

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

- FOUR CASE STUDIES OF SCHOOLS ●
- WHICH NO LONGER REQUIRE SPECIAL MEASURES ●

*Impro***V***ing Schools*

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THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Four Case Studies of Schools Which No Longer Require Special Measures

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FOREWORD

In December 1996 the School Effectiveness Division of the Department for Education and Employment commissioned the International School Effectiveness and Improvement Centre (ISEIC), of the University of London's Institute of Education, to undertake a number of case-studies of how schools which had been found by OFSTED to require special measures had succeeded in turning themselves around. Associates of ISEIC visited schools and talked to Head Teachers and staff about their experiences. These are the first four case-studies in that series. The schools concerned are:

- Brookside Special School, Derbyshire
- Northcote School, Wolverhampton
- The Drive Primary School, Gateshead
- Francis Askew Primary School, Hull

The schools were chosen in consultation with ISEIC as a representative sample of the first schools to come off special measures. It is a welcome fact that the number of schools coming off special measures is rapidly increasing and that there will be further case-studies of this sort.

It is hoped that these studies will provide useful exemplars of good practice which will be of practical relevance to any school seeking to improve itself. The Department is grateful to all the schools which willingly co-operated in this exercise and looks forward to their continuing to make good progress.

Any queries about the methodology used should be directed to:

Professor Peter Mortimore
Institute of Education
University of London
20 Bedford Way
LONDON
WC1H 0AL
Tel: 0171 580 1122

Queries about special measures should be sent to:

Simon James
Rm 4.63
Department for Education & Employment
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
LONDON
SW1P 0BT
Tel: 0171 925 5708

BROOKSIDE SPECIAL SCHOOL.

THE SCHOOL NOW

Brookside Special School is set in pleasant grounds on the edge of a desirable commuter village in Derbyshire. It is a school for boys with educational behavioural difficulties (EBD) between the ages of eleven and sixteen. At present the school has about forty pupils of whom a quarter to a third are residential at any one time. (In the past there were as many as eighty pupils at the school, a good proportion of whom were residential.)

The mood is calm throughout and there is a feeling of routine and preparedness. Occasionally the boys' behaviour is challenging, and some are so-called 'hard cases'. For example: on entering one classroom one was told immediately that Kevin is 'having a mardy'. And at a post-break meeting a boy gave a partly hidden, partly ritualistic V-sign as he entered the room. If things become out of hand in a lesson, there is a 'time-out' room where pupils can cool off and be counselled by the teacher on duty.

The school now accepts only boys who have a statement of special educational needs. Class sizes are necessarily small. Boys in Year 7 work in groups of six to eight for half the week with the same teacher. By the time they leave at sixteen they will have studied the full range of National Curriculum subjects modified to their needs, and can enter for GCSE in English, maths, science and art. They will also be able to sit the Welsh Examining Board's 'Communication Skills' paper and the City and Guilds Vocational Diploma. A varied programme of other educational experiences comprising visits, work experiences or link courses at a local college is also arranged. If boys are residential there is an out-of-hours programme which is the responsibility of the Head of Care. Each pupil has an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) which enables the class teacher to tailor an individual learning programme for each pupil. Each pupil has a key worker who can use the detailed targets in the IEP to check on individual progress.

To complete the support system pupils may be allocated points in each lesson:

1 point for work

1 point for observing class rules

1 point for individual relationships and IEP targets

The points pupils have scored for each lesson are acknowledged in the school assembly.

It is clear that the teachers have a shared understanding of how the school should run. Schemes of work are in place and teachers are able to adapt them, both to each pupil's IEP and in response to the particular needs of a group at a particular time.

The boys' behaviour around the school is one indicator of how well the school is succeeding in developing them socially. A more formal indication of success is the number of physical restraints recorded. It is usually low in more recent times.

On their most recent visit Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) reported positively on the standard of classwork. But staff are still struggling to improve the quality of written or spoken English, of maths and of social skills.

There is no question about what is expected of staff and pupils because every aspect of the school's work has been reconsidered and examined in detail in recent years. Each half term, the whole staff reviews its work together. A real sense of professional purpose underpins the staff's confidence and skills to adapt their plans swiftly to meet the needs of their pupils.

THE OFSTED REPORT

The criticisms made in the OFSTED report covered every aspect of the school's work. A serious lack of educational leadership and management expertise had resulted in little unity of either purpose or action amongst the staff. What was happening depended on individual teachers. As a consequence pupils were being 'cared for', but inconsistently, and were not always challenged to learn. A 'them and us' control mentality pervaded the school culture, with a high level of physical restraint and exclusions which rose to thirteen out of thirty-eight pupils at one time. There was a significant amount of bullying during the ninety minutes lunch break. Pupils excluded from lessons sat on a bench unsupervised. In this environment only the more experienced teachers could create their own kind of order. The attendance was 68.2% at the time of the inspection.

The only positive features noted were that the teachers worked to establish relationships and practical links with a local school and with a college of further education, and that in science and English the standard of classwork observed was satisfactory or better.

Key Issues

- **Key Issues identified by OFSTED for immediate action**

The LEA and governing body to:

- agree the future role of the school and;
- clarify the roles and responsibilities for governors.

The LEA, governing body and headteacher to:

- ensure all pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum, including National Curriculum and RE;
- secure an appropriate time allocation between subjects;
- prepare and implement a policy on assessment, recording and reporting;
- develop and implement a whole-school policy on the management of behaviour; and
- establish an effective system for managing and monitoring the school budget.
- The LEA to be satisfied that an effective system is in place, before delegating responsibility for the budget through Local Management of Schools (LMS).

Reactions to the report

In December 1993 OFSTED identified Brookside as a school requiring 'special measures'. As it was one of the first cases, there was an explosion of interest from the media. There was no previous experience of how to deal with such a situation. The Derbyshire LEA had recently carried out its own inspection of the school. Unsurprised by the OFSTED decision, it was able to act quickly and decisively. The school did not have delegated powers at that time. Had this been the case, then full responsibility would have been located with the governors and would have made it less easy for the LEA to intervene so effectively.

In the event, the headteacher retired voluntarily and the chair of governors resigned. The residual governing body appeared not to have sufficient knowledge of the school or, if they had, not to have the systems to deal with it. This situation was made more acute because special schools which serve a wide catchment area do not find it easy to recruit and to engage the active commitment and support of governors.

The LEA responded strategically by:

- freezing admissions;
- setting up a strong support team;
- appointing an acting headteacher; and
- seeking and appointing a new chair of governors with experience and authority.

More controversially, in addition to the joint LEA-school press release, the school was opened to the media with the undertaking that no pictures of pupils would be published. The promises proved worthless, as pictures of children were broadcast on national television. Nevertheless, the policy of having nothing to hide did cool media interest and enabled the LEA to treat Brookside as a technical problem which could be solved.

The LEA seconded the head of its Behavioural Support Service (Secondary) to Brookside, to be acting headteacher at Brookside. He was supported by a Principal Adviser, the County Adviser for Special Educational Needs and the Area Education Officer - all very experienced educationalists. This team was able to formulate the statutory Action Plan in response to the key issues raised by OFSTED in consultation with the new Chair of Governors.

Given the unprecedented level of publicity, it is noteworthy that no parent withdrew a child and only one parent expressed concern.

The pupils were not so understanding. Pupil behaviour in the school deteriorated badly. There was an immediate increase in vandalism and aggressive behaviour from pupils, which they justified by asserting that 'This school is a load of crap'.

School staff felt 'rubbished' and, at a personal level, alone and unsupported. The staff described the post OFSTED time as being like a state of mourning. Those loyal to the existing regime considered the criticisms unfair because the school was performing in line with other Derbyshire special schools. Other staff either acknowledged that some things had not been working effectively or that they had always known that there were fundamental issues which the school had not addressed.

LEA officers judged that there was sufficient capability within the staff to pull the school round. The choice put to staff was uncompromising. They told them that it was the LEA's belief that things could be pulled round, provided both parties worked together. If staff were committed to joining them as partners in striving for a solution, they would be supported. But there was no room for the uncommitted. Three teachers left. For the majority, who secretly feared closure, this approach was reassuring.

THE PROCESS OF IMPROVEMENT

At the time of its OFSTED inspection Brookside did not have the capacity to use its resources as tools to ensure appropriate outcomes for pupils. It is useful therefore, to identify two kinds of ensuing improvement: the improved social and academic progress of the pupils themselves; and improvement in the school's increased capacity to help the pupils improve. At Brookside the first priority was clearly to attend to the school organisation. Supported by the LEA advisers, the acting headteacher first took action to reassure and encourage staff. Staff reported later that he made them feel good. He

then acted resolutely to reduce the high level of tension caused by pupils' negative behaviour.

Improving pupils' behaviour

Pupils' behaviour deteriorated alarmingly following the OFSTED report. The unacceptable level of physical restraint and exclusions had to be reduced and the 'us and them' nettle had to be grasped in order to create a more constructive attitude to learning on the part of both staff and pupils.

Two strategies were used to reduce the level of misbehaviour at lunch time. The lunch period was shortened from ninety to fifty minutes and mountain bikes were obtained for pupils to use at lunch time.

The existing staffroom was made into a supervised 'time-out' room for pupils who needed to be out of lessons for whatever reason. When mainstream teachers want pupils to be removed from a classroom, it is usually because they are disrupting lessons. In an EBD school pupils sometimes need to be out of lessons for therapeutic reasons. A supervised 'time-out' room demonstrated heightened staff awareness that removal from lessons was also to assist the pupil removed. In retrospect, moving the staff to create a special room for pupils can be seen as symbolising a change in the school's values.

Changing the approach to pupils' behaviour following the OFSTED inspection was fraught with difficulty. As the physical restraints were lifted, pupils' behaviour became even worse and exclusions continued at an unacceptable rate. Fortunately for all concerned, the acting headteacher was well versed in behaviour modification and knew that things would probably get worse before they got better. And that is exactly what happened. But the number of recorded physical restraints has since fallen from a figure of 20 to an average of between 4 and nil per month.

Changing the curriculum and pastoral routines

Changes have also been made to the pupil support system and to the curriculum. The consistent use of IEPs, the allocation of key workers to pupils, half-termly reviews of pupils and the 'points' system were all important developments.

- **Individual Education Plans**

The deputy headteacher had devised a system of IEPs which previously had been implemented only in part. The acting headteacher concentrated on developing IEPs

and ensured that the deputy headteacher could use the system throughout the school to provide every pupil with a plan for use in all lessons.

- Key workers

Each member of staff was allocated as a 'key worker' to three or four pupils and was to monitor their IEPs regularly.

- Reviews of pupils' progress

Each pupil's progress was reviewed once per half term.

- Pupil points system

Pupils were allocated points for every lesson. Each morning during break the points were collected from the whole school before the groups went to their next lesson. This routine had the dual purpose of connecting with each individual's progress and of starting the next lesson in a calm manner.

