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School
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HOW TO RECOVER FROM A POOR INSPECTION OUTCOME

FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOL
HEADTEACHERS

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How to recover from a poor inspection outcome



If you have recently been inspected by Ofsted and it didn't go well, my best advice for you is - get in touch with [Marell Consulting Limited](#)– we will help you bounce back quickly. We have done it successfully for every school that has requested this service from us.

For those of you who prefer to address this on your own, here is a strategy you can follow in order to quickly recover from a poor inspection outcome. I offer this strategy because according to recent [statistics](#) published on the 9th of May 2019, only 49% of Independent Schools that received follow up “progress monitoring” inspections since September 2018 managed to get a positive outcome. 49% is not a great recovery rate so here is the strategy I use - I call it – **“Accept the outcome then follow the 5C's”** The strategy includes the following steps:

- Accept the outcome
- Categorise areas for improvement
- Compile a SMART action plan
- Complete actions as scheduled
- Check progress regularly
- Conduct a final evaluation

It sounds simple enough doesn't it? Well, your success will be determined by how effectively you implement this strategy.

Accept the outcome

If you have just been inspected and it didn't go well, you are not going to be in a good place. You most certainly feel disappointed, maybe angry, perhaps you don't agree with the outcome and are looking at ways of challenging it. Unfortunately, you can't afford to spend too much time in that state because you will most likely be receiving a progress monitoring inspection in as little as 6

months! If inspectors found that the school did not meet some of the independent school standards, they will inform the DfE. The DfE will then send a letter to the school asking you to compile an action plan to demonstrate how you will address the standards that were not met. Schools usually have a limited time during which they are required to compile an action plan, implement it and be ready to demonstrate improvement at the next inspection. So, even though you are not feeling great after receiving a grade 3 or 4 from an Ofsted inspection, don't waste time questioning the outcome - by the time the inspection report is published and even as early as the time the draft inspection report is sent to you for factual checking, the grades are final. You can make a formal complaint about the inspection process, but this will not change your grade.

The only time you can make an impact on your grade is during inspection. If, during the inspection you think that the inspectors are missing something and are not evaluating your school accurately or fairly speak up immediately. Present additional evidence; give explanations and set things straight because after the provisional grades are given to you in that final meeting – the only way they could change is if the inspectors conducting the quality assurance before the report is published determine that the grades and the evidence are not in alignment. So, the first step towards recovering from a poor inspection outcome is to accept the outcome and focus on recovery.

Categorise areas for improvement

In order to do this, you need to know where to look and you need to be thorough. You might find this section a bit too prescriptive however I am sharing this with you because this is what I do when I am supporting a school. You can decide if you want to use it. I have found that following this procedure guarantees that all areas for improvement are addressed. The type of inspection report referred to in this article is one that is sent after a standard inspection - a full inspection during which the outcome is presented in the form of grades.

So, moving on – to get the best from this next part you need to be looking at your inspection report. The first page of an inspection report has a list of the reasons why the grade for overall effectiveness was awarded – this is the first place for extracting areas for improvement, all of these will be expanded on later on in the report so this is what I advise you to do:

- On page 1 assign a number to each reason given for the grade (3 or 4)
- On page 2 under the heading “What does the school need to do to improve further”, read each point, check if it relates to any of the numbered points on page 1 – if so, assign the same number. If not assign the next number chronologically from where you left off on page 1
- Read the body of the report as if you were not present during the inspection. For any area that is less than good, check if it relates to any of the numbered points on pages 1 and 2 – if so, assign the same number. If not assign the next number chronologically from where you left off after the last instruction
- If you were present and heavily involved during inspection, check your notes. Is there anything that came up as less than good that was not mentioned in the inspection report – if so check if it relates to any of the numbered points you have so far – if so, assign the same number. If not assign the next number chronologically from where you left off after the last instruction
- Type up everything that has been allocated a number onto a document, grouping everything by number. You have finished categorising your improvement areas – this is the first draft of your action plan.
- Go to the page which has the heading “Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements”. This lists the standards that were not met. Read each paragraph, then go back to your

improvement areas, scan to see if you can match the standard to a numbered improvement area. If you can, add the standard number (in brackets) next to it. Please note that not all improvement areas will match a standard because not all areas for improvement are always related to the standards

