



**Excellent Schools:**

**A vision for schools in  
Wales in 21<sup>st</sup> century**



**Estyn**

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi Dros Addysg  
A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
For Education and Training in Wales

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**BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL**  
**INVESTOR IN PEOPLE**

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## 1. Introduction

As part of its remit from the National Assembly for 2001-2002, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning asked Estyn to advise on what schools can do to provide better opportunities for learning. This paper reviews best practice in schools in Wales and presents a 'vision' of what schools in the future might be as we seek excellence for all learners. The paper examines three key aspects of the role of the school:

- **the school as a learning community;**
- **the school working in and with the wider community; and**
- **the school as a self-critical community.**

We hope the paper will stimulate discussion and challenge schools and local authorities to be radical in their future planning for school development.

### **Modernising schools**

In the last 10 years, schools in Wales have shown marked improvements in the quality of the education they provide and in the standards that pupils achieve. There has been a dramatic reduction in the number of pupils leaving school with little or nothing to show for their 11 years of compulsory education in terms of accredited outcomes. Schools in Wales are better managed than in the past. They are also generally more civilised communities in terms of their ethos. The curriculum is better planned and many schools are more aware than ever of the responsibility of all staff to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology (ICT) skills. As in the past, teachers play a key role in the personal and social development of their pupils. They and other school staff will play an important part in realising the National Assembly's vision of a Wales in which young people are confident, active citizens who show creativity, entrepreneurial skills, and an informed concern for other people and the environment.

Changes in the nature of employment – and in the aspirations of politicians, parents and the public at large – mean that we now expect virtually all pupils to reach levels of competence formerly achieved only by the minority of pupils who, in the immediate post-war decades, went to grammar schools. Levels of attainment nationally, and in the great majority of schools, are higher than ever, yet the gap in performance between schools remains as wide as ever. This is partly a reflection of socio-economic differences in the areas served by schools, but there are also other important factors at play.

There are often wide differences in the outcomes achieved by schools serving similar areas – measured in terms both of test and examination results and, the grades achieved during Estyn inspections. In virtually all schools, there are pupils who lose interest and motivation and become disengaged from education. Schools cannot be held accountable for all society's ills. Nevertheless, they are major partners in the task of tackling inequality and social disadvantage – as well as contributing to improving health, reducing crime and providing employers with skills needed to strengthen the economy.

Schools face many similar challenges. Much of their work is determined by a common curriculum and national requirements. At the same time, schools are individual and distinctive. It is right that governors, headteachers and staff, working in partnership with parents, local authorities and the community, should determine how to provide a common entitlement to a first rate education. Schools should have greater financial autonomy and the ability to plan their budgets over longer periods if they are to plan their own path to improvement in the light of their aims, values and the particular circumstances in which they work.

Notwithstanding the differences between schools, school leaders and staff can learn a great deal from one another's experiences. This paper sets out to reflect on the successes achieved by schools inspected over the last few years. Most schools demonstrate good practice in some individual subjects or aspects of their work. Yet despite the hard work of the great majority of staff, the proportion of excellence reported in inspections remains small – commonly fewer than 10% of classes inspected across the country. Having the confidence in what has proved to be effective in the past may retain the status quo but we also need leaders who can think in new ways to use time and resources more creatively and effectively. It is unlikely that just providing more of the same kind of education will bring about enough improvement to meet the rising expectations and aspirations outlined above.

Much of what we have to say in this paper can be summed up in the idea of 'modernising schools'. If we were starting from scratch to organise a system for educating children and young people, how many of the following features would we include in our schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

- opening times of fewer than 200 days per year;
- a working year based on the child labour demands of the 19th century agricultural year, with a crammed time schedule at certain times of the year depending on when Easter falls;
- built-in inflexibility with peaks and troughs of activity caused by variable length fixed holidays and term times;
- a cycle of activity that starts in September when people's body clocks are beginning to slow down, rather than in the spring which would tie in better with the planning and finance cycles;

- almost standard learning periods for subjects which are more effectively learned in shorter or longer time slots;
- tests and examinations for learners for long periods of the nicest, warmest part of the year which take place in rooms that are not usually air-conditioned;
- a requirement that all the people who work in the organisation are there at exactly the same times every day, and take their holidays at exactly the same time of the year, even though parents increasingly have to take their children away at other times because of their work schedules or financial reasons;
- built-in inefficiency losses caused by sending everyone on a long holiday in July/August so that learners have forgotten much of what they have learned and teachers take a few weeks to get back into their stride;
- a single transition point where children move from having a single teacher for most of the curriculum to having eleven or more teachers for different subjects;
- teaching predominantly in rooms filled with furniture that assumes large groups of learners will be engaged as individuals in sedentary tasks for most of the day; and
- the separation of education from training, with lower status accorded to training even though education is acknowledged to be failing many of our young people.

If schools of the future are to meet the challenges posed by the new century, their leaders need to engage fully with a modernisation agenda similar to that set by government for the provision of public services, and the best practice that characterises successful services in the private sector. At the very least, this will need to involve:

- an emphasis on effective leadership at all levels within schools;
- a sharper focus on meeting the needs of 'customers': the learners, their parents, employers and wider community;
- a commitment to exploring the full potential of ICT in pupils' learning;
- a greater understanding of and commitment to all aspects of diversity and equality of opportunity;
- a new role for teachers as managers amongst groups of other adults, partners and volunteers, all of whom have a contribution to make to the work of the school;

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- a view of schools as learning organisations that give priority to training and developing all the people who work in them;
- an acceptance of accountability and the central role of performance management in school improvement; and
- greater financial autonomy and enhanced business improvement skills.

## 2. The school as a learning community

### The focus on learning

Schools exist for learners and for learning. That is not to say that everything that happens in schools should be seen as a preparation for what comes afterwards. Schools – along with parents and the rest of society – have an important responsibility to help prepare young people for adulthood, active citizenship and the world of work. But schools are also communities where young people live and work together day by day, and where they grow and develop. To raise standards further and to achieve excellence for all learners, we have to ensure that schools are learning communities, for pupils, students and all the staff who work in them.

It is easy to be distracted from this emphasis on learning. Yet, research into school effectiveness has repeatedly emphasised the fact that successful schools maintain a strong focus on teaching and learning as their core activities. This involves maximising the available learning time, inside and outside lessons, creating an orderly and attractive learning environment and developing an ethos in which staff and pupils maintain high expectations in terms of achievement.

