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# Know Where You Are Going:

How five headteachers led  
innovations that go beyond the  
National Curriculum and national  
strategies to enhance children's  
learning

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F U L L P R A C T I T I O N E R E N Q U I R Y R E P O R T

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## **1. Introduction**

Two years into my second headship and following an Ofsted inspection, I wished to build upon what the school had achieved to enhance children's learning. My headship experience to date had been driven by the standards agenda and focused on the national strategies, the Ofsted framework and standard assessment tasks (SATs). To broaden my knowledge, I attended a variety of courses and conferences, and read material from different authors. Faced with an array of ideas, proposals and strategies, I was uncertain how to proceed, and sought to learn from what other headteacher colleague had already done. Therefore I investigated how five headteachers went beyond the National Curriculum and national strategies to enhance children's learning.

## **2. Methodology**

Five schools were studied. The schools were identified by word of mouth from professionals who knew the focus of my study.

1. Each school was visited.
2. A semi-structured interview format was used for interviews with:
  - the headteacher of each school
  - teachers nominated by the headteacher either as having played an important part in the innovations or as able to provide accurate information about the innovations
3. Lessons, activities and displays were observed, and documentary information was collected about each school - papers and policies which the headteacher or other teachers believed would illustrate the innovations taking place at the school.

## **3. The study schools**

The locations, intake and size of the schools visited as part of the research varied. All were popular and three had Beacon status. All five schools satisfied the following criteria. They:

- followed the National Curriculum and national strategies
- adapted the national strategies to be appropriate for their pupils
- went beyond the national curriculum and national strategies to enhance children's learning.

## **4. The report**

Having visited the five schools, spoken with the key staff and observed key activities, I produced five brief case studies. Each study comprises six sections:

1. The school context: a brief description of the school and its context
2. The headteacher's motivation and vision: a description of what the headteacher was trying to achieve
3. The journey taken: a brief description of the action taken by the headteachers to realise their vision for the school
4. Evidence of enrichment: the most important activities that were found to enrich the learning experience for children in a particular school
5. Summary
6. Suggestions from the staff at the school: ideas put forward by staff in their interviews or questionnaires

## **5. The case studies**

### **5.1 School 1**

#### **5.1.1 School context**

The school is located in inner London and is housed in a Victorian three-storey building with limited hard-surfaced play areas. It is a popular two-form entry school. There are a total of 410 children on roll, 19 per cent of whom are entitled to free school meals. The school achieves high academic standards. When it was last inspected in November 1998, the inspectors reported that the school had “established a culture where learning is of prime importance”. The school was subsequently awarded Beacon status.

#### **5.1.2 The headteacher**

Mrs Y, the headteacher, is driven by her life history, her background and her own experiences. She comes from, “a really poor East End family” and is very firm in her belief that education provided children with the opportunity to better their lives and, as she explains, “escape from the quagmire” of deprivation. To this end she is driven to raise academic standards. Part of her drive is the fear of what happens to children who leave the primary sector without a basic level of literacy and numeracy. She does not see herself as an innovator, but as someone with high standards and high expectations. She is hugely inquisitive and motivated, considering all possible ways of supporting children, especially the less privileged and those who struggle at school.

#### **5.1.3 The journey taken**

In this school the key driver is the headteacher, ably supported by a series of deputy headteachers and members of the senior management team. She reads widely, attends conferences and encourages educational debate within the school. The headteacher supports her staff in their exploration of new initiatives. Many innovations have taken place during Mrs Y’s headship. Since she has been in post for such a long period of time, some of the innovations that were cutting-edge at the time are now commonplace within other schools. An example of innovation at this school was the development of accelerated-learning techniques. The first step towards developing accelerated learning was the headteacher developing her own knowledge base by reading and attending conferences. She recalls that much of what was said reminded her of her own training in the early 60s. Senior teachers were then encouraged to attend a variety of conferences and accompany her on a visit to a school that had already adopted some of the ideas being advocated. The information gleaned from the visit was subsequently shared with the rest of the staff and a guest speaker was

invited to introduce the ideas to the whole staff. Teachers were asked to reflect upon what they had seen and pilot the ideas. Senior staff encouraged further embedding by monitoring these strategies as part of the established programme of observations.

