



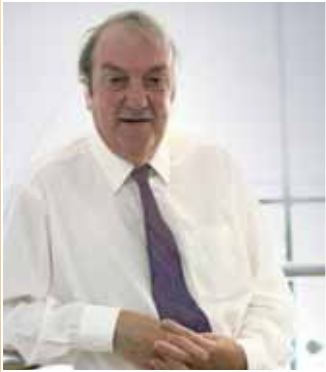
Essential pieces

THE JIGSAW OF A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL

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About the author



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Tim also likes jigsaws.

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Understanding the picture

Before we embark on this fascinating (and hopefully revealing) journey, we need to recognise one rather startling thing: ‘School Improvement’ is still in its infancy.

It wasn't until 1977 that HMI published “Ten Good Schools”, the first serious attempt to define what makes a school outstandingly successful. It broke new ground. A couple of years later, Michael Rutter published his famous “Fifteen Thousand Hours”, a piece of research which proved that how schools are managed and led made a huge difference to pupil outcomes.

Since then, thousands of writers and researchers have entered the field, fuelling the ‘school effectiveness’ and ‘school improvement’ debate.

Head teachers, meanwhile, shake their heads. They've heard it all before: “The theory is fine. But our reality doesn't quite fit the theory. It's much messier than you make it sound.”

Yet, for these very head teachers, the quest to improve becomes more urgent. That fickle weather vane ‘parental choice’ is championed by all politicians, and the position of schools in the local league table becomes more important. Ofsted, too, may come visiting.

A framework. A process

I've spent more than 20 years championing a framework of school processes which, if we learn ever more about each of them, is likely to help any school get better.

Here they are:-

Leading – at every level and recognising the need for different styles in different circumstances and at different times.

Managing – again at different levels, ensuring that everyone plays their part in getting the detail right.

Creating a fit environment – visually, aurally, behaviourally and in a way that encourages learning.

Learning, teaching and assessing – the bread, butter and jam of schooling. It occupies everyone's time.

Developing staff – not just teachers but all staff, by making sound appointments, providing thorough inductions and extensive further professional development, which combines individual and collective need.

Self-evaluating and critically reviewing – an activity that prompts gradual or great change and which is now back centre stage after some years in the shadows.

Involving and connecting with parents and the community – often overlooked, but key if the more public place that is the school is to be accessible to all who might benefit and contribute.

I would still defend a focus on learning ever more about these processes. As a guiding compass and map as we pioneer new territory, it's proved invaluable to me and many others. Through developing and researching case studies, writers – and above all, practitioners doing the job – have widened our understanding of each of these processes or some close variation of the process map. Head teachers, however, still furrow their brow and say, "That's fine – but it's not that clear. My circumstances won't fit that neatly drawn map."

And so to this booklet

This booklet has been put together as a result of three recent events.

First, some wise and experienced person said that she thought that two sorts of headship were doomed. Schools would never succeed if:

1. the head teacher was laid back to the point almost of inertia; or if
2. the head teacher believed he had a recipe, which, if precisely followed, would be successful.

As we discussed further, we agreed that we'd seen very lazy and unfocused head teachers succeed, where they had the good fortune to take over a highly successful school with a stable staff full of intellectual curiosity. But the 'recipe merchant' head? Well...no, neither of us thought we'd seen that

succeed. Too many head teachers come a cropper second time around. But now I'm not so sure...

Where's the formula?

The second event arises whenever I've visited a school, which has recovered its sense of direction and pride after falling on hard times. I ask the (usually new) head teacher, "Well, what did you do?" The reply is always the same. Whatever the head teacher's style, whether understated and calm, cool and determined or outrageously busy, the reply usually contains the phrase: "Well it's not rocket science. We just concentrated on getting a few essential things right".

Energy, enthusiasm – and hope

Irrespective of style, head teachers share three essential qualities in large measure – energy, enthusiasm and hope. These common qualities and this unanimity of view – that it's doing a few key things right – have always made me wonder if there really is a formula: a sure way to solve the puzzle of making a school successful, whatever the circumstances – if only the leader of the school follows faithfully all of a few essential steps.

The third event, which has changed my view, is the way in which schools over the years have responded to a simple description of successful schools. It was written by the American researcher, Judith Little, as long ago as the early 1980s. "Schools are successful," she claimed, "when the following four things happen:

1. Teachers talk about teaching.
2. Teachers observe each other teach.
3. Teachers plan, organise, monitor and evaluate their teaching together.
4. Teachers teach each other."

I suspect the reason why these statements are so persuasive, is that you can immediately see how each of them can be made more likely to happen.

1. Teachers talk

For example, the first is more likely if all school and faculty meetings are about teaching, assessment and curriculum. Business is never discussed there. More likely, too, if the head teacher, at the end of a school day, visits the staffroom to talk informally about her own teaching. This shows how, by use of open discussion, she hopes to improve it. It's even more likely if staff are expected in turn to circulate interesting things they've read – about teaching, learning or their subject of course – on a regular programmed basis.

2. Teachers observe

The second – teachers observing each other – will happen if teachers have the opportunity to observe each other in a focused way. So, involvement in initial education and training of teachers is an

opportunity to facilitate inter-classroom observation. This involves three parties: senior teacher, trainee and colleague in the planning of a lesson together, followed by unthreatening observation of each teaching the same lesson and then collectively discussing their different approaches. Another example of how to make it happen would be to use one of the five annual inset/training days for staff to have focused visits to comparable schools in session. A team follow-up discussion would explore what's been learned.

3. Teachers plan

Planning, monitoring and evaluating their work together will happen if there is the expectation that every department facilitates it. This affects the nature of meetings; moderating each other's marking; and the device – three teachers planning a single lesson and then all teaching it (as mentioned above). In one school I know, all three are encouraged. It organises its timetable so that staff can bid for time to do one of these three activities as a part of non-contact time. They can participate either on a regular basis or in one of non-metronomic 'days' or 'weeks' that break up the metronomic repetition of the conventional timetable.

4. Teachers teach

The fourth, teachers teaching each other, demands a change in approach to staff development. Professional development meetings in school time where colleagues share practice will ensure teachers teach each other.

Is it that simple?

This short booklet, then, is meant to start a debate about (say) 15 requirements which, if followed, will surely bring school success. "Well," I hear you say, "it can't be that simple." And no, it's not. For you have to possess sufficient emotional intelligence, a form of intelligence which like any other you aren't simply born with but can develop, to 'read' and then act on the human context in which you operate. It could be a remote rural community at one extreme through to a turbulent challenged inner-city set of disparate communities at the other. Context of people, place and organisation is everything. So many school leaders, whether heads of school or department, have succeeded in one situation only to fail in another.

Enter the jigsaw

So, having set the limits on my claims, let's get on with the 15 steps – but only after using one more set of imagery as a final caveat. The 15 steps are not sequential, nor are they simultaneous, although ultimately they all interrelate and depend one upon another to keep a school developing. They are more like pieces of an interlocking jigsaw. Completing the jigsaw takes some people more time than it does others. The picture begins to emerge as a coherent whole. It's how quickly you can recognise the shape and the whole that helps solve jigsaw puzzles more quickly. So it is with schools.

A final point deserves notice. When solving jigsaws, most people have a strategy. They put in the four corners first and then proceed to the straight-sided bits.

They collect the blue bits of sky into a heap and then try to discriminate between the different shades of blue. They try to avoid dropping any pieces on the floor.

Of the 15 pieces in this hexagonal jigsaw, I've indicated six corner pieces. The rest are straight-edged or wiggly. At the end, I've tried to suggest some of the subtleties to consider when you tackle the blue bits, some of which are in this booklet and others that can only be determined by you reading correctly in your own particular local context.