The focus of leadership and management time must be on the quality of learning that takes place inside and outside the classroom. In planning their budgets, both local education authorities (LEAs) and schools need to reflect learning as the key priority, and to keep this as the central focus in evaluating their success. While examination and test results remain important yardsticks against which we can measure school performance, they only tell part of the story. Pupils must gain knowledge, understanding and skills that equip them for life and leisure. They also need to develop positive values and attitudes to learning, including those described in the 'Framework for Personal and Social Education'<sup>1</sup>. Confidence and self-esteem come from the experience of success in learning and from active participation in the life of the school community. Pupils need opportunities to gain a wide range of skills that relate to the local and wider economy, that will make them confident entrepreneurs and attractive employees.

In recent years, more and more LEAs and schools have made aspects of how pupils learn the main focus of their professional development programmes. Some training for teachers has drawn on research-based work on cognitive development within particular subject disciplines. In other cases, more generic research into models of learning is being used to improve the consistency of teaching and to raise teachers' aspirations. Such work is often accompanied by a recognition of the strengths that learners bring with them – and the need to build more effectively on what they have achieved at the previous key stage. A key message from all this activity is that learning must become less compartmentalised. Teachers need to be more aware of the relationships and connections between subjects, especially through linkages such as key skills.

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<sup>1</sup> *Personal and Social Education Framework*, Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales, 2000

Teaching approaches need to take more account of the fact that pupils learn in a variety of ways and have preferred effective learning styles. A real commitment to parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways for pupils will require a fundamental re-evaluation of what we mean by attainment and a broader approach to how we assess pupils' achievements. This could, for example, include greater recognition of their personal and social achievements, and of the learning that takes place outside school.

### Curriculum balance

While there is no proposal in Wales that schools should move towards specialised status, many schools already have one or more specialist areas of provision. Some primary schools have developed their grounds, creating conservation areas designed to promote pupils' environmental knowledge and understanding. The Technology in Schools Initiative has provided a number of secondary schools with industry-standard equipment to extend the scope of their work in areas such as computer-aided design and manufacturing. Initiatives such as these have served as a basis for building excellence. Schools need to take more account of local needs and circumstances in developing their curriculum. This has happened to a limited extent, for example, in areas of mid Wales where schools have focused on courses in leisure and tourism, and in the south-east, where there are shortages of skilled young people in construction, engineering, catering and other service industries. There is scope for schools to develop excellence in other areas such as physical education and sport, the arts, technology or languages. Models of excellence can inspire teams and individuals within the school, and the expertise gained can also be made available to other schools in the area. Overall, however, the aim should be for excellence across the board in community-based schools.

The learning we offer pupils needs to be challenging and relevant. This means achieving an appropriate balance between the teaching of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes. The revised National Curriculum Orders emphasise the wider curriculum that underpins formal subject learning. These so-called 'common requirements' can be best met through the commitment of all teachers to work consistently to develop a wide range of qualities and learning skills.

Alongside these common requirements, there are recently developed frameworks for ten aspects of personal and social education (PSE) and the framework for work-related education for 14-19 year olds. Taken together, these elements have the potential to enliven, extend and add relevance to much of the work that pupils do in school. The world of work already features strongly in the work of some primary schools that have forged productive links with local businesses and employers. For the youngest pupils, visits from people who do different kinds of jobs in the community and trips to local supermarkets, farms and other businesses can provide the basis for extended tasks completed in school. Good planning for these aspects of the curriculum will help to meet the requirements of the new Education Act 2002 to prepare pupils for the 'opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life'<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> *Education Act 2002*

To some extent, achieving an appropriate balance between subjects, skills and wider personal and social development is an easier task in primary schools. Secondary teachers are often concerned that additional demands to teach key skills impose burdens on teaching time – or that they distract staff from what should be their prime concern with the teaching of subjects. However, all teachers have a responsibility to develop pupils and students as learners. The development of learning skills, or what is increasingly being known as ‘learning to learn’, is inseparable from good subject teaching.

### **Information and communications technology**

A major challenge for all schools will be how to exploit technological advances to bring the greatest benefit to all pupils, regardless of their background. All schools are seeking effective ways of teaching with ICT and planning activities that involve pupils in using multimedia resources. We now have much greater choice not only about what is to be learned, but also about how and where it may be learned. Yet many of the learning structures in our schools are much as they have been for centuries. The scope for distance learning and e-learning will make us question the need for daily on-site attendance at school, or attendance within a particular building at fixed times. It will also raise questions about the role of the teacher in an increasingly ICT-driven world, and of health and safety issues both in using computers and in relation to access to websites and software.

The fact that so much ICT equipment in schools is used for comparatively short periods each day should raise questions about the length of the traditional school day. More schools are using their ICT and other facilities as a community resource, welcoming adult learners during the day, as well as at evening classes. To a more limited extent, schools are opening longer to provide pupils and students with access to learning resources that they may not have at home.

A small number of school and other providers, especially those in rural areas, have begun to capitalise on the potential of ICT to deliver post-16 courses through collaborative arrangements. The use of e-mail, video-conferencing and distance learning packages offers potential advantages to schools with sixth forms who may currently struggle to offer a wide range of subjects. The use of these approaches may signal a shift in some sixth forms from institutional teaching to the development of networks of excellence and support.

We live in an increasingly 24 hour day, 7 days a week environment. Yet schools amongst many of our public services are not yet attuned sufficiently to these changes. There is a world famous institute in America that is to put all its learning packages on the Internet making them freely available to browsers. In a few years from now, we may see others doing the same and this may call into question the notion of school as never before. It will call into question the extent to which schools are keeping pace with the modernisation that is taking place with other areas of training as well as in employment. We are only just beginning to consider the implications of ICT for both school organisation and for the delivery of pupils' learning. In planning and developing teaching, for example, we will need to re-appraise the appropriate balance between content-based work, information retrieval and evaluative skills.

### **The alternative curriculum**

There is increasing use of the term 'alternative curriculum' to signal dissatisfaction with the standard fare provided by schools. This can be a response to a perceived lack of relevance in the work undertaken by certain groups of pupils – including those described as gifted or talented. However, in most schools and LEAs, there is recognition that more needs to be done to develop a battery of learning approaches to address past failures. Teaching should be adapted to meet the specific needs of pupils for whom a more practical approach to learning is likely to be appropriate. At the same time, our aim should be to further develop our understanding of how children learn in order to motivate and capture the imagination of learners of all abilities.