#### **5.1.4 Evidence of enrichment**

At this school you will find:

- teachers using techniques developed from and based upon training in:
  - accelerated learning
  - thinking skills
  - philosophy for children
- children being challenged to use thinking skills in a variety of lessons, including art
- specific food provided when the children are undertaking assessments
- children using brain gym
- children with dyspraxia following a structured programme of physical exercises each day
- the use of open-ended questions in homework
- new strategies considered and filtered through the school's systems and ethos and only adopted where they will have a positive effect upon raising standards
- the use of music and perfume to enhance children's learning
- an awareness of concentration spans and the subsequent increase in the number of physical breaks
- the teaching of relaxation techniques
- the use of drama to enhance children's learning in a variety of subjects
- a genuinely broad curriculum
- an emphasis on whole-staff training

#### **5.1.5 Summary**

The headteacher continues to strive to improve the standards achieved at the school: "I don't think you ever finish with these things: you experiment with them and you measure whether they have made a difference."

#### **5.1.6 Suggestions from staff**

Suggestions from staff at this school included:

- not waiting for things to happen to you, but instead looking to make things happen

- being enthusiastic
- taking your time
- not doing too many things at the same time
- keeping changes manageable
- giving staff the opportunity to experiment and reflect on what's been successful and unsuccessful
- encouraging open discussions before taking on new ideas
- involving all staff in innovation
- ensuring the whole staff are working together
- informing parents of developments and encouraging their support
- ensuring new members of staff understand the systems and processes
- observing others in order to pick up different ideas
- trying things, as you might be surprised how well they work
- reviewing regularly

## **5.2 School 2**

### **5.2.1 School context**

The school is located in a socially mixed area and is housed in a modern building with significant areas of well-used and well-kept playing fields. It is a popular two-form entry school. There are a total of 426 children on roll, 22 per cent of whom are entitled to free school meals. The school achieves high academic standards. When it was last inspected in March 2002, the inspectors reported that this is “a very successful school with many very good features”.

### **5.2.2 The headteacher**

The headteacher, Mrs. U, is hard-working and has a clear philosophy and a vision for the school. She has been challenged at each stage. It has been a long and often bumpy road to get the school to where it is now. She believes that children learn best from first-hand experiences. This is a style of teaching for which she was trained and which she has adopted throughout her teaching career.

Before taking up this headship nine years ago, she held two successful headships in less challenging schools. She felt that she could make a greater difference to the lives of children at this school by following the same approach she had used in her previous two headships. The confidence she had developed from her headship experience was very important during the challenges of this headship, for Mrs U’s reservoir of hope was to be severely challenged by both the demands of the school and by criticism from the Local Education Authority (LEA).

### **5.2.3 The journey taken**

In the early days of her headship, Mrs. U decided the children deserved better and she could not wait for the majority of staff to agree with her ideas. At the time, some opposed her ideas, others were complacent and many had low expectations of the community they served. She knew what she wanted to achieve and had a clear philosophy and the confidence that came from her previous successes both as a teacher and a headteacher.

She believes there were two main areas that needed to be addressed: behaviour and attainment. She introduced innovations to address both issues.

To address the behaviour issue, very early in her headship, Mrs U set about creating a calmer environment. She spent time modelling what she wanted to see. The school building was developed to support a calmer climate. Walkways



were enclosed, so that children stayed within the building and did not have to pass through numerous doors.

Teachers were encouraged to adopt a new approach to behaviour management. They were told:

- not to shout
- to set aside a little more time for packing up
- to avoiding rushing
- not to use terms such as “hurry up”
- to spend more time teaching children to share, co-operate and work together; for example, “shared painting”, where a small group of children worked together on a single painting, following clear rules such as that one child cannot rub out what another child has done

In addition, areas were carpeted and children began to wear slippers in class.

To help raise attainment, a thematic approach based upon first-hand experience was adopted. The belief that teachers should provide children with a variety of stimulating and exciting experiences was fundamental to the school’s approach.

This was no quick fix. Mrs U has been at the school for nine years, and it is only since a very successful Ofsted inspection two years ago that the school has received the credit she believed it deserved. Until then, it had been a hard and often lonely road for her, working to achieve what she believed to be right. The headteacher needed champions – people who modelled what she wanted to see and helped enthuse staff – to help move the school forward. Some were found among the existing staff, some were recruited, another was headhunted and Mrs U called upon a consultant with whom she had previously worked.