- New timetable

A new timetable was introduced to increase the amount of direct teaching from 19 to 25 hours for both Key Stages 3 & 4. National Curriculum subjects were included. No pupil was disapplied from any part of the National Curriculum.

- Schemes of work

Schemes of work were introduced with the help of LEA subject advisers. By referring to IEPs, classwork could be differentiated for each pupil on a planned basis.

- Resources

A small amount of building work was completed and an additional £11,000 was allocated to the curriculum. Some of this money was used to provide an IT resource centre.

- Examination entries

All the above changes raised expectations that pupils would achieve at least some grades from GCSE and other public examinations.

Clarifying professional duties

The job descriptions of the deputy headteacher and senior teacher were revised to give each responsibility for a separate key stage. This enabled them to work with teachers as a teaching team. The care assistants continued to give classroom support but now worked explicitly in accordance with a rigorous educational plan.

Establishing purpose and cohesion

A new whole-school belief that Brookside pupils could be taught effectively underpinned the new systems and relationships outlined in the earlier sections of this report. The acting headteacher and his staff engaged in a professional dialogue to agree the statements of principle, policy and practice which now provide the framework for all their work. The keystone was a statement of purpose which had two guiding principles:

- To ensure that all students have the opportunity to work within the full range of the National Curriculum; and
- To create an environment in which every student's difficulties, whether social, emotional, behavioural, learning or a combination of these, can be addressed at the appropriate level.

As one member of the Brookside community commented, "the school began communicating with the 'inner self of the pupils'". In the context of a school reclaiming itself, it is important to note that both guiding principles of the statement of purpose are expressed in terms that can be checked to see if the stated aims are actually being achieved. Supporting this expression of intent was a curriculum statement. This statement reinforced:

- the right of access to the full curriculum for all pupils;
- the requirement for approved schemes of work; and
- a policy on assessment, recording and reporting.

Tracking pupil progress

The assessment and recording system which the school now has in place enables staff to record what is actually happening and to make judgements about the extent to which children are learning, and, in these terms, how the school is succeeding. Each pupil now has a personal record of achievement.

Policy development

Further policies on equal opportunities, race and anti-racism and sex education have been agreed. One OFSTED finding was that 'Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is not fully secured either through curriculum provision or through arrangement for individual support and guidance'. These agreed policies can influence powerfully the manner in which these crucial relationships are conducted.

Strengthening the leadership team

As well as drawing on the support of two experienced advisers, the acting headteacher worked very closely with the deputy headteacher, senior teacher and head of care to develop an effective senior management team (SMT). Previously these three existing senior post holders had not worked together consistently as a team. The new job specifications helped team members to be clear about their own roles.

The SMT also ensured that every new development was discussed at weekly Staff Meetings. The style of these meetings was characterised by a judicious mixture of genuine consultation and person-to-person support and direction. The acting headteacher also acted as line manager to all teaching staff.

Establishing governor accountability

The area education officer worked with the governing body to improve its ability to deal with key issues and associated financial implications, and to enable governors to develop a clearer understanding of their statutory responsibilities. Four sub-committees were established to deal with: finance, school development, personnel, and discipline. The new chair of governors visited the school frequently. Although the work of governors did not impinge directly on the day-to-day activities of teachers and care staff, the staffs understanding of their own professional accountability to governors began to develop.

Relationships with parents

The school wishes to work more closely with parents on a regular basis, and not only in times of crisis. The school is still finding it difficult to obtain the active involvement of parents. Only one or two parents attend the "Annual Report of Governors to Parents' Meeting". Nevertheless, an expression of the school's commitment to developing its relationship with parents is that it sends the school bus to bring parents to consult with teachers about their children.

REMOVAL OF SPECIAL MEASURES

HMIs made three return visits to the school. On the first in June 1994, eight months after the OFSTED inspection, they found improvements in many aspects of the school, but that 'some of the developments are fragile and need to be consolidated'. By the second visit in November 1994 matters had improved sufficiently for the DfEE to issue a press release stating that the school "has made good progress and may soon no longer require 'special measures' ". There was, however, no room for complacency. The covering letter from the DfEE to the Director of Education reminded her that the Secretary of State was 'not minded to transfer control of the school to an Educational Association at the moment '. After the third visit the school was informed that it was 'no longer failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and special measures are not required'. By this time HMI was making recommendations about the proposed new structure of the school. What is not evident from the formal letters and reports is the close and continuing positive dialogue about the process of improvement which occurred between HMI, the school and the LEA officers. At no time did anything appear in the reports which was not considered justified by the school.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

Brookside is a small 'special' school. When it was last inspected in March 1995 there were 39 pupils and 16 full-time equivalent teachers and care staff. Unlike most schools, its major stakeholders do not live in the vicinity. Parents are distant and pupils are, in most respects, not free agents. For these pupils there are no other options. They are obliged to attend this school. Yet despite its level of 'distinctiveness' there is much to be learnt from the process of improvement which enabled Brookside to move out of 'special measures' in such a short time.

Sense of focus

The urgency caused by the declaration of special measures and the haste to remove the strictures of Section 207 of the Education Act tend to obscure what had already occurred before the OFSTED inspection. Derbyshire LEA was not surprised by the decision because it had inspected the school two years earlier. It already knew what needed to be done and was able to respond and put in place quickly a powerful co-ordinating team. Given a largely defunct governing body and limited stakeholders, it was able to act executively and consistently throughout the formulation of the action plan and its implementation.

Key actions

The LEA was very fortunate in being able to appoint within days of the published OFSTED report an acting headteacher of high calibre and substantial experience. In turn, he was fortunate in having considerable potential talent for leadership within the staff. The appointment of an experienced chair of governors to legitimise the work of the team so quickly was equally essential.

It is possible to identify particular developmental actions which characterised the process of improvement:

- Some immediate changes, such as the changed timetable and the shortened lunch time, were direct responses to OFSTED's criticism;
- The clarification of educational values and the writing of supporting policy statements resulted in changed procedures which were appropriate and consistent;
- Effective line management and consultation with and support from staff helped ensure that decisions made and policies agreed were carried out consistently and effectively;
- A pupil support system was designed to promote many key aspects of their development;
- The discussion of staff accountability to governors led to shared understanding.

In many cases the idea that failing schools can be 'turned around' quickly with new leadership and sound management is dangerously simplistic. But at Brookside it happened. The school was placed in special measures with a long list of fundamental faults. Four terms later it had improved significantly, and its capacity for further improvement was in good shape. By March 1995 Brookside had moved from being a school with serious pupil control problems and standards of achievement which in October 1993 were only satisfactory in science and English to being a school where standards of achievement were satisfactory or good in all subjects inspected and where pupil behaviour was generally satisfactory. Moreover, teachers' expectations were higher and the leadership and management of the school were clear and effective.

The school now has effective systems in place which reflect the shared educational philosophy of staff. These provide a crucial and effective support for both staff and pupils and make consistent implementation of policy and practice more, rather than less, likely. Teachers are managing pupil behaviour rather than reacting to it. The school culture has moved from the behavioural to 'a deeper expressive level'. But, as HMI pointed out, this provides only a sound foundation for the larger task of improving pupil attainment.

The story of Brookside's progress out of the failing school category is a classic tale of purposeful leadership and management and positive, collaborative effort on the part of all staff. The school is now in a strong position to continue improving the quality of pupils' learning.

NORTHCOTE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

THE SCHOOL NOW

Northcote school is an 11-18 LEA-maintained comprehensive school located in the outskirts of Wolverhampton. It serves an area characterised by high unemployment, council housing and high levels of socio-economic deprivation. There are over 500 pupils on the roll. Although the numbers are increasing, there are few pupils of a higher ability range and two-thirds of the pupils in Year 7 require additional support for literacy or behavioural difficulties. Thirty per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals and 70 per cent are on the Special Educational Needs register (most are on Stages 2-5; 2 children have formal statements and 15 more are in the process of being assessed). By any measure the school can be said to serve a disadvantaged area and the pupils present a considerable challenge to the school and its staff. The school therefore has a crucial role to play in offering the children both the best possible education and every opportunity to achieve and develop their potential.

The school's motto, introduced since its OFSTED inspection in November 1993 - 'Excellence for Everyone' - expresses most succinctly its overall approach and attitude. Through the hard work and efforts of the headteacher, the staff and the governors, the school's reputation in the community has risen. This reflects the significant improvements that have been made and which are continuing. Northcote is without question a school that is 'on the up':

- in many key respects the headteacher is highly respected;
- staff and pupil morale are rising;
- the governing body is effective; the buildings and learning environment continue to be improved;
- strong emphasis is placed on all pupils' achievements and outcomes - and not only academic successes.

The school is a thriving, positive environment in which to work or study, and the ease with which it is able to make good appointments indicates its increasing attraction both within the Borough and beyond. An analysis of attendance, exclusions, reading age, examinations and post-16 take-up, shows positive gains. The number of pupils on roll continues to rise; an extra 34 children entered the school in 1996/7 and the number staying on post-16 has risen from just over 8 per cent in 1994 to 38 per cent in 1995. Sixth form numbers have increased from 22 to 53 and there are plans to expand further.

The contrast between the school just after it was inspected and deemed to be requiring special measures, and exactly one year later is clear from Figure 1 (attached at end of

case study). This was produced by the school for a training day at the beginning of the Spring term, 1995.

So what did the inspection report say? In what ways was the school 'failing' to provide its pupils with an acceptable standard of education and what were the reactions to its findings?

THE OFSTED REPORT

The inspection report listed 12 main areas in which the school was failing to provide appropriately for its pupils. Issues identified included: standards of achievement, teaching and learning issues, examination results, truancy, vandalism, planning and management, health and safety, and buildings. The two last concerns, particularly whether the school was a safe place, tended to dominate in initial press coverage. In a sense this made it easier for the headteacher to distil a response. The headteacher, who had been in post for less than a term, had always tried hard to communicate well with parents. In its report to parents on the main findings of the inspection, the school included some artist's impressions giving the parents a snapshot of what was planned. The buildings were at the time in very poor condition and there had been talk of the possibility of the school's closure. As a result little had been done; consequently the school was not only in a state of disrepair but there were numerous health and safety issues that needed addressing immediately.

Reactions to the report

The initial reactions to the inspection report varied. Amongst the staff there was some transfer of blame and a degree of disbelief. Some teachers did not trust the report's findings, feeling that the issue of closure was involved. Others accepted the main findings and wanted to do something about them. The headteacher's view was that it was a brave report by an LEA team inspecting its own school. Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) were on site to monitor the conduct of the inspection and some members of the school community felt that this may have played a part in the decision to fail the school.