Most commonly, alternative curricula have concentrated on meeting the needs of disaffected pupils through work-based schemes and vocational alternatives such as National Vocational Qualifications, often taught by arrangement with local further education institutions. Other programmes, such as those involving youth workers and local employers, have focused on the core curriculum, basic skills, and the development of pupils' personal and social skills. Some programmes are using youth award schemes and other forms of accreditation to recognise pupils' achievements more broadly than is possible through GCSE qualifications.

To a large extent, these approaches have been compensatory. They have certainly been costly and often bureaucratic in that they involve schools in having to bid for special funding from a variety of different sources. There is a growing recognition that schools should be adapting the mainstream curriculum and, where necessary, providing a more flexible and responsive curriculum to meet the needs of all their pupils. This will only be achieved in the future through better identification of pupils' needs and earlier intervention to meet those needs within the mainstream curriculum to avoid losing young people at any stage. To ensure equality of access to the curriculum for all pupils, both in terms of their entitlement to the formal curriculum and to opportunities to participate in informal learning, schools will need to make use of a wider range of staffing and resources both inside and outside the school, including realising the potential of in-class support and ICT.

## Out-of-school learning

The term 'out-of-school learning' is being used increasingly to describe any learning activity that takes place outside normal lesson time. This includes extra learning opportunities, such as breakfast clubs, homework clubs and revision courses. Schools have always provided some extra-curricular activities to supplement classroom learning, to increase motivation and enjoyment of work and to help pupils who have limited facilities to study at home. If we want to reach ever more challenging goals, then all pupils should be able to benefit from learning opportunities that extend well beyond the traditional school day. This has often been a strong feature in independent schools. Out-of-school learning needs to be planned and organised systematically if all pupils are to benefit. On the current organisational structure, this presents considerable challenges for maintained schools, particularly those in more rural areas where pupils travel long distances to get to school.

As part of a radical re-evaluation of attitudes to learning, schools may need to reassess their approach to homework and extra-curricular activities. For example, while no one would deny that the setting of homework is a potentially valuable aspect of pupils' learning, the setting of homework that only a proportion of pupils are able to complete is only liable to widen the gap in performance between those pupils who have parental support and those who do not. Examining the range of tasks set for homework and their rationale will ensure that as many pupils as possible have access to the resources and support needed for them to complete tasks successfully.

Recent work on out-of-school learning has identified three categories of activities:

- enabling – those designed to reinforce basic and key skills;
- extending – those that build on classroom activities, for example through homework clubs, arts and sports activities; and
- enriching – those which provide opportunities that are different from the normal curriculum (e.g. chess, debating, farming or rural science projects, community activities).

The effort needed to plan and deliver out-of-school hours programmes is recognised in the increasing funding from the National Assembly available to support such learning from, through the National Lottery and organisations such as the Prince's Trust, Education Extra and others. Schools that invest the most time and other resources in carefully planned out-of-school learning reap the benefits in terms of improved motivation and staff/pupil relationships. There is also an impact on standards of attainment in more formal settings. The impact of these activities is greater when schools monitor pupil participation and encourage the involvement of all pupils.

However, the answer to planning informal learning cannot just be to extend each end of the day through add-on activities. It will require a more radical review of what schools are for, and of how learning opportunities can be extended by working with a wider range of partners from specialist agencies and voluntary organisations.

## Sport, the arts and voluntary activities

There is widespread acceptance of the potential of physical education and the arts, not just as vital aspects of the curriculum, but also as the means of developing essential personal, social and learning skills, values, attitudes and interests that contribute to well-being, stimulation and pleasure throughout life. At the same time, teachers and those outside schools recognise that cultural activities require specialist expertise that many classroom teachers may not possess. There is rarely enough time, or sufficiently long periods of time, available within the normal curriculum to do justice to a wide variety of sports, and activities such as art, music, drama and dance.

Schools and LEAs respond to these challenges through the provision of out-of-school programmes, peripatetic services and county-wide provision of teams, orchestras, choirs and other performance opportunities. In Wales, the Urdd continues to play a unique role in providing a network for developing the arts and a challenging competitive framework for children to participate and achieve excellence. Nevertheless, the voluntary take-up of sports and cultural activities outside school is self-selecting and much of the work undertaken is focused on a small number of gifted and talented participants. The challenge for schools – and potential partners in the youth service and voluntary sector – is how to extend participation more widely.

If sport and the arts are to be equally important for all children and young people, then schools should consider what lessons might be learned from European models, and from boarding and independent schools, who start the teaching day much earlier and thus have longer afternoons and twilight sessions available for extended participation in music, drama, sport or a range of outdoor activities. The establishment of specialist centres represents one approach to supplementing what individual schools can offer. A few schools have taken the step of buying in specialist coaching or professional support for school productions where the necessary time or expertise have not been available within the school.

## Learning and behaviour

Schools are more willing nowadays to accept the close links that exist between the quality of pupils' learning and their behaviour. Research such as that carried out recently in Scotland<sup>3</sup> has established that instances of seriously challenging behaviour are few and far between. The vast majority of poor behaviour that adversely impacts on teaching and learning consists of low-level disruptive behaviour. For the most part, this consists of:

- calling out answers;
- talking while the teacher is talking;
- distracting other pupils from concentrating;
- making irritating noises;
- eating or chewing gum; and
- walking around the classroom.

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<sup>3</sup> *Better Behaviour – Better Learning*, Report of the Discipline Task Group, Scottish Executive 2001

The accumulated impact of low level disruption is stressful to both staff and pupils. Yet the vast majority of pupils do not intend to be disruptive; indeed, many of them are often passive in class and avoid behaviour that might get them into trouble. But passive and compliant pupils are not necessarily learning effectively. Pupils who are challenged by tasks and busily engaged in their work are likely to be enthusiastic about what they are doing and less inclined to be disruptive.

### **Closing the gender gap**

For many years, boys appeared to out-perform girls in areas such as mathematics and science. More recently, since the introduction of a standard National Curriculum for boys and girls, that phenomenon has been conspicuously reversed. Girls out-perform boys in almost all areas of the curriculum – most particularly in language and language-based subjects. There is no single or simple explanation for this. However, in seeking to ensure equality for all, schools must continue to explore the reasons for the current under-performance of boys and seek out strategies that will enable the gap in performance to be reduced while continuing to raise the performance of both boys and girls.

