

delivering **change**

schools
beyond the
classroom

**managing collaboration
for social inclusion**

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1 introduction

“Ultimately, the problems that inhibit high standards, especially in the inner city, are much greater than the school can tackle on its own.”

Ofsted inspection report on Leeds LEA, July 2002

This report draws on the work of six local authorities that have introduced strategies to integrate social inclusion and education. It looks in particular at the strategic role of the local authority in identifying areas of need and in drawing different providers together to deliver a comprehensive programme of support for schools, pupils and their families, and at the experiences of schools operating within this new way of working.

Despite a steady improvement in academic achievement overall, Britain still has one of the greatest class divides in education in the industrialised world. More than in any other country, it is social class that determines the educational success of a child growing up today.

The attainment gap is evident before the age of two, and it widens at primary and secondary school level, so that poorer children are one third as likely to get five or more good GCSEs as their wealthier counterparts, and young people from unskilled backgrounds are five times less likely to enter higher education than those from professional backgrounds. (DfES Strategy 2002)

“Schools which are effective at supporting poor children are characterised by a culture which sees achievement not only in relation to test results; by a staff team who understand and value the contribution of children from different backgrounds; by school leadership which has high but realistic expectations of all children, and by an approach which encourages the local community to involve themselves in the school.”

Education and Child Poverty report from the End Child Poverty Group, March 2003

Exhaustive collection of data on individual pupils, new floor targets and the inspection regime now make it impossible to ignore these differentials, or the poorer performance of certain groups such as pupils of African-Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage, and looked after children, that are exposed in the figures. Whilst many of the answers to closing the gap lie within improving schools – schools can make a difference – it is also recognised

that the school can be a powerful locus for community renewal, and authorities and schools also face the challenge of working together to tackle the causes of underachievement.

This challenge draws authorities and schools into a complex interrelationship that exemplifies many aspects of the modern local governance agenda: the role of community leadership and the use of the power of well-being¹ in drawing strategic plans together, the integration of self managing schools in the development and delivery of local social programmes, and the role of stakeholders – governors, parents, local people and businesses, in the same. It takes the debate beyond the education department and the classroom into the very heart and purpose of local government and local self-determination.

Education makes a significant contribution to community regeneration, and not just through developing knowledge and skills. An open school also helps to build social capital – through being a place where family and friendship networks are developed; through being a place where shared values and mutual respect are actively promoted, and through being a place where more vulnerable parents and pupils can feel safe enough to go to for help. Add to this the job and career opportunities a local school can provide, and the facilities it can share, and it is clear that no other public institution carries such a heady mix of responsibilities and opportunities for community well-being.

The Ofsted Local Education Authority (LEA) inspection framework now acknowledges this, and has been developed to include review of the authority’s council and corporate structures, and its planning and partnership working beyond the education department. And new education legislation is also encouraging schools to work collaboratively with other schools and other agencies to raise standards of teaching and learning. The extended schools policy recognises that in some communities this will require outreach work with families. The children’s services Green Paper, *Every child matters* (DfES September 2003), gives schools a clear role in multi-agency preventive strategies for vulnerable children and young people, and at 14-19 it is recognised that collaboration with local employers, colleges and youth agencies is seen as a pre-requisite to tailoring courses to meet students’ needs.

¹ Part I, Local Government Act 2000 – Local Authority power to promote economic, social and environmental well-being which includes a legal duty to prepare a strategy, which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development.

Nonetheless, the process of integrating social inclusion and regeneration initiatives with schools is clearly not easy. The Ofsted Annual Report, *Standards and Quality Education 2001/02*, said that the school improvement functions of LEAs are now, for the most part, competently exercised, but support for social inclusion is “both more variable and, often, excessively separate from the drive to raise standards of attainment”, when in fact they are “closely complementary”.

The challenge for modern governance is about creating a virtuous circle that incorporates strategic planning at the level of the local authority with individual activities at ground level. Under CPA (see below), this aspect of corporate governance, the enabling and integrated authority, comes under close scrutiny. For community renewal to be sustainable it needs this inclusive approach. Initiatives that rely upon energetic and far-sighted individuals alone, whether head teachers, council officers or elected members, are vulnerable. The head teacher might move on, the councillor might lose her seat and the initiative then fizzles out. But when local action is embedded within the community of the school and in the culture and practice of the elected authority, then changes of personnel can be a stimulus rather than a threat. Within this kind of culture, active citizenship becomes a core feature of local politics, guiding decisions that are made by the executive rather than simply implementing them, and community leaders at every level pick up on what works so as to scale it up to enable system-wide reform.

Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA), introduced in 2002, is a method of judging the overall performance of a Council. The Audit Commission looks at how the Council is run, as well as how its main services perform – drawing upon the range of inspection reports now available, and on each authority’s own self-assessment. Authorities are also banded according to how they perform against other councils. As with schools, weaker authorities are subject to targeted intervention, whilst top performing authorities are to be given the freedom to innovate. Freedom for authorities to innovate should not mean any diminution of the powers that autonomous schools have gained under self-management. High performing authorities will therefore need to work closely with schools in devising any new initiatives that combine education and social inclusion.

The report draws together material from strategic plans and inspection reports of six local authorities. It also highlights a particular initiative in each authority that illustrates collaborative working on education and social inclusion, and incorporates the views and experiences of key people involved.

Currently a number of LEAs are involved in DfES-led initiatives such as the Extended Schools pathfinders and the 14-19 pathfinders to pilot new forms of collaboration. The LGA is also running a pilot Schools for the Community project with seven LEAs. By concentrating on the processes of managing effective corporate governance, this NLGN report aims to complement these pilots, and provide some clear pointers to support others in their strategic planning for new partnership working.

Schools Minister David Miliband has given the most succinct definition yet of the role of the modern LEA, in a speech he made to an education seminar at Oxford University in March²: “The 1944 Act called for ‘a national system... locally administered’. LEAs were in the pole position, often the arbiters of the curriculum as well as school organisation. Today the ‘national system...locally administered’ has a different vocabulary. ‘Local’ means the school. The role of the LEA is to add value to the work of schools, guaranteeing places for all children, tackling issues that cross school boundaries, and above all organising pressure and support for the raising of standards in under performing schools.”
