

# **LOCAL AUTHORITY PERSPECTIVE ON THE EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS AGENDA**

## **Regional Governors Conference 6<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

The effective schools agenda is clearly one which affects, interests and involves us all. My task in 45 minutes is to try and examine some of the complexities of this brief statement and to leave you with some specific issues for you as governors to consider.

In doing so I will try and deal with this in five stages by considering:

- the nature of effective schools
- the current national position
- the local authority perspective including its practical application
- specific implications for governors.

### 1. **Effective Schools**

It would be very easy here to rehearse the range of definitions of effective schools. However, more fundamental is the issue of from whose perspective is effectiveness to be judged and how might effectiveness differ according to perspective?

It is clear that perspectives will show the school in a different light. The view of the concerned parent may differ from the view of the child, especially the more recalcitrant of them who may view the school as being at its most effective on Saturday and Sunday or after 4.00 p.m. There are, however, certain commonalities which will inform our overall perspective. These will include the historically tried and tested indicators of:

- achievement
- leadership
- learning and teaching
- communication
- ethos.

We must conclude that effectiveness may be judged from multiple perspectives which will differ within each client group. Therefore, we need to think of effectiveness in terms of:

- which areas determine effectiveness
  - teaching
  - leadership
  - buildings
  - communication
  - etc.
- what standards or measures are used to make effectiveness judgements

- what data is used to form an opinion on effectiveness
- at which level is effectiveness analysed.

Having posed a range of questions and no doubt added to your confusion, let me try and work towards an elaboration of our broad collective responsibility for school effectiveness and the achievement of the best for all our pupils.

## 2. **National Context**

Turning to the national picture there is an understandable desire to improve our performance as a country. In order to achieve a consistent approach to this, WAG have introduced the School Effectiveness Framework and the associated National Model for School Improvement. This is something which attempts to define the responsibilities of all partners and, as such, it is clearly something that you and your headteachers need to be familiar with.

The SEF will become Wales' key policy for educational reform and all other policies will need to be aligned to it from September 2010.

One of the most important parts of the SEF is the inclusion of 'non-negotiables'. These are

- a national purpose for schools
- Embedding the SEF
- Focus on challenge, support and collaboration
- Annual self evaluation
- High quality leadership and training
- Collaboration through Professional Learning Communities
- Effective analysis and use of data
- Focus on inclusion and equity
- Outcome agreements
- Rationalising grants
- Strategic and effective planning of schools

Within this framework the responsibility of schools and, consequently, your responsibilities are

- the quality of the experience offered to children
- social inclusion through diversity, well being and personalised learning
- meeting community needs

## 3. **The LA Perspective**

This is the key element and the issue I have been asked to address. It is, however, essential as I hope you have seen to consider this in its broadest context.

In legal terms the 1998 Education Act charges LA's with the duty of securing educational provision for all children; funding that provision and exercising all our functions with a view to promoting high standards. That same duty is placed on the governing body who are required to conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards. The same Act also identifies the school as the main agent of improving standards.

In addition the Children Act 2004 states that LA's have to ensure that outcomes for children and young people are improved and that LA's are statutorily responsible for educational quality and outcomes across their locality and are accountable for this to elected members and citizens. The reality of this is that whilst the day to day responsibility is delegated to governors, the LA must discharge this through the effective execution of its support and challenge function.

What then does this mean in practice? Clearly the over-riding principle is one of the LA, school and governing body in partnership to raise standards. As we have said, in law and in practice, the primary responsibility for standards rests with the school but the LA has a key role in supporting schools to improve and challenging them to do better.

The LA role is to support and challenge heads, staff and governors in their duty and their efforts to improve. We also have a statutory duty to intervene when necessary. By intervention, we mean action taken to get a school to do things which, left to itself it would not do.

This is where, of necessity, I become parochial and identify for you what support and challenge means in RCT. However, given that we have a joint advisory service, the basic principles will be the same. The key strategies are:

- INSET and consultancy support
- networking and sharing of good practice
- support for local and national programmes
- advice and support for governing bodies

However, the central element of this is the LA review and development programme. It is designed to enhance the schools own self evaluation and provide challenge and support. It is also the vehicle which enables us to fulfil our statutory responsibilities in relation to standards. It consists of:

- analysis of performance
- R & D visits related to wider issues of standards and quality
- sharing of information at school and LA level
- risk analysis leading to categories of support
  - standard
  - additional
  - significant

Clearly the weaker the performance or the existence of issues facing the school will determine the level of support. For schools in need of significant improvement, whether identified through inspection or LA review, there is a comprehensive support plan.

That is a brief tour of processes. Before this leads me to consider the implications for governors, there is one fundamental requirement that applies to headteachers and LA officers. It is that performance information and judgements are communicated to you, fully, clearly and without ambiguity so that you are able to discharge your duties and responsibilities in an informed manner.

#### 4. **Implications for Governors**

The final part of this journey through school effectiveness is to explore the implications for governors. Keeping to my brief of the LA perspective, I will try and approach the implication for you from my position in the LA. It would also be important to stress here that there are clear implications for headteachers and ways in which the necessary information is communicated.

The key is knowledge. You cannot do your job and consequently support the partnership between LA and governors without knowledge. Reflect for a moment on where we started – what measures do we use and what data do we analyse to make a judgement on effectiveness? In other words, what do you need to know in order to make your strategic decisions about development priorities, finance, staffing, etc., etc.

A word of caution, however. This should not be about micro management by governors. You are the critical friend and strategic decision makers based on professional advice from your headteacher. To do this effectively you need to know:

- School performance
  - raw data
  - value added
  - trends/variations
  - benchmarked comparisons
- Other indicators
  - parents
  - students
  - satisfaction surveys/other instruments
- Network/PLCs
- Response to national/local initiatives
- ALN provision
- ‘Soft’ indicators or qualitative judgements
  - ethos
  - discipline
  - involvement
  - participation

- learning environment
- ambiance
- communication.

This seems a daunting list but bear in mind it can be prioritised across a year. There are specific times in a school calendar when certain things happen and can be reported in cycles. The LA has a crucial role to play here in the annual reporting (as an independent broker) of standards and trends and comparisons. However, none of this should be a surprise to you.

The final part has to be that the LA and governing body impact on effectiveness and improvement must go beyond simple knowledge. Things only develop if action is taken on the basis of clear evidence. The governing body must, therefore, also be an agent of support and challenge and learn to ask the right questions about the information you have. Asking the questions ensures that together we have a relentless focus on standards and quality in a positive and supportive way.

To summarise and conclude : the LA perspective on school effectiveness should be no different from yours. We do different things but ultimately this is about our joint strategic role to promote achievement, improvement and development for the sake of that child.