

Supporting Success:

The TransformED School Improvement Programme

Programme Framework

October 2026







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Executive Summary

Supporting Success: The TransformED School Improvement Programme

This framework sets out the purpose, principles, structures and operating arrangements for the Supporting Success Programme.

Supporting Success is the Department of Education's new school improvement programme, which replaces the Formal Intervention Process (FIP) set out in *Every School a Good School*.

As a key component of TransformED, it provides a structured, collaborative and evidence-informed approach to addressing identified challenges and strengthening schools' capacity to secure and sustain improvement.

The programme has been developed in response to growing evidence that long-term improvement is most effectively achieved through strong school ownership, effective partnerships, evidence-informed practice and support that is tailored to the needs of individual schools.

The Supporting Success Programme, therefore, focuses on capacity building and continuous improvement. It also provides access to a broader range of support than was available through previous arrangements, drawing on expertise from across the education system.

The programme is led by the Department's Centre for Educational Excellence and Improvement, in collaboration with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), and delivered in partnership with the Education Authority (EA), managing authorities and other education partners.

Supporting Success Programme at a Glance

- School-led and partnership-based approach to improvement.
- Tailored support informed by evidence and need.
- Strategic Coordinator assigned to each school.
- Improvement Action Plan and Support Schedule for each school.
- Access to coordinated support from across the education system.
- Regular monitoring, review and progress reporting.



Core principles

The Supporting Success Programme is underpinned by four core principles:

1. **School ownership of improvement**
2. **Partnership and collaboration**
3. **Tailored, evidence-informed support**
4. **Building sustainable capacity**

These principles ensure that support is focused on evidence-based approaches to improving outcomes for learners while strengthening the leadership, expertise and organisational capacity needed to sustain long-term progress.

How schools enter the programme

Schools may enter the programme through any of the following routes:

- ETI inspection;
- referral by a managing authority;
- self-referral by the school; or
- identification by the Department through analysis of relevant evidence.

What the programme provides

Schools participating in the Supporting Success Programme receive a tailored package of support aligned to their identified priorities. This may include leadership support, professional learning, governance support, curriculum and pedagogical expertise, specialist services, peer support from an experienced system leader and access to effective practice across the system.

Delivering better outcomes

The overarching aim of the Supporting Success Programme is to ensure that every participating school develops the leadership, expertise and organisational capacity and has access to the timely support necessary to secure sustainable improvement and deliver better outcomes for children and young people.

Through a structured programme of support, challenge and review, schools are enabled to strengthen their effectiveness, build long-term capacity and sustain progress beyond their participation in the programme.



Department of
Education
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TransformED



Centre for Educational
Excellence & Improvement
Northern Ireland

Supporting Success

The TransformED School Improvement Programme

Building a coherent high-performing education system focussed on excellence and equity for all

OUR PRINCIPLES FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT



1. School Ownership

School-led improvement with ownership of their priorities and decisions.



2. Partnership and Collaboration

Working in partnership to build capacity and share expertise.



3. Tailored, Evidence-Informed Support

Flexible and responsive support is matched to individual needs.

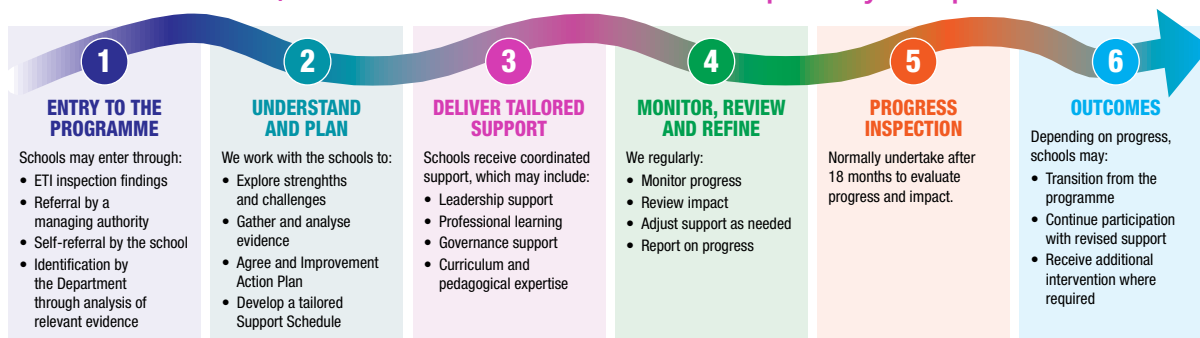


4. Sustainable Capacity

Building sustainable capacity for long-term impact and improvement.