There are areas of the curriculum that either boys or girls tend to avoid. For example, girls still tend not to choose technology-based subjects in key stage 4 and beyond, and few boys study arts and languages. Age-old stereotypical views of the curriculum need to be challenged so that we can capitalise on the potential of all learners to meet the skills needs of the community. If we are to make progress in terms of gender equality, the process of challenging stereotypes needs to begin in nursery and infant classrooms. This should include an examination of the balance of activities undertaken by boys and girls during sessions, and of the most common images and stereotypes presented to young children, for example, in the stories they hear and read, the topics they learn about, and in the toys, games and dressing-up clothes they use in their play.

### **A multi-lingual community**

Within Wales, there are distinctive issues that relate to language and culture. All schools need to have a clear idea of their role in developing pupils as bilingual learners – according to the needs and levels of linguistic competence of the individuals and groups within the school. Historically, Britain has a poor record in terms of the ability of the population to master languages other than English.

Since the introduction of the National Curriculum, we have made great strides in teaching Welsh as a second language to younger pupils. However, there is much more that schools will need to do if we are to realise the aims of creating a bilingual society. Many pupils drop out of Welsh-medium education at the secondary stage, and even more do so for their post-16 education and training. As well as providing 'express routes' for older pupils who may wish to switch to bilingual education, all schools, including those that have seen themselves as providing a predominantly English-medium education, need to review the opportunities they provide, or might provide, for pupils to build on their level of competence in Welsh. In this way, schools can contribute to building a continuum of provision in Welsh as a step towards further study, for example in the context of vocational training or adult education.

In parallel with the success in teaching Welsh, there has been a continuing decline in the take-up of modern foreign languages at GCSE and Advanced level. This is a disturbing trend in a Europe where national barriers are rapidly disappearing and there are increasing opportunities for economic activity across the continent as a whole. Schools need to review the way in which their language teaching is organised, the age at which it is introduced and, in many cases, assumptions about whether pupils of all abilities can benefit from continuing with the study of languages. Schools also need to attract more learners to continue pre-16 and post-16 by incorporating elements of language study within vocational programmes and within the core of a Baccalaureate-type qualification.

Of equal concern in an increasingly multi-racial society, is that there is very little teaching or recognition of languages spoken by the communities of people from new commonwealth or other countries who have made their homes in Wales. If schools are to make an effective contribution to a truly multi-lingual society in Wales, we need to do more to introduce pupils to the bi-cultural, linguistic heritage of Wales, and to value and exploit the ever increasing language diversity that there is in modern Welsh society.

### **Inclusivity and support**

In too many cases in the past, schools have tended to tolerate or even justify low levels of performance on the grounds that little can be expected from pupils from particular areas or backgrounds. The best schools have demonstrated the advantages of early intervention to identify the barriers to learning that might be preventing individual pupils from making progress. Discussion at school level about ways to engage, motivate and support pupils who appear to be disaffected has reaped benefits. This is particularly true where the process begins before pupils transfer to secondary school.

Schools are well aware of the tensions inherent in providing the same curriculum entitlement for all, while, at the same time, seeking to provide individualised support that meets the learning needs of all their pupils. Pupils do not all start from the same place or have access to the same advantages in terms of family and economic support. The notion of ‘inclusivity’ implies a need to put more resources into diagnosing needs and tailoring curriculum programmes – and learning styles – to pupils’ interests, aptitudes and abilities. Central to this, is the acceptance that all pupils, not just those with identified special needs, need a variety of ways in which to learn, and that all teachers have a responsibility to cater for individual needs and to differentiate their approaches to teaching and learning accordingly. Schools need to achieve a better balance between whole-class interactive teaching and individualised learning and support. If pupils are to be fully prepared for the opportunities and challenges of later life, they need a learning environment that will help them to be independent, creative, to work in teams and solve problems together.

Across LEAs, the services currently provided to support pupils with special educational needs should, wherever possible, be focused on mainstream schools. The assessment of pupils’ needs in the statementing process will be simplified under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, and there is general agreement about the benefits of earlier intervention. The expertise available in special schools and units, and in the special educational needs and educational psychology services, could be used more effectively as a resource. Staff with specialist skills could cater firstly for those pupils with the most specialised or severe learning needs. As a source of professional advice, special educational needs staff could also be deployed more widely in mainstream schools to provide support and to develop the expertise of all staff. If schools of the future are to be truly inclusive, then the challenge must be to plan a curriculum to meet the needs of individual learners, not merely to slot them into whatever provision might be most readily available. In particular, mainstream staff will need more training in the full range of strategies for meeting special needs, including those for managing and supporting pupils who may have challenging behaviour.

### **Lifelong learning and the world of work**

Secondary schools have traditionally catered for the full range of abilities up to age 16, but, apart from introducing a small number of vocational courses, school sixth form education has concentrated on those pursuing academic routes to higher education. Schools, and those who evaluate their performance, should take more account of pupils’ destinations in judging success, and devote more care to establishing curricular continuity and progression post-16. Too many pupils who leave school at age 16 experience a time of uncertainty, marked by ill-informed decisions and wasteful changes of direction. Schools need to work more closely with Careers Wales and their partners in the further education and work-based training sectors to ensure a smooth progression to the most appropriate post-16 education or training route for all pupils.

The kinds of employment available to young people depends on them having a broader education, attaining more qualifications and reaching higher standards than in the past. All teachers share a responsibility for giving the work in their subjects a vocational dimension. This process begins well in the best nursery and primary schools that regularly use the local community and employers as a curriculum resource. In secondary schools, the tendency is to see work-related education as a short period of work experience, the responsibility of a small number of vocational specialists or merely as a strand within PSE. The world of employment demands far more flexibility and confidence than many pupils currently acquire through their formal education. Young people require opportunities to develop positive attitudes to learning new skills throughout their working lives.

### 3. The school in the community

#### Education and care

For the youngest learners, attending nursery classes or playgroups represents the first step into the wider community outside the family. During the early years, the responsibility to provide well for children's safety, protection and care is inseparable from the responsibility to provide for their learning. Children's health and well-being needs to be a precondition of effective learning in designing a distinctive foundation curriculum for pupils in Wales aged 3-7. Meeting children's needs for physical, emotional and social development are as fundamentally important as meeting their need for intellectual stimulation and growth. Learning from models of early years education in other countries where the purpose of the early years curriculum is to establish readiness for formal instruction may mean a greater emphasis on physical and social development than is the case in many of our nursery classes. To achieve a more holistic approach to early learning, schools will need to work ever more closely with parents and other partners in health, social services and the voluntary sector.