For the new headteacher the inspection provided a comprehensive audit of the school. For him, there were few surprises and many of the inspectors' findings corresponded with his own observations and conclusions. He saw the inspection as providing a detailed snapshot with clear evidence of how the school was working at a particular time and a useful basis for an action plan. The report acted as a powerful catalyst for change. The matters requiring attention were clearly specified and the main areas for development outlined in Figure 2 (attached at the end of the case study) were based on a careful analysis of the report.

The reaction of parents was mixed - they were obviously concerned about the school and by association the children being labelled in this way. They needed considerable reassurance that things would change quickly and the headteacher was prepared to promise this. Parents needed to be confident that the school would deliver, but the headteacher and staff too needed confidence in their ability to do so. The inspectors' findings had been a major blow to the staff's esteem and professionalism. The pupils were reported to have been traumatised by the whole affair and a siege mentality prevailed initially.

The headteacher and chair of governors issued a press statement expressing their commitment and support for Northcote and outlining the plans to improve the school, particularly the need to address the immediate issues of the buildings and health and safety. In their view they 'took the bull by the horns' and worked hard 'to get the parents on our side' and to maintain a positive attitude towards the school. It was at this time that the phrase 'the new Northcote', with the mission statement 'Excellence for Everyone' was coined. The report to the parents was forward-looking and full of positive messages. It stated that the school welcomed the inspection because it provided information about what precisely was needed to progress. Parents reacted well to this and the booklet and the termly 'good news' newsletters certainly helped to allay any fears or concerns.

The school felt that it planned as well as it could in anticipation of media coverage but this was hard because national interest in Northcote as the first school deemed failing by an OFSTED inspection was great. The school's situation was particularly 'hot' news for two days but the interest of the media continues. The school still features regularly in both the national and local press. When Northcote came off special measures in November 1995 local press reports were positive.

The governing body was very aware of the financial difficulties in the school which had been the subject of much discussion. They were far less certain of what was going on in the classroom and so their reaction to the inspectors' findings was initially one of surprise. But they were quick to acknowledge the extent of their responsibilities and reacted positively. This was helped by a change of chair, who, with the headteacher, set about galvanising the governing body around the action plan.

The LEA responded to the failure of one of its schools by one of its own OFSTED teams by setting up a working group which included the Chief Education Officer (CEO) and governors from Northcote. This group played an important role in the school's improvement programme and provided necessary support and resources.

THE PROCESS OF IMPROVEMENT

The school was the first in the country to be identified as 'failing' and the first to be removed from special measures by HMI just under two years later. So how was such a

feat achieved? What did the school have to do and what assistance, if any, was needed?

Involving the community

Managing the aftermath of the inspection was critically important and the headteacher took the view that any serious attempt to 'turn' the school around could not succeed without the involvement of the whole community. The approach to informing the parents about the findings has already been mentioned - parents needed to be 'on-board'. And there was a need to lift the morale and commitment of the whole community. This would be difficult but was crucial to success. The original post-OFSTED action plan therefore included such things as sporting initiatives and activities that involved the community and encouraged adults into the school. For example, governors and parents became part of a very successful family literacy project. Fifty-four adults have become involved in this scheme, working with their own children or others, and the school has recently been awarded a quality mark by the Basic Skills Agency for this initiative.

The headteacher felt that this focus on the community had had a powerful effect and was keenly aware of how difficult it would have been to achieve anything in isolation from it. He commented:

'You've got to shift parents' perceptions. And where you are bowled a very difficult ball which can only reinforce negative perceptions, you've got to take it head on and try and shift it. You shift it in all sort of ways , for example, by communications, by talking to the 550 pupils day by day and going out and meeting people. Also you challenge it more directly in terms of what you're doing, how you portray the school and so on.'

Effective leadership and management

The headteacher's active role in the community was important but was just as active, visible and available in school. His influence on staff and pupils was highly significant. It would be wrong to underestimate the role of the headteacher in Northcote's success. The headteacher had taken up post only a few months before the inspection, from a predecessor who had remained at the school for over 20 years. But during his brief tenure, he had been able to re-motivate and inspire the staff. Talk to any teacher, pupil, governor or parent at Northcote and it will not be long before the leadership qualities of the headteacher and his key role in developing the school community are mentioned.

The headteacher has led by example and even the pupils commented on how nothing was too much trouble for him. But he would be the first to admit that the school's achievements must be seen as a team effort which was only possible through the outstandingly hard work and dedication of both staff and pupils. Where he led, others followed, but he also enabled staff with leadership roles at all levels in the school to

undertake these roles effectively. Like all effective leaders, he wanted to surround himself with good people. This he did in a number of ways.

The inspection report pointed to the inadequacies of the management structure and the lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities. So the staff structure had to be changed and a more effective structure put in place as quickly as possible if progress was to be made. As in most schools requiring special measures, there were changes of staff. The head and governing body refused to duck any issues regarding staff under-performance or redundancy. The headteacher tried 'to back winners where possible'. There were some internal promotions and a small number of staff were persuaded to leave, made redundant or found other jobs. Some decisions were painful but staffing issues were resolved.

The school reorganised its pastoral system and six new faculties have replaced a rather inefficient and cumbersome departmental structure. This has enabled curriculum areas which came out reasonably well from the inspection and selected individuals to be given greater responsibility. The headteacher wished to build on the pockets of good practice identified.

The new senior management team was made up of the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and two senior teachers. Each has taken on specific roles such as policy development, the pastoral system, SEN, assessment, curriculum and post-16 education. The headteacher remarked that he was delighted with the team's progress and that of the middle managers. He considered he had been very fortunate because the school had the necessary talent there and was now realising its potential more effectively.

The headteacher recruited several excellent new teachers and was able to get the new structure in place by September 1994. This was achieved through much hard work and both the headteacher and the chair of governors felt that this strategy had been of great benefit to the school.

The role of the LEA and other agencies

The LEA and other bodies also played an important role in the improvement process. For example, the Borough devised an action plan which specified where officers and other support with regard, for example, to staffing and buildings, would be available. A group of LEA officers, school staff and governors met frequently during the term following publication of the report. This group ceased to function when there was a change of CEO but by then it had its own momentum. It was a useful forum where the action plans both of the school and the LEA could be brought together. The school and the LEA wanted to collaborate in producing their action plans, so that both knew precisely what was in each. The LEA was accountable for its action plan, as was the school, and in the headteacher's view this arrangement had worked well. For example,

the LEA invested £240k in the school to dismantle the redundant and dangerous wing and to create or refurbish accommodation comprising a new music room, science laboratory, staffroom, toilets and canteen. Interestingly, pupils from the School's Council were involved in the planning of these developments. As a result the environment and ethos of the school have improved significantly.

The school's link inspector from the LEA was part of the original inspection team, and having expressed some initial concerns, staff too, subsequently acknowledged this as having been a correct decision. The headteacher saw the role as crucial; the link inspector was said to be always available, offering a second opinion and helping to co-ordinate the LEA's monitoring process. The close link with the LEA had created a facility for ongoing dialogue.

The headteacher also spoke positively of the assistance received from the DfEE, particularly in the development of the action plan, and referred to their genuine desire to help. Lavish praise was also given to HMI for the role that they had played. The quality of the feedback and the advice offered from the termly HMI visits was said to have been of the highest order. Northcote was visited by HMI twice in 1994 and termly in 1995, to assess the progress it had made in addressing the key issues in the OFSTED inspection report of November 1993. HMI retained a link inspector which enabled the school to benefit from a consistent overview. This link was supplemented by different expertise on different occasions. According to the headteacher it had worked extremely well and he valued highly the HMIs' professionalism.

Nevertheless, in the headteacher's view, the most tangible support had to come from the community, and the headteacher, aware that 'you can't do it alone', made a conscious effort 'to make myself well known and get the support of businesses in the catchment area'. As part of the school was in its catchment area, the headteacher has developed links with City Challenge who shared his vision for the school and its community. Similarly the Training and Enterprise Council was helpful. This holistic approach has helped to ensure that the school does not become isolated or perceived as solely responsible for developing out of 'special measures'.

The Governing Body

The wider community has been also an important source of new or additional governors. Indeed, the governing body as a whole was considered revitalised by the inspection process and by all accounts played a very significant role in helping the school to come off special measures. Before the arrival of the new headteacher, the governing body knew very little about 'the educational side of the school'. As the chair of governors explained:

'We tended to concentrate on buildings, painting the corridors, looking after the money and fending off all the LEA's documents! We had very little to do with the quality of learning.'

The headteacher explained how he was delighted with the progress made with the governing body. The new chair, a governor at the school for seven years, had helped to recruit new governors, which the school was able to do while it was under special measures. Initially, to deal with the action-planning process, the governing body created a series of six working groups instead of sub-committees, who could make recommendations rather than decisions formed around the inspection report's key issues. Six working groups, made up of governors, staff, and in some cases pupils, parents and other co-optees, focused on six key issues, some of which the OFSTED inspectors' key issues had grouped (see Figure 3 attached at the end of the case study). The remit of each working group was to produce an action plan based on the key issue for which it was responsible. The professional staff completed the bulk of the writing and the groups reported back to the full governing body. They were seen to perform a most useful function and provided a good example of partnership in action.

The role of the chair of governors was crucial and the headteacher explained that there was a need for a good working relationship between the two. But all governors, not only the new ones, were sharing the workload and putting much time into the school. There had been an approximately four-fold increase in the amount of time governors were devoting to the school but the main thing was that governors could now see that they 'had something to do'. The headteacher remarked:

'The governors are aware of their responsibilities and they're not afraid to take them. They've never dodged any issues. As a head you have to encourage and engender confidence in them. There is enormous latent potential there but for many it remains latent. The key is to awaken this potential. The beauty of the OFSTED process is that if you can awaken it around a clear framework or plan of action then you can channel it so people can see what contribution they can make. They then feel more secure as they have some idea how it all fits together and they are clear about the part they can play.'

Governors do bring their own perspectives to the school, and, as the headteacher further explained, this can be most helpful:

'There are times when they might say 'I'm not sure about this or have you thought about that?' - and that's a very healthy situation to be in. They can be constructively critical. For example, we have formed a behaviour and discipline working party out of one of our key issues - we had two parent governors on this - they bring a beautifully uncluttered view to that group. It is important because it cuts through some of the constraints that professionals might have picked up en-route and gets right to the heart of the problem. It can be very useful to get two different angles on the same thing.'

The governing body has begun to focus more on the pupils' standards of achievement but, as the chair of governors explained, it is still very difficult for governors to feel that they influence curriculum and learning. He remarked:

'I think I have seen a mechanism which might assist governors to have a role here. It's not in place at Northcote yet. The head teacher and I have come up with a quality improvement programme. This will involve governors in agreeing targets with the professionals, leaving them then free to deliver them. Governors can't say we want GCSEs increased by 10 per cent and we, the governors, are going to do it. Governors should be able to discuss in the curriculum committee this kind of question; do you think that is a reasonable expectation and, if so, what do you, the professionals, need to do and can we link this back to financial planning? Governors can agree with staff what is the best way forward or the best use of resources. The governing body now feels it can influence some aspects of school life - as do parents.'