The Supporting Success Journey

A structured, collaborative and evidence-informed pathway to improvement.



OUR SHARED AIM

To ensure that every participating school has the leadership, capacity and support necessary to secure sustainable improvement and deliver better outcomes for children and young people.



LEARNERS THRIVE



SCHOOLS IMPROVE



STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS



ENHANCED CAPACITY



1. Overview

This framework sets out the purpose, principles, structures and operating arrangements for the Supporting Success Programme.

Why school improvement matters

Schools play a critical role in improving outcomes and life chances for children and young people. To do so effectively, they must operate within an increasingly complex environment. Alongside their core responsibility for teaching and learning, they are responding to increasingly diverse learner needs, evolving societal expectations, workforce challenges, growing expectations around inclusion and wellbeing, and wider social and economic pressures.

School improvement is an ongoing responsibility of every school. Through robust self-evaluation and development planning, schools are expected to identify and address their improvement priorities, utilising their Teaching Professional Learning funding and drawing on the universal programmes available to all schools.

Some challenges, however, require additional support, capacity and specialist expertise beyond that available within the school itself. In these circumstances, timely and proportionate external support can provide additional expertise, challenge and capacity, enabling school leaders and staff to secure the best possible outcomes and experiences for every learner.

International evidence demonstrates that long-term school improvement is secured through strong leadership, evidence-informed practice, effective partnerships and support tailored to the needs of individual schools. It also emphasises that sustainable improvement is not something that is done *to* schools, but something that is achieved *with* schools through effective collaboration and shared accountability.

The Supporting Success Programme

The Supporting Success Programme has been developed to translate this evidence into a practical and coherent approach to supporting schools to secure and sustain improvement.

Schools may enter the programme following inspection, through referral by the relevant managing authority, or by self-referral.

The programme replaces the Department's Formal Intervention Process set out in **Annex C** of *Every School a Good School: A Policy for School Improvement (ESaGS)*. It represents a significant shift towards a collaborative, developmental and evidence-informed model that places school ownership of improvement, partnership and capacity-building at its core.

Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach, the Supporting Success Programme provides support tailored to each school's context, strengths, challenges and improvement priorities. Through a structured programme of support, challenge and review, it helps schools strengthen leadership, governance and organisational capacity.



The Programme will provide access to a broader and more coordinated package of support than FIP, drawing on expertise and resources from across the education system. This may include support in areas such as leadership, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, self-evaluation and improvement planning. The aim is to help schools build the capacity needed to secure and sustain improvement.

The Centre for Educational Excellence and Improvement

The Supporting Success Programme forms part of the Department's wider TransformED reform programme and is led by the [Centre for Educational Excellence and Improvement](#), established within the Department on 1 September 2026.

The Centre provides strategic leadership across key areas of educational reform, including:

- curriculum development, implementation and support;
- professional learning;
- leadership development;
- school improvement;
- assessment and qualifications policy; and
- evidence, research and evaluation.

The Centre is part of the Department and is responsible for coordinating, commissioning and, where appropriate, directly delivering services that support teaching, learning and educational improvement. Its role is to ensure support for schools is coherent, evidence-informed and aligned with the priorities of TransformED.

Working with system partners

The Centre works collaboratively with ETI within the Department and with key partners across the education system, including EA, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), sectoral support bodies, universities and other specialist providers.

As the lead organisation for the Supporting Success Programme, the Centre provides strategic oversight and coordination of the programme, ensuring that support is coherent, evidence-informed and tailored to the needs of individual schools. By bringing together expertise and resources from across the education system, the Centre helps create a joined-up approach to school improvement, enabling schools to access the right support at the right time.