So, let's get started...



Corner pieces



Corner piece

“We share values, a vision of the future and we enjoy telling stories” – doing the right things

It is a truism to say that successful schools have a high degree of shared values.

So, shared values might include:

- Being committed to success for all members of the community, rather than success for some at the expense of others. That’s why norm-referencing is such a dangerous fellow-traveller for schools, where we have a moral duty to treat children as they might become, rather than as they infuriatingly are.
- Seeing intelligence not as ‘given’, ‘predictable’ or ‘general’, but as ‘multi-faceted’ and infinitely capable of development. This is a really tricky one, not least because it’s counter-intuitive to all the practices of our own earlier years and those of previous generations. But most people recognise intuitively so many of the non-academic intelligences; not just the art & craft and physical or visual and musical, but also the emerging interest in growing and developing what’s now called ‘emotional intelligence’. Also, in particular, the capacity to understand oneself and other people and act accordingly.
- Trying to be inclusive rather than exclusive as a school community.
- Practising formative and ipsative assessment – that is measuring the pupils’ understanding of the next step in their own learning and ensuring they act on it, while

trying to improve on their own previous best.

- Ensuring that young people realise that education is a ‘lifelong’ not a ‘once and for all’ activity.

These values derive loosely from, and certainly need to be put alongside, the moral precepts that we all associate with the religions and classical philosophers.

They will inform the whole community’s actions, particularly those who lead and have the most influence on the school community, namely the head teacher, staff and older pupils. They know they have to live with the knowledge that there has to be a consistent thread between ‘what they say,’ ‘what they do’ and ‘who they are’.

To these constantly-upheld values, the school attaches its straightforward ‘mission’ statement. That is what they stand for and are trying to do. A ‘mission’ statement might say, “Our school is a place where:

- all talk of ‘our’ achievement and everyone is anxious to improve on previous best collectively as well as individually..
- all pupils are increasingly aware of their potential and that it is without limit if they make the effort..

- everyone respects each other, feels fulfilled in what they do and contributes to the fulfilment of others..
- the full range of success – sporting, academic, artistic, practical support for others, triumph over adversity – is celebrated..
- all members of the school community are committed to their own continuous learning and support that of others..
- everyone is aware of the school’s collective past and present success and is ambitious to contribute for the benefit of future generations to that legacy..
- we facilitate these aims and promote the fun of learning and the pleasure of achievement.”

The ‘vision’ statement

The separate parts of these mission statements are reinforced at assemblies, at awards ceremonies and parents’ meetings, and in tutorials. They may find expression in a list of next priorities in development plans. At staff meetings and in staff development days, the skillful leaders speculate and then formulate a ‘vision’ statement. If the school has a ‘vision’ statement, it will be framed in a description of what the school will be like in five or so years into the future. It will be linked to what people are doing now and will have done in the future to reach the improved state of affairs envisaged. It can, and sometimes does, take the form of a video with accompanying text. Usually the fruitful areas for change lie in adapting and making the best use of the e-learning technologies, but will also encompass changes in the local and global world. For instance, today it would be likely and

desirable that a Newham school revisiting its vision statement would make full use of the 2012 Olympics.

The vision statement will be revisited from time to time, updated regularly by a ‘School Improvement Group’, charged with coming up with ideas which are aimed to create continuous improvement to all aspects of school life. The ‘School Improvement Group’ will comprise a cross section of all staff at all levels: it may seek the views of pupils and parents if they aren’t already part of the group. Members of the group will have one thing in common: they will be ‘energy creators’ not ‘energy consumers’.

They will be ‘what if’ seekers after silver linings, who ask “how we could”, rather than tired cynics, who see clouds, regard everything as half empty and say “why we can’t”.

Finally, the school is a place where stories abound told by leaders at all levels. They are good stories – there’s no better story teller than the good teacher – and the stories will focus on both the past and the future, which, after all, is the school’s business.



Corner piece

“Our language makes the school”

Language can make or break a school. Careless talk can sap a school’s energy. The energy and motivation of even the most optimistic and willing colleagues can soon drain away. So, using “we” rather than “I” and “you” is important, not simply in the spoken word, but in written form too. You can use “I” when taking the blame and “you” rather than “we” when giving praise and celebrating genuine success. It’s here that the current buzz word ‘personalisation’ comes in. Letters home, supposedly individual and personal, which refer to “your son/daughter” and fail to mention names, are impersonal. Of course, general messages of information are different; but here too presentation is important. More than one successful head teacher has told me that the most important job they do is to write the weekly newsletter home, and how important it is to find the right words and tone.

“Non-teaching” staff is as offensive as it would be to refer to “non-white” staff or pupils. It probably betrays a subliminal message about a hierarchy of the value put upon certain tasks and certain people in a bygone age. Continuing to use ‘general ability’ descriptors to describe ‘bands’ or ‘streams’ or referring to the “bottom set” in their presence (or for that matter at all?) is

the modern equivalent to stamping ‘remedial’ on the inside cover of a book. It will encourage a misplaced notion of general ability, rather than the more generous multi-faceted form to which a school may be saying it subscribes. Using “learning” instead of “work” is also a plus rather than a minus. (It’s amazing what a difference it makes to refer to youngsters getting on with their learning rather than work).

The written language used in job descriptions, the school prospectus, job advertisements, marking, school reports and staff handbooks is as vitally important as the spoken word in assemblies, tutorials, lessons, the corridors and the playground. All meetings are redolent with implied messages in what is said and in the body language of participants.

It’s a topic worth having a knowledgeable outsider check from time to time. Or perhaps it’s one for the School Improvement Group.



Corner piece

“The school is a beautiful place”

The importance of the physical appearance of a school was brought home to me recently, by being one of the judges of a re-run of The Guardian’s famous “The school I’d like” competition, which inspired Edward Blishen’s equally famous book of the same name around 30 years ago.

With my fellow judges, we sifted the final shortlist of 40 or so of the thousands of school pupil entries the competition had inspired. It was a salutary experience: one of the most vivid was from three year 8 pupils, all boys. Their school was a 1960s system – built steel-framed cluster of boxed and connected buildings in a sea of tarmac, with a moat of a drive through a small windswept muddy field. The video film left little to your imagination, as we visited the usual squalid lavatories, the desolate flaking corridors and doors and the litter-strewn playgrounds. It was sustained for ten minutes by a humorous commentary from the 13 year-olds. We paused to meet only one adult, the motherly librarian, working in an environment which contrasted with the rest of the barren school; a welcoming adult in a beautiful oasis of calm. The film ended with a ‘zoom out’, incorporating all the glass and rotting wooden clad and panelled building with the

words, “in our ideal school, all of this would be the library”.

It didn’t win, but one of the entries which did give a similar message as follows:-

“My ideal school could never exist. There is no reality in idealism. I dream of happiness and learning united. I dream of no interruptions. If I went to my ideal school, I wouldn’t wake up every morning and dread the next day, the next week, the next year and the rest of my life. In my perfect school, we would only have the teachers who knew and understood what they were talking about, they would all be passionate about the subjects and help us to unleash our passions. In my perfect school there would still be rules, but they would guide us, not confine us. Teachers and pupils would mix harmoniously. There would be no grading, praise only for working hard not for your mental capability. I wouldn’t have to try to compete with my friends and they wouldn’t all want to be better than each other. We would not be concerned about whether we did the best in the class, but only about whether everyone was happy with what he or she was doing and how he and she was progressing. There would still be punishment, but these punishments would matter to the pupils.”

They would have to miss their favourite lessons for a week and have to take double lessons of their worst lessons instead.