The governors' knowledge of the school was reported to be 'first class'. They offered a lay perspective which could be exceedingly helpful. But staff and pupils had to change their attitudes and beliefs about the roles of governors, to appreciate the lay perspective and its real value to the school.

Changing the Culture

A shift in culture was reported to have occurred on other fronts too, particularly in relation to learning and teaching and the monitoring of classroom practice. The school was trying to raise standards of achievement through more effective learning and teaching and a large number of developments were taking place. These are summarised in Figure 4 (attached at the end of case study) which was produced by the headteacher for a staff INSET or training day. He wanted to encapsulate all of the issues that formed part of the school's efforts to raise standards.

The school has successfully focused the majority of its activities on pupil achievements and has created a culture whereby success of all kinds is formally recognised. The new pastoral system, for example, has enabled the Head of Year to monitor achievements both of individuals and form-groups and to award incentive points for such things as completion of coursework, good behaviour and attitude. The school has managed to inculcate a culture of learning where academic and other success was not frowned upon by the peer group. The pastoral system and the school's united and consistent approach to discipline and behaviour are widely recognised as crucial in raising standards. Until the issue of pupil behaviour was addressed successfully it was difficult, if not impossible, to guarantee that learning was actually taking place in classrooms. The focus of attention moved clearly from behaviour to achievement.

The previous poor levels of achievement were partly a result of the low expectations set for the pupils. In addition, the special needs work of the school had caused particular

concern. The appointment of a new Head of Special Needs, who had been heavily involved in the introduction of the parents and pupil reading scheme, was a significant factor in addressing this particular weakness.

Monitoring of the work of both staff and pupils has now become much more commonplace in the school. Middle managers have accepted that a key part of their role was to monitor the work of their faculty and teachers have become used to other adults visiting their classes. Teachers appear much clearer about lines of accountability both to themselves and to each other; they are mutually supportive. Most schemes of work, policy documents and handbooks have been rewritten and processes and procedures agreed by staff. Northcote staff were considered dedicated and always to give their best; but there had never been clear structures or goals to work towards. The headteacher was seen to put these in place.

Pupils' work, including homework, is now carefully monitored and there is a regular study support club, and a homework diary. The school has also begun targeting borderline children, who meet regularly with senior staff, who check their work and set new targets. All these activities have helped to change the culture of the school towards one of high expectations, where different kinds of success are valued and recognised.

The quality of teaching has also improved significantly. After their revisit HMI considered it satisfactory or better in four-fifths of the lessons and good in more than one in five. This has been achieved by substantial professional development and training and by building on and disseminating the good practice that the OFSTED inspectors and, later, HMI identified. The National Curriculum, too, was no longer perceived as a strait jacket and staff have felt more in control, using teaching materials they felt would engage the children and promote learning. The staff are keen to raise expectations and to become more academic in their teaching orientation.

A key issue facing the school was how to maintain the momentum and continue to develop positively once the pressure of requiring special measures had been removed. Everybody had worked so hard over the previous two years; there was bound to be a slight easing-off immediately after the school was given "the all-clear". The headteacher, senior staff and governing body were very aware of this and aimed to continue the good work through the new action plan which the school had now to produce (see Figure 5 attached the end of the case study).

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

It will be clear from the above account that a number of positive factors were important in enabling the school to come off the special measures register and to do so within the two-year time period. The most important of these can be summarised as follows:

- * Effective leadership

The leadership was optimistic, positive, outward-looking and clear-sighted. The style of management was open and participative. Leaders knew the capabilities of the staff and were able to optimise abilities and encourage teamwork. They had a clear vision for the school.

* An emphasis on achievement, target-setting and high expectations

This was expressed in a variety of ways but the monitoring and improvement of pupils' outcomes were important factors. The school culture was achievement-driven and there was an expectation that pupils, indeed all members of the school community, should strive to do their best.

* A professional and committed workforce

Staff were dedicated, mutually supportive and hard-working. They were united behind a well-respected headteacher and management team and were determined to put matters right. The teachers' professionalism and sense of worth were revitalised. The school was operating as one, with no divisions or split between the 'managed' and the 'managers'. Everybody was 'rowing in the same direction'.

* Effective governance

The governing body was deeply involved in the school and supported the headteacher actively. It was aware of the crucial role it had to play, particularly with regard to school improvement.

* Involving the community and other bodies

Such rapid progress could not have been made without the support of the wider community. By involving the local community, the LEA and other agencies, the school achieved much more than it would have done by 'going it alone'.

* Giving the stakeholders a voice

Parents and pupils were both involved in a number of ways in the school. They responded by demonstrating a growing commitment and loyalty to the school and what it stood for.

* Additional resources

A major refurbishment and building programme did much to resolve health and safety issues and helped create a learning environment of which the pupils and staff were proud.

Placement under special measures meant that the school had to put things into effect quickly when probably it would have liked more time to deliberate. Would it adopt a more leisurely approach to change now that HMI are no longer visiting the school? The school's management considered any 'performance dip' was an understandable but temporary phenomenon. Staff not only felt under less pressure when special measures were removed but enjoyed working in a school that was making such rapid progress. The general view was that there was little chance of the school ever having to suffer again the ignominy of being labelled 'failing'. Rather, the challenge now was to make Northcote one of the best, if not the best school in the area, and to achieve its avowed aim of 'Excellence for Everyone'.

Figure 1

THE NORTHCOTE SCHOOL

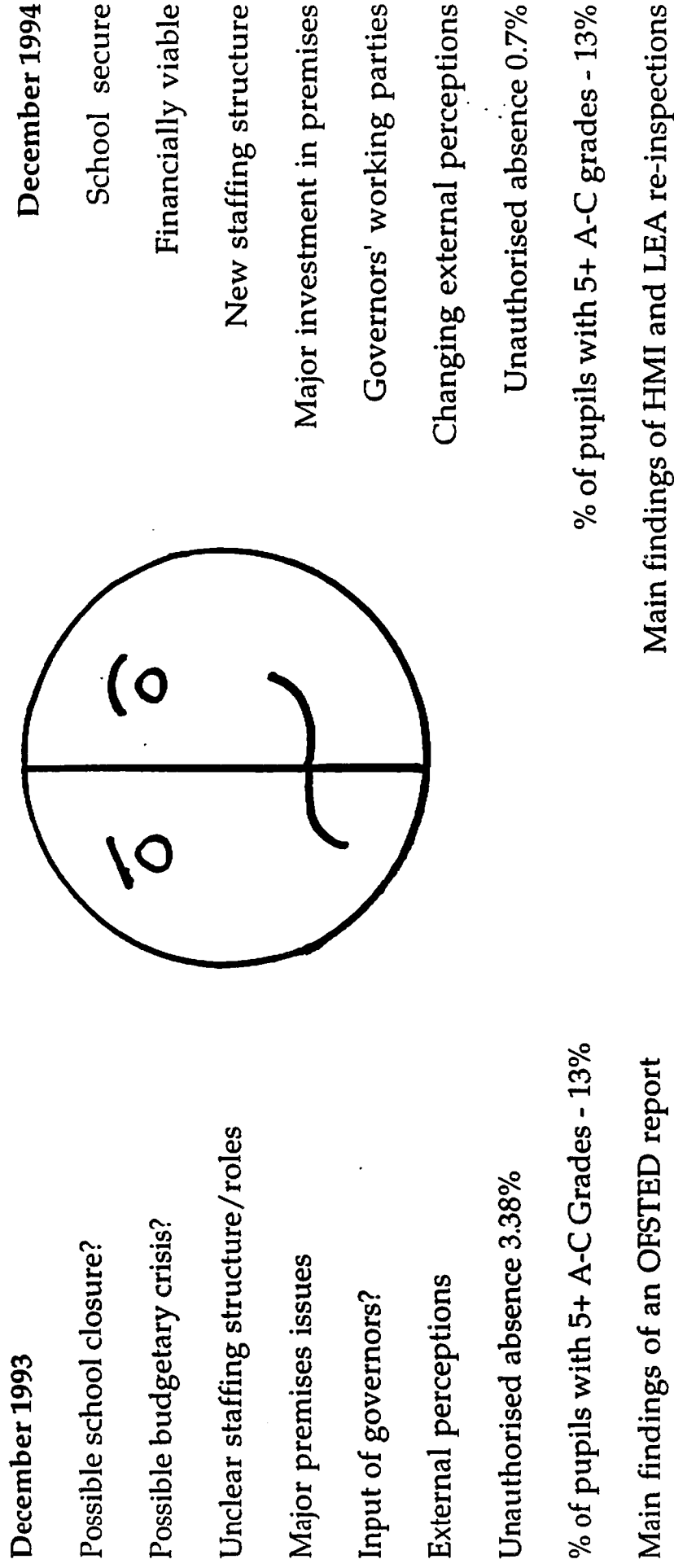


Figure 2

NORTHICOTE SCHOOL:
AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- **Planning/schemes of work**
- **Match of task to ability**
- **Pupils' understanding of what they were doing**
- **Pupils' development of their own ideas and confidence to express them**
- **Teachers' intentions and their link to activities**
- **Teachers' expectations and increased pace**
- **Teacher intervention**
- **The link between assessment, planning and future learning**
- **Job descriptions**
- **Management framework**
- **Monitoring and co-ordination of the curriculum**

Figure 3

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION: NORTHICOTE

- **Governors should review their planning mechanisms especially with regard to finance and the monitoring of general policy outcomes.**
- **The school should institute consistent and formal monitoring of pupils' performance.**
- **The organisation and management of the curriculum should be reviewed with particular consideration of the arrangements for pupils with special educational needs.**
- **Arrangement for promoting attendance and good behaviour should be reviewed to achieve consistent whole school responses.**
- **The school should re-assess the manner in which it seeks to promote a commonly understood set of aims and values to support pupils' development.**
- **The management and staffing structure in the school should be reviewed to provide an efficient structure with clear lines of responsibility and defined job descriptions.**

