

EVERY SCHOOL A GOOD SCHOOL INTO Response

SUMMARY and OVERVIEW

INTO welcomes the opportunity to respond to this belated consultation on a proposed revised School Improvement Programme. In this response, INTO argues that, in the current unprecedented period of change in education, recognition of the role of the teacher and of schools as professional communities of teaching and support staffs needs to be a given. Without the support of teachers, this proposed new School Improvement Programme is dead in the water. INTO has concluded that fundamental and significant change is necessary, following this consultation, to make Every School a Good School fit for purpose.

INTO has previously endorsed the vision of the Department of Education:

We will work together as partners in education and youth services to ensure a high standard of education for all children and young people, which will put them at the centre of education, motivate them, build their confidence and enrich their lives, and provide the foundation for a strong and vibrant economy.

INTO believes that every child's life chances are immeasurably affected by the period of statutory teaching and learning they receive and they are entitled to the best. Schools, as professional communities, assisted by the Inspectorate, must strive to ensure the highest possible standards. INTO supports the principle of reflective self-evaluation in a professional environment.

'Every school a good school' presents little new argued educational rationale for school improvement. Instead it refers in Para. 3.10 to accountability issues:

*The legislative framework between teaching communities in schools and the Employing Authority, Education and Library Boards and the Department of Education;

*Perceptions that SIP only applies to a few schools;

*Authorities having too few interventionist powers;

- *perceptions that there is insufficient emphasis in schools on raising standards;
- * Schools not using data sufficiently.

This is a most disheartening development for the teaching profession, which INTO deplures. INTO proposes a different approach - 'A good local school for every child and every community.' Teachers and support staff need support, not opprobrium. OECD[2004] has stated :

'Strong basic education systems tend to succeed by providing high quality support for student, teachers and schools, in the context of an integrated, rather than in a differentiated school structure.'

Yet, the genuine attention paid to the needs and aspirations of teachers and to the future of the professional community of teachers by DE and Direct Rule Administrations has been inadequate. In a society emerging from conflict, teachers and the communities they serve deserve more support than that presented in *'Every School a Good School.'* A good school for every child and for every community is much more than having an institution which performs against pre-set targets supervised by proposed 'school improvement professionals.'

Regrettably, *Every School a good School* is largely a managerial document. It is almost entirely teacher unfriendly. The effects of its policy proposals will be to deprofessionalise the roles of and demoralise and demotivate principals and teachers. The document does not understand how schools work as professional communities. Its false Gods are data collection and bureaucracy, the use of which will stress teachers and principals more and add considerably to their workload, at a time when the Department says it is not in a position to implement the recommendations of the Curran Report, which sought to contextualise the National Agreement on workload into Northern Ireland, giving teachers much needed Planning, Preparation and Assessment time [PPA].

The document gives negligible recognition to key factors impacting on school performance, such as social disadvantage and lack of social cohesion. It conveniently ignores the long term structural policies operated by the Department of Education that impact directly on school performance. These

include Open Enrolment within a selective system; Bain and the school/teacher rationalisation agenda and school funding based on school competition and giving a disproportionate resource to grammar schools and large post-primary schools, at the expense of primary schools.

This document is not acceptable to INTO in its present form. INTO believes that a re-evaluation of the document needs to be undertaken on a genuinely collaborative basis with teachers' representatives as well as with the representatives of other education stakeholders.

Consultation Point 1

Characteristics for successful schools

INTO strongly disagrees with the set of characteristics outlined

In the total absence of any meaningful consultation on these characteristics INTO has serious difficulties with this document. Why is it so unfriendly and patronising to teachers? When were its authors last in a classroom?

Teachers and principals [quaintly referred to throughout this document as 'the school'] are responsible for more or less everything, including ethos, leadership, organisation, expectations, pastoral care, teaching and curricular provision etc. Behind the teachers is an army of bureaucratic administrators, seeking a statutory basis for a parasitic relationship with teachers, in the name of accountability. Ethos is an 'Emperor's clothes' expression which has a variety of meanings. Reference is made in Para 2.7 to 'research' underpinning the characteristics referred to, without any indication of the source of the research. INTO does not concur that 'ethos' is confined to a particular sector in education. INTO prefers the DE definition in 'Pastoral Care in Schools - Promoting Positive Behaviour'. Here it is defined as:

'... The ethos, or the distinctive character and atmosphere of a school, reflects the extent to which the school, under the principal's leadership, promotes the all round development of its pupils within a caring community...'