The school had a rapid turnover of staff during the first years of her headship. “In the early days teachers left to get out of the school, to get away,” recalled one teacher. “Today people only move to get promotion elsewhere.” An advantage of these changes is that staff are now supportive of the headteacher’s philosophy. People know what the school stands for and what to expect. New staff are inducted into the school’s systems and practices. Teachers feel valued and able to explore their own ideas. One teacher, for example, was given the opportunity to concentrate on developing art and drama, while another developed her interest in a particular approach to teaching phonics.

The journey towards achieving a calmer climate, developing a thematic curriculum and maximising the use of first-hand experience has been both difficult and challenging. The greatest obstacles came from a senior member of staff, central government initiatives and the LEA inspectorate. Mrs U would not fully adopt the National Strategies despite pressure from local inspectors to raise standards by spending more time on the basics. This put an immense strain on

the headteacher and other staff. Despite her long experience, her reservoir of hope almost ran dry on several occasions. She recalls being at a particular low point following a pre-Ofsted inspection by the LEA inspectors: “It was after their visit that I felt closest to having a nervous breakdown.”

The headteacher has taken risks and stood against the tide. The governors have supported what has been done. They have rejected changes that they do not believe were in the best interests of children at the school.

#### **5.2.4 Evidence of enrichment**

At this school you will find:

- a climate intended to provide a level of calm in which the children can develop as learners
- playtimes and lunchtimes which are offset to help calm the school by reducing the number of children in the playgrounds at any one time
- teachers who do not hurry the children, but who give them time to prepare and pack away
- a curriculum that emphasises first-hand experiences, where teachers seek to provide children with experiences that stimulate their interest and knowledge
- the creation of Advanced Skills Teacher posts to develop the school’s philosophy and retain key members of staff
- themes that include “Sleeping Beauty”, “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” and “The Tempest”

The thematic first-hand-experience approach is seen as the lifeblood of the school. There is an emphasis on drama, dressing up and art. It is this work that enriches the experience of the children at this school. For example, a successful Key Stage 2 (KS2) theme was World War II. The activities and experiences encountered by the children included:

- being physically evacuated in role by train
- making cases and gas masks
- a blitz experience in school with appropriate sounds and lighting
- visitors coming to the school in role
- rationing:
  - actually bringing in the relevant types and quantities of food
  - investigating how many slices of bread could be buttered using the weekly allocation of butter

### **5.2.5 Summary**

This school has changed enormously over the years of Mrs U's headship. The buildings, curriculum, results, staff and reputation have all improved. The headteacher had a clear vision of what she wanted to achieve and has worked tirelessly, ably assisted by key champions towards achieving this goal. It is only recently, since the Ofsted inspection, that the approach and their work have been vindicated. Almost overnight, her reputation changed from that of dinosaur to that of innovator. Mrs U was adamant that she does not see herself as innovating, but as building upon what she has always done, what she believes is right.

### **5.2.6 Suggestions from staff**

Suggestions from staff at this school included:

- Stand up for what you know to be right.
- Do not bow to pressure from others to change your philosophy.
- In challenging areas standards will improve through providing a good curriculum instead of through teaching more and more English and maths.
- It takes time to turn schools round. It requires permanent, committed headteachers not a temporary, seconded super-head.
- Provide excellent induction and training.
- Do not assume teachers have been trained in these approaches – they probably haven't.

## 5.3 School 3

### 5.3.1 School context

The school is located in a village just outside a major town in the north west of England. It is housed in a modern single-storey building with significant areas of well-used and well-kept playing fields. It is a popular one-form entry school. There are a total of 250 children on roll, 10 per cent of whom are entitled to free school meals. The school achieves high academic standards. When it was last inspected in February 1999, the inspectors reported that this “is a very good school, whose many strengths far outweigh its weaknesses”.

### 5.3.2 The headteacher

Mr Z, the headteacher, is retiring this summer after 14 years leading the school. He believes strongly that schools should develop the whole child through a curriculum suited to the needs and interests of all children. He also believes children respond best when they are challenged, given the opportunity to take risks and encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions.

Mr Z has invested a great deal of time and energy in developing the school environment. During his tenure:

- The school grounds have been improved.
- Funds were raised to extend the school building.
- Business sponsorship was obtained to provide the children with excellent sports kits.
- The school has taken responsibility for providing the school meals and cleaning the school.
- 

He has had a hands-on approach to school improvement. He has been ably supported by teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, governors and members of the local community.