We wouldn't be confined within walls of stone: we would go outside and experience the weather. We would travel and experience other pleasures. We would gain an understanding of the way of the world. Exams would be abolished, people would work together and alone, they would use other people's knowledge to enrich themselves and others would be the same with them. In my perfect school, there would be no bullies, there would be no insecurities. We would discuss our opinions in every lesson and everyone would listen and respect each other. Teachers and pupils would be equals, no privileges or disadvantages, everyone would be in the same boat. In my school, the only things they would ban would be unhappiness and pain, no room for lying, revenge and deceit.

But to have my perfect school, you need a perfect world, and if there were a perfect world, there would be no room for dreaming."

Let's return from dreams and turn to lavatories.

Lavatories

For generations, school lavatories have been locked or are places where pupils visit only 'in extremis'. (Children's bladders over the years have suffered in ways best left to the imagination). It doesn't have to be like that. Some schools now see the lavatories as a touchstone of whether the improvements they've made are simply skin deep. Involving what's called 'Pupil Voice', they

suggest to the School's Council, issues that are concerning the 'School Improvement Group', seek their comments on the issues and ask about omissions. The School's Council are then provided with a budget either for the school or a part of the resources required to solve the particular project. The School's Council can be guaranteed to raise issues which affect the environment. So the lavatories are very likely to be on their list.

There are many solutions now claimed by schools. The best ingredients, apart from pupil involvement in identifying solutions, include refurbishment, installation of smoke detectors that only go off in the main office (so miscreants can be caught with a 'smoking gun' as it were), and then regular inspection of the toilets either with paid attendants or regular patrols of school council members and staff of the school.

Lunch hour

Chances are the school will also receive comment on the lunch hour and the queues. Lunch hours too can be transformed. Solutions range from condensing the lunch hour to abolishing it altogether. The former can involve:

- ensuring that all support staff have duties in their contract to help with supervision.
- providing a rich range of activities, run either by the permanent staff, senior trained pupils with staff supervision or 'bought-in' entertainment.
- having a clearly thought-through and implemented practice of music, used as 'choice' background with DJ – a rota of

'wannabe' pupils – during the lunch hour or as background calming music to modify behaviour. (Certain music affects mood – and of course disposition to learn – in different ways).

- changing the nature of the playground. Here, the pioneering work of "Learning through Landscapes" has meant that the conventional tarmacadam can be transformed into a varied sequence of spaces defined by plants, structures and sculpture.
- welcoming pupil access to the carefully-designed and well-supervised range of ICT facilities, including those permeating the library, where pupils can pursue their 'independent study' or 'homework' assignments.

The abolition of the lunch hour has been implemented by a few schools. Anybody embarking on that option needs to visit a school that's done it and reflected on the outcome. Schools I know that have done it are the Compton in Barnet and Ninestiles in Birmingham. Each refurbished their dining area and catering facilities, a solution incidentally frequently pursued by those wishing to minimise queues. Then the two schools tackled the timetable, so pupils from different age groups (linked to faculty or subject) are off-timetable at different times. For instance, between 11.45am and 1.30pm, groups have their lunch together in a setting of no more than 250. During their 'spare' time, after eating and while others are in learning, the pupils are encouraged to pursue studies or take part in supervised playground activity. Both schools report "transformation": by choosing different age

groups to eat together, they have minimised large peer group behaviour problems.

Thirdly, there are very few schools in challenging areas which would go back on their decision to have pre-school breakfast clubs. Opportunities include access for pupils and staff to morning papers and an environment calmed with appropriate background music.

All these measures – the lavatory refurbishment, the playground transformation, the use of music, the encouragement of access to pursue independent learning, the change in the lunch hour, the start to the school day – minimise opportunities for bullying and reduce stress for staff. They are all part of creating an environment fit for learning. If music, food and water (always encouraged to be readily available in lessons to enhance concentration) are crucial, so also is the visual backdrop to learning.

Presentation

Here, secondary schools still have much to learn from primary schools. Scratch any experienced primary teacher and they will have a critical eye on display. Pupils' work is beautifully mounted, with an eye to all pupils getting in on the act. Wall displays also include a reinforcement of language, scientific & mathematical thinking and speculation. Different parts of the circulation space are transformed into grottos, thinking areas, and quiet rooms with frequent reinforcement of the school's key messages about what the community stands for and how members of it behave one to another.



Corner piece

“We try to do things right in our school” – taking a stand on detail

One of the most debilitating school features can be poor organisation and management. The neglected banging door in the corridor, the continually dripping tap saps energy. So too do day-to-day practices in the school, which are honoured in the breach. Everyone knows what should happen, but it doesn't. What are the essential ingredients to smooth organisation? There are perhaps four.

The staff handbook

The staff handbook is the school bible and is at the heart of its smooth organisation. Time and again, schools which fall into difficulty, realise too late, that they've allowed their staff handbook to fall into neglect and therefore be overlooked.

First, even in the smallest schools, there needs to be a staff handbook, which includes in loose leafed form all the school's policies and practices – a simple A4 sheet for each policy and practice. On this sheet will be a brief statement of both policy and the implications for practice, with the name of the member of staff responsible for leading the next review of policy and practice and the date on which it is to be reviewed. There are also the names of the teams of people responsible for implementing different aspects of the

practice. When there is any change – and with changes in staff, this is inevitable – the revised version is formally included as an item of information at staff briefings and the replacement sheet inserted in all copies. Usually there is a copy in the staff room, faculty areas and the school office.

The best schools now have their staff handbook in electronic form and readily available to all through their e-learning platform.

Job descriptions

The second element of doing things right is the nature of the staff job descriptions. Crucially they will relate to the staff handbook in the sense that the description of 'lead' and 'support' responsibilities for different aspects of school life will be reflected in the language of the job descriptions. So too the tasks necessary to carry out the policies. The best schools now avoid a long list of duties ending with the catch-all "and such other duties as may from time to time be determined" preferring instead to list 'primary' or 'lead' responsibilities along with 'secondary' and 'support' responsibilities – the latter usually in teams. Job descriptions are closely linked to 'performance management' or 'staff appraisal' or 'professional development'.

(Different schools use different language according to the climate they are seeking to encourage for those closely related activities and the emphasis they think appropriate for individual staff discussion).

In the best schools, job descriptions are provisional and subject to review and change after a specified period. In this way, leadership can be reviewed and rotated to the benefit of the individual and the schools as a whole. The third vital element of 'doing things right' is the staff induction programme. Of course, the essential details for the **staff induction programme** – the underlying policy and the details of the practices – will be included in the staff handbook. But it is worth picking it out: it becomes a vital support to maintaining consistency where there is high staff turnover. Staff induction must encompass all staff – teaching and support alike. It should contain a common element for all with faculty-based (including administrative team function) elements. The timetable will usually be on an annual cycle. It will offer opportunities, for those who arrive either at the beginning of the school year or during it, to have a brief, repeated, general introduction. This should be followed by a sequence of modules, carefully focused on what the school knows are the vital elements in 'singing from the same song sheet'. There is, in addition, a guide for part-time and supply staff, so they, too, know what it is they are expected to do to support the school.

A fourth major and essential element is the **calendar** of events, which all staff see and negotiate before putting in new entries, thus avoiding clashes and potential recriminations.



Corner piece

“In our school we sing from the same song sheet” – the elusive quest for consistency

This is the most intangible and elusive, yet vital, part of a school’s success. It lies at the heart of what head teachers call ‘consistency’. Clearly, the larger the school, the more important and tricky the issue becomes. After all, if you lay down too precisely what everyone must do, then individual flair and creativity will wither. Moreover, the most imaginative, free thinkers among the staff will soon seek new pastures. At the other extreme, where virtually anything goes, the school begins to fall apart. The smaller the school or department, the easier it is.

