

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that there should be a separate judgement on the effectiveness of a school's sixth form?

The Sixth Form Colleges' Association welcomes the proposal to introduce a separate, numerical judgement for sixth forms in schools and academies. Under the current arrangements, the overall numerical grade for a school or an academy can mask serious underperformance in the sixth form.

For example, table 1 summarises the inspection grades of schools and academies with a level 3 academic success rate below 70%. The majority of these institutions are currently rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. No Sixth Form College has a level 3 academic success rate below 70%.

Table 1: inspection outcomes - schools and academies with a success rate below 70%

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	All
School sixth forms	21	121	86	23	251

Table 2 summarises the inspection grades of schools with a Level 3 value added score below -5.0. Again, the majority of these institutions are currently rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. Only one Sixth Form College has a Level 3 value added score below -5.0.

Table 2: inspection outcomes - schools and academies with a L3 VA score below -5.0

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	All
School sixth forms	22	124	59	12	217

The inspection grades above are for overall effectiveness. But the success rate and value added performance of these institutions indicates that they are not effective for all their pupils, despite being graded as good or outstanding by Ofsted. The overall grade for these schools and academies does not adequately inform prospective learners of the quality of sixth form provision.

While the case for introducing a separate, numerical judgement is clear, it is crucial that the process for arriving at this judgement is robust. A school or academy sixth form grade that simply mirrored the overall effectiveness grade of the whole institution would be more misleading than the current arrangements.

It is also important that the grade is comparable with judgements awarded to Sixth Form Colleges. We would suggest that the criteria used to arrive at the judgement should mirror the criteria used in the common inspection framework for further education and skills. In the consultation document, the

evaluation criteria for school and academy sixth form inspections encompasses:

- Achievement
- The quality of teaching and learning
- Behaviour and safety
- Leadership and management

But when inspecting a Sixth Form College and FE providers, the judgement on overall effectiveness is based on:

- Outcomes for learners
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- The effectiveness of leadership and management

We believe the criteria used in the common inspection framework for further education and skills should be used when inspecting school and academy sixth forms. More importantly, the data used to arrive at judgements on attainment/outcomes for learners should also be consistent. The role of qualification success rates is particularly important in this context. Even within the world of further education and skills the use of success rate data has proved contentious. SFCA has long opposed the use of a success rate benchmark (or 'national average') in Sixth Form College inspections that is higher than the benchmark used when inspecting other FE providers. It makes no sense to have a national average based on the legal status of a group of institutions, and this is based on misguided assumptions about the prior attainment profile of students that attend Sixth Form Colleges. If success rates are to be used for benchmarking purposes, the national average should be based on the performance of all providers (including schools) by qualification type, irrespective of institution type. School success rate data remains in experimental form, although under the current arrangement this data should be made available to, and used by, inspection teams.

In short, the role and status of success rates in the eyes of government is rather confused. They do not feature in the main performance tables, HMC1 Sir Michael Wilshaw has described them as 'palpable nonsense' and yet they still feature prominently in Ofsted inspections of Sixth Form Colleges. Level 3 value added data does feature in the performance tables and should have the same role and profile in school and academy inspections as it has in inspections of Sixth Form Colleges.

Parents and students should be able to make direct comparisons between different types of sixth form providers, irrespective of whether they are schools or colleges. The data used to arrive at judgements, and the criteria used to guide those judgements, should be as closely aligned as possible.

Inspections of schools and academies are typically half as long as Sixth Form College inspections (two days compared to four). With this in mind, it is crucial

that sufficient time is devoted to the inspection of sixth form provision. We would recommend that at least one member of each team is a specialist in 16-18 education. Training needs to be provided to ensure that inspection teams are familiar with the latest data, trends and developments in sixth form education. It is important that the inspection of sixth form provision is not considered to be a 'bolt on' to the inspection of the main institution. With this in mind, and given the government's belief that sixth forms play a vital role in driving up standards across schools and academies, we believe the judgement for the sixth form should act as a limiting grade for the whole institution.

James Kewin
SFCA Deputy Chief Executive
13 May 2014