Mr Z’s vision has been shaped by his life experiences. He was a police officer before becoming a teacher. He taught in several schools and has a number of outdoor hobbies. He describes seeing poor teaching and working in a school that was a shambles. He also described working in a wonderful school on one of the most challenging estates in the country, a school that offered exciting and interesting experiences. It was at this point in his career that he made the conscious decision that: “If I ever get a school, it’ll be like this one.”

The actions he has taken at this school have not been based upon any specific reading or theory. The key decisions of his headship are, in Mr Z own words, “just common sense”. There have been times when his approach has been

challenged, not least by local inspectors. Receiving a very positive Ofsted report was in some ways an endorsement of what had been done. The working relationship with the LEA inspectorate has subsequently improved, and Mr Z now feels valued as an experienced and successful headteacher.

### **5.3.3 The journey taken**

The leadership style adopted is one where there is a shared vision; those who have joined the school buy into the vision; they are in turn supported and empowered to develop their own interests within the school's ethos. Great care has been taken in employing the right people. Many of those who have worked or now work there had links with the school prior to their appointment. People work extremely hard and put in long hours. The expectation is that people go beyond their job descriptions, whether this means teachers running clubs or non-teaching staff taking Information Technology (IT) lessons, covering for absent colleagues or organising events. As the headteacher states: "If you don't want to do extra stuff here, you don't want to be here." The present deputy head believes she has become the public face for his vision. Another more recent recruit to the school explained that: "I share very similar views to [Mr Z]. We both believe there should be a lot of sport, extra-curricular opportunities and outdoor education. We're proud that we offer so much more than most schools in the area." Both teaching and non-teaching staff are given the opportunity to flourish, irrespective of their job title. One Learning Support Assistant (LSA) transformed the school library into the "surf shack"; another has trained as a netball coach; and the "brilliant" school keeper runs discos and accompanies trips.

Mr Z's vision is very important for the school. In the early years of his headship, battles had to be fought and won if the school was to develop in the way he wanted, in the way he felt it needed to change. When he first arrived he found that the teachers were used to having a great deal of independence; many did not plan their lessons, and the quality of report writing was unacceptable. There was a great deal of resistance from some staff. One teacher, who was a parent at the time of Mr Z's appointment, remarked that "The school had needed to be prepared for the 21st century."

Mr Z had to drag some kicking and screaming into a new way of working. The first Ofsted inspection helped the process of moving certain individuals out of the school.

Most important of all has been the appointment of key teachers, the so-called champions. The first was not, however, appointed until the fourth year of Mr Z's headship. Well motivated people who shared the vision were headhunted. They were encouraged to play significant and high-profile roles in taking the school forward. The two most important champions joined the school as newly qualified teachers. Both were, however, mature students who already had wide personal

experience and knew both Mr Z and the school before they were appointed. Mr Z has huge respect for both women, their skills, professionalism, application and motivation.

#### **5.3.4 Evidence of enrichment**

At this school you will find:

- challenges which have a significant and positive effect upon the development of the child both socially and academically
- virtually every child taking part in a sports club
- every child having the experience of using the school's climbing walls and being awarded certificates for their achievements
- teachers seeking to challenge children to take risks within a carefully controlled, supportive and safe environment, for example, orienteering in the Lake District
- children given the experience of several residential Outward Bound school journeys (two in Year 6, and one each in Years 4 and 5.)
- children expecting to play in high-quality, well-organised, competitive sports teams
- teachers believing they are making a difference to children's lives
- staff and children believing children should have a voice
- the school council taking a positive part in developing the school by:
  - operating an eco-warrior system where children take it in turns to organise the recycling of food
  - working hand in hand with the cooks to ensure they provide popular meals
- staff trying to cater for each individual to allow them the opportunity to develop as a person as well as academically. For example, one teacher explained: "It's good to see children who struggled to get on with others in Reception being responsible and caring when they are in Year 6."
- the Year 6 children acting as buddies for other children who may find it difficult to keep out of trouble at break time

#### **5.3.5 Summary**

What was found was that the headteacher has a clear vision and that this vision was shared with staff and children. Staff who did not buy into the vision and had high expectations moved on, while like-minded people were recruited and retained. Staff now work hard; they have high expectations of themselves and the children. Several teachers described being rewarded by knowing they are good at their job and that they are making a difference.