It’s pushing the case but the more dysfunctional a school or department is, the more tightly the ‘singing from the same song sheet’ rule needs to be drawn agreed and – most vitally of all – followed by everyone. The more successful, the school or department, the more leeway there is – not least for experimentation.

Are there things which are absolutely essential in ‘singing from the same song sheet’? Probably there are. I list below three practices, which any school will feel are susceptible to examination and debate. I just want to ensure that each school hits the right

note in their own particular version of the song they are trying to sing together.

1. Lessons

Clearly, some agreement about the planning and recording of lesson plans is necessary. Whether it should be a three-, four- or five-part lesson will vary within and between departments, or indeed be laid down within descriptors of other possible models. But, for example, there will probably be agreement about ‘greeting and seating’. That is to say the teacher is expected to be at the classroom door to allow pupils to go into the classroom to settle at their desks. Of course, there’s a world of difference between carrying out that process well and doing it not-so-well. Do you stand between the open door and the opposite door post, increasing the likelihood of pupils brushing against you, while ignoring them as they enter, except to rebuke? Or do you spread the door open with welcoming arm allowing maximum room and have a word with every pupil, perhaps beckoning a prospective troublemaker to whisper jocular threatening sweet nothings in his/her ear? Once inside, is there a convention that all staff, from the most to the least experienced, from the strongest to the weakest, sets the seating

plan that suits them best? Is this ritual signalled across the whole school at year assemblies in the first week of each half-term?

2. The corridors

In one school, the pupils confessed to me that groups or gangs of pupils controlled the corridors. The school, of course, was dysfunctional except, as they observed, for the maths department, where a strong head of department had created an oasis of order. In another school, however, the conversations between staff and pupils in corridors, at break times and at the start and end of the school day were pleasantly casual and frequent. So, conversation in corridors is an essential part of 'singing from the same song sheet'. In some schools, as we shall see later, this includes some focused conversations with particular named pupils who, for one reason or another, are deemed most at risk.

Some minimal ground rules on display are another feature of corridor policy for departments/houses/stages. So, too, is agreement on the rapid retrieval of litter.

3. Behaviour

Unless there is consistency on expectations of behaviour, everyone in the school suffers. There is an American programme called "Consistent Management Consistent Discipline" (CMCD), which has been tried by some schools in challenging circumstances. All schools involved claim it is successful. When one describes the main features, they seem obvious. Teachers agree that when anyone wants silence they raise their hands and expect the pupils gradually, but rapidly,

to do the same. The same practice continues in staff meetings. Every half-term, every member of staff – even the best – allocates their revised seating plan for their lessons. Pupils are prepared for it at year assemblies by the head of year and the head teacher. Pupils apply for classroom jobs and are given them: one is to be the 'question monitor', involving using a beaker with all pupils' names on sticks and choosing one randomly, whenever a teacher required a respondent.

Primary schools will recognise the 'applying for classroom jobs' strategy. They will use 'circle time' and train pupil mediators, both to be found in secondary schools too, where the full array of peer tutors, peer counsellors and peer mentors reflect a structure that allows pupil involvement and pupil voice.

All schools mark out a preferred ratio of rewards to sanctions. All are carefully recorded, as are minor and major incidents, so they can be analysed and practice adjusted accordingly.



Corner piece

“Our teaching, learning and assessment”

At the heart of any really successful school is teaching, which leads to learning. Ultimately, after the successful assessment of work by the teacher, it enables the pupil to assess their own work, as they become increasingly autonomous learners.

Of course, it can be argued that the introductory reference to Judith Little’s research into successful schools are schools, where:

- teachers **talk** about teaching.
- teachers **observe** each other teach.
- teachers plan, organise, monitor and evaluate their teaching **together**.
- teachers **teach** each other.

This is all very well. As I claimed, it does make you think of the things you could do to make it more rather than less likely to happen. But what if we changed it a little to the following:

- staff **TALK** about learning.
- staff **OBSERVE** each other’s learning.
- staff **PLAN, OBSERVE, MONITOR & EVALUATE** their work **TOGETHER**.
- staff **LEARN** from each other.

Then we should be forced to think of all the staff and what they all contribute to learning. It would have implications for staff meetings and those who belonged to the School Improvement Group. The third point of reviewing together would ensure that, at the time of self-evaluation, everyone’s contribution was valued. There would be implications for staff rooms too.

It leads us into pushing learning squarely as a consequence of teaching. In the question of teaching, in addition to the models of the three-, four- or five-part lessons with learning objectives and plenaries, there are some time-honoured aspects to teaching; that any school’s policy and practice will cover as they seek to move from ‘good’ to ‘outstanding’.

Among them will be the use of questions in teaching.

Questions, questions

Much has been written about sequencing, distribution and the rules of pause. Some schools, however, only allow pupils to put their hands up in certain prescribed and thought-through circumstances, preferring the teacher to direct questions of an appropriate nature to different pupils according to where they’ve reached in their

learning. Other schools wishing to ring the changes have a 'question monitor,' with the teacher posing the question, again carefully considered as to difficulty, and the 'question monitor' takes one of the 30 sticks each with a pupil's name from a beaker.

Teachers are expert in four orders of question, each using the seven questioning words: "When", "Where", "What", "Why", "Who", "Which" and "How". First order questions are questions of fact; second order questions are questions of inference; third order questions are 'surprising' questions; and fourth order questions are ones of 'conditional hypothesis,' preceded by the devilish "if"! I sometimes think 'surprising' questions are the same as 'Fermi' questions. Fermi was an Italian nuclear physicist, who loved complex questions. So, an example of a 'Fermi' question would be: "How many piano tuners are there in New York?" They are designed to call for lateral thinking, estimation and justification of your hypotheses that lead to your conclusion. Equipping pupils with knowledge of the seven questions words and the four orders of question is to pave the way for good group work, because pupils are skilled in using questions.

In addition to 'questions', teachers may look at each other's 'story telling' techniques, for as we have remarked, stories are at the very heart of successful teaching, since the mind-opening habits of the philosopher Plato.

Also, what of the 'Alter Ego' of teaching? Just as the nursery teacher sends 'teddy bears' home to have adventures with pupils, who come back and create pictures and

stories of what's happened, so the same teacher uses the teddy bear as another character to stimulate pupils' talk.

The primary teacher continues this practice for a time and is alert to the use of puppets. But it continues into secondary school, not in the form of puppets, but sometimes with lifelike figures in the history room (Henry VIII say) or in science (e.g. Darwin), and to these figures the teacher from time to time defers. They have imaginary conversations on the phone and, in the digital age, have orchestrated 'e-tutors' to whom the pupils can turn. One school has an enthusiastic teacher who has his very own 'Avatar', a constructed and moving figure on the screen with a programmed voice. We are of course in the foothills of our journey to exploit the learning technologies.

In one school, teachers debated, agreed to produce, and then created a booklet for all pupils called "Language to think and learn". Based on theories of multiple intelligence and the need for variety of learning approaches, the booklet set out the vocabulary for each subject and for examinations that they wanted the pupils to understand – high order conceptual language, if you like. All the staff then set about teaching the meaning of the vocabulary, week by week, to all the pupils in year 7 (see butterflies at the end of this booklet). A similar approach has been applied in years 8 and 9 – the whole issue of course reinforced by display of the vocabulary in every room.

As I have already suggested as an obvious point – teaching leads to learning. So every member of staff has a 'Learning Plan for the Year'!

