that are resource intensive and the expectations these create for parents and carers.

It can also be complicated for parents and carers to understand how to interact with schools, especially in the transition from primary to secondary school. **School leaders should consider how best to set out the expectations and rules for engagement with parents and carers (e.g. through a communications protocol).**

Recommendations

- The DfE should commission research that describes the range of current practices in parental engagement, alongside their time demands, with a view to designing a randomised controlled trial to test the impact of low-time investment models of parental engagement.
- The DfE should review its guidance on reporting to parents and carers to clarify the expectations of schools, and to permit the use of technology to engage parents to meet these expectations.
- The DfE should also publish templates for manageable reporting procedures, and case studies of how these have been adopted by schools.

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- **Nick Brook**, Deputy General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)
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- **Ben White**, Teacher and Director of Curriculum, Highworth Grammar School, Kent

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- **Alison Ryan**, Senior Policy Adviser, National Education Union (NEU)
- **Dame Kate Dethridge**, Deputy Director, North West London and South Central England Region

ANNEX A: Summary of recommendations

Recommendations to the Department for Education:

- Find out how school and MAT leaders currently evaluate their use of data, and test with school staff whether there is a need for further support for schools to do this (such as an audit tool or checklist) by Spring 2019. Following this testing the DfE should commission experts to develop the final product if needed.
- Evaluate to what extent schools are aligned to the principles set out in this report. If this evaluation reveals significant levels of non-adoption, work with stakeholders to ensure that more schools incorporate the principles into their policy and practice.
- Add a new section on behaviour management to the workload reduction toolkit, with amended guidance to reflect this, and test this with schools.
- Work with stakeholders to promote the development of teachers' understanding of assessment as a key feature of teacher expertise.
- Expand work on ensuring schools have suitably robust infrastructure for cloud working to support other technologies that reduce or minimise workload, including the wider use of online testing in schools.
- Beyond statutory data collections (such as the results of key stage 1 assessment), do not request regular attainment data from schools unless they meet a trigger for intervention. When this is required this should be in the school's existing format, and should not add to the number of data collections. The DfE should communicate to local authorities, MATs and others that they should not ask for this information either.
- Continue to promote effective use of education technology to improve the efficiency of attainment data collection, monitoring and analysis.
- Commission research to describe current target setting practice in schools, with a view to testing alternative models through a randomised controlled trial. This research should consider mental health of pupils.
- Not request data on pupil targets and predictions to hold schools to account. When this is required to allocate support to schools, this should be in the school's existing format, and should not add to the number of data collections.
- Speak to a broad and diverse group of schools, to understand the impact and burden of the current reporting requirements for pupil premium and primary PE and sport premium spend (including online reporting, and to Ofsted inspectors) and publish actions to address any issues that arise by Spring 2019.

- Amend performance management guidance to clarify that objectives and performance management discussions should not be based on teacher generated data and predictions, or solely on the assessment data for a single group of pupils.
- Revise the governors' handbook, competency framework and other guidance to reflect the principles of this report, and speak to governors to test what guidance and training they need.
- Incorporate myth busting for governors into the workload reduction toolkit or other guidance, to address misconceptions of what is required by the DfE or Ofsted and where policy has changed.
- Continue to improve the content and usability of Analyse School Performance based on feedback from schools and governors, and place emphasis on supporting governor needs. The DfE should ensure schools are able to access comparative performance information as soon as possible.
- Commission research that describes the range of current practices in parental engagement, alongside their time demands, with a view to designing a randomised controlled trial to test the impact of low-time investment models of parental engagement.
- Review guidance on reporting to parents and carers to clarify the expectations of schools, and to permit the use of technology to engage parents.
- Publish templates for manageable reporting procedures, and case studies of how these have been adopted by schools.

Recommendations to Ofsted and other organisations:

- **Ofsted** should monitor the consistency of inspection practice relating to the principles of this report.
- The **DfE, Ofsted, unions and professional associations** should reflect these principles in their guidance, in training for schools, officials and members, and through their networks.
- **Unions and professional associations** should disseminate the principles of this report, and collect and share case studies of where schools have made changes to their data practices.
- **School, MAT leaders and governors** should review their data processes according to these principles, using the tools provided by DfE.
- **Ofsted** should provide further clarity to schools to assure them that inspectors will not expect to see detailed logging of every single incident and detention, and that schools should use their own judgement of what constitutes a 'minor' incident.
- **School leader unions** should promote the development of teachers' understanding of assessment as a key feature of teacher expertise by organising events and training for their members.
- **Ofsted** inspectors should ask questions about whether schools' attainment data collections are proportionate, represent an efficient use of school resources, and are sustainable for staff. They should draw on the responses from teachers to the staff questionnaire regarding SLTs' consideration of workload when implementing policies. If a school's system for attainment data collection is disproportionate, inefficient or unsustainable for staff, inspectors should reflect this in their reporting on the school.
- **Local authorities and multi-academy trusts** should not request data on targets and predictions to hold schools to account. Where this is required to enable, for example, providing additional support to schools, this should not be in a different format to the format the school uses, and should not add to the number of data collections.
- **Ofsted** should continue to ensure that inspectors do not ask to see performance management targets based on assessment data during inspections.

ANNEX B: Summary of advice to schools

Principles:

- The **purpose** and use of data is clear, is relevant to the intended audience and is in line with school values and aims.
- The **precision** and limitations of data, and what can be inferred from it, are well understood.
- The amount of data collected and the frequency with which it is collected is **proportionate**.
- School leaders review **processes** for both collecting data and for making use of the data once gathered.

School leaders should:

- have simple systems that allow behaviour incidents, detentions and other pastoral information to be logged during the normal working day, rather than at break and lunchtimes, wherever possible.
- minimise or eliminate the number of pieces of information teachers are expected to compile.
- understand the quality and purpose of the assessments being used in their school – including details of their reliability and validity in relation to the curriculum.
- review their approach to reporting and parental engagement, to inform parents of their child's performance and behaviour at school in a way that is manageable for teachers, and consider how best to set out expectations to parents.
- use the data principles set out above to decide what the planned intervention for students is, and to minimise the data burden involved in ensuring the students are correctly identified.

School leaders should not:

- have more than two or three attainment data collection points a year, which should be used to inform clear actions. Increasing assessment frequency is not inherently likely to improve outcomes for pupils.
- make pay progression for teachers dependent on quantitative assessment metrics, such as test outcomes.

Governors should:

- be prepared to receive information in whatever form it is currently being used in the school. They should agree with school leaders what data they need and when.

Governors should not:

- be routinely seeing teacher judgement tracking data and in-school testing data if it has no external reference.

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