Figure 4

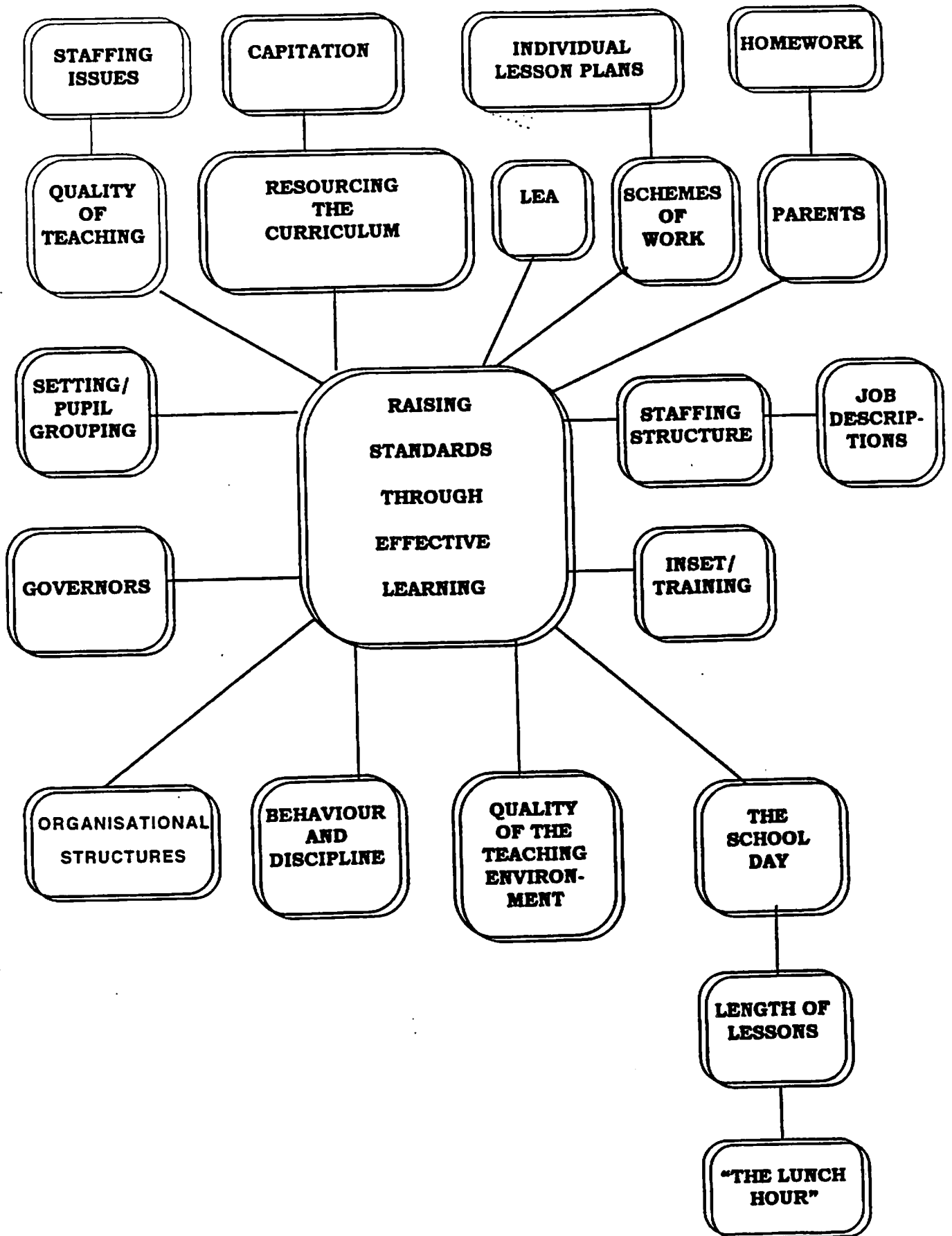


Figure 5

KEY ISSUES

In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, the senior managers and the staff need to:

- continue to raise the pupils' standards of achievement;
- maintain and support the initiatives on literacy and ensure that the development of numeracy is given appropriate priority;
- continue to improve attendance;
- continue to focus on raising the quality of teaching to improve beyond the level of being sound;
- refine further the procedures for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the quality of teaching and learning, and of pupils' achievement;
- improve the quality of provision for post-16 students and evaluate the effects of the expansion of this provision on the whole school; and
- continue to improve the site.

THE DRIVE PRIMARY SCHOOL, GATESHEAD

THE SCHOOL NOW

The Drive County Primary School is located in the Felling district of Gateshead. Unemployment in the neighbourhood is above the national average and 56 per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. None of the pupils comes from an ethnic minority background. Aged from 3 to 11 years, they predominantly live in council-owned properties in the surrounding area. Most will have attended the school's nursery unit. The time allocated to teaching each week is 20 hours for the nursery, 21 hours for Reception and Key Stage 1 and 23 hours for Key Stage 2. Levels of attendance at the school are quite high (92.3%) and no pupil has been permanently excluded in the past year. The results in the National Curriculum Assessment Tests taken in 1996 show that pupils in Key Stage 1 are likely to be achieving well below the national average, except in mathematics where their performance is in line with the national average. The majority achieves below the average on non-verbal reasoning tests.

KEY STAGE 1	Teacher Assessment		Test results	
% LEVEL 2	The Drive CPS	National	The Drive CPS	National
Reading	53	79	54	78
Writing	46	77	46	80
Speaking	54	85	-	-
Maths	79	77	78	
Science	69	84	-	-

KEY STAGE 2	Teacher Assessment		Test results	
% LEVEL 4	The Drive CPS	National	The Drive CPS	National
English	38	56	50	48
Maths	56	54	56	44
Science	56	64	63	70

In the results for Key Stage 2, the picture is rather different, suggesting that the Drive pupils are performing better than average both in English and mathematics test results and in the teachers' assessment of mathematics.

The school's motto, introduced since the inspection, is 'Learn and Grow.' This symbolises the school's new emphasis upon high-quality teaching and effective learning for all pupils. The headteacher and staff work in an active partnership with governors and the LEA. Parents and pupils express enthusiasm for the learning

opportunities the school provides for pupils and optimism about the future of the school. The hard work of the headteacher, the staff and the governors has clearly changed the reputation of the school in the community. The Drive is now a moving school. It is a happy place where the achievement of the pupils is celebrated and the headteacher is seen as the leading professional. Staff morale is high and parents are involved and supportive. The governing body works effectively and efficiently. The buildings and the external environment are safe places for children. Overall, the school is now a thriving, positive and innovative place in which to learn.

THE OFSTED REPORT

The school was identified as failing when it was inspected in January 1994. The inspectors found standards to be satisfactory and, in some respects, good in the nursery. But in Key Stage 1 standards were judged to be in line with national expectations only in science and art, and were judged as below average in all subjects in Key Stage 2.

The Inspection Report stated also that:

- the leadership and management of the school were weak and that planning was poor and inconsistent;
- the budget, though adequate, was poorly managed and failed to meet the school's priorities;
- curriculum policies were poor and staff responsibilities were unclear, with the result that the requirements of the National Curriculum were not met;
- the quality of teaching was generally unsatisfactory and in some cases poor; monitoring and evaluative procedures were lacking
- teaching time was used ineffectively and assessment information was not used to plan further tasks; and
- too little emphasis was given to the spiritual and cultural development of the pupils.

On the positive side, the inspectors found that the social and moral development of pupils was promoted adequately, that teachers cared about the pupils' welfare and that standards of behaviour were generally satisfactory.

The inspection team identified a number of key issues for action by the school community. These included five major challenges:

- Imposing effective leadership;

- Ensuring adequate coverage of the National Curriculum;
- Implementing detailed schemes of work for all subjects;
- Establishing a series of management systems;
- Dealing urgently with all matters of health and safety.

THE REACTIONS TO THE REPORT

The news about failure was circulated in the local newspaper. Parents were surprised but did not manifest any obvious signs of panic or discontent. The staff were shocked and initially considered the decision to be unfair. The headteacher agreed to take early retirement at the end of the academic year and spent from April to August on sick leave.

The LEA moved rapidly to appoint a new headteacher. The advertisement appeared in late February 1994; interviews were held in April, and the new headteacher began work on the 3 May. As the deputy headteacher was also on sick leave from soon after the inspection until she took early retirement on 23 January 1995, the LEA seconded two successive acting deputy headteachers for this period.

Prior to the inspection, the governors had played little part in the running and development of the school. They had not been encouraged to be pro-active, as all decisions had been dominated by the headteacher. They were initially surprised by the decision to fail the school but accepted the judgement and set about working with the Deputy Director of the Local Education Authority to draw up an action plan. The plan was sent to the Department for Education and Employment in April 1994, shortly after the new headteacher had been appointed but before she started work at the school. It included endorsement of a new mission statement for the school, as well as a declaration that "...the school could, once again, become a school of quality and high standards..."

The format of the plan was clear and simple:

- each action statement was arranged so that it related to one of the key five actions identified by the inspectors;
- each action related to a 'person responsible' and starting and completion dates were specified;
- the resources necessary for each action were itemised;

- success criteria were indicated; and
- the responsibilities for monitoring the progress of each action were stated.

The school remained in special measures for twenty-nine months until it was removed following a sixth re-inspection in June 1996.

THE PROCESS OF IMPROVEMENT

The process of improvement has been achieved by systematic change and development. All change has been based on the principal goals of improving the effectiveness of teaching and thereby the quality of learning at the school.

The key to the school's success appears to reside in a multi-layered approach to school improvement. A shared belief among teachers, governors, parents and the LEA that it was possible to turn the school around clearly assisted this process. The core components of recovery and improvement appeared to be:

- The involvement of the governing body;
- Early support from the LEA;
- Effective leadership and management by the headteacher;
- Developing and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning;
- Staff development and training;
- The establishment of a positive learning culture and school environment.

Involvement of the governors and the LEA

The absence or virtual withdrawal of senior management meant that LEA officers frequently assumed the leadership of the school. This also left the drawing-up of the Action Plan to the Governing Body tutored by the LEA. In the process of formulating and refining this action plan and in co-opting new members, including an international authority on school effectiveness from Newcastle University, the governing body re-established its own function within the school. The action plan which it produced was of a high quality and the willingness of governors to accept responsibility undoubtedly helped in the process of recovery. For the first time the governing body was able to offer firm strategic direction to the staff of the school. This active role could have led to difficulties, had the headteacher been less secure. As it was, the new headteacher and

the governing body formed a strong partnership and were able to provide clear accountability and leadership. Staff and parents welcomed this partnership.

The need to appoint a new deputy headteacher provided the opportunity for the headteacher and the governors to work together in a rigorous process of selection. This helped to ensure that they made a high-calibre appointment who would actively support the improvement process within the school. Interestingly, the person appointed was an existing member of staff who had joined the school shortly after the inspection.

The LEA was highly supportive throughout the period of change, despite the fact that its initial nominations for new governors for the school were not deemed to be acceptable to the Secretary of State. As well as taking a key role in the formulation of the action plan, it dealt swiftly with the appointment of a new headteacher. On her advice a series of inspections, parallel to those mounted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate, was abandoned and replaced by more positive, less formal feedback and encouragement.

Effective leadership and management

Before the OFSTED inspection it was widely acknowledged by staff, governors and parents that the leadership in the school was weak. The inspection report endorsed this view and highlighted this factor as a major problem for the school. The report also revealed that there were severe inadequacies in the various mechanisms for management for the school. The appointment of a new headteacher provided an opportunity to overhaul the whole organisation of the school.