In another school, for each year group at the beginning of the year there are short 'study skills' or 'learning to learn' courses: at a foundation level for year 7 with such items as 'learning to listen', progressing through mind maps to revision of research skills in year 10, now so much easier as a result of access to the Internet.

Finally, there is assessment, so frequently interpreted as the chore of marking. But 'marking' can be by peer group, by the pupils themselves, by computer, as well as by the teacher or indeed support staff. 'Outstanding' lessons undoubtedly will contain peer assessment interludes of each other's progress and performance, and perhaps of the outstanding teacher's too.

Perhaps it's fair to say that it's impossible to have a really successful school without an active and rigorous assessment system that reflects good 'assessment for learning' principles on the one hand, yet avoids the 'four out of ten – try again' syndrome. Reports for parents and parent days reflect the team work of assessment and are led by form tutor. Above all, teachers, teaching assistants and mentors will try to avoid 'normative' language implied in the poem from Ed Buscemi as follows:-

*"I don't cause teachers trouble
My grades have been OK
I listen in my classes
I'm in school every day
My parents think I'm average
My teachers think so too
I wish I didn't know that
'Cos there's lots I'd like to do
But since I've found I'm average
I'm just smart enough you see
To know there's nothing special
I should expect of me
I'm part of that majority
That hump part of the bell
Who spends their life unnoticed
In an average kind of hell."*

In the outstanding school, teachers mark each other's work and know that one of their main and precious tasks is to enable the pupils to see for themselves how to improve their own work.

Now that we have put the six corner pieces of the hexagonal jigsaw in place, why are they the corners? Well, they affect everyone in the school – all staff and all pupils. Now it's time, albeit more briefly, to turn to the six straight-sided pieces. They are also important because each affects a different and particular group in the school.



Straight-sided pieces



Straight-sided piece

“We develop all our staff”

Workforce remodelling in 2005/6 enabled schools to draw a line under a divided past. There was an ‘upstairs’ and ‘downstairs’ mentality in many schools which implied, as I have earlier remarked in the section on language, that there are two sorts of staff ‘teachers’ and ‘non-teachers’. In most, there was an often uncomfortable awareness among teachers, that the ‘secretary’ and the ‘caretaker’ had pretty powerful roles.

The introduction of workforce remodelling and the TLRs or TLAs (Teaching and Learning Responsibilities or Teaching and Learning Allowances) has forced schools to rethink who does what and set it out in job descriptions. In the best schools, there has been thoughtful inclusion of ‘whole-school’ responsibilities that straddle the teaching divide. In some, all staff – not just teachers – belong to a ‘house’ in their ‘house system’, thereby ensuring that every pupil is known well and that learning and achievement is everyone’s business.



Straight-sided piece

“We listen and involve our pupils”

Unless the interests and skills of all staff are constantly supported, we produce, as mentioned earlier, more ‘energy consumers’ than ‘energy creators’. It’s a battle between the “Why we can’ts” and the “How we could’s”. They battle for the hearts and minds of the ‘energy neutrals’, those who can go either way. The list of what schools can do here is long and includes:

- a ‘School Improvement Group’ (SIG), which allows all aspects of school life to be reviewed with an eye to the future.
- use of e-learning professional development programmes e.g. teach and learn.net
- school-based weekly professional development sessions for all staff.
- use of residential for staff.
- changes in job descriptions as a regular thing after a specified period.
- best use of the five inset/development days.
- ‘bursaries’ for newer members of staff to attend subject association conferences.
- adoption of annual learning plans with the example set by the senior team.
- ‘just in time’ coaching to extend practical use of ICT-supported learning and communication.

‘Pupil Voice’ has been discussed as a desirable issue for many years. Pupils need a voice, however, that has consequences for the community. So, a School Council without a budget is simply ‘talking shop’. Perhaps this extends to Year Councils in large schools.

Pupils are otherwise involved in different roles:

- within the classroom in managing roles and in self assessment as part of ‘assessment for learning’.
- as peer tutors – an excellent way of learning and modifying behaviour for older pupils who are tasked to help younger ones.
- as peer mentors – within and beyond the classroom as a symbol of co-operative learning.
- as peer counsellors and mediators – to aid behaviour in and around school and act as a guard against bullying.
- as ‘community workers’ – helping locally as part of citizenship programmes.
- as editors and contributors to a pupil-produced magazine.

Pupils in the best schools are involved once a year in a 'Student Survey', which tests the temperature of the school ethos and pupils' motivation to learn. The Year Council and School Council receive written reports on the outcome.

Pupils are observers in the governing body and are involved in staff appointments.

Perhaps the best practice I've come across was in a junior school, which had what is called a 'Head Teacher for a Day' scheme as part of 'Children's Day' each year. It involves six pupil candidates from year 6 putting themselves up for election two weeks before local elections and after SATs are over. Each has to publish manifestos and each has to attend a kind of hustings for questions and answers in front of staff and pupils. Voting takes place on local election day: all staff are eligible to vote along with all pupils other than those who are late. The winner is announced and becomes 'Head Teacher for the Day'. Aided by a cabinet of fellow pupils, they set out proposals for the day for consultation with staff and pupils. The 'Head Teacher for the Day' must take the 'praise assembly', when they give out 'Achievement of the Week' awards. They have tea with their favourite members of staff and prepare a newsletter for parents about their experience as head teacher. There is a fund raising event. The day usually ends with a talent session.

From such a story, it's possible to imagine all sorts of new usage of involving pupils. It might be a topic for the School Improvement Group.



Straight-sided piece

Are we data rich and information poor?

It is frequently said that we live in a 'data rich, information poor' society. There's no doubt that the availability of data has never been better. It's how we use it that's important. Schools are awash with data, much of it comparative.

Comparative data is particularly useful to schools and parts of schools seeking to visit other schools – in comparable circumstances of pupil intake, of course – to learn how they do things: some better, some worse.

Internally, this data is much more useful as a result of the work of the Fischer Family Trust: indeed it's fair to say that no teacher or department should be ignorant of the way some pupils with similar potential aren't learning in some areas but are in others.

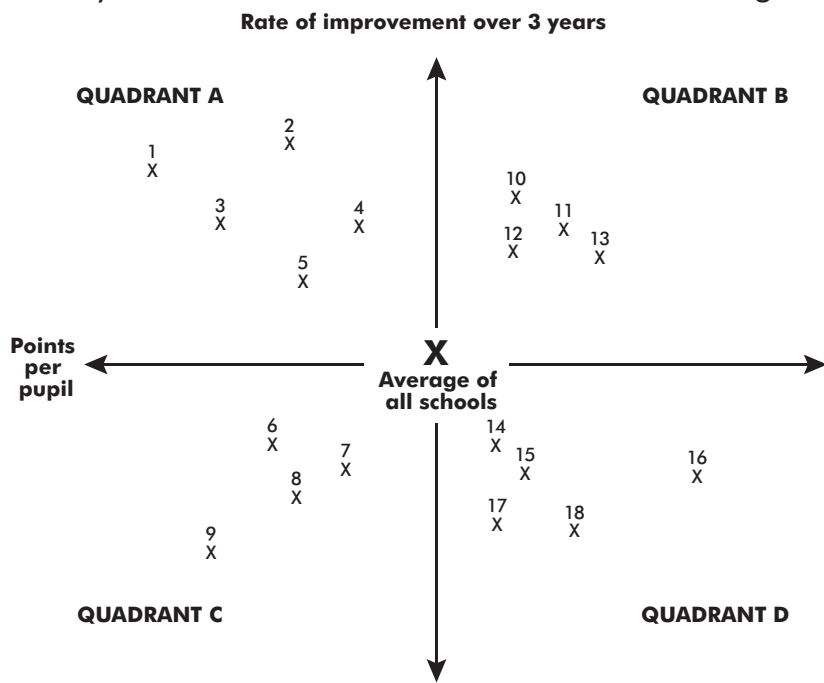
At the individual level, too, such data has the potential of enabling pupils 'at risk' to be pinpointed at the end of each year. It can help to increase those pupils' competence, confidence and resilience next term.