The characteristics flagrantly ignore existing educational structural problems - selection; social disadvantage, the funding of schools under LMS-particularly in the Primary Sector; the Department's policy permitting Grammar Schools to fill up to physical capacity seriously disadvantages non-selective post-primary schools, particularly during a period of demographic decline.

There is little or no reference to successful schools being well resourced with good pastoral care systems, where teachers are safe, valued and cared for; where they can be happy and where pupils with special educational needs are likewise valued. There are problems with definition throughout the document. Many schools in areas of acute social disadvantage do not achieve the crude

targets in GCSE public examinations being set by British Education Ministers, including Ed Balls MP, but are successful schools, adding massive added value to their pupil intakes. Underperformance was identified as an issue in the School Improvement Programme, launched by Tony Worthington, MP, in 1998. It is important to distinguish between successful schools where performance in public examinations appears low and other schools where under-performance may impact negatively on the life chances of pupils.

There is a preponderance of offensive, patronising verbiage - 'competent' teachers and 'rigorous' rather than 'reflective' self-evaluation. Governors are given an unrealistic support and challenge role to the teaching community in circumstances where they are voluntary and receive little real training. The reference to DE preparing '...a new handbook for school governors, which will include guidance on the role of governors in setting standards, monitoring performance and ensuring effective teaching and learning in the context of the revised curriculum...' is breathtakingly ignorant of the reality in schools, as well as being overtly offensive to teachers and principals.

Para 2.3 is unacceptable, fixated as it is on what is measurable, with little concept of what the teaching and learning experience of schools is.

At its heart, this document is diseased with a poorly conceived concept of school improvement. It suggests in Para 2.5 that its 'key underpinning argument...is that improvement and raising achievement is, above all, the responsibility of the school.' This fallacy is a bureaucratic pipe dream which repeats the mistakes of the 1998 School Improvement Programme. What is required up front is for the Department to undertake some self-evaluation; identify and remove at source the structural policies that underpin pupil under-performance in Northern Ireland.

No reference is made to pastoral care, health and well-being [of either pupil or teacher] in the document, in spite of Trojan work by the Department in this area. Is a joined-up, as well as a partnership approach, to policy making possible with DE?

Consultation Point 2
Key Issues to be addressed
INTO disagrees

The breathtaking ignorance of school performance in a selective system, displayed in Para. 3.1, the obsessive regard to crude, measurable data in a competitive selective system [where grammar schools are permitted to fill to physical capacity] is staggering. Many successful secondary schools, confined by the Department to taking 'D' and 'U' pupils, make significant, immeasurable differences to the attainment and development of their pupils. The ETI knows this. As professional advisers to the Department, ETI should not allow crude documents such as this to emerge into daylight.

Much of what passes for informed comment in Para 3.6 about previous success in the 1998 School Improvement programme is superficial. INTO contests the idea that the development of leadership programmes has helped schools raise their performance. Schools are communities of teachers and pupils. The outcome of leadership programmes has contributed to bringing about a culture of managerialism, which INTO believes is detrimental to successful school communities. Likewise, the DE/ETI emphasis on target setting and school development planning is the dead hand of bureaucracy and undermines teaching and learning. Successful school communities perform well, in spite of this DE structural adversity and in spite of the 'interest' and activity of Employing Authorities.

It is a fallacy that *'good performance at the top is masking an unacceptably long tail of underachievement and poor performance by individual schools.'*

This derogatory, disparaging language is alien - not only in Ireland, but also in Scotland and Wales and, in a selective system, is unacceptable to INTO. Related initiatives such as 'Achieving Belfast' are likely to be more effective in assisting under-performing schools which exist largely in areas of cultural and social disadvantage. Details of the ongoing 'Achieving Belfast' and 'Achieving Derry' educational initiatives are surprisingly missing from this document.