The new headteacher made an immediate impact upon the school in several ways. A senior management team (SMT) was created. This gave a visible message that in future a new approach to management had been adopted and that leadership was to be shared. The SMT comprised the headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher and a curriculum co-ordinator, who subsequently became the new deputy headteacher. Each SMT member had specific roles and responsibilities such as policy development, staff development and assessment within the team.

The headteacher also carried out interviews with all members of staff in order to gain an insight into their responses, their perspectives, and any anxieties surrounding the inspection findings. These interviews provided opportunities for staff to feel that the headteacher had listened to them and that they were valued. They also enabled the headteacher to judge the potential capacity of staff to change.

The headteacher sought to implement the action plan by giving responsibility to working parties, consisting of staff and governors, for specific areas of development and change. These working parties reinforced the sense of shared responsibility for change and gave teachers, who had previously felt powerless, a sense of direction, purpose and, most importantly, ownership in the progress of the school.

Some staff were encouraged to move into different areas of teaching responsibility which offered them new teaching challenges. The headteacher provided personal support to such colleagues by teaching alongside them herself. Her frequent monitoring and observation of class teaching made staff more aware of the variable quality of their own teaching. Where staff were not performing adequately, the headteacher's response was to turn to professional development and training rather than to blame or criticise individuals. Her style of leadership was firm but encouraging, and her own skill as a teacher led staff to respect and emulate her.

The headteacher's positive attitudes and well-developed skills were key factors in transforming the school. Staff were inspired and motivated by her approach and example. The teachers felt that the firm and purposeful leadership of the SMT had made the school "a different place" and that its members had "turned the school around by enthusiasm and example".

Developing and monitoring high-quality teaching and learning

Previously teachers had worked in isolation with little idea of how their teaching contributed to the overall quality of learning and teaching in the school. The majority of changes and new initiatives introduced to the school focused directly on improving the quality of learning and teaching. From the whole-school development plan, through the schemes of work, to individual lesson plans, the central aims were to improve pupils' learning and to raise their levels of achievement. An important initial step in this endeavour was to encourage teachers to work together.

The absence of any whole-school ethos and common standards of acceptability before the OFSTED inspection meant that pupils' work had been highly variable in both quantity and quality. For this reason, the staff's discussion of standards focused initially on their expectations of pupils in the light of their results in work assessed in a variety of ways in the core subjects and in standardised verbal and non-verbal reasoning tests. Teachers worked in groups, sharing views about what were acceptable standards of performance at different ages and abilities while compiling the levelled school assessment portfolio. This resulted in staff creating a set of shared norms, values and expectations.

Working groups were also set up to plan different areas of the curriculum and to devise schemes of work to ensure curriculum coverage. In addition, the headteacher appointed specialist subject co-ordinators to develop curriculum continuity, progression and coherence across the different year groups. A considerable amount of her time and energy was devoted to training and working alongside the co-ordinators.

At times all these changes proved difficult for teachers to accept but the enthusiastic support of the headteacher helped ensure that mechanisms for curriculum planning and

co-ordination were implemented successfully . These mechanisms have been translated into two-week schedules used by each teacher. This detailed level of planning is accompanied by a rigorous system of self-assessment. The plans act as a catalyst for change but have also proved to be a powerful means of self-review and self-evaluation.

Other mechanisms for systematic school-wide monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning have also been put in place. Regular review has become a feature of school life. Evidence is collected from a wide variety of sources to inform the headteacher, governors, teachers and parents about the progress of individual pupils. The school monitors not only outcomes such as test scores, but also processes such as particular aspects of the work of the teacher in the classroom. The openness created by the headteacher within the school ensures that such review is seen not as threatening but rather as a necessary part of sustaining improvement. A new system of appraisal is designed primarily to provide teachers with feedback and to assist their professional development.

A whole-school assessment policy was devised by the teachers to improve the flow of consistent information between both year groups and different subject areas. Its clear principles have been translated into regular classroom procedures and practices. The new assessment system incorporates a record of achievement which is used as a means of sharing criteria for judging children's work. It has been used effectively by the school to focus on target-setting and review.

Staff development and training

The inspection report highlighted weaknesses in teaching across the school. To respond to this, the headteacher gave priority to staff development and training. This focused primarily on improving teaching practices and on extending teaching repertoires.

A number of strategies were used. First, staff were encouraged to attend INSET sessions which focused on subject teaching in particular. It was evident from the report that the teaching in core subjects needed serious attention in some classes. Second, staff were encouraged by the headteacher to visit other schools and observe teachers in different contexts. This strategy worked well and was appreciated by teachers who felt it extended their view of teaching. Third, the headteacher taught some classes and modelled different teaching methods and approaches. Staff were encouraged to observe these sessions and to discuss with her the different teaching strategies and techniques used. Last, teachers were encouraged to team-teach and to observe each other's lessons. This partnership approach was an effective form of professional development and led to greater confidence and competence in teaching.

The investment in staff development proved to be a most valuable resource in achieving and sustaining school improvement. The strategies instigated by the headteacher encouraged teachers to talk about teaching and to share different perceptions with each other. Structured INSET also contributed importantly to improvements in teaching, as it resulted in experimentation and the refinement of different teaching approaches. Most importantly, the headteacher believed that staff could improve and demonstrated high levels of trust in the staff at all times.

Producing a positive school environment and learning culture

Several important factors contributed to a change in the school's culture. This change was described by teachers and parents in terms of a more positive environment and "a place where learning happens". The external environment of the school was improved substantially by the removal of a dangerous earth slope, by the re-design of the play area, and by the incorporation of outdoor seating for pupils. The involvement of pupils in the design of the play area was important in demonstrating that they too could influence positive change.

The LEA provided extra financial help to assist the school with re-decoration and some refurbishment. In addition, teachers worked hard to produce imaginative and colourful displays. Teaching staff made enormous efforts to make their classroom a stimulating and interesting place for pupils to learn. The high-quality of pupils' work was evidenced in several displays throughout the school.

Changes to the external and internal physical environment were complemented by changes in relationships between pupils and staff. The introduction of a clear behaviour policy meant that teacher-pupil relationships were less fraught because discipline procedures were clear to all. A merit scheme was introduced to promote praise as the means to positive pupil control and good behaviour. Parental involvement in the school also increased quite dramatically and several community projects were developed.

Changes in the internal and external conditions of the school resulted in a cultural change at the school. Externally, support from the LEA, governors and parents proved instrumental in the maintenance and development work of the school. Internally, improvement in conditions such as pupils' behaviour, teaching quality, pupils' attitudes to learning and staff development all contributed to the improved quality of learning and teaching. The school has moved from a failing position where staff relationships were poor, leadership was weak and morale was low to a position where confidence, trust and high standards have contributed to improved learning and teaching.

The key themes

Certain key themes emerging from this study include:

- The need for early intervention;
- The need for leadership for improvement;
- Expectations and trust as drivers of change; and
- Inspection posing a challenge or encouraging dependency.

The need for early intervention

This case study demonstrates the need to intervene in the management of schools with serious weaknesses. With hindsight it is clear that when earlier visits by HMI and an LEA inspection team had 'rung warning bells', insufficient efforts were made to support the school. At that time, however, there was no generally accepted policy for dealing with a 'failing' school and certainly few precedents of schools in such circumstances having been threatened with closure. Today, in a different climate where there is more public discussion of inspection reports and a much 'harder-nosed' interpretation of accountability, the LEA would be likely to intervene at the first sign of serious difficulties. Furthermore, the present governing body would also have a different conception of its role, and of the workload that such a role involves, and would be much more likely to demand that the LEA should do something about the management of a school in difficulties. That these things did not happen in 1994 is regrettable but not surprising, given the prevailing assumptions and attitudes about the management of schools.

The need for leadership for improvement

The key to the improvement strategy for this school was the appointment of a new headteacher. The school was lucky to attract an application from a very experienced candidate who had the necessary personal and professional skills to do the job. The new headteacher realised that there was a need for leadership to be distributed throughout the staff - as well as for the governing body to have a role in the management of the school. That said, it is also abundantly clear that the headteacher has been at the heart of change and improvement in the school.

Expectations and trust as drivers of change

Although there have been changes in the school staff, it is highly significant that the bulk of the teaching body has remained in post at the school. They have changed their

practice and have thus demonstrated that they had the capacity to develop skills in the new climate of learning that the headteacher had created. This is important evidence for school improvement: change is possible.

This case study cannot, by itself, justify the DfEE's policy on failing schools but it lends considerable credence to it. Without the routine inspection the Drive might have been permitted to continue on its path of failure for some considerable time. Special measures brought up short all those involved with the school and made them face the reality of the situation. They did so and, as a direct result, the school has improved beyond all recognition. The policy has worked and those responsible take proper pleasure in its success.

Inspection: posing a challenge or encouraging dependency

The policy of special measures, however, can have an associated danger: school staffs can be made dependent on external judges. Staff who have been found to be failing, especially when this judgement comes as a surprise, may lose confidence and become deskilled. They can learn to rely overmuch on the feedback of the returning inspectors, yet scrutiny of follow-up reports on the progress of this school over its twenty-nine months under special measures shows evidence of inconsistency in some judgements. Such instances can hardly be challenged by the staff or governors because the inspectors have absolute power over the future of the school. Arguing with the judgements may lead only to an extension of the time under special measures. In this case, because the governing body appointed such an experienced headteacher with no previous connections with the failing school, she was sufficiently strong to avoid the dependency trap.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the school's pupils in the National Curriculum Key Stage Tests are now reasonable and seem likely to improve. Both the attitude towards learning and the behaviour of pupils are positive. Staff have had to come to terms with a hard lesson but have done so with remarkably good grace, and now demonstrate many of the skills of accomplished teachers. The headteacher is a gifted and highly experienced professional. The governing body has developed a positive role and works well with the LEA. Pupils and their parents are positive about the changes and believe in the ability of the school to continue to nurture talent and to inculcate sound values.

FRANCIS ASKEW PRIMARY SCHOOL, HULL

THE SCHOOL NOW

Francis Askew School is a large primary school with 460 pupils and a nursery class with 104 part-time places. It is situated in an area of high social deprivation in south-west Hull. Unemployment in the area is well above the national average and 44% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals.

When you visit Francis Askew, you feel that the school exudes positive energy. The pupils talk animatedly of their school and work with pride. When asked what they would say to a potential new pupil they reply: "You'll make more friends. It's a good school. It's improved." Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs) results have improved and parents feel that the children are more interested in what they are doing at school. They are not coming home saying they are not doing anything. The pupils are perceived as much happier; they display a more positive attitude to school and over 95% wear the official uniform. Displays of pupils' work are attractive, purposeful and of good quality, and the pupils take an interest in and appreciate them. Pupils are viewed as considerably less aggressive, and the number of bullying incidents has declined, although there are still isolated incidents of aggression. On a recent educational visit, the museum curator remarked that it was the best-behaved school group who had been there.