Unless data is used by the leadership team of the school and is directly related to the classroom, the school will remain information poor. Some pupils will fail who need not. That will happen only when job descriptions and habits of review are so framed that the data is used as a matter of course.

In the best schools, the development of the management and ICT-supported learning and communication techniques has meant that management and learning information is available online, through a portal which can be accessed as appropriate by staff, pupils and parents.

Unless schools overcome their insularity, they run the risk of not finding ways to improve what they do. One of the features of outstanding schools is that they are always trying to find new and better ways of doing things. Often visits are not as useful as they could be because schools are so different one from another. The Ofsted PANDA, for example, leave schools stranded, knowing that compared with the average of schools like them, they are either (in real terms or on value added) significantly above or significantly below others in comparable circumstances. But they have no clue as to which those schools are. Given that most schools want to improve on their previous best this data is unhelpful – unless one knows the names of the schools in comparable circumstances, which are doing better and worse both in absolute terms and in the speed of improvement.

Family of schools of similar socio-economic background



Key Stage 2, 3 or GCSE **Key = X:** These are 18 schools, numbered 1 – 18

That’s why the ‘Family of Schools’ initiatives, at first in Birmingham and now in London, are so important. The diagram above shows the format of how each family of schools is represented.

Quadrants

Clearly Quadrant C schools have low performance and are not improving as fast as other comparable schools, perhaps “not waving but drowning”? Quadrant A schools are improving more quickly but have low points per pupil, perhaps “heads above the water”? Quadrant B are schools with high points per pupil and high rates of

improvement, perhaps “walking on water”? Finally Quadrant D schools have high points per pupil but low rates of improvement, perhaps “treading water”? The point of the ‘Family’ is that schools have similar ‘prior entry attainment’ scores and similar numbers entitled to ‘free school meals’. So, schools do not need to waste time. They can visit and learn from schools they know to be broadly similar. When such data is added to the data from the Fischer Family Trust, there is the potential to learn from each other, subject by subject and with different groups of pupils.



Straight-sided top piece

“We understand and welcome change because change is learning and that’s our business”

Hoffer once said, “In an age of great change the learners inherit the earth, while the learned are beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.”

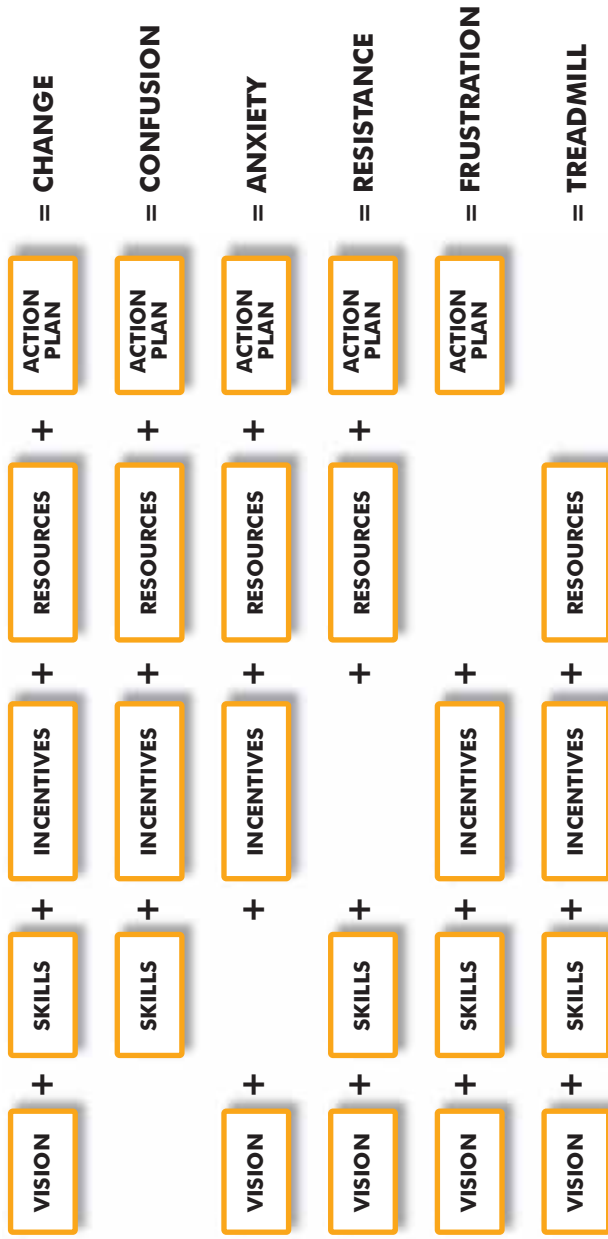
Teachers of today understand that. Increasing numbers of young and old alike can use the Internet to become well informed about any particular topic; 20 years ago visits to libraries were restricted. What is more, the ‘deferential’ age has given way to the more disputatious and participative present day.

The teacher is no longer, if she ever was, the sole supplier of information. Rather the teacher is the coach, the developer of pupil skills and competence, as well as the wise and trusted guide on values and where to go for further information. She knows that to learn is to change.

But the present day has brought incessant externally-imposed change from successive central governments. So the successful school sees to it that every member of staff understands some of the essentials of change, so they can welcome it, divert it or resist it as the school community decides. The successful school will have inwardly registered some of the rules of change.

The first lesson concerns complex change. The following table shows what happens when any one of five essential ingredients is absent. Of course, it doesn’t explain the dysfunctionality which is created, when two or three are absent or when all you’ve got is a succession of ‘Action Plans’ with no vision, skills, resources or incentives! But it’s a helpful guide to implementing change.

Managing Complex Change



Adapted from Knoster, T. (1991) Presentation at TASH Conference, Washington DC
 (Adapted by Knoster from Enterprise Group Ltd.)

Internally generated change is always welcome. It arises from members of the school community, perhaps in a School Improvement Group, suggesting change and having it adopted. Externally available change is that sort of change that you can embrace and tailor to your needs. It might be a behaviour system or in curricular terms, the 'Opening Minds' project of the RSA. This, too, is welcome. Externally mandated change is much more difficult. All these sorts demand attention to the complex change table set out on page 29.

Most importantly, welcoming change involves knowing that "if a thing's worth doing it's worth doing badly", the first time round during the adoption phase. Of course, second time round, after review, "it's worth doing better". Finally, in the consolidation phase, anything "is worth doing well".

There are 'change rules' concerned with who is put in charge, support groups and review.

Anyone serious about this piece of the jigsaw will want to read Michael Fullan's books, either the popular easy read: "Leadership in a Culture of Change" or the more theoretical: "The Meaning of Educational Change".



Straight-sided piece

“We practise learning walks”

‘Learning walks’ is a rather grand title for making the most of visits, once likely places to visit have been identified. The purpose of the school visit is like planning an expedition, rather than a pleasant day visit to the seaside.

