In this Issue

SM&L

School Improvement and a cooperative approach to managing the demands of the new curriculum

By the time this newsletter reaches you, we hope that all the issues relating to the industrial action that have closed many of the country's schools and hospitals will have been resolved and that schools will once again be fully functional and working to minimise the impact that the loss of teaching time has had on pupils.

In this issue of *SM&L* we have included a number of articles which look at issues relating to school improvement, including one on the IQMS and Whole School Evaluation. We continue our series on leadership and on professional development with two further articles on these topics; and gather further advice on the teaching of Mathematics, this time from a group of dedicated high school Mathematics teachers who make a number of suggestions of things that principals can do to enrich and support Mathematics teachers and teaching in their schools and in doing so, help produce improved results in this important gateway subject. What is particularly interesting and inspiring about this group of teachers is their commitment to working together and to sharing resources and solving problems. Although they complained about a number of issues relating to the implementation of the new curriculum and the lack of or indifferent support that they had received from their district subject advisors, they did not use this as an excuse for poor classroom practice. Instead they had made a plan to use their considerable pool of knowledge and experience to provide the support and materials that they felt were lacking. The advantages derived from this cooperative approach not only benefits members of the group but has no doubt had a positive influence on the members of their subject teams and ultimately on the pupils that they teach. Certainly there is a need to encourage this kind of cooperative approach to teaching and principals can play a key role in this regard. The support and promotion of subject-specific cooperative groups of this kind is even more important in districts and regions where support from PED officials is inadequate. *SM&L* would like to hear from similar groups that may be operating in other areas and would be happy to help facilitate cooperative links between schools and subject specialist groups from across the country who may wish to work together.

Alan Clarke
Managing Editor

Teaching Mathematics

A group of experienced, well-qualified and committed high school Mathematics teachers provide advice to principals on what can be done to support and encourage good Mathematics teaching and to improve the Mathematics results of pupils

I was fortunate recently to have been invited to an informal meeting of Mathematics teachers held at Rustenburg Girls' High School. The meetings, which take place each quarter, go under the quaint but appropriate name "Swap and Share", for swapping and sharing is what happens at the meeting. Participation is voluntary and about 15 teachers from 6 or 7 different schools form this loosely-knit group of committed teachers. It is their commitment that binds them, a commitment to the pupils they teach and to the teaching of Mathematics. Teaching Mathematics is what brings them together, it is what they talk about at their meetings and it is what makes them willing to come out on a cold winter's evening – the meeting I attended started at 17:30 in the library of the host school and was still going strong when I left at 19:30 – to share ideas, to swap teaching materials and to enjoy the company of like-minded colleagues.

I had been invited to the meeting by Chris Murison, the retired head of Rondebosch Boys' High School. For the past few years Chris has been teaching Mathematics on a part-time basis at Rustenburg, and I had approached him for ideas on the things heads could do to support and improve the teaching of Mathematics at their schools. His response was to invite me to the meeting, and what a pleasure and inspiration it was to meet these dedicated teachers. Interestingly these were not new or inexperienced or under-qualified teachers. They were all experienced and well-qualified professionals. Yet the first thing I noticed while listening to the informal chatter of the meeting was that there was a level of anxiety about the NSC Mathematics curriculum. Their anxiety centred on two issues: (a) their coverage of the curriculum – was it sufficient? (b) whether they were teaching the material in sufficient depth. More than anything else they wanted to see Grade 12 exemplars papers and were adamant that the DoE needed to provide these to schools sooner rather than later and that they needed to have the exemplars before the end of this year.

They kindly allowed me to pose two questions to the group. These were:

1 What should principals do to support and encourage good Mathematics teaching at their schools and to improve the Mathematics results of their pupils?

2 What concerns do they as teachers have about the NSC Mathematics curriculum and its implementation and how are they trying to address these concerns?

> A calling, true professionalism, call it what you like, the commitment of these teachers of Mathematics is an example of what good teaching is all about

Their consolidated responses are listed below:

Encouraging good Mathematics Teaching and improving results:

• Teaching time: Mathematics must be allocated sufficient teaching time in the school timetable. It was interesting that there was a small but significant variation in the weekly time allocated to Mathematics amongst the group. In terms of policy the weekly allocation for Mathematics is 5 hours in Grades 8 and 9 (18% of required 27.5 hours of teaching time) and 4.5 hours for Grades 10 to 12. All of the teachers indicated that they could do with more time.

• Subject meetings: These should be timetabled, or if this is not possible, principals should allocate a set weekly time for subject meetings as these were considered to be essential for the proper coordination of teaching within a subject department and also because they offer opportunities for the subject head to mentor and advise inexperienced and less-qualified colleagues. All the schools represented had regular weekly subject meetings although not all were timetabled as part of the teaching day.

• Subject meeting minutes: Minutes of subject meetings should be kept. The minutes should reflect decisions made and should be retained for reference purposes. Minute keeping in this way was common practice for most of the schools present.