- Now you have the second draft of your action plan

Compile a SMART action plan

When the DfE ask you to compile an action plan you will be given a deadline for sending this back. The action plan will then be sent to Ofsted for evaluation and it can be approved, rejected or approved with modifications. So you need to get it right, not only because your action plan will be evaluated but also because if you get it right and it is approved, you can be confident that the actions will address un-met standards and you will have enough time to implement before Ofsted come back for the progress monitoring. If your action plan is rejected, you have to draft another plan and you will also have to revisit some of the actions that you had already started implementing if Ofsted deems that they are not sufficient to address un-met standards. This will take up a lot of your time which is already limited.

For this reason, I would suggest that you compile a SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound) action plan. I am sure you have heard about SMART targets and are probably thinking, not this again. I am sure you are also aware that even though many people can reel off what they are, they still fail to set SMART targets. I am going to use the principles behind SMART targets to demonstrate how you can get the action plan right.

The DfE have published guidance about action plans [here](#). Your action plan should state the standards that have not been met, outline actions that will be taken to address these standards, specify a deadline for completion and explain how you will measure success. The DfE guidance includes a suggested template for an action plan which you can choose to use, see below:

Action plan submitted under S.114 of education and skills act 2008

School Name: _____ **School Number:** _____

Standard No	Objective	Action proposed	To be completed by	Responsible person	Costs and resources	Success criteria or outcome

I prefer to use the format below and I will explain why:

Objectives	Action Proposed	Responsible Person	Start date or deadline	Costs and resources	Success Criteria	Progress?
Standards	Here I would list all the standards that are related to a specific area for improvement					
Standards	Here I would list all the standards that are related to the next area for improvement					

There are only 2 differences between the DfE template and the one I choose to use– an additional column for progress and the placement of the standards section. I think it is essential to have a progress column to prompt you to check and record progress – otherwise the implementation of the action plan might not be as focused. The standards have been placed as a row on the second template for 2 reasons:

- to save space, the table can get quite wide – it is a lot of columns.
- to prevent the need to repeat actions for example, let’s say your school has failed to make one of the required pre-employment checks specified on standard 18, this means that the school will also fail to meet standard 21 (the one about the single central register – because the register won’t have a record of that pre-employment check), it also means that the school will also fail to meet standard 7 (the standard about safeguarding). Although all three standards are not met, it is because of one failing – if each standard is given a row on the action plan then you would need to repeat the action about carrying out the missing pre-employment check three times which is ridiculous.

So, onto compiling a specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) action plan. Each area for improvement identified in the section above should be written as an objective on the template. For each objective state the actions that need to be taken in order for the objective to be met. Be specific, when someone else reads your actions, there should be no doubt about what needs to be done – they shouldn’t be able to ask, “how will you do this?” Number each action – it will make tracking and recording progress easier.