Staff are aware that discussion about learning and teaching is now more frequent, more substantial and more valuable to them than before. The atmosphere in the staffroom is seen as different: "We discuss educational matters, laugh and joke. There are no cliques, we feel at ease, and there's no backbiting". Time is set aside for 'staff minutes' three times a week and staff consider communications to have improved considerably. They also work together closely, and are more involved than before in INSET after school. Non-teaching staff and governors are also invited to attend INSET sessions. Teachers describe themselves as happier. One, who saw herself as a loner before — "I wasn't prepared to give" — feels that her own teaching practice has changed because she has become more enthusiastic. Parents, governors and pupils also see staff as more friendly, "Now there's always a smile".

Relationships with governors are viewed as excellent; governors "pop in regularly", and people are on first-name terms. Parents, who used to wait outside the school, feel their presence is valued, that problems are sorted out immediately, and that they are increasingly involved in education. They believe, however, that the school still suffers from a poor image in the wider community and that the school needs to continue to "sell itself".

Policy decisions are adhered to and followed through, and while "hard and fast decisions have to be made, everybody has a right to have a say. We have heated debates but we respect each other". There appears to be a secure structure within

which people can work. Planning and the evaluation of the delivery of the plans are viewed as greatly improved both within and across phases. Several staff commented on how hard teachers are working, "a lot of the staff work a heck of a lot of hours", "they are tired out", but they also feel a greater sense of being "more focused on the issues". There is also a feeling that while some people still complain, people are now supported by each other and the headteacher. Since going into special measures the school has celebrated pupil and staff successes on a regular basis, especially when the school came out of special measures after 13 months.

There is no sense of complacency. Standards are viewed as still too low and able children are considered to be underachieving. There is a general feeling that expectations of pupils, parents and teachers need to be raised even further. The school continues to be concerned about pupils in the current Year 5 and, particularly, Year 6, as their early years' experience at the school occurred before the OFSTED inspection.

There is a hope that within three years all the hard work will have shown through, and the school will be a centre of excellence and a learning school:

"We will turn out children who are literate, who can question life situations from their own knowledge",

"We'll have improved from being the bottom of the pile to being as far up the ladder as you can get",

"I'm sorry my children will be leaving",

"It's progressive, up and coming, a school for the next century and will move with the times".

Moreover, there is the expectation that some staff will also have moved on to take on senior management positions elsewhere.

There is more confidence and momentum from within the school, although there is also a sense that "we haven't done everything". Some staff comment that some colleagues are very stressed, and still suffer from low self esteem. Some staff also question whether the pace can be maintained. The eight pre-OFSTED staff who have remained at the school and their more recently arrived colleagues are continuing to develop their working relationships, in particular through working together in phase teams.

The school is now considered a good place to be. One of the non-teaching assistants, who was there before and after the inspection, agreed that she would be happy for her own child to come to the school, noting: "It's a good atmosphere . . . one of the best schools I've worked in . . . you are made to feel welcome. It's really friendly. Before I used to come because it was a job, but now I come because I like it".

THE SCHOOL BEFORE THE INSPECTION

The OFSTED picture of Francis Askew School was bleak; unwelcoming to pupils, parents and staff alike and with an atmosphere that was not conducive either to good quality teaching or positive learning. Staff were isolated in their individual classrooms, unable to share or learn from each other professionally, with several uncertain about what and how to teach. As one teacher observed "there were those of us who were screaming about what was going on". Because leadership from the headteacher had been ineffective, none of the 'enabling structures' characteristic of effective schools were in place. Meetings were held but lacked clear purpose, management responsibilities at all levels either did not exist or were unclear, and there was no effective planning, record-keeping or assessment systems in use. Staff lacked a shared view of what good-quality teaching and learning looked like. This situation was reflected in the findings and key points for action in the OFSTED inspection report.

THE OFSTED REPORT

The report listed eight key findings as evidence of why the school was failing to provide a satisfactory standard of education:

- Standards of achievement varied greatly within and between subjects.
- Variability in teacher expectations of pupils.
- A significant minority of pupils at KS1 and 2 were underachieving.
- The uneven quality of the teaching and learning.
- Lack of effective leadership.
- A fragmented curriculum.
- The need for the governing body to participate more effectively.
- Poor financial management

The positive theme throughout the report was the caring ethos of the school and the good relationships between pupils and staff.

Reactions to the report

The school was one of the first primary schools to have an OFSTED inspection and failure had never occurred to most people because, as one teacher commented, "children were not running around the school or throwing chairs". When the judgement was received, the prevailing emotion was one of disbelief and shock. Teachers were described as "stressed out" and "distraught", because most had had no idea how bad the situation was. One interviewee also saw them as worried about the security of their own jobs.

Nevertheless, a few members of staff had thought the school might be at risk in the light of the results of two previous LEA inspections. For a few staff, the OFSTED result was

not a surprise. One teacher, who had attended a course on classroom observation, felt the school was not functioning properly, in terms of leadership, organisation, keeping up with curriculum changes, cohesive procedures and in its lack of team work. Teachers were "shutting the door and getting on".

THE PROCESS OF IMPROVEMENT

Headteacher Leadership

A new headteacher was appointed to start in January 1995 after the inspection in September 1994. His leadership appears to have been and continues to be of vital significance to the process of improvement in Francis Askew. It embraces several key qualities: vision; valuing people; high expectations; modelling; empowering colleagues and developing leaders; firmness and the ability to take hard decisions; openness; involving the community; clear communication; setting up clear structures; networking; applying pressure and providing support; a proactive approach to staff recruitment; and understanding, procuring and wisely managing finance.

The new headteacher arrived with a range of strategies. As one teacher noted, "he knew what he wanted and where he was going". Another described his style as "harnessing the work in the right direction", and a third talked of "superb long-term vision. He has effective school management". Coherence from the nursery to the top of the school was emphasised. He took the teachers through the post-OFSTED action plan and clarified it for them. Working on several fronts at the same time, he has worked to make staff feel wanted and has consistently showed a positive attitude towards the school. He has "turned the budgeting upside down", locating money that had not been spent and working with governors and staff to make sensible decisions on how it might be spent on resources and the physical environment to improve the running of the school.

He himself is prepared to work extremely hard, and he expects the same of his colleagues. He is also approachable and encourages people to speak out, if they feel expectations are unreasonable. If there is a problem, "he will listen". He has drawn on teachers' strengths, and persuaded one who was considering early retirement to stay on. Praising people is a key quality noted by colleagues. They also note that he is not afraid to take hard and fast decisions.

Developing and empowering colleagues occurs through working with phase leaders to develop their observational skills, reviewing classroom practice and giving them responsibility to support new teachers. Interested staff are invited to join the senior management team meetings every week on a rotational basis, and policy development working parties have been established, giving teachers the opportunity to take on leadership roles and influence decision-making within the school. Development and empowerment includes non-teaching staff, who feel they have been given increased

responsibility, and extends to the governing body whose involvement has been a critical factor in the improvement process. The headteacher has taken time and care to ensure the governing body understands its role.

Although "he runs a tight ship", colleagues are very supportive. One viewed him as "the ideal man for the job. He has vision and foresight. He will bring conflict together in a cohesive way. It is a privilege to work with the man".

Staff changes

Staff changes have clearly impacted on the school. The most significant change was perceived to be the arrival of the new headteacher. As one person noted, "initially the impetus came from the leadership". Until then the school had been almost at a standstill. The interim was seen as a waiting time.

Since the original OFSTED inspection, eight staff have left and 13 staff have been appointed. The headteacher described using "all the strategies I could to get good people".

Very soon after his appointment, the headteacher arranged for the two-term secondment into the school of a teacher to become a phase leader and to support the two deputy headteachers. This, the second realised, was a sensitive role and he knew it was imperative not to "tread on toes". He has tried to work by exemplifying how he sees the job of a phase leader and to collaborate with other phase leaders throughout the school. At first he was perceived as a threat; he was aware that he "was used as an instrument" to bring about change. He has attempted to move colleagues' thinking forward, encouraged and supported new ideas and tried to deal with problems quickly when teachers cited them as inhibiting efforts to change. For example, the windows between classrooms and the corridor were covered with children's work because there were no display boards. When he learned of this, he insisted that display boards be ordered and fitted immediately. Reflecting back, he commented that dealing with his colleagues in the early days was the hardest thing he has ever done: "I worked on anger for two terms because the children were not getting what they should have". The headteacher asked this second to stay on, and he was subsequently appointed as third deputy headteacher.

As changes began to occur, it became clear that some teachers were having difficulties. The headteacher was clear that he wanted staff to teach effectively. Senior management expectations of staff before the OFSTED inspection had been too low. The new headteacher was asking for "staff to deliver the children's entitlement." He was insistent on the need for urgent change. As one person commented, "some didn't keep going. It was 'sink or swim'". Another described "horrendous pressure", which some people did not manage. Some staff chose to leave. Many of the staff who remained began to realise their potential for the first time. The headteacher felt the

majority of staff "thrived on the success" which the pressure to teach effectively brought. He sees recruitment of good staff as a key strategy, and a priority has been to ensure that the newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in the school are effectively supported by their phase leaders. It appears that both their professional and personal needs are given high priority. As part of the welcoming process, pupils arrange a buffet for new staff before they take up their post.

Systems and structures

A new management structure

Even before the new headteacher took up his post, he had put in place a management structure to take effect from the first day of the Spring Term 1995, when he formally started at the school. The SMT consisted of two deputy headteachers, 4 phase leaders, the SENCO and the headteacher. The SMT now comprises both original deputy headteachers as phase leaders of Phase 1 and Phase 4, the new third deputy headteacher in charge of Phase 3 and the teacher in charge of nursery and reception as head of Phase 1. Other members are the home, school and community teacher, the assessment co-ordinator and the SENCO. All phase leaders have a full-time teaching commitment, because ensuring that all senior staff are involved closely with the teaching and learning is a key component of the improvement strategy.

Roles, responsibilities and job descriptions

Not all members of staff had job descriptions and where these existed, they needed substantial revision. All teaching and non-teaching staff were given new job descriptions that reflected clearly the changed expectations and the importance of teaching and learning as the central purpose of the school. The role of the phase leader is seen as crucial to the rapid development and improvement of the quality of the teaching and learning. The 'phase' is where the actual day-to-day planning takes place. It offers a structure for teachers to share planning, assessment and record-keeping and to develop greater continuity and consistency across classes in each phase.

Meetings, systems and communications

The school had held meetings in the past but staff commented that these had been poorly organised and managed, inconclusive and ineffective. Staff generally agreed that the meetings are now enabling and supportive and do not waste people's time. Comments included: "like a breath of fresh air", "it feels like one school", and "meetings are focused and we can see a way forward". A programme of whole-staff professional development meetings each Monday, is planned on a termly basis. Initially

these were led by the headteacher or visiting external colleagues, but gradually the headteacher has encouraged members of the school staff with relevant expertise to lead them. Staff see this as a positive development. Governors are encouraged to attend, and a significant number now do so, despite other commitments.