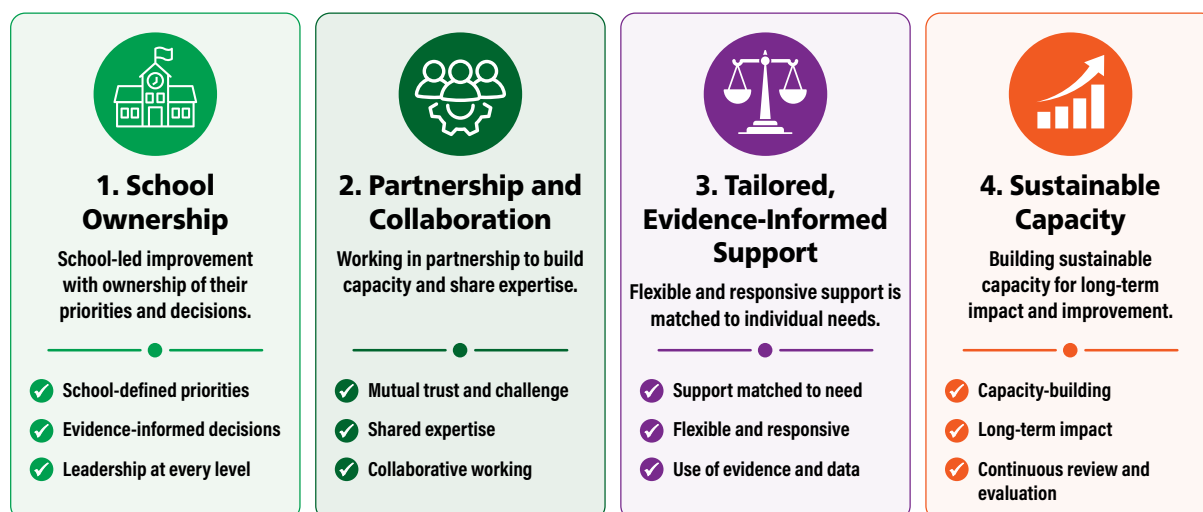
2. The principles of School Improvement

A shared framework for improvement

The Supporting Success Programme is underpinned by four core principles that shape how support is designed, delivered, monitored and reviewed:

1. School ownership of improvement
2. Partnership and collaboration
3. Tailored, evidence-informed support
4. Building sustainable capacity

PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT



These principles establish a common understanding of how schools, system partners and support providers work together to secure better outcomes for children and young people.

The principles reflect the belief that sustainable improvement is most effective when schools are empowered and supported to lead their own improvement journey. They recognise that long-term improvement is most likely to be secured through a combination of strong school ownership, effective partnerships, support that is both evidence-informed and responsive to the specific circumstances of each school and a focus on capacity building.



What the principles deliver

Through these principles, the Supporting Success Programme seeks to deliver:

- **A school-led approach** whereby schools retain ownership of their improvement journey.
- **A collaborative approach** that works alongside schools as partners in improvement, providing support, challenge and expertise to strengthen leadership, systems and practice.
- **A tailored approach** that recognises the unique context, culture, strengths and needs of each school.
- **A proportionate and flexible approach** that provides the right level of support at the right time and adapts as circumstances and needs evolve.
- **An evidence-informed approach** that draws upon research, professional expertise and effective practice to focus effort where it will have the greatest impact.
- **A capacity-building approach** that develops leadership, professional expertise and organisational effectiveness, enabling schools to secure lasting impact and sustainability.
- **An aligned approach** that brings together support from across the education system.

The aim is to ensure that support is focused on improving outcomes for learners and building the leadership, capability and resilience required to sustain progress beyond participation in the programme.



3. Entering the Programme

Routes into the programme

A school may enter the Supporting Success Programme through one of the following routes:

- i. **Following an ETI inspection**, schools will automatically enter the programme where findings indicate that the provision of sustained external support is required to help schools to address the identified areas for action in a timely way.

Where an inspection identifies areas for action and the need for a Progress Inspection, schools will continue to be required to develop, with the support of the EA, and submit an Improvement Action Plan. Schools will have access to a System Leader Partner and may also choose to enter the Supporting Success Programme, should they wish to access additional, more intensive support.

- ii. **Referral by a managing authority**, where additional support is considered necessary to address identified priorities.
- iii. **Self-referral by the school**, where leaders wish to access support to strengthen capacity and improve outcomes.
- iv. **Identification by the Department**, where analysis of relevant evidence indicates that additional support is required.

Admission and participation

Where a school enters the programme through routes ii to iv, ETI will undertake a full inspection within three months of admission to the programme. This will establish a baseline position and inform subsequent support and monitoring arrangements.