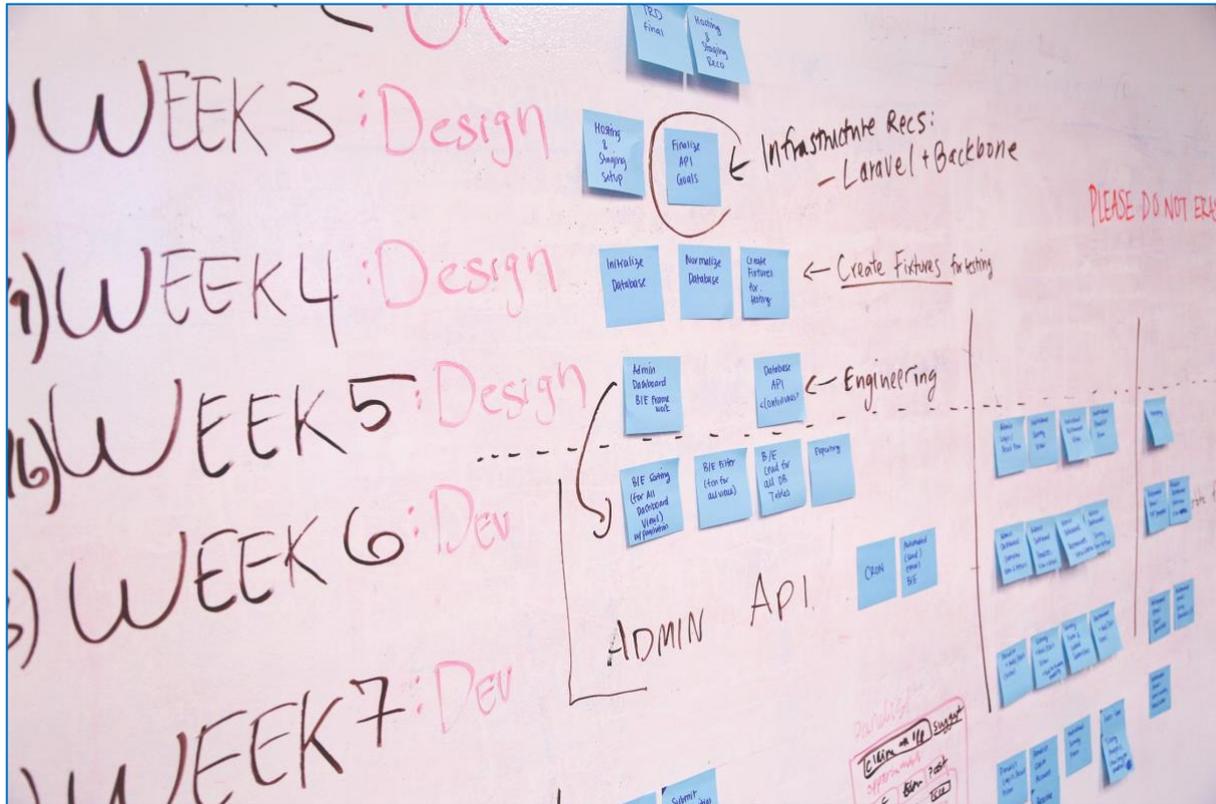
Wherever possible earlier start dates and deadlines are better bearing in mind the limited time in which schools are expected to turn things around. Deadlines cannot be more than 3 months from the date on the DfE letter. Any standards to do with safeguarding and welfare of pupils should be prioritised because the longer they are not met the longer pupils are at risk. Having said that, in discussion with those responsible for implementation, make sure that actions can be completed within the time specified on the action plan.

The person responsible for each action should be chosen carefully ensuring that they are the best person for the job. They should be informed that they have been chosen to carry out this task and be given a chance to consider and either accept or suggest someone else more suited to the task before the action plan is finalised.

For each action set success criteria – which answers the question “How will you know you are done?” Please be careful with the wording when it comes to success criteria about mandatory issues

such as reporting FGM. I know this is pedantic, but I have seen Ofsted feedback saying that an action is not acceptable because the success criteria states that something “should” be done instead of “must” be done.

Complete actions as scheduled



In order to do this effectively you need a driver – someone in the organisation who is good at getting others to do things. Assign such a person as the driver of your action plan. If you are assigned as the driver this is what you need to do:

- get the thickest lever arch folder you can find
- place the action plan at the front of the folder then;
- get several packs of dividers – enough to create a dedicated section for each action on the action plan
- on the front of each divider, write down a list of the evidence that will show that the success criteria for that action are met

At the beginning of each month

- identify actions that need to begin or that need to be completed in that month
- identify the people responsible for implementing these actions then;
- Do your thing: talk to them, motivate them, encourage them - make sure that they complete the actions. Instruct them to report back to you, giving you the relevant evidence of completion where possible (some evidence cannot fit in a file).

I can't stress enough how important it is to hold people to account here. Make sure that everyone completes the tasks assigned to them no matter what. Implementing this plan is how you get your

school back in good standing with the DfE (who – and I hate to mention it here, but I have to, they have the power to close your doors).

It might help to motivate staff if you have a monthly meeting during which the driver thanks staff for completing their tasks. Each responsible person could mention what they have done to implement the action plan, so all staff know how much progress has been made.

The driver should update the action plan each time tasks are completed – making a note of the date, the action completed and whether or not success criteria are met. This information goes in the “Progress” column of the action plan.