Weekly phase meetings, occasional cross-phase meetings, weekly SMT meetings and 'Minutes' Meetings have been introduced. Communication in all aspects of school life has improved and the format of the meetings has been a key element in this process. One member of staff commented "everything that was introduced was open, discussed fully, and people at all levels were able to feel involved." The headteacher was insistent that staff had to understand what was happening and expected of them if they were to move forward together. One of the deputy headteachers who had been in post at the school for a number of years commented that the new headteacher has a "thoroughness in approach to communications and systems" which enabled the school to begin almost at once to function more effectively. Staff commented "once order came back, able teachers were able to perform well", "some staff began to blossom straight away, once the shackles were removed". The headteacher "walks the corridors" frequently "praising and rewarding". Communications with the governing body and parents have also improved and are described in a subsequent section.

Image of the school

Considerable attention has been paid to enhancing the image of the school. Visual changes were made to create a "feeling of belonging". The reception area, a focus for first impressions, was repainted and refurbished, and featured a carpeted seating-area, labelled boards of pupils' work, and immediate access to the school secretary to welcome visitors. It also made the governors feel that they were doing something that had an immediate and visible effect to support the school, in addition to the longer-term tasks they were addressing.

At the time of the OFSTED inspection, uniform was not compulsory. An emphasis on pupils' wearing the correct school uniform was an early focus, and was viewed as part of a deliberate strategy to encourage students to identify with the school, as well as addressing parents' and governors' wishes. One governor saw the reasons as: "to make people realise we were just as good as other schools". The pupils thought that wearing their proper uniform was better than not wearing it and that, "people recognise us if we go on a trip". Parents were also satisfied, viewing uniform as easier, cheaper, and a symbol of their children's pride in the school.

Display boards were purchased because teachers had little room to celebrate pupils' work. Non-teaching assistants were trained in how to mount and display pupils' work effectively and now take a major responsibility for changing displays, thus freeing teachers to spend more time planning, marking work and meeting with colleagues.

Positive discipline

Respecting, recognising and involving pupils are important parts of a positive discipline strategy introduced as part of the process of improvement. Before the headteacher arrived, discipline was based on external control. Self-control is now emphasised: "it's the way he talks to children". The pupils have been given rules, for example, opening doors for each other. These rules are not just there for the children; adults are expected to respect them as well. Pupils are clear that good discipline is expected, and aware that "the headteacher goes mad if we start fighting". A system of stars, stamps and merit cards has also been introduced, alongside a tuck shop and bank which pupils run. In their words: "there are lots of jobs".

More adults have been placed in the playground during breaks and dinner time, and a range of playtime games have been introduced. The pupils were given responsibility for choosing equipment and helping with a raffle to raise money for playground benches. The two playground areas were also allocated to separate age groups: Phase 1 and 2 share one playground and Phase 3 and 4 in the other (see previous footnote). The positive effects of this are visible at lunchtime, with pupils playing the games properly, or chatting and walking quietly with their friends. The non-teaching assistants and pupils are also aware that there are fewer playground scuffles.

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning clearly had to become and remain the central concern of the headteacher and the staff. There were no systems in place to support the effective delivery of the curriculum. Improvements and progress had to be made quickly.

Planning, assessment and record-keeping systems

The headteacher worked with staff to introduce an effective planning system for the long, medium and short-term across the school. This was not imported from another school. Instead, the teachers, led by the headteacher, agreed their own planning system. This ensures that they focus on learning objectives and learning outcomes for pupils. One member of staff commented "we were all encouraged to bring our best ideas, and agree and work together. A shared view of what good-quality teaching and learning look like is beginning to emerge as teachers work together on their planning and monitoring of pupils' work. One teacher stated "you don't accept second-best". In the classrooms there is clear evidence in children's work of consistency resulting from effective planning across classes in the same year group. A senior member of staff with experience of assessment in the LEA joined the school for two terms and was able to lead the work on assessment and record-keeping. One of the phase leaders explained "you could see the children start to achieve when the planning and record-keeping systems were in place."

Monitoring

A system of monitoring the teaching and learning in individual classrooms was introduced immediately, and undertaken initially by the headteacher and the LEA adviser assigned to the school. The headteacher felt that the LEA adviser gave unstintingly of his time and expertise, spending at critical times at least one day each week in the school. The monitoring served to identify those areas of good practice that could be shared and built upon and those areas of concern that needed to be addressed. This process also highlighted those staff whose professional practice was a cause for concern. The LEA adviser, the headteacher and the phase leaders are all now involved in monitoring. Phase leaders are given one half-day non-contact time each week to monitor the teaching and learning in their phase. Staff consider the monitoring process an effective mechanism for supporting and encouraging consistency of practice.

Special educational needs (SEN) support

The arrangements for managing and delivering SEN support were also changed. A clearer role was given to the non-teaching assistants (NTAs). Regular meetings with the SENCO were introduced, and the NTAs have taken on responsibility for keeping records of pupils' achievements. The planning system also involves specifying clearly their role in supporting pupils, especially those with Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

Curriculum development

Reading, the paramount curriculum priority, was the focus of staff meetings and professional development days. Detailed step-by-step guidance was given to staff about the approaches to reading and literacy skills, using both external advisers and a full-time member of the teaching staff who was known to be very skilled in the teaching of reading.

The school has introduced setting in mathematics and 'fast-tracking' in mathematics and information technology (IT) for the most able pupils in Years 5 and 6. 'Fast-tracking' in IT was chosen because it was an area where one of the deputy headteachers had expertise, the school has a fully equipped IT suite and it was felt to be an area where the school could show achievement.

Staff now plan more effective use of school visits. They are no longer seen as 'outings' but are clearly 'educational visits' with a clear curriculum focus.'

Non-teaching assistants and resources

The role of the NTAs has developed substantially over the last two years and they are now seen as significant in supporting the effective delivery of the curriculum. A key part of their role is their responsibility for organising the resources for each phase. One of the deputy headteachers who had been in post before the inspection described graphically the enormous difficulties staff had in accessing even the most basic resources, but observed that "we are now resourced to deliver". A simple but effective system of stock management has been developed by the NTAs which means teachers are able to concentrate on teaching and learning, not on organising and ordering resources.

Staff Development and Support

The headteacher understood clearly the staff's need to have both pressure and support. The headteacher views staff development as crucial both to his role and his improvement strategy for the school. In his first 18 months in post, he was involved to an exceptional degree in detailed implementation of the staff development programme. Staff were invited to take part in a process of professional thinking and planning at a depth that had not been expected in the past. This was a demanding process. Although the formal staff development programme was critical to the improvement process, the informal learning was equally significant, with staff sharing and learning from each other as they worked and planned together.

Building the community

The need to rebuild a positive relationship with the local community was a key priority for the headteacher and his staff. Two community groups were of particular significance - the parents and the governors. The school had always thought of itself as a 'community school' but, as one of the deputy headteachers explained, it now saw itself as a "community school offering an academic service".

Governors

The governing body had not been able to take up its role effectively under the previous headteacher. As the vice-chair of governors observed "we had no idea what we were supposed to do. We never received the information about courses". Before he took up his post at Francis Askew, the new headteacher invited governors to visit his current school and speak to staff, in order to allay any apprehensions or concerns the governors may have had. This gave out a powerful message to governors about the open way in which he intended to work. One of the first things the headteacher did with the governors when he had taken up his post was to 'walk the school'. Governors

wanted to take action that would demonstrate very quickly to parents that the school was going to be a different sort of place, and improving the physical environment would be one very clear way of doing that.

The headteacher took time and care to help the governors understand exactly what their role was. Again, it is important to note the very detailed preparation necessary. The vice-chair noted particularly the sensitive way in which at meetings the headteacher would explain technical terms to ensure the governors understood, "he would take time to explain" and "taught us how to brainstorm" as a way of sharing ideas. The governors attended governor training courses which occasionally also involved teaching staff. The governors have become closely and actively involved in managing the budget and in making staff appointments. Appointment of staff has changed so that the process is now managed in a more "professional" way.

The following comment from the vice-chair illustrates the changed relationship between the headteacher and the governing body, "I don't keep quiet now. If I'm afraid something is wrong, then I check it out with the headteacher, and trust that something will happen".

This belief that "something will happen" when something is reported is echoed by the parents.

Parents

Parents felt that the refurbishment of the reception area gave out an early and powerful message about how the school intended to manage its future work. The school has introduced several innovations to show parents that it values them. A crèche is provided to enable parents to attend training sessions and certificated training courses are organised on the school site for parents. A "family computer room" is provided for family groups to use in the evenings, and at the last count 45 families had done so. Letters sent home to parents have changed in tone and content and are seen by parents as useful and informative. Letters are sent home when pupils perform well and not just when there is cause for concern. The arrangements for the open evenings have been adjusted to allow a choice of dates and an appointments system. Finally, the school has appointed a home-school liaison teacher whose explicit role is to 'enhance the quality of life for parents and children'.

As one parent commented "If you have a problem you know it will get sorted out".

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

The previous section, analysing the improvement process at Francis Askew School, documents several examples of actions that the school took to raise the achievement of its pupils. Few of those actions were particularly novel or surprising. But for a school seeking to come off 'special measures' the speed with which the improvement process is expected to take place gives a significantly different context and acuity to the developments.

In addition, the school had to face a number of significant challenges during its school improvement journey. These included:

- Finding the time for the amount of developmental work necessary and sustaining such a rapid pace of change.
- The effect of long-term absence of some staff and the need to manage the potential discontinuity to minimise the disruption to pupils' learning.
- Ensuring a supply of cover staff of good quality to make possible the necessary teacher release for planning and staff development.
- The effective induction of new staff joining the school during this process of change.
- The paramount need to help members of staff believe in themselves and cope with the pain of failure.
- Managing the wide range of staff knowledge and expertise and ensuring rapid staff development.
- Gaining and sustaining an understanding of the 'critical path' of the developments and changes. The school proceeded to implement change and development on all fronts but it was clear from conversations with staff that unless some important 'building blocks' were in place progress with raising pupil achievement could not 'take off'. For example, effective teaching and learning were not possible until the behaviour management policy was securely in place and understood and implemented by all staff.
- The need for the headteacher and senior management team to 'take everyone with them'.

Managing school improvement on this scale and at this pace is not easy. Once a school has 'come off special measures', the governors, headteacher and staff then have to

give careful thought to the processes they can use to sustain the level of staff commitment and development to ensure the continued raising of pupil achievement.

As a newer member of staff commented: "Every facet of the profession and my knowledge of it has been stretched."

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ISBN 0 85522 587 4