Where a referral is made by a managing authority or through a voluntary request from a school, the Department will consider the available evidence and determine whether participation is appropriate.

For routes ii to iv, the final decision to place a school within the Supporting Success Programme rests with the Department of Education following consultation with the school and the relevant managing authority.

Once a school enters the programme, active engagement with agreed support, monitoring and review arrangements is expected throughout participation.



4. The Supporting Success Programme

How the programme works

Following admission to the programme, schools will enter an initial planning phase. This phase will establish a shared understanding of the school's strengths, challenges and improvement priorities and will inform the development of:

- an Improvement Action Plan, including a tailored Support Schedule;
- agreed success measures and milestones; and
- arrangements for monitoring, review and reporting.

Support will then be delivered through a coordinated programme of activity aligned to the school's identified priorities. Throughout the programme, progress will be reviewed regularly to assess implementation, evaluate impact and determine whether additional support or adjustments are required.

A Progress Inspection will take place after a minimum of 18 months, (unless the school requests an earlier inspection), following entry to the programme. The outcome of this inspection, which will indicate the extent of the school's progress and take account of the views of key stakeholders, will inform decisions regarding the next phase of support, transition arrangements or exit from the programme.

Strategic Coordinator

Upon entering the programme, each school will be assigned an officer to coordinate support. The Department will commission EA, as its principal school improvement partner, to provide a suitably experienced Strategic Coordinator to undertake this role for all participating schools.

The Strategic Coordinator will act as the school's primary point of contact throughout its participation in the programme. They will work in partnership with the school, the Department, CCMS (where appropriate) and other relevant partners to coordinate support, monitor progress and ensure that improvement activity remains focused on the key priorities.

The Strategic Coordinator will support the school to address the identified areas for action from inspection and to develop a robust understanding of its performance through the consideration and triangulation of a wide range of evidence, including:

- self-evaluation evidence;
- learner outcomes and assessment information;
- classroom observations;
- learner, parent and staff voice; and
- relevant contextual information.

Their role is not to direct the school, but to act as a trusted partner, providing coordination, support, constructive challenge and access to relevant expertise.



Key responsibilities of the Strategic Coordinator include:

- supporting the school to address areas for action from inspection and identify improvement priorities, leading to the development of the Improvement Action Plan;
- coordinating the development and implementation of the Support Schedule to accompany the plan;
- coordinating and brokering support from a range of relevant services and partners including EA services, managing authorities, sectoral partners and wider external providers;
- providing appropriate challenge and support to maintain momentum for improvement;
- facilitating effective communication across all partners involved in the programme; and
- providing regular progress reports to the Department on implementation, impact and next steps.

Improvement Action Plan

The Improvement Action Plan is the primary vehicle through which a school's priorities, actions and intended outcomes are translated into a coherent programme of improvement activity.

Developed and owned by the school, with support from the Strategic Coordinator, the plan will address the areas for action identified by inspection and issues identified through school self-evaluation, making effective use of pastoral and performance information and other relevant evidence.

The Improvement Action Plan will:

- be led and owned by the school;
- focus on a small number of clearly defined improvement priorities;
- identify intended outcomes for learners;
- include measurable actions, milestones and success criteria;
- identify responsibilities and timescales;
- outline arrangements for monitoring implementation and evaluating impact; and
- support the development of sustainable leadership and organisational capacity.

The Improvement Action Plan will be accompanied by a Support Schedule which sets out in more detail the specific support package that will be provided throughout the programme. It will set out:

- support to be provided;
- roles and responsibilities;
- delivery arrangements and timescales;
- agreed milestones; and
- arrangements for monitoring impact and reviewing effectiveness.



Support will be tailored to the school's circumstances and will be adjusted as needs change and progress is secured.

The Department, informed by advice from ETI and relevant support bodies, will review and approve the Improvement Action Plan and Support Schedule.

Earmarked funding will be available from the Department to address specific areas of need and the Support Schedule should include indicative costs.