In time the headteacher's vision and the school ethos are shared by all.

### **5.3.6 Suggestions from staff**

Suggestions from staff at this school included:

- Have a clear vision and communicate this vision to others.
- Look very carefully and, if necessary, be ruthless in putting things in place and getting rid of people.
- Lead by example; be a role model or provide role models, ensuring people see what should and can be achieved.
- Look happy and get things done.
- Know what you want, have a clear time frame and know when the job is complete.
- Decide what you are going to delegate and know how you are going to know if they have done it.
- Ensure good communication between staff and children.
- Appoint, train, motivate and retain the right people.
- Keep staff morale high by praising and supporting all staff.
- Where possible, use motivation rather than coercion.

## **5.4 School 4**

When I visited this school there was an acting headteacher in post, as the previous, very influential headteacher had retired six months earlier.

### **5.4.1 School context**

The school is located in a village on the outskirts of a major city in the Midlands. It is housed in a split site surrounded by fields and houses. It is a popular oversubscribed three-form entry school. There are a total of 528 children and the number entitled to free school meals is below the national average. The school achieves high academic standards. When it was last inspected in February 2001, the inspectors reported that: "This is an outstandingly successful school, with strengths in all areas." The school was subsequently awarded Beacon status.

### **5.4.2 The headteacher**

Mrs Q, the headteacher, was key to developing the school. She had decided to retire in the summer at the age of fifty. She spent 12 years as headteacher, initially as headteacher of the infant school and then as head of the amalgamated school. She was hugely influential and well regarded by her staff. Her resignation proved distressing for many of her staff. She had very high expectations of herself, the staff and the children.

### **5.4.3 The journey taken**

Mrs Q provided the impetus for the school's development. She was motivated by the desire to improve children's ability to learn and think by whatever innovative means possible while ensuring teachers were happy. Teachers were encouraged to develop a repertoire of teaching strategies and to use the ones most appropriate to a child's needs. Mrs Q continually looked to improve the school. She would often find out about an idea herself and enthusiastically share this with colleagues. On other occasions, colleagues would come to her with ideas, confident that she would always listen and support them. Mrs Q shared her vision. Where she perceived something was important, there was a clear expectation that it be adopted. She also helped teachers to develop their own ideas. One developed the "Fit for learning" system now used throughout the school. Another, following Mrs Q's own example, was supported in undertaking the twenty-day neurolinguistic programming (NLP) trainers' course. Accelerated learning is a good example of an approach adopted at this school. Mrs Q was convinced it would make a difference to the children; she provided training for all staff and accelerated-learning techniques are now used throughout the school.



Mrs Q's energies were not confined to improving the curriculum. She worked hard to improve the whole school, to improve the buildings and to provide high-quality resources. Mrs Q was also aware of the need for teachers to have an appropriate work-life balance. One of her mantras was "Less is more." She sought to reduce what she felt were unproductive elements of her teachers' workload. For example she brought an end to:

- class assemblies for parents, seeing them as too demanding on the teachers, as they had become competitive and of little benefit
- the nursery nativity, replacing it with less stressful traditional low-key Christmas carol concerts for both KS1 and KS2
- residential trips, believing as much could be achieved in day trips with far fewer demands being placed on staff
- staff meetings, if she felt teachers were too tired or jaded

#### **5.4.4 Evidence of enrichment**

At this school you will find:

- There is an emphasis on displays to reinforce learning.
- There are many extra-curricular activities.
- Policies are based on research and reflect the school's ethos.
- Music is used to support children's learning.
- All children follow a daily programme of exercise known as "Fit for learning"
- 15 to 20 children follow a daily programme of special exercises matched to their special needs. Exercises include developing their balance through the use of spacehoppers™ and wobbleboards.
- Personal and social development is valued; children are asked to evaluate their own feelings.
- They use their Behaviour from within (BFW) programme to help improve behaviour.
- Accelerated-learning strategies are used throughout the school.
- Interactive whiteboards are used.
- Teachers see themselves as learners, with the headteacher modelling the role of lead learner.
- Teachers see themselves as researchers and apply their research in their classrooms
- There is an emphasis on good-quality induction.
- Children are encouraged to take an adventurous approach to learning.
- Children record their thoughts and comments in the way they think most appropriate, after considering a variety of strategies they have learnt from their teachers.