One school has, as its agreed priority, a shared determination to move their teaching and learning practices from ‘good’ to ‘outstanding’. So they have attempted to define what this meant by some of the features, which distinguished the one from the other. They explored in terms of subject-specific techniques and generic approaches to teaching, including, of course, lesson plans and questioning techniques: the use of story, marking and independent study. They have also linked it to a consideration of behaviour and how that relates to lessons, corridors and break times. Their policy discussions, all part of self-review, include an examination of how school organisational practices (e.g. assemblies, awards, monitoring of pupils at risk, the place of special educational needs, rewards and sanctions) affect teaching and learning. Having identified two other broadly similar schools, they arranged visits in pairs or threes for a focused observation of various elements of the other school’s practices.

Now comes the clever bit. They visited the schools when they themselves had organised one of the five occasional inset days, but when the other schools were in session, thereby minimising costs. They finished the day with a social get-together and a quick debrief. The material and ideas gathered then formed the agenda for the next term’s weekly staff development sessions. Support staff were involved too.

The schools they visited then reciprocated. The last I heard they were intending to hold a joint inset, when all three schools were planning to synchronise one of their five occasional days. They had learned the important lesson that collaboration between and among schools is the best way to accelerate professional learning.

That’s a pretty ambitious project, but it’s possible to start more modestly and establish the learning habit.



Straight-sided top piece

“We are fussy about appointments” – It’s a privilege to work here

How do schools reach that enviable stage? Those schools with a really strong staff at all levels, but a great mix too: seasoned experienced professional leaders and some ‘Young Turks’ fresh out of training and keen to try out new ideas and learn from experienced colleagues?

At first, I used to think it was to do with location. Yet that explanation doesn’t stack up. In some of the favourably-placed schools in shire counties, there is a mix of schools. Some have staff who never move. So they grow old together, with all the dangers of colluding in comfortable ‘tried and tested’ ways, which may no longer meet needs, for example, by taking early advantage of the new technologies. Other schools in the same favourable circumstances, perhaps in a nearby market town, manage to combine continuity with a regular turnover of staff new to the profession, who contribute for two or three years before moving on.

In challenging urban areas, schools like this exist too, alongside others which have huge turnover and often with people in key positions, who stay but aren’t up to the job.

Appointing the right staff is therefore crucial. It starts with the ‘further details’ and the

advertisement. Both need to convey the flavour of the school. So if you want – ‘energy creators’, you need to ask your existing ‘energy creators’ how the advert and the debriefs are best framed. Perhaps humour and enthusiasm, energy and hope need to be conveyed with such a sense of commitment, that the wrong people are put off applying! Whatever you do, you can’t afford to appoint ‘energy consumers’ into positions of leadership.

That means reading the applications with a discerning eye. It is time consuming, but there is no more important job that a leader does. One head teacher I knew had a simple sifting device. In addition to evidence of subject knowledge and pedagogy, she looked for someone who was active in music and sport. “I want them to have an interest in something outside school. It will inspire them inside school. And who knows,” she added with a smile, “they might want to involve the kids in it outside the normal timetabled hours too.”

The next stage is interview...well, perhaps not quite. Because knowledge of the stable from which the likely candidates are coming, is probably present in other members of staff. So knowing where existing staff have worked before will help get a cross-bearing

on the applicant. At interview, some schools – wisely in my view – insist on applicants carrying out an exercise pertinent to the job, observed more widely than simply by the interview panel. For teachers, that would be teaching a lesson: for learning mentors, perhaps a session with a well-prepared group of pupils; for receptionist, a session answering the phone.

By this time, some readers will be getting furious. They know they have to recruit from abroad, advertise three times to get a single applicant or grow their own staff. Well, on a positive note, growing your own staff through the on-the-job graduate entrants scheme offers huge advantages, if done well. The same is true of a deep relationship with an initial teacher training provider. Both in effect mean an extended chance to observe and assess whether someone is right for the school community.

“What if”, I hear you say, “we are desperate and there really is nobody?” This is the most dangerous position for any school: the temptation to appoint anyone living and walking is almost irresistible.

Yet resist you must. Make it temporary, alter the curriculum. Bring in someone temporarily. Do anything but don’t appoint. As one head teacher said to me wistfully, “It isn’t just marrying in haste, that’s wrong.”

That’s why a key factor is being fussy about appointments. The time invested then, and, of course, in induction and staff development, will save so much later.



The wiggly pieces





Wiggly piece

“We value and involve our parents and the community”

Once, schools were islands cut off from their local community by a moat of a drive through a sea of green fields or, more likely in the urban environment, by high walls with broken glass on top. (Now sadly, so many schools, in the sensible interests of safety in an unsafe world, are surrounded by a steel grey stockade with security gates). In bygone days, just to reinforce the point, parents were reminded of their place by signs or lines on the playground, carrying the message, “No Parents Beyond This Point”.

We’ve moved a long way. It’s often been a painful process. Most leadership teams in urban schools will say that a significant proportion of their day is taken in patrolling and making contact with the local community and parents. Primary school head teachers on estates often insist that, whatever else they do, all staff buy something from the local shop. Businesses, pubs, shops, clubs, community centres, residents’ associations, places of worship are all part of the school’s agenda. The subtleties of enlisting the support of the local community, so that it sees the school as a contributor to its health and well-being are many. So too with parents.

Parents have felt more involved with those schools, which have replaced parents’

evenings. The queues (and even dread) have been replaced by staggered appointments to ‘achievement’ or ‘progress’ days.

They fit in well where schools are so abreast with each individual’s progress, that the class teacher and head of year (from subject departments) know exactly where a pupil has reached in all their in and out of school activities.

Together, form tutor, parent and pupil can review progress and what needs to be done to succeed in the future. The most thoughtful schools take the opportunity of such occasions to take the temperature: they poll parental views about school priorities and their general concerns through questionnaires available to complete on the day. For many head teachers, the weekly newsletter is the most important task they do. One enterprising school paid the free newspaper boy to drop inserts with school news through every door when making their deliveries. Another school, while acknowledging the real difficulties involved with awkward parents, goes out of their way to arrange meetings and adjust their behaviour to make each parent (they are all different of course) feel comfortable and not unnecessarily threatened.



Wiggly piece

“We make our school personal. Every child and adult matters here”

In 2005 the Government urged on the agenda of ‘personalisation’ and set out the five points of “Every Child Matters”:-

- being healthy
- staying safe
- enjoying and achieving
- making a positive contribution
- achieving economic well-being

The jigsaw you are solving assumes that any school will interpret ‘personalisation’ (perhaps to some cynics a word associated more with number plates, ties and t-shirts than with the everyday business of schools) as attempting in all they do to be ‘personal’ rather than ‘impersonal’.

The evidence for this will be found in the staff’s use of pupils’ names in the corridors, in the everyday exchanges in classrooms, in marking, in letters home, in carefully arranged personal appointments, in phone calls made and returned – in short, in all the language and day-to-day practice of the school.

In one primary school, it finds expression in the habit of the head teacher who, as a matter of course, writes five letters each week to individual pupils inviting them to tea and a chat during break and lunchtimes.

Above all, it shows itself in any school in the acts of unexpected kindness and generosity between adult and child; adult and adult; and child and child.

Adults matter too

The “Every Child Matters” agenda will prosper in such schools, because they are inclusive places. It will only be delivered if every adult matters too. Perhaps one of the most impressive practices contributing to the five aims set out earlier is where schools keep a ‘risk’ and ‘resilience’ lists. Pupils on the ‘risk’ list are selected for inclusion after a process which involves each year head, or in the primary school the leader of each Key Stage, discussing the theory of ‘risk’ factors (e.g. poverty, parents’ levels of education, multiple parents, violence in the home, summer born pupils, boys) and then checking it at the end of each year against the reality of names suggested by class teachers or form tutors. When the list is agreed, the whole of the following year’s experiences will incorporate a plan to grow the ‘resilience’ of each pupil on the list.