Support available through the Supporting Success Programme

A range of tailored and targeted resources will be made available to schools participating in the programme. These include:

- An assigned **Strategic Coordinator** who will play a central role in supporting and challenging schools to develop and implement their Improvement Action Plan (see roles and responsibilities section for further details).
- An assigned **System Leader Partner** from the Centre for Educational Excellence and Improvement within the Department. This experienced principal will work alongside the Strategic Coordinator, providing peer support, mentoring and practical improvement expertise.
- Leadership development, including relevant courses, and coaching and mentoring for senior and middle leaders.
- Diagnostic review and self-evaluation support.
- Governance and strategic leadership support for Boards of Governors.
- Professional learning, including curriculum, assessment and pedagogical support.
- Access to effective practice, networks and collaborative partnerships.
- Specialist support relating to inclusion, Special Educational Needs (SEN), wellbeing and safeguarding.
- Bespoke programmes designed to address other identified improvement priorities.

Monitoring and review

Progress will be monitored and evaluated by ETI.

Monitoring arrangements will also include a termly structured progress review led by the Department.

Roles & responsibilities

Partner	Roles and responsibilities
School leadership	• Take ownership of improvement and engage fully with the Supporting Success Programme. • Work with the Strategic Coordinator and other support personnel, education bodies or schools to address the areas for action from inspection and implement agreed priorities. • Develop, implement and monitor the outworking of the Improvement Action Plan and Support Schedule. • Engage staff in improvement activity, professional learning and capacity building. • Use evidence to evaluate and report against progress, impact and sustainability of improvement.
Board of Governors	• Provide strategic leadership, challenge and support. • Monitor the progress, outcomes and impact through school development planning, including self-evaluation. • Oversee accountability and embed a culture of continuous improvement. • Ensure effective stewardship of resources. • Support long-term sustainability and contribute to key review and transition decisions.
The Department of Education (Centre for Educational Excellence and Improvement)	• Determine the policy and guidance frameworks for school improvement. • Determine entry to the programme, progression through the framework, transition and exit arrangements. • Oversee implementation and evaluate effectiveness and impact. • Ensure appropriate resources and support arrangements are in place. • Allocate a System Leader Partner to support the school and delivery of the Improvement Action Plan. • Promote system-wide learning and improvement.
Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)	• Determine the policy and guidance frameworks for inspection. • Identify through inspection where external support and/or further inspection activity is required. • Provide professional advice to inform decisions on progress and next steps. • Maintain professional dialogue through the work of the District Inspector or specialist inspector, monitoring, inspecting and reporting on progress and impact. • Undertake baseline and progress inspections.



Partner	Roles and responsibilities
EA (support for all schools)	• Nominate a Strategic Coordinator for all schools to engage in Supporting Success Programme and act as the primary contact and lead coordinator for the school. • Coordinate the provision of school improvement, professional learning and a range of specialist support services. • Provide professional advice, support and challenge to all schools. • Support governance, staffing, operational effectiveness and organisational capacity. • Contribute to review, transition and intervention decisions.
Controlled Schools Unit (managing authority support for controlled schools)	• Actively work in partnership with the Strategic Coordinator and contribute to the Support Schedule and review processes as appropriate. • Contribute to review, transition and intervention decisions. • Provide managing authority related support for schools in the controlled sector, including leadership support in areas such as governance, finance and HR.
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)	• Actively work in partnership with the Strategic Coordinator and contribute to the Support Schedule and review processes as appropriate. • Contribute to review, transition and intervention decisions. • Provide managing authority related support for schools in the Catholic maintained sector, including leadership support in areas such as governance, finance and HR.
Sectoral Support Bodies	• Actively work in partnership with the Strategic Coordinator and contribute to the Support Schedule and review process as appropriate. • Provide specialist and sector-specific expertise. • Support improvement planning and capacity building.

5. Next steps

A minimum of 18 months after entry to the programme, a Progress Inspection will be undertaken by ETI. The Department will consider the inspection outcome, alongside evidence from ongoing monitoring and advice from relevant partners, before making a decision as to whether the school will remain in, or transition from, the Programme.

Decisions will be guided by a single principle: ensuring that every school has the leadership, capacity and support necessary to provide high-quality education and improved outcomes for all learners.

Pathway 1: Transition to universal support

Where the Progress Inspection demonstrates that sufficient and sustainable improvement has been secured, and the Department is satisfied that the school has the leadership, governance and organisational capacity to maintain progress independently, the school will transition from the Programme.

To support a smooth transition, a time-bound period of reduced and proportionate support will be provided to help consolidate and embed improvements. This transition phase will normally last for up to two school terms and will focus on:

- sustaining progress against improvement priorities;
- strengthening self-evaluation and quality improvement processes;
- embedding effective leadership and governance arrangements;
- ensuring continued monitoring of outcomes for learners; and
- supporting the school's transition to universal support arrangements.