The statutory role being proffered for ESA in Para 5.3 is not acceptable to INTO. INTO will oppose Boards/CCMS attempting to perform the challenge and intervention role, in the crass manner outlined. The SSP Steering Group should continue, on a genuine partnership basis, with professional teacher union membership. The ESA role outlined in Para 5.4 is not acceptable. It is another quasi-paramilitary intervention and an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy and cost, on top of the valuable inspection role, already performed by the ETI.

The SIP Plan and Report process, outlined in Para 5.6, will undermine teaching professionals. Perhaps that is its purpose? It will deprofessionalise the role of the principal and teaching staff.

What are missing from 'Key issues to be addressed' are the professional views of the teaching unions and the General Teaching Council.

Consultation Point 3
Key principles for a School Improvement Policy
INTO disagrees

Many of the principles outlined here are worthy of support, but not in the hostile environment outlined. The document refers to the 'interests of pupils rather than institutions' being at the centre of this policy. Institutions are bricks and mortar. INTO sees this as an offensive term for teaching and support staff in schools. A hostile and patronising tone pervades the document.

Reference is made to constructive challenge from the school, the Governors, the wider community and ESA. Reflective challenge, free from this managerial, top down, ignorant approach is likely to be more productive.

'Every school is capable of improvement.' This contradicts the statement above that pupils, rather than institutions, are at the centre of this policy. INTO rejects this fallacy. Every pupil, within the range of his/her ability is capable of improvement but it is false to create the expectation of a giddy drive upwards, based on measurable crude data, as children's attainment can plateau. DECD data reveals the capability of the crude English improvement agenda driving attainment levels down, rather than up.

The argument that sustained improvement comes from within the school, taken forward by high quality leadership, denigrates the collegiality and team working of professional school communities and highlights again the document's top down approach to the management of change. No shared evaluation took place of the School Improvement Programme 1998. As a result there is little shared understanding between the Department and teachers who implemented SIP and all the other various DE initiatives during the past decade.

INTO rejects the principle that the school makes effective use of data as an evidence base to help evaluate performance, identify areas for improvement and assist with target-setting. What instruments are to be used? Those which currently exist are not fit for purpose. INTO asserts that when data becomes 'high stakes,' it ceases to be diagnostic.

Consultation Point 4
Proposed Roles and Responsibilities
INTO disagrees

INTO welcomes the 'motherhood and apple-pie' statement in Para 5.1 that schools need the participation and active support of parents and the community in the process of teaching and learning. It proposes nothing where these factors are missing; nothing where teachers and principals are attacked verbally and physically; nothing where the milieu associated with middle class suburbs is missing.

The document is confused on terminology and definition. What is a school? What is school improvement? How does a school in Para 5.2 ensure its ethos motivates the pupils and provide them with the opportunities to succeed? The Oxford dictionary states that a 'school' is an institution for the education of children. 'Improve' is to make or become better. A school is not bricks and mortar. A school is a community of pupils, teachers and support staff. This document is aimed at these professionals who, in the context of Chapter 5, have most, if not all, of the main roles and responsibilities in the education of children.

Greater responsibility lies with parents. The document proposes no role or responsibility for parents. This absence is stunning. Collectively, parents are a vital education stakeholder. As a key element of the educational sphere, they should constitute a sector. They are more in need of 'Sectoral Support' than many of those deemed so by the Department - the Churches, Irish and Integrated bodies and the Governing Bodies' Associations for Grammar Schools. DE is content for parents to be diffused into acting as bit players in Boards of Governors. The myopia to parents in Chapter 5 contrasts with the effete proposed role for Sectoral Support Bodies of 'taking an interest and liaising with ESA...'

Also missing from proposed new roles and responsibilities are teachers and principals. This is not a surprise as, collegiate, communities of professional practitioners are what this document designates as those who will be done onto, monitored more closely, held more sharply to account and challenged more

frequently. Challenge is a weasel word, beloved by civil servants. It describes difficult tasks or situations as well as the more traditional meaning of a call on teaching communities to participate in a contest or fight to decide who is superior. This is justified on the basis of so called accountability. The struggle proposed by this document is not in the interest of the teaching and learning of our young people.