#### Family learning

Over recent decades, schools have grown increasingly aware of their accountability to parents, particularly where the context has been one of falling rolls and competition for pupils. At the same time, many schools take a positive view of the contribution that partnership with parents can make to extending and enhancing pupils' learning. Nursery and infant schools, where contact between family and teachers is often part of the daily routine, have traditionally led the way in this, providing more frequent and informal opportunities for dialogue between home and school. The best nursery schools regularly exploit the potential of home-school tasks, based on lending libraries which include graded books, number games, toys and other attractive learning materials, to involve parents actively in the curriculum.

The introduction of home-school learning agreements is a further step in this direction. There is evidence that more secondary schools and departments are taking steps to explain to parents what they are trying to achieve in and through the subjects of the curriculum at each key stage. By issuing summaries of schemes of work with key learning objectives in simple language, schools are beginning to engage parents in supporting their children's learning in school. The perennial criticism of school reports to parents has been, not that they lack detail about pupils' experiences, but that they offer too little about pupils' real achievements and few specific learning targets for pupils to aim at if they wish to improve. The language used to describe learning goals needs to be easy to understand so that parents can encourage and support their children.

## Working with partner schools

Many see the ideal model of primary-secondary education in a given area as one of a group of primary schools linking closely with a single secondary school. While this pattern is the norm in many rural and valley communities, relationships between primary and secondary schools in urban areas remain complicated by parental choice. In some areas, denominational and bilingual provision can also provide pupils and their parents with further choices about which school to attend at age 11. Working within these different contexts, schools generally have sound administrative and pastoral arrangements to secure a smooth transition for pupils as they transfer from primary to secondary education. The schools concerned also seek, with varying degrees of success, to establish a measure of continuity in the work that pupils do in Years 6 and 7.

The great majority of pupils are excited and enthusiastic about the move to secondary school. Nevertheless, the changes brought about by this move are often, significant and abrupt in terms of their impact on pupils' learning. The period from Year 7 to Year 9 sees a widening gap in performance between pupils, a slackening in progress and a loss of self-esteem for a significant group of learners in secondary schools.

Schools seek to counter the adverse effects of transition by promoting collaboration between staff in partner schools. There are many examples of good practice, for example, in the joint planning of schemes of work or of individual projects and assignments, visits by Year 6 pupils to receiving secondary schools - including tours and 'taster' lessons in a variety of subjects. Some groups of primary and secondary schools also plan joint teaching programmes or release individual members of staff to work alongside teachers in the other phase, though these strategies tend to be less common.

Nevertheless, schools have done relatively little in recent times to stagger the transition from a curriculum taught predominantly by one teacher, with input from occasional specialists for music, Welsh or physical education, to one delivered in small subject chunks by as many as 14 different teachers within a 1-2 week period. Primary and secondary schools need to do more to address the potential discontinuity in learning styles caused by transition, and to ensure that teaching approaches, and teachers' expectations, take account of the knowledge and skills that pupils bring with them at each stage.

Perhaps most importantly, schools should consider developing the role of the Year 7 form tutor to mirror, at least to some extent, that of the primary class teacher. Providing additional time for secondary form tutors to spend with their classes during the week would enable them to observe pupils' progress in a range of subjects and diagnose potential problems. Providing one-to-one support for pupils experiencing difficulties early on might represent a sound investment in terms of preventing underachievement or combating disaffection at later stages. Such a strategy would give form tutors a closer knowledge of individual strengths and weaknesses. It would form a good basis for involving parents in reviewing pupils' progress and planning their future learning goals.

## Multi-agency approaches

Many schools that serve challenging catchment areas provide a haven for pupils, a safe and orderly community in a wider environment that can be threatening, demoralising and confusing in the mixed messages it conveys about the value of learning. This positive ethos is not achieved without effort and commitment to pupils' welfare. Yet in many of these same schools, inspectors find that teachers tolerate standards of achievement that are, at best, modest. When challenged, the reasons teachers often give are that it would be unrealistic, or even unfair, to expect more of children from 'an area like this'. Alternatively, it may be claimed that pupils' attainment merely reflects their low reading ages and test scores on entry, which are regarded as sound predictors of future attainment. Pupils with low attainment and poor basic skills often attend school irregularly and are most at risk of dropping out of school altogether. Schools need to find new ways to identify and support these learners, and to work with them and their families to raise expectations of what they might achieve.

There are lessons that we can learn from recent initiatives to rescue pupils who have become disengaged from learning; groups of young people in the majority of secondary schools whom Professor Barber describes as 'the disaffected, the disappointed and the disappeared'<sup>4</sup>. In many areas, there is a greater recognition that the barriers to learning are multi-dimensional – and that there is therefore only so much that teachers working in isolation can do to overcome these. In many parts of the UK, perhaps most notably in Scotland but also in parts of Wales, there is a resurgence of interest in the concept of community schools and colleges.

While the precise models of community provision vary from place to place, most agree that, in order to maximise educational achievement, many learners and their families would benefit from better integrated services and support from a range of agencies. The most effective models of community provision involve teams of teachers, health workers and personnel from social, community and youth services. Other potential partners include local drug addiction and mental health teams, community policing and crime reduction initiatives, and activity aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy.

For multi-agency initiatives to work successfully, the roles and responsibilities of participating staff need to be clearly articulated and focused on meeting the needs of learners and their families. There are considerable potential benefits where services can be co-located and crèches and other childcare services made available. Schools will need to work with their local authorities to identify the role they can play in the Assembly's Communities First Programme to help tackle educational disengagement at local level.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Learning Game*, Michael Barber, Victor Gollancz 1996

There is a great deal of good work to build on, illustrated, for example, by the projects funded through the Youth Access Initiative and Schools and Youthwork Partnership. Many of these have involved partnerships working and have shown what can be achieved when schools work together with youth workers, the further education (FE) sector, employers and voluntary agencies to combat disaffection and disengagement. In many cases, the emphasis has been on helping young people by providing them with the confidence and skills needed to return to learning and move on to FE or training in the workplace. What primary and secondary schools need to get better at is identifying the needs of pupils at risk at a much earlier stage and adapting the mainstream curriculum and teaching styles to maintain their interest and progress.