The measures on the ‘resilience’ list range from each member of staff – that’s all the staff – having the names of two pupils to whom they should speak casually in the corridors at least twice a week, through to a

consideration of the full set of other opportunities run by the school. These could be extra opportunities in and out of school or residentials, as well as taking full advantage of the special interests and expertise of various members of staff employed to help such pupils.

It's at this point that it's appropriate to mention one further complication in solving this particular jigsaw puzzle. It will only be solved by schools collecting and then using 'butterflies'....Let me explain.

The 'butterfly' effect

The researcher, David Hargreaves, distinguishes two kinds of practice of intervention. 'Low leverage' interventions are all too familiar – a lot of time and effort goes into a school practice and the pay-off is paltry. The contrast is with 'high leverage' interventions: relatively low effort is needed to formulate or implement, but they yield extremely beneficial outcomes in terms of learning and ethos. All school leaders aim to avoid low leverage practices and regard high leverage alternatives as the school equivalent of gold dust.

That's where the 'butterfly' effect comes in. In the spirit of seeking high leverage, both in the important things in school life and in reinforcing how the important things are done, small interventions can have a disproportionate effect. They are called 'butterflies' after the chaos or complexity theorists' story, that if sufficient butterflies were to beat their wings in the Amazonian rain forests, they could trigger a hurricane thousands of miles away.

High leverage indeed, but sometimes if you were to put yourself in the position of the butterfly, quite a lot of effort. Perhaps, too, an unintended consequence. That's why butterflies in school life are so elusive. They may work in some contexts and not in others. Examples of school butterflies are not difficult to come by; there are one or two scattered in the text, but two examples would be:

Red Admiral

Led by the head of year 8 after consultation with all heads of department, a secondary school decided to introduce a weekly 'vocabulary' competition.

Each department took it in turns to announce, at the Friday and Monday briefings, the three words which all teachers of year 8 classes would incorporate into one of their year 8 lessons with appropriate definitions and examples of usage. So science for example, chose 'analysis', 'hypothesis' and 'investigation'. Each teacher, in addition to posting the words and definitions on the board and using them in a teaching context, would add two further words of their own choosing.

The subsequent competition involved all year 8 pupils at the end of Friday putting their selection of the three common words in the 'Vocabulary Box'. With the first correct solution drawn at the next week's year 8 assembly, the winner received a prize.

Swallowtail

One school decided to re-enforce the push to accelerate progress in year 9 (when pupils all too often can mark time) by introducing a team approach as follows:

The five form entry school has five tutor groups each of 30 pupils. All are mixed ability as tutor groups, although they are taught mainly as setted groups in subject areas. So the school decided to break each tutor group, still with one tutor – into two teams of similar spread of ability. They then brought in sixth-formers as ‘managers’ of each team. Hence there are ten teams in the year group. Each ‘team’ is trained by the tutor and the two sixth form managers in their team approach. The ten teams compete in attendance, behaviour, punctuality, service to others and attainment. Suitable points are devised for each subject with Key Stage results an obvious and important element for the attainment competition.

Each manager negotiates expert coaching from other members of staff for their team – with the obvious ones for Key Stage attainment making demands on English, maths and science. At the end of the year, there are prizes for each of the elements: attainment; behaviour; attendance; punctuality; and service to others, with some sort of a prize going to each team.

Every piece of the jigsaw will have the potential for at least one butterfly as well as use of the ICT-supported learning. That’s why each piece of the jigsaw have a butterfly on them and images of learning technologies have been used throughout this booklet.

Almost the final word

If you have read this far, you will have noticed there are descriptions of only 14 pieces. That’s because the 15th and perhaps the 16th, 17th and 18th must be identified and fitted in by you, for every school is different. Moreover, because schools are such complex places, where the cast is constantly shifting and changing roles, the pieces of the jigsaw need constant reshaping and adjustment. But you know that...and there’s never enough time. That’s why this booklet is so short. Inevitably it makes it all sound so simple when, in reality, it’s hectic and messy.

It is, however, the most important job in the world. And unfortunately one piece did fall on the floor. So here it is...



A piece that dropped on the floor?

“We communicate, collaborate
and are creative”

At the heart of a successful school, there is a collegiality among staff and pupils, that reinforces and thrives on intellectual curiosity and a willingness to be imaginative.

Conversely, schools where teachers are isolated and rely on their own resources within the confines of their own classroom are showing signs of dysfunctionality. Usually such schools are in areas of great challenge. If implemented, other pieces of the jigsaw, for example: the implications of Judith Little's advice (referred to at the beginning); the sections on teaching and learning; staff development; considering data; and use of language, will all counter any tendencies for that to happen.

Considering communication in its own right, however, is essential, because communication is never 'good enough.' Communication always has the potential to be on the slide and as it does it affects everything else.

So what are the features of 'good enough' communication? Does it include regular staff briefings? Does it include an e-platform, that enables pupils, parents and staff to access, any part of the school's management information and learning programmes, that are appropriate to them, including lesson plans, school reports on pupil progress and homework, from school, home, the local library, community centre (or for that matter anywhere)? Is it remembering birthdays? Is it in the handwritten notes of thanks? Is it the school's newsletter? Is it remembering that when you are speaking and presenting to the media, that the most important members of your audience are your own staff, parents

and pupils? Is it being at the school gate every evening?

Well, it's each and every one of these - and more besides. To keep communication as it should be requires not only thought through strategy, it requires checking like everything else. Not just with questions in the annual survey of staff, parents and pupils, but also through 360 degree feedback and as a regular part of self-review of every aspect of the school's practices.

Communication oils collaboration and enables people to work in a culture, where imagination is valued. Some schools have found an analysis of 'appreciative enquiry', 'problem solving' and 'ensuring compliance' helpful as set out below:-

Ensuring Compliance

1. Decide what is right.
2. Promulgate single solutions.
3. Regulate and inspect.
4. Punish in public deviants and inadequates.

Problem Solving

1. Find a felt need.
Identify the problem.
2. Analyse causes.
3. Analyse solutions.
4. Develop an action plan.

Appreciative Enquiry

1. Appreciate the best of 'What is'.
2. Envision.
3. Dialogue for new knowledge and theory 'What should be'.
4. Create the vision 'What will be'.

Most schools as organisations realise that you need three parts of appreciative enquiry for every one part of problem solving, if only because people need the boost in energy and self-belief that appreciative enquiry provides. There are problems enough and they have to be solved, but they require energy and persistence. The third, ensuring compliance, is only wise in a crisis when dysfunctionality is in danger of taking over. Too much of it will induce constant problems drive out appreciative enquiry and lead itself to dysfunction.

Postscript

Finally, to try another image – and good schools are full of images and revel in them: the jigsaw puzzle pieces might not be jigsaw pieces at all, but ingredients in a recipe. They need to be put together in the right order and in the right quantities and at the right time. Moreover, it will depend on what sort of cooker you've got – some people on reading this might be thinking, "A cooker of any sort would be a fine thing. All I've got is a paraffin stove!"

As you build capacity, and as enthusiasm, energy and, above all, hope infuse all aspects of school life, the momentum will grow and become almost self-sustaining. Almost. It will still be necessary to glance at the jigsaw puzzle from time to time in the midst of the pell-mell that is school life, to ensure you aren't inadvertently missing a vital detail that could jeopardise the bigger picture!!!

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the thousands of head teachers and teachers I've met in the last 45 years, but most thanks goes to those in the last 20, during which time I've become obsessed with the issues in this booklet. Particular thanks to all my colleagues in advisory services, especially those in Oxfordshire, Birmingham and London.



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