Chapter 5 proposes a new parasitic practice for ESA including:

- School Improvement professionals to meet regularly with school communities to gainsay their professional judgements; to mull over their targets for improvement and performance benchmark them with what looks like equivalent school communities; seek out what they may regard as unsatisfactory teachers who, where '*...improvement is not made...*' are passed on to local Boards of Governors who '*...will be expected to take appropriate action.*' The distasteful detail of sacking teachers and principals is left to Governors safe in the knowledge that principals and professional communities of teachers will sort out the proposed mess. Even then, it is proposed that ESA or DE '*...retain the authority to intervene...*' where they '*...remain unsatisfied...*' INTO opposes and will resist this proposed draconian intervention.
- Monitoring the performance of individual schools, particularly the standards of attainment;
- Challenging schools about their performance;
- Providing the necessary support to schools, '*especially those which are under-performing;*'
- Taking '*the actions required to deliver and sustain improved performance in those schools, where it is deemed unsatisfactory;*

Schools are already accountable to their Governors, their local community and in a variety of ways to the ETI. INTO is unconvinced about the necessity for another layer of authoritarian control and inspection. INTO opposes a role for

ESA in so-called unsatisfactory teaching. INTO finds extraordinary, the lack of reference to informed and agreed policy relating to this sensitive area, in particular, the GTC publication '*Teaching : The Reflective Profession*' which has developed 27 agreed new professional competences organised in 3 broad areas including:

- Professional Values and Practice
- Professional Knowledge and Understanding and
- Professional Skills and Application..

There is no reference to nor regard paid to the GTC's published 'Code of Values and Professional Practice.' These omissions demonstrate a sloppy, slipshod approach to policy development which is nothing short of lamentable. This proposed, one- dimensional approach to parasitic accountability, seeking new weapons and strategies to punish professional teaching communities could not have emerged where genuine collaborative policy making had been developed in social partnership.

The proposed parasitic accountability role for ESA continues with:

A **School Improvement Plan** for submission to DE for approval *at the start of each financial year*. April Fools' Day, the start of the financial year is significant. So far are the writers of this document from the classroom that they cannot conceive the start of the school year or the natural rhythm of school communities as being significant or relevant. This Plan will place a particular focus on Literacy and Numeracy and will set out:

- details of overall performance and progress against key targets;
- ESA's assessment of the current position and its proposed actions; and
- Measurable outcomes for these actions, linking these to the key performance data.

It is a mistake to believe that his ritual beating up of professional communities of teachers, in the name of accountability, will enhance teaching and learning.

The parasitic, censorious regime continues with a proposed ESA Annual Report commenting on progress against its Plan. Passing regard is made to the role of the ETI and the Chief Inspector's Report-although now backed up by data and more data from 'research outcomes and performance statistics.' The unjustified claim is made that all this will inform '...school support and all aspects of teacher education...' INTO seeks clarification on how these objectives can be achieved and will comment further when it is available.

INTO has a critical regard for the Education and Training Inspectorate [ETI]. By and large, inspectors they perform their role well. ETI makes a genuine attempt at partnership working with the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council [NITC]. This has proved beneficial for teachers and all parties involved in teaching and learning. INTO questions the role of the ETI in its advice on policy development with respect to this sorry document - 'Every School a Good School' - although this is a surprising departure from normal quality control.

Consultation Point 5
Review of Self Evaluation and related proposals
INTO disagrees

DE suggests that each Board should now refine '...the role of the SSP Steering group...' This is about as close as the DE gets to self evaluation and self criticism. More candour and transparency would be helpful from the DE about its previous strategy. There is no reference to the Raising School Standards Initiative and lessons learnt. The DE School Support Programme [SSP] which emerged from the same silo of non consultation with teachers' unions opens:

'... Through the world, there are schools which face particular problems associated with the poor socio economic backgrounds which they serve. In Northern Ireland, many such schools face the additional challenges of communities scarred by civil unrest spanning more than a generation, where the combined effects of endemic unemployment and ongoing paramilitary activity have radically altered the accepted social role modelling, and where, in consequence, the traditional values associated with home, church and community often no longer apply...'

Where has this previous, professional empathy and understanding of the real world experienced by teachers gone?

SSP recognised that '...as a strategy, school self evaluation and a specific programme of self improvement, supported by CASS, works, and, for most schools works very effectively...' INTO contends that genuine self-evaluation can only exist in a culture of openness and collegiality. This is recognised by the ETI in 'Together Towards Improvement: A Process for Self-Evaluation:'

'... The most important step is to establish a climate where all involved are encouraged to be open about their work, evaluate, and, where necessary improve on their own performance. If an appropriate culture of self-evaluation is to be established, all those involved, from senior management to the most recently appointed teacher, should be willing to reflect on current practice, accept praise and criticism, and make changes where necessary...'