#### **5.4.5 Summary**

Over a number of years the school has developed as a cutting-edge, self-challenging school, where teachers look to learn and help the children learn. The work being done was based on strong academic research. Staff actively sought new ideas. These were considered, filtered and adapted to meet the children's needs.

#### **5.4.6 Suggestions from staff**

Suggestions from staff at this school included:

- Make planning and preparation as realistic as possible.
- Keep everyone informed.
- Encourage a variety of people to lead developments.
- Show everyone you have their best interests at heart.
- Show trust in others and that you value their judgement.
- Adopt the school-based BFW programme.
- Ensure there are clear structures and that they work.
- Delegate effectively, ensuring people know what has been delegated.
- Share your beliefs.
- Ensure your senior staff share the school ethos and that they share their views with others.
- Encourage teachers to develop ideas and initiatives.

## **5.5 School 5**

### **5.5.1 School context**

The school is located in an affluent London suburb and is housed in a modern single-storey building with a well-kept playing field. It is a popular two-form entry school. There are a total of 350 children on roll, five per cent of whom are entitled to free school meals. The school achieves high academic standards. The school was last inspected in December 1998. It was subsequently awarded Beacon status.

### **5.5.2 The headteacher**

Prior to joining the school Mrs R, the headteacher, had developed interests in, links with, and knowledge about aspects of education that were to have a significant influence upon the innovations that have subsequently taken place at the school.

The headteacher is motivated by:

- a desire to take the school and children further and not rest on the laurels of high achievement and a good Ofsted report
- her belief that teaching techniques offered to gifted and talented children can benefit all children
- a desire to ensure children have the opportunity to develop their thinking

### **5.5.3 The journey taken**

Before being appointed headteacher, Mrs R had links with the local university and an interest in educating gifted and talented (G&T) children. It was at one such G&T course that she had met Mrs H, who was to become one of the school's champions. The same university was the employer of Professor A, who provided both theoretical and practical assistance for the innovations. This was also the school to which Professor A sent his own children and the site of much of his research into developing thinking skills. These factors helped make the school a fertile site not only for innovation, but also for a particular type of innovation. Initially the focus had been on challenging gifted and talented children. In time this developed into a programme for all children. A major initiative was based upon the thinking skills work of Professor A. The professor worked closely with the school, leading in-service education and training (INSET) with the title of "Developing the thinking school" and modelling "thinking lessons". Within the school, two particular teachers championed the ideas: one had the advantage of not being class-based and so was able to work throughout the school; the other influenced practice from within her own class and through

meetings. Mrs R believed it was very important to keep parents and governors informed about the approach. Governors were invited to attend the training and INSET day. Professor A also led a most successful meeting attended by over 80 parents.

A critical point in the development of thinking skills throughout the school was the making of a school video, with the subsequent Beacon conference at Kew Gardens. Much of the video was based around the work of the two champion teachers. The processes of making the video, preparing for the conference and hosting teachers from other schools as part of the Beacon initiative have all had a positive effect upon embedding thinking skills throughout the school.

Reflecting upon the progress made, one teacher explained that, in the early days of the development, the thinking lessons were seen as bolt-on lessons, often led by the champion teachers. Later, the decision was taken to integrate thinking into the whole curriculum. Subsequently, curriculum plans and policy documents have been rewritten to incorporate thinking skills and higher-order questioning. Thus while, in the early days, copies of Professor A's books were purchased to be used in specific lessons, today teachers are working to include thinking skills and thinking questions in all lessons.

The headteacher feels passionate about the developments that have taken place. She has supported others in developing the innovations. The champions have been given the opportunity to advance thinking skills and encourage teachers to use a wide variety of strategies. At this school there is a commitment to training and professional development – what one teacher described as the “continuous journey”. Teachers undertake training, they develop, and some move on. Both of the champions in post when the headteacher was first employed have now moved on. Other teachers have taken on the key task in developing the school.