At the conclusion of the transition period, the school will leave the programme and move to the universal support available to all schools.

Pathway 2: Continued participation in the Supporting Success Programme

Where the Progress Inspection indicates that improvement is evident but not yet sufficiently secure or sustainable, or where further capacity-building is required, the school will remain within the programme for a further period.

The Department recognises that meaningful and lasting improvement can take time, particularly where schools are addressing complex or longstanding challenges. Continued participation in the programme provides an opportunity to build on progress already achieved while ensuring that support remains aligned to the school's evolving needs.

The Strategic Coordinator will act on the findings of the Progress Inspection and will work with the school and other support bodies to review and refresh the Improvement Action Plan and Support Schedule in light of:

- the findings of the Progress Inspection;
- progress against agreed priorities;

- 
- emerging challenges and opportunities;
 - evidence of impact; and
 - the school's capacity to sustain improvement.

Support may be refined, intensified or reconfigured to ensure it remains focused on securing better outcomes for children and young people.

A further Progress Inspection will normally take place after a minimum of a further 18 months to assess progress and determine subsequent next steps.

Pathway 3: Further action

Where a school has not demonstrated sufficient and sustained improvement following two Progress Inspections or where there remains significant concern regarding its capacity to secure improvement independently, the Department will consider whether additional intervention is required.

Escalation may also be considered at any stage where there is compelling evidence of deteriorating educational outcomes; limited or declining capacity to improve; significant weaknesses in leadership or governance; serious safeguarding concerns; or other factors that indicate urgent action is required to protect the quality of educational provision and the interests of learners.

The Department will convene a case conference involving senior representatives from the Department, including ETI, the relevant managing authority and other key partners, as appropriate. The purpose of the case conference will be to review all available evidence, assess the school's circumstances and determine the most appropriate course of action.

Following consideration of the evidence, the Department may decide that additional intervention is necessary. This may include:

- a review of leadership and governance arrangements;
- the deployment of additional specialist expertise or intensive support;
- enhanced monitoring and oversight arrangements;
- the appointment or removal of governors using statutory powers where appropriate;
- consideration of changes to leadership arrangements; or
- consideration of the school's longer-term viability and sustainability.

Any intervention will be proportionate to the level of concern, informed by the school's context and focused on securing sustainable improvement and better outcomes for children and young people. The Board of Governors will be engaged throughout the process, and decisions will be communicated clearly and transparently.

Annex A

Supporting Success Programme – Key stages and timescales

The timeline below is based on schools entering the Supporting Success Programme following an inspection. Where a school is admitted to the Programme following referral by a managing authority; self-referral; or identification by the Department through analysis of relevant evidence, ETI will undertake an inspection within three months of admission to the programme to establish a baseline position, and the timeline and stages below will then commence.

Stage	Activity	Indicative Timescale
1	ETI Verbal/Oral Report Back Meeting including representation of an EA officer and, where appropriate, a senior representative from the relevant managing authority.	Day 0.
2	ETI notify DE of the inspection findings by means of a memo/note of report back meeting.	Within 10 working days of the Report Back Meeting.
3	Departmental notification letter issued to the school and copied to the EA and relevant managing authority confirming engagement in the Supporting Success Programme. This will include allocation of a System Leader Partner . The EA will appoint a Strategic Coordinator to the school and notify DE.	Normally within 10 working days of the receipt of the note of the Report Back Meeting from ETI.
4	ETI publishes formal report.	Normally within 30 working days from the Report Back Meeting.
5	School supported by the Strategic Coordinator develops an Improvement Action Plan (including Support Schedule).	Submission within 60 working days from receipt of the notification letter from the Department.
6	Departmental feedback on Improvement Plans. Informed by advice from ETI and relevant support bodies, the Department provides feedback on the Improvement Action Plan and Support Schedule.	Normally within 10 working days of submission of the Improvement Action Plan and Support Schedule. Where revision is required, the Plan should be resubmitted to the Department within 15 working days .

Stage	Activity	Indicative Timescale
7	Structured Progress Reviews (chaired by the Department).	At least termly .
8	ETI Progress Inspection.	A minimum of 18 months from entry to the programme.