INTO contends that, in the current and emerging environment envisaged in *'Every School a Good School'*, this culture of openness and collegiality is absent. In this context teacher self-evaluation, rigorous or not, is becoming dangerous, if not downright impossible, for teachers.

INTO has a concern about the working of the SSP Steering Group. It was supposed to be based on:

- * The weighted performance index for secondary schools updated with recent information;
- * Free School Meals' Entitlement for Primary Schools augmented by transfer procedure grades and pupil assessment outcomes;
- * Available data on average pupil attendance, teacher absenteeism and expulsion rates for the relevant years in question.

There was no reference to Special Schools. There was a lack of transparency about the final decision for school entry into SSP on the basis of Board/CCMS/ETI determination.

The SSP Steering groups should include accountable, teacher representation. In view of the tone and content of *'Every School a Good School'* serious consideration is being given to the non-participation of INTO members in the process of self-evaluation.

Consultation Point 6

Ensuring Strong and Effective Leadership

INTO does not believe the actions proposed are appropriate or necessary

Terminology gets more erratic in this chapter. Reference is made here and in succeeding chapters to 'north of Ireland' schools. Have new geographical parameters been set? Will the unacceptable strictures contained in *'Every School a Good School'* not pertain to schools in the south, east and west? Reference is made to 'managing authorities' when what is surely intended is 'Employing Authorities, NICIE, GBA and Comhairle na Gaelscolaichta.

INTO is less than convinced about recent developments in the area of so-called school leadership, with the introduction from England, without consultation with teachers' unions, and the publication by DE, of the 'National Standards for Head Teachers' - notwithstanding the fact that Northern Ireland schools has Principals, not 'Head Teachers.' INTO views the 6 key areas, outlined in these standards, as being overly managerial and alien to the context in which schools operate as professional, collegiate communities.

INTO has a concern about the Professional Qualification for Headship - PQH. It would be interesting to know how many of the examples of ETI identified 'poor leadership' possess PQH qualifications. INTO and other teachers' unions have raised the lack of a suitable industrial relations component in this qualification. INTO is concerned about the closed entry mechanism, through which teachers seek access to this qualification. INTO and other teachers' unions have opposed PQH becoming a mandatory qualification and objects to the authoritarian manner, ascribed to the Department, in making determinations on this.

INTO, in common with the misnamed 'managing authorities' in Para 7.8, shares the concern about the declining number of applications from teachers to be Principals - not 'headship', as stated here. The implementation of this document's proposals will be a further disincentive to applicants. Information sharing would be helpful in this area.

INTO contends that the role of the DE in not implementing the recommendations of the Curran Committee of Enquiry in relation to school

leadership in the areas of administrative time, work/life balance; its statutory regulations on School Development Planning increasing bureaucracy; as well as pay and conditions of service are all significant factors contributing to this downturn. INTO welcomes the recent provision of administrative time for teaching principals although this is in the context of serious primary school under-funding under LMS.

INTO notes with interest, the intention of DE to revisit the Unsatisfactory Teacher and Principal Procedures in Para 7.6. Other major issues are passed over quickly here including:

The nature and structure of Initial Teacher Education;
Continuous Professional Development;
Training for Governors;
The role of ETI, GTC and ESA.

INTO is concerned at

- (i) The lack of resource and time available to Beginning Teachers;
- (ii) Arbitrary DE proposals to further reduce teacher intakes into HEIs;
- (iii) The non-introduction of the Curran recommendation, guaranteeing each qualified Beginning Teacher a guaranteed teaching year;
- (iii) The non reference to the Performance Review Staff Development Scheme in schools and its direct link with professional development;
- (iv) The offensive airbrushing out of this document of the General Teaching Council [NI];
- (v) The continuing denial of Planning, Preparation and Assessment time [PPA] to Northern Ireland teachers.

Consultation Point 7

Involving parents and the Community

INTO disagrees that the proposed measures are appropriate

There are no proposals to empower parents as a collective body. INTO would welcome the establishment of a Sectoral Support body for parents as outlined previously in this response.