(V) Check progress regularly

This task should be assigned to a senior person who is not the driver. At least every 2 months, check to see which previously un-met standards are now met. To do this effectively you need to understand the requirements of the standards. I would advise that you either read the [standards](#) and the [Ofsted guidance](#), the [DfE guidance](#) and any additional guidance relevant to the standards in question that is signposted in the [handbook for inspection](#) or use our Standards Compliance Audit Tool which you can buy [here](#). Sign off standards that are met.

Also check your working action plan document, ensure that the driver has made all updates and that all the evidence is in place in the action plan folder.

(VI) Conduct a final evaluation

If you follow this procedure, there will come a time when you will notice that you have addressed all previously un-met standards and other qualitative issues that needed improvement. This is the time to conduct a final evaluation of your progress. I would advise that you get an external person to carry out the evaluation, they can be objective because they have not been involved in the improvement process. If you prefer to conduct this evaluation yourself, this is how I do it:

Plan the evaluation carefully, for each area for improvement identified in section (ii) above draft a line of enquiry based on the specific failing identified at the last inspection then think about how an inspector might check to see if the school has improved. Do this for each area of improvement so that you end up with something like this:

Area for Improvement	Lines of enquiry	Method of evaluation
Behaviour in lessons	How is disruptive behaviour managed now? Are pupils now arriving for lessons on time?	Observation of lessons Analysing documents – behaviour policy, behaviour logs, class registers
Premises	Have repairs have been made? – the ceiling, the plaster, the window and the general state of the premises. Has the missing fire extinguisher been installed? Have the fire escape signs been put in place?	Premises walk
Ensuring that the school meets the standards	What has been done to ensure that leaders and mangers have the knowledge required for ensuring that the school meets the standards?	Talking to school leaders. Analysing documents – minutes of meetings, records of audits or reviews of compliance with the standards

Carry out the evaluation in a formal manner, as if you were an external person. Inspectors complete this evaluation in 1 day – do the same. Inspectors will do the following:

- Check to see if previously un-met standards are now met
- Check to see if any qualitative issues identified at the last inspection have been addressed

If inspectors notice that standards that were met at the last inspection do not continue to be met, they will follow additional lines of enquiry and report to the DfE. In your evaluation, if you notice the same, please make a note of it.

Inspectors will always have regard for safeguarding and will report any concerns to the DfE. In your evaluation, if you notice the same, follow your school’s safeguarding procedure.

At the end of this evaluation, you can be confident that your improvement efforts have been successful if you can confirm that:

- All previously un-met standards are now met
- All qualitative issues identified at the last inspection have been addressed
- The school continues to comply with standards that were met at the last inspection

While you wait for your progress monitoring inspection continue to check that standards continue to be met. [Sign up for our newsletter](#) and you will receive a document with guidance about how you can ensure consistent compliance with the standards. If you find this article useful we would love to hear from you.

Marell Consulting Limited

Independent School Improvement Partners

Our vision is to be the go-to-company in the UK for supporting independent schools to become self-improving organisations consistently progressing towards outstanding education outcomes. We work in partnership with independent schools to improve the quality of education they deliver and ensure that they meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards.

What Do Others Say?

"...Ellen has consistently kept the management team up to date with new educational legislation and good practice. Marell Consulting has set a regular monitored programme of support for school improvement. Their level and quality of input has been complimented on by Ofsted during inspection. Ellen has supported our school from an inadequate through to a good with outstanding features, using clear guidance and action plans, thorough hands on professional and reliable support. A genuine child focussed caring consultant who I would be happy to recommend."

Tzaraine Cope, Proprietor of Fairfield House School

"I advertised for someone to offer me technical education knowledge and understanding after being commissioned to support a school that had been rated inadequate by Ofsted.

I interviewed a number of people, but Ellen gave me the greatest confidence in her understanding of the inspection process and of her knowledge of the Independent School Standards and education more generally. That was almost two years ago and the school has moved from strength to strength with her input and support."

Peter Barron, Director & Owner of Childhood Matters Limited



Ellen Mukwewa, the Director and a Consultant at Marell Consulting, is passionate about developing systems that drive improvement in school settings and has specialist experience of supporting the leaders of Independent Schools that are inspected by Ofsted to achieve a consistently better quality of education for the pupils they serve. Find more about Ellen here.