#### **5.5.4 Evidence of enrichment**

At this school you will find:

- children taught thinking skills
- children using thinking logs to note down their thoughts and how they attempt to solve problems
- the term “thinking” incorporated into a variety of events, for example, a ‘Thinking maths week’ and ‘Thinking art lessons’
- children taught to adopt the ‘Community of enquiry’ approach advocated by Professor A
- children encouraged to discuss issues and explain why they think as they do
- teachers speaking about metacognition
- classroom prompts displayed around rooms with a wide variety of questions

- thinking skills being deliberately integrated into lessons and subject policies
- children being encouraged to reason and debate
- brain-gym exercises used within lessons
- children having direct access to drinking water, as the staff believe this assists their learning
- children vocalising the process and talking through how they solve problems
- children encouraged to work with partners as “learning buddies”

### **5.5.5 Summary**

The main focus of the innovations at the school has been based upon providing an enriched learning experience through the development of thinking skills. Staff at the school found the National Curriculum and national strategies quite limiting, dull and restrictive before embarking on the journeys. The school was already successful in terms of academic achievement, Ofsted inspections and parental opinion. The whole school community has been introduced to the concept of thinking skills. Teachers and children talk about thinking and the term metacognition is widely used.

### **5.5.6 Suggestions from staff**

Suggestions from staff at this school included:

- Look for an enriched curriculum, not tack-on lessons.
- Make a commitment to spend time and money on the innovations.
- Do not try and do things too quickly; use a layered approach.
- Provide good-quality systematic in-service training.
- Ensure the whole school community is involved and behind the initiative.
- Involve and challenge parents.
- Do not be afraid of National-Curriculum and other targets. “You will get there in the end, but not necessarily in the same way”.
- Realise that metacognition is the most important thing for schools.
- Do not take too long to roll ideas out to the whole school.
- You need someone to lead both within school and from a theoretical perspective.
- Look at different styles and different approaches.
- Use as many strategies as possible.

## **6. Lessons from the five schools**

### **6.1 Innovation**

While several of the headteachers were uncomfortable in describing themselves as innovators, all accepted that their schools qualified to be part of a study which looked at curriculum innovation.

### **6.2 Leadership**

The main focus of the enquiry was on how the innovations were led. The following patterns of leadership were found.

*In all cases the headteachers:*

- had been in post for at least eight years
- were hard-working and highly motivated
- attracted and recruited like-minded people
- had a clear vision, which became the school ethos
- had a vision that became self sustaining
- developed effective induction programmes
- led by example and modelled what they wanted to see
- recruited or developed champions to model what they wanted to see (The status and experience of these champions varied from newly qualified teachers to a professor and an educational consultant.)
- adapted the national strategies to suite the school ethos
- considered other initiatives and then adapted or rejected them
- took calculated risks
- developed clear structures and organisation
- supported others in developing their own ideas

*In most cases the headteachers:*

- required a reservoir of hope to sustain what they were doing and stand up to opposition
- were following what they had done throughout their careers

*In several cases the headteachers:*

- had to overcome opposition from the LEA and staff

*In some cases the headteachers:*

- required a significant staff change before the innovations could take hold
- became democratic once their beliefs had been adopted by others
- were assisted by Ofsted reports that:
  - precipitated some staff moving on from the school
  - vindicated what they were doing

## **7. Conclusion**

The headteachers were confident that their schools were making a positive difference to their pupils and their learning. This confidence was confirmed by Ofsted reports, word of mouth, and the evidence of my visits. The headteachers had different personalities: some sought the limelight; others were shy and retiring. The headteachers had followed different paths, and their schools were very different places. Each headteacher was trying to provide the very best for children in their care, but their visions for their schools were markedly different. Each school had its own ethos, and the work being done to enrich the curriculum varied from school to school. There were, however, key similarities in what had been done. Each headteacher had a clear vision of what he or she wanted to achieve, each had appointed and retained like-minded and highly motivated people, and each had continued along their chosen path in the face of changes and, in some cases, outright hostility. In all cases, the journey had taken several years, and most heads say it has not yet been completed.

### **7.1 The key findings for headteachers and those who aspire to lead**

These were:

- Know where you are going and what you want to achieve, even if you don't know how you will get there or when you will arrive.
- Accept that your vision may be different from that of your colleagues.
- Appoint and retain like-minded people.
- Ensure your key staff share your core values.
- Model what you wish to see.
- Accept that the journey may take a long time and follow a winding path.
- Consider ideas, read books, attend conferences and be confident in assessing what you hear, using your own filters when deciding what to adopt.

These headteachers have spent years striving for what they knew to be right and the children in their schools have benefited from their work and that of their staff.

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