### **The community as a resource**

As well as parents and employers, the community that surrounds a school also offers a range of other equally valuable partners. These include, for example, the police, fire services, environmental groups and a range of voluntary and other organisations that are willing to engage with schools and make a contribution to the curriculum. In primary schools, teachers are often alert to opportunities provided by the school grounds and immediate locality to explore social and environmental aspects of the curriculum. Work with partners such as local shops and businesses requires a focused effort to plan the nature of the collaboration and to ensure that their input is consistent with the school's aims, objectives and ethos. In primary and secondary schools, for example, there are members of sports clubs who are keen to enthuse and coach children and young people. There are professional artists and musicians, and people with art and craft skills, who can make a contribution to work in the arts and technology. Parents, relatives and other individuals can be valuable sources of living, oral history. There are churches and members of other faith communities that offer access to living faiths and cultural traditions.

### **A school for the community**

If schools are to succeed in motivating and supporting those pupils who are currently under-achieving, or in danger of being lost to education and training, they are likely to be most effective if they can have an impact on the wider culture of the communities they serve. This may well involve the school in taking on a role as provider of educational opportunities for parents and other adults in the community. Schools with surplus accommodation are particularly well placed to develop community provision during the day. All schools have the potential to be used as bases for adult and community education after normal school hours.

The contact that primary school staff enjoy with parents provides opportunities to draw adults into a culture of learning, for example, by offering activities that enhance parenting skills. Health visitors, home-school liaison workers and education welfare officers are all in the position of visiting homes. Their role can be extended, not just to identify the needs of children, but also to engage with adults in families who might benefit from learning opportunities for basic skills. Such family learning can be a first step to FE or employment. Schools that have been most successful in developing a community dimension have explored ways to provide crèche facilities or to provide care and nursery education on site. There are examples of secondary schools in some Welsh urban areas that have worked in collaboration with neighbouring FE institutions to develop a comprehensive vocational curriculum. In one instance, as many as a thousand adults are enrolled and attend courses on site during the week. In many more cases, adults use school facilities to follow courses connected with ICT skills, both during the day and after school.

Schools in disadvantaged areas have much to gain from developing themselves as a community education resource. By contributing to the success of adult learners in the community, they have the potential for countering what may be an experience of educational failure affecting several generations of the same families. By helping to restore confidence in the value of educational opportunities for adults, they might begin to reverse patterns of condoned absence and enlist the support of parents as partners in their children's learning.

## 4. The school as a self-critical community

### Leadership: vision and values

The schools that are most effective at self-evaluation are those that know where they are at the moment, where they are going and, how they intend to get there. Most schools run smoothly from day to day and are generally well managed. However, the schools that make the most difference are also led with vision, have a clear sense of direction and share values about how they will work together. The work of school staff and the partners with whom they work is underpinned by shared values and a common understanding of the kind of place they want their school to be.

For schools to be effective, it is not essential for them to be continually focused on innovation. There are innovative schools that have made dramatic progress, sometimes in difficult and challenging situations. There are other schools that have achieved and sustained high levels of performance through doing simple things well, by teachers having consistent expectations of themselves and of their pupils and by persevering in implementing agreed strategies. However, even the best schools can seek new ways to challenge pupils and staff. This can be achieved where leadership is successful in securing a culture of continuous improvement backed by a commitment to providing good working conditions and the training and development of people.

To be fully effective, school leaders not only need to motivate and inspire, but to manage the performance of their staff more systematically than in the past. Performance management must be based on a cycle of objective setting for individuals, teams and departments, with regular reviews based on agreed criteria. While many of the earlier attempts at systematic staff appraisal have largely run into difficulties, schools are at the beginning of a new era in terms of performance management. Much will depend on the success of leaders and managers in building a self-critical culture and embedding effective systems for the appraisal and management of performance. There will need to be a clear and convincing link between the management of performance and strategies for the ongoing training and development of staff. Initial training, career development and progression should not just be available to teachers, but equally to nursery and learning assistants, supervisors, instructors and other staff who already play increasingly influential roles in schools.

### The self-directing school

In determining their priorities, schools will still need to strike an appropriate balance between national and locally agreed policies on the one hand, and the desire to address needs arising from their particular circumstances on the other. The involvement of governors in this process remains crucial, and the efforts of those involved in governor recruitment and training will be influential in helping schools respond to the national improvement agenda. At the same time, governors have a key role to play in meeting the needs of the school's immediate community by taking account of its particular social, cultural, economic and linguistic character.

The changing role of LEAs has promoted school autonomy, both through the increased delegation of funding and the re-positioning of services to provide challenge and support rather than direct responsibility or control. The annual planning cycle of review, target setting, monitoring and evaluation is well embedded in schools. There is closer alignment between school budgets and priorities for improvement identified in school development plans. To make further substantial progress, schools will need to develop longer-term strategies for improvement on the basis of budgets that can be relied on for more than a single year at a time. The current system discourages long-term planning and too often results in schools under-spending or carrying large surpluses rather than addressing identified needs.

The expectation of the National Assembly for Wales is that local authorities will now establish a framework for partnership to bring together all those involved in providing services for children and young people. This provides the background against which schools will need to define their particular mission and their strategies for working in partnership to support learners and their families. While not all schools may choose to define themselves specifically as 'community schools', all will need to have a clear view of their unique contribution to local initiatives for tackling disadvantage and promoting equality of opportunity, inclusion and sustainability.

Policy makers at national and local levels will need to develop more effective mechanisms for matching available resources and support to schools with the most need. What is not clear enough at present is how schools in the most disadvantaged areas of Wales can play a key role within wider projects for economic and community regeneration. While there are often funding streams available for projects related to different aspects of community development, bidding for these can often be wasteful of staff time. At worst, staffing short-term projects – however well intentioned the aims – can result in instability in the provision of core services. On the other hand, schools in challenging areas cannot automatically expect to benefit from differential funding formulae without being accountable for improved outcomes over a given period of time from their increased funding.

### **Reviewing human resources**

As with all organisations, the prime resource available to any school is its people. Effective management therefore needs to begin with a re-appraisal of the roles of teachers and other members of staff within the school, and of the potential contribution of those groups, such as administrators and learning support assistants, who work alongside teachers. Schools are beginning to make more use of trained administrators with bursarial functions to take responsibility for planning and for the development of finance, personnel, buildings and premises. This can release other senior staff to concentrate on standards and the quality of the curriculum, learning and teaching.