Good practice from the Extended Schools project, which does not involve all schools, should be disseminated and resourced for all schools.

There are few new ideas, no helpful proposals and continuing negativity with the reference that '...It is unfortunate that for many parents, particularly the 'hard to reach', the school is not a welcoming place. This negativity towards teachers permeates the document

Consultation Point 8
Target Setting and effective use of information
INTO disagrees

DE and ETI are directly responsible for the plethora of initiatives and strategies that beset schools. In this respect INTO has little tolerance for the Chief Inspector's assertion in her recent report that insufficient use is made of data, including the use of bench-marking data, to support the process of self-evaluation. INTO has made previous reference to the impossibility of developing self-evaluation in a 'high stakes' environment, as is proposed in this document, and self-evaluation will be a casualty, should this negative data-based approach prevail.

The reference to data needing to be balanced to avoid encouraging 'teaching to the measure' is plaintive in the extreme. What planet do the authors live on? The statement that '*...It is important that the increased focus on data and performance does not lead to additional stress for teachers and pupils...*' is risible.' The data on which the outcomes of the School Improvement Programme [SIP] 1998 strategy were based [at primary level] - Key Stage outcomes in English maths - were crude measures for which parents and teachers had little regard.

INTO has a concern about the data proposals for this revised SIP. Primary Schools will administer INCAs and ALTAs as diagnostic tools and share the results with parents. Then, revised Levels of progression will be introduced to replace the current levels of progression which are used for key Stage Assessment. These levels will become the instrument used to measure performance. Yet teachers, apart from the few that were involved in pilot work with CCEA, have had no opportunity to comment on the Revised Levels of Progression or their value as measures of progression.

The introduction of the Revised Curriculum delays the introduction of formal reading and writing, yet by the end of P4 children will be tested in Maths and English, against the same benchmarks as those set for the current P4 and P7, who were introduced to formal reading/writing much earlier. The whole concept

of 'readiness to learn' could be endangered by a narrow emphasis on Literacy and Numeracy after Foundation Stage to get pupils up to previous levels.

The outcomes of the Revised Curriculum are longitudinal, designed to 'produce' a generation of young people who have a more positive attitude to learning, based on success, rather than underlying failure. Children who have positive self esteem and high expectations will, in the medium term, become parents themselves and will nurture more positive attitudes towards school and education in their own children. In this way the cycle of underachievement might actually be addressed by those who have the power to make an impact.

The danger of 'Every School a Good School' and the revised Literacy and Numeracy strategy is the potential creation of another dual system where there is too much emphasis on Literacy and Numeracy, at the expense of the best elements of the Revised Curriculum.

How can an initial set of indicators be developed with no reference to Pastoral Care and whole child development?

INTO opposes the development of another school league table with '...once added value measures are available...' requiring a reporting mechanism to show how schools perform against appropriate value-added benchmark targets.

INTO notes the DE predilection for data and intends data to be a legitimate target for industrial action, precisely to avoid its proposed regime of over-accountability.

Consultation Point 9
Educational Accountability - Quality Indicators
INTO disagrees

This document needs significant improvement if it is to be made fit for purpose.

INTO opposes the bureaucracy and workload associated with the current statutory process of School Development Planning.

INTO contends that, with the introduction of the Revised Curriculum, the plethora of initiatives, the blow to teacher morale from the non introduction of PPA, the demoralisation caused by the nature and removal of 'added years', the move towards managerialism and the use of a school's financial management in LMS as a so-called quality indicator, undermines the teaching workforce and acts against the process of school improvement.

Serious clarification is needed on the proposal that data with Levels of Progression will replace Key Stage Assessments. INCAs does not cover writing. How are Levels of Progression to be determined?

INTO fundamentally disagrees with the individual school interventionist, bureaucratic ESA role outline in Para 9.6, as specified elsewhere in this response.

Schools where intervention is necessary
INTO disagrees with the strategy outlined

INTO questions why this wretched document does not seek a response to this section '*Schools where intervention is necessary.*'

Self-evaluation is likely to become impossible in the proposed environment.

INTO opposes the designation of schools in a grading system of 1-6.

INTO opposes the envisaged role for schools that are graded 5/6.