Learning support assistants are a potentially valuable resource, not only in supporting nursery and younger pupils and those with physical handicaps or other special learning needs, but also in all mainstream classes. Yet they are not always used to best effect. In this context, it would be useful for schools to re-evaluate the work of existing nursery nurses, technicians and ICT staff so that they can make a more formal contribution to the teaching and supervision of pupils' learning. One obvious benefit of this might be the provision of regular non-contact time for teachers in primary schools.

There should be greater regularity across LEAs in the pay and conditions of non-teaching staff, and planned staff development for learning support assistants and others to extend their expertise with the option of progressing to instructor or, where appropriate, qualified teacher status. Given the current contribution of many experienced staff, such as nursery nurses and ICT technicians, there is little justification for the wide differentials that currently exist between the pay of teachers, instructors and other groups of staff.

If we accept that the barriers to learning involve factors such as health, family and social support, then personnel from a wide range of core services and others from the voluntary sector have an essential role to play in widening participation in education and training. In seeking to raise people's expectation of learning within the community, not everything that needs to be done to improve skill levels can or should be done by teachers. We need to be clear about the particular role of teachers and the distinctive skills which they bring, for example, to the planning, organisation and assessment of pupils' learning. This is not to undermine the role of teachers but to enable them to use the skills they bring to best effect.

Key partners from outside the school who have much to offer both in terms of the curriculum and support for learners, include health professionals, police, youth service and community workers. Schools have much to gain from the specialised skills of counsellors, therapists, playworkers, and others who can counsel and support children with low self-esteem or poor self-image. This can benefit pupils who find it difficult to control or manage their own behaviour, as well as those who need support in coping with teasing or harassment they might experience inside or outside the school.

### **Self-evaluation**

Schools of the future will therefore need to be ever more clear and confident in how they evaluate their own effectiveness. Some schools already make use of an agreed quality framework developed individually with their own staff, often drawing on contextual information supplied nationally and through services provided by the LEA. This will become more commonplace. The school's framework for evaluating quality will need to be compatible with other recognised frameworks for judging standards, such as those associated with the Investors in People standard, the Business Excellence model and external inspection frameworks.

Estyn's survey reports on self-evaluation in primary and secondary schools<sup>5</sup> drew attention to the growing confidence of senior managers in reviewing the work of their schools. The advances in self-evaluation made by schools in Wales over the last decade have been largely in development planning, in arrangements for the monitoring and review of quality and standards, and in the use of data to set and monitor targets. The emphasis on improvement in test and examination results, and on attendance, has understandably focused attention on quantitative indicators of performance in these areas. Schools in Wales have further to go in identifying goals associated with the more qualitative aspects of school ethos, and in assessing the satisfaction of pupils and parents with the quality of the services they provide.

### Listening to children and young people

Putting children and young people at the centre of the services they use will mean involving them more actively in the evaluation of those services. This will be a challenge for schools because they are not generally good at asking children and young people what they think of what the school provides. Pupils need to be taught the skills of being consulted, of expressing themselves and explaining their viewpoints. The poor turnout at national and local elections suggests that fewer and fewer young people are accepting responsibility for choosing leaders and sustaining our democracy. Schools need to do considerably more to gather the views of pupils about their learning experiences, for example, through meaningful school councils and other forums. Schools need to ensure that these structures allow pupils to express their views and that they are helped to develop the confidence and skills to contribute effectively.

Making the changes necessary for this to happen in Wales will not be easy, but the establishment of the Children's Commissioner for Wales shows that the National Assembly for Wales is keen to listen to young people. Schools must be prepared to listen to their pupils. The lessons of recent history, reflected in, for example, the Waterhouse Inquiry, demand this. Adults have sometimes failed to listen carefully enough to accusations of bullying or abuse. We have placed some of the most vulnerable children in settings and institutions where they have been further damaged. Schools of the future must look closely at how adults will hear what learners are saying, and expect greater scrutiny of whether the right structures are in place, and whether they are working effectively.

If we listen to pupils, then we will have to be prepared for some hard messages and we must be sure that the views we are seeking are representative. We will have to seek actively the views of not just the articulate and committed young people heading for professional careers, but of those who are less articulate, who may be disadvantaged, lacking in confidence and unsure of their direction. The emphasis on consulting children and young people is essential if we wish to create a society that combines respect for the individual with an expectation of social responsibility. To achieve this, schools will need to give children the chance to take part in discussion and decision making about their schools from the earliest possible age.

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<sup>5</sup> *How well are we doing? A survey of self-evaluation in secondary schools*, Estyn 1999  
*Self-evaluation in primary schools: Adding value and making a difference*, Estyn 2001

## **The future of self-assessment and inspection**

Since 1992, inspectors have paid increasing attention to the effectiveness of the school's processes for self-evaluation and the quality of their planning for improvement. Estyn's proposals for the next cycle of inspections are based on a conviction that self-evaluation and inspection should be complementary processes. A provider's self-assessment report should be the starting point for external inspection, the basis for auditing its arrangements for managing quality and for confirming its own judgements. If school self-evaluation is to be robust enough to provide a basis for inspection, schools will need to be as confident in identifying their shortcomings and areas for development as they currently are in pointing to their strengths.

Schools will also need to get better at setting goals in the light of the feedback they receive from their customers and stakeholders. They will need to measure how well they are responding to the wishes and concerns expressed by learners, parents and staff, taking account of the views of the diverse minorities that make up the population of the schools and their local communities. In seeking to measure quality, most schools need to extend their arrangements to include social and other aspects of school life as systematically as they now measure academic performance. Examples of this will be the rate of participation of pupils in extra-curricular and out-of-school hours learning opportunities. School leaders will also need to focus their evaluations closely on feedback from staff, employers and the community they serve.

## 5. Breaking the mould

As we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the challenge for schools is to achieve excellence for all learners and to lay the foundations for lifelong learning. Schools will need to devote attention to developing attitudes to learning - affecting the disposition of learners and developing their learning skills - as well as to delivering formal instruction. Pupils from all communities must be able to reach the highest standards of which they are capable, and be equipped to shape and transform the communities and society in which they will live. Education must help pupils to become effective citizens of Wales, of an increasingly open Europe and of the wider world.

As part of this challenge, we may need to recognise that traditional ways of working, and of structuring our schools and the time spent in them, some of which date back centuries, may not be appropriate for the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the course of the next decade, parents of pupils starting their education in the most innovative schools may be increasingly unable to recognise much of what goes on as similar to their own experience of school. In this final section, we consider the implications of some of the key changes discussed in the paper for:

- the traditional school day and the pattern of the academic year;
- the nature of learning;
- the personnel involved in education; and
- the way schools are led and managed.

### The shape of the day

The formal school day is generally very short. In both primary and secondary schools, pupils' learning is subject to frequent interruptions. It is clear that the comprehensive secondary school day – with its pattern of organisation into subject slots – involves young people in much stopping and starting of work, changing of subjects and wasted time moving around the school campus. Pupils transferring from primary to secondary school can find it difficult to adjust to different teaching styles and the expectations of different teachers and other staff in terms of discipline and behaviour. As well as wasting time for learning and the discontinuity involved, this pattern of organisation, along with the breaks and lunch period, provides abundant opportunities for pupils to be late, to get into trouble and to truant.

Schools, LEAs and policy makers need to:

- explore ways to structure the school day in an increasingly flexible way; and
- provide learning opportunities which are available to all pupils, parents and other adults in the community during the day, evenings and weekends.

## Organisation, structuring and resourcing of the school year

The pattern of the three-term year has rightly come under scrutiny in several local authorities in parts of the UK. Starting the academic year in the autumn, as opposed to the calendar or financial year, and having a long summer holiday during which pupils find it difficult to maintain momentum in their learning, are all unhelpful features of the traditional pattern. Radical national discussion is needed on the organisation, structuring and resourcing of the school year.

LEAs and schools should:

- collaborate in piloting alternative structures for the school year in relation to teaching, assessment and financial planning.

## Formal and informal learning

Schools share with others who care for children and young people, the responsibility to provide for their health, safety, protection and well-being. The recent publication of frameworks for personal and social education, and for work-related education for 14-19 year olds, have helped to formalise the responsibility of schools to provide a broad-based education for children and young people. To be effective, these aspects need to underpin and complement the teaching of traditional subject disciplines and skills. Schools in the future will need to examine traditional definitions of learning, of what is usually set as homework and what is conceived as informal or out-of-school learning.

Schools should:

- develop clear policies and strategies for teaching pupils to think, learn, work collaboratively and solve problems;
- view the traditional design of classrooms and other areas of the school to maximise the use of ICT in pupils' learning;
- have an ICT strategy for extending and incorporating e-learning into more conventional programmes;
- build and effectively manage a complementary programme of informal and out-of-school learning that complements and enhances classroom teaching; and
- review the potential for involving parents and providing a curriculum for adult learners.

## Working with partners

The barriers to learning and the challenges involved in overcoming them are often such that schools will struggle to make continuous improvements if they try to 'go it alone'. There is a limit to what schools can achieve by providing more of the same. Schools can and should enlist the support of a far wider range of partners to support pupils' learning.

Governing bodies, senior managers and staff should:

- create opportunities to involve parents more fully in planning, supporting and reviewing pupils' learning;
- review the roles and potential contribution of all the full and part-time staff who contribute to work in our schools;
- re-structure staffing to enable progression through different types of jobs;
- plan to enlist the help of a wider range of specialist partners in pupils' learning; and
- establish structures for school teachers to work more closely with staff in the core services of health, social services, community education and the voluntary sector in order to meet the needs of learners and their families more effectively.

## School leadership and management

Developments in school funding should increase school autonomy and enable them to plan further ahead. Hand in hand with this, governing bodies and headteachers must be prepared to accept increased levels of accountability for the outcomes of their performance. Some individual schools have been particularly enterprising in terms of securing funding through partnerships, or in bidding for money to participate in multiple projects. The management of schools can benefit significantly from enhanced business skills. However, these skills should be used to support the main purposes of leadership and management, which are to improve learning and promote the work of the school within its community.

Those who lead and manage schools need to:

- establish a culture in schools based on providing continuously improving services which are responsive to the needs of learners and other customers;
- ensure that leadership at all levels is focused on promoting equality of opportunity, diversity and sustainability in the initiatives they introduce;
- encourage the commitment of all staff to regular self-evaluation as the basis for school improvement;

- embed performance management for individuals and teams at the heart of the way schools are managed; and
- link performance management clearly with continuing training and development for all school workers, with opportunities for gaining accredited qualifications and career progression.

### Excellence for all learners

All learners deserve equal entitlement to excellence in terms of quality of educational provision and equality of opportunity to enjoy a rich and full curriculum inside and outside the classroom. Equality of opportunity does not necessarily mean identical provision for all, but requires a sharper focus on meeting individual needs. In terms of excellence, the quality of the learning environment is an important and influential factor – both for pupils and for the staff who work in our schools.

Pupils learn in different ways and the most effective approaches use a balance of methods combined with sensitivity to individual needs. Inspection findings suggest that excellence in the classroom is not necessarily linked to major initiatives, but rather is found where work is carefully planned, inherently interesting and enjoyable, challenging in its expectations and, thoughtfully and helpfully assessed. The quality of learning is often reflected in the way teachers pose questions and use language themselves to probe pupils' understanding. Effective learning builds on what pupils already know and can do. It helps them progress from simple to more complex concepts and cognitive strategies. Learning is best developed and reinforced when pupils have practical opportunities to apply their knowledge, understanding and skills in a range of contexts: to communicate with audiences, to design tests and solutions and to solve authentic problems.

In terms of their own individual potential, all pupils are capable of achieving excellence. In terms of attainment, while there are basic levels of competence to which all learners should aspire, excellence is a relative term. For the child or young person with severe learning difficulties, small steps in learning to communicate or in managing their own may represent heroic efforts and outstanding achievement. Conversely, in some schools where the overwhelming majority of pupils exceed all the traditional indicators of performance, many children may be working well within their capabilities and achieving modestly in terms of their real potential.

In order to achieve excellence, all schools should:

- raise awareness of the diversity of needs, interests and abilities that learners bring with them and develop strategies for addressing these;
- increase the level of challenge in day-to-day teaching and raise expectations of what pupils of all levels of ability should achieve;
- establish broader definitions of attainment that reflect the personal and social progress made by learners and, their learning and key skills; and

- continue to make use of relevant data to review the progress of individual pupils and to set realistic and challenging targets.

Many of the issues raised in this paper are intended to promote further debate within schools and other organisations. The nature of change within the education system has often been piecemeal and the rate of progress slow. Some of the features of educational provision discussed have remained relatively unchanged after decades of development. Innovation can deliver better opportunities for learners and significant improvements in quality. It is vital that policy makers, local authorities and schools consider the changes that need to take place to realise a vision of excellence for schools in Wales that will benefit generations of learners to come.