INTO opposes the draconian powers proposed for ESA in the adoption of failed English 'special measures' including the removal of teaching staff, principals and governors.

INTO opposes the process for School Support in these circumstances of intervention

INTO seeks immediate consultation on the National [sic] Standards for School Improvement Professionals

INTO seeks clarification on the proposed School Development Fund suggested in Para. 11.6.

Equality issues

The Ministerial foreword begins with the sentence:

"My vision for education is rooted in a strong and passionate belief in equality and in the creation of a school system where every young person has the same opportunity to succeed, regardless of socio-economic background, gender or race."

The equality of opportunity sought by the Minister, and supported by INTO, can only be delivered when the vested interests of the various educational policy makers and the Department realise that children are variable organisms that exist in a world of competing experiences seeking to impose themselves upon them. They do not have all the answers.

The Equality the Minister seeks will not to be found in increased inspection - a strategy which appears to have failed in the previous SIP cycle. Neither are increased levels of planning the solution. That cohort of schools that survived the SSP are already action planning their continued development, their

curriculum planning is already target-led, yet they continue to be by and large found in the lower reaches of the ubiquitous league tables. The managerialists and statisticians associated with this document are plotting a course that will lead to increased destabilisation of schools, manifested in resentful teachers, stressed school leaders and bewildered governors.

Children will find the prospect of a broad and balanced curriculum, as held out in the Revised Curriculum, denied to them, as schools struggle to reach arbitrary targets in Literacy and Numeracy, imposed upon them by 'school improvement professionals.' Teachers are not the problem.

Equality requires that children are respected for being different, each presenting with a complex web of need which teachers have to address whilst also satisfying an equally complex and fluid series of societal needs. Consequently equality, like truth [in a war], becomes the first casualty.

The DE, in Para. 2.2, abdicates its responsibilities to those in the classroom whilst reserving for itself the right to point the finger if the demanded miracle doesn't materialise. Such a miracle will reveal itself through a process akin to a shaman casting a jumble of bones across an animal skin. The statisticians will be the arbiters of success. Teachers and children are reduced to the level of dots on a scatter graph- the only equality here guaranteed by the laser printer's software ensuring the ink is evenly distributed on the paper.

Existing inequalities in the education system are then to be compounded with ESA being given a role in the area of inspection. Currently, schools, assisted by the ETI publication Together Towards Improvement [TTI] and various ELB initiatives, are evolving self evaluatory approaches and are subject to inspections by the ETI that seek to build on these organic and meaningful developments. This evolutionary process is characterised by equality as not only is the process collaborative amongst those working in a school but because the conclusions reached are then subject to analysis with the ETI, with an agreed way forward emerging. Yet ESA is to be involved at both ends of the process, their School Improvement Professionals will dictate to schools the areas requiring development, they will then have a role in the school's self evaluation and should the ETI disagree with the focus or the methodologies the unfortunate teachers, principal and Governors will be left to carry the can. Where's the equality in that?

Inequality, currently perpetuated by our selective system and LMS that sustains it, is maintained in the processes laid out in the document. Paragraph 11.6 clarifies that no additional monies are to be made available to schools to support improvement. The one aspect of the SSP that allowed schools to effect improvement is denied to the broader school estate - no 'equality' here then. Furthermore, the money a school dedicates to supporting improvement is to be

found from within the LMS budget. The reality of this will see *Governors* and principals forced to visit inequalities on sections of a school community to ensure that externally developed targets are achieved. This inequality is then enshrined in the proposed School Development Fund which would appear to hold out the prospect of additional monies for some schools, but not others. The issue of adequate funding for improvement and school funding in general are ripe for an equality audit.

This document does not meet the objective of promoting equality as stated by the Minister. It does illustrate a limited understanding of what equality means and it confirms the old adage that some are more equal than others. It is very disappointing.

Conclusion

This is a most disappointing proposed programme which, if left unchecked, will do immeasurable harm to the process of teaching and learning in schools. The statement in Para 12.1 that the document places the pupil at its heart is a fallacy. The lack of consultation with teachers' unions has been compounded by the lack of opportunity for teachers in schools to become aware of the document, on account of the stealthy nature of this internet consultation.

Frank Bunting
Northern Secretary
March 2008