• Planning meetings: Day-long subject planning meetings were considered to be an essential part of the annual planning process at these schools. They are held during the year-end examinations. Subject teams are released from invigilation for the day so that they can plan for the following year. Most of the schools represented had at least one meeting of this kind each year. One of the schools also had a meeting of this kind in mid-year.

• Subject budget: At all the schools represented the subject departments submitted subject budgets as part of the school's budgeting process. Subject heads were free to spend the allocated funds once the budget had been approved, provided the funds were available.

• Teaching guidelines: The subject heads in some of the schools represented provided members of their subject teams with detailed guidelines of what should be taught, over and above what was provided in their subject work schemes. This was

done as a means of supporting those team members who are inexperienced, under-qualified or unsure of the material they were teaching. Subject heads also helped colleagues prioritise different sections of the syllabus to ensure that appropriate time and effort was devoted to those sections which are most important.

• Teachers teach all grades: The group felt that there are important benefits to be gained from having teachers teach all five grades. The most important value of this approach is that all teachers gain a good understanding of the scope and extent of the curriculum, how the different parts of the curriculum link together and how material taught in the lower grades underpins the work that is taught in the higher grades.

• Teachers share test and examination setting: Sharing the load of setting and marking standardised tests and examinations not only ensures that all members of the department carry a similar work-load, it also promotes good communication between teachers about the work that has been and is to be covered and the best ways of assessing what has been taught. Sharing test and examination setting also makes it possible for the subject head and/ or more experienced colleagues to provide guidance to and support for their less experienced or competent colleagues on an informal basis when discussing test and examination papers that have been set.

• Class visits: Few of the schools represented had any system, either formal or informal of regular class visits other than those which are required for determining IQMS ratings. A number, however, expressed support for the idea of regular informal class visits as a means of sharing experience and of learning from colleagues.

• Pay Mathematics teachers more: this suggestion was to be expected and although in their case it was their first suggestion and made in a rather tongue-in-cheek way, it would, for this group of teachers be well deserved and money well spent. Commitment and competence of this kind deserve to be well rewarded.

Their concerns about the roll-out of the NSC Mathematics curriculum include the following:

• Concerns about depth – How superficial or in-depth should the teaching of the various sections of the syllabus be?

• Concerns about the extent to which the curriculum will equip pupils to deal with the demands of Mathematics at tertiary level

• They would like to be provided with more exemplars and particularly Grade 12 exemplars because they felt that this would be the best way to improve their detailed understanding of what the curriculum required.

• They bemoaned the lack of Grade 12

textbooks and the fact that there were inconsistencies and a degree of diversity in the way different textbooks covered different sections of the syllabus

• Subject advisors were generally seen to be unhelpful and of indifferent competence. The group felt that many of the meetings they called simply wasted the teachers' time. Advisors also tended to be confrontational rather than supportive when dealing with the concerns of teachers.

There was consensus that there was much about the new curriculum that was good, interesting and exciting to teach and that once they had a better idea about the level at which their teaching should be pitched, they would enjoy teaching it.

There was some disappointment that Additional Mathematics was no longer an option. Those that taught the Additional Mathematics curriculum felt that the NSC curriculum developed by the IEB was very well integrated with the NSC Mathematics curriculum and this made it a good and valuable option for those pupils who were good at Mathematics and who planned to proceed to Mathematics-based courses in their tertiary studies.

Attracting and Developing High Quality Teachers

It would seem that South Africa is not the only country struggling to attract and develop high-quality teachers. In its May newsletter *The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement*, a United States-based organisation funded under contract by the US Department of Education, suggests a number of strategies that school districts can use to attract and develop high-quality teachers. They note that high teacher turnover rates and teacher shortages especially in areas such as Mathematics, Science and special education have left many states and districts "scrambling" to find ways to recruit and develop highly-qualified teachers. It all sounds rather familiar!

Their suggestions for a successful recruitment plan include the following:

• the formation of a recruitment strategic planning team

This team should include staff from district offices as well as school-based staff such as principals and teachers. They believe that this will give all involved greater ownership of the recruitment process and make it more effective.

• the development of marketing and outreach strategies

This should be geared at attracting high school pupils to the teaching profession and should involve the use of the

Professional development

How a needs analysis can be used to determine the professional development needs of teachers

In this edition we continue our series on Professional Development with a look at how a needs analysis can be used to determine the professional development needs of teachers.

The most important thing to remember about the professional development of teachers is that it is about the pupils' needs not the teachers' needs. Its primary purpose is to improve the educational attainment of the pupils that the teachers teach by improving the knowledge and skills of teachers in those areas which will best equip them to improve the performance of their pupils. Any assessment of teacher needs for the purposes of future professional development should therefore start with an assessment of the educational needs of the pupils they teach.

At its most rigorous level a needs analysis is used to assess the performance gap between established goals and actual performance. As an example, a primary school may set as one of its goals the improvement of the performance of its pupils in the Grade 3 and 6 National Benchmark Tests for Literacy and Numeracy. For the purpose of a needs assessment it is important to be more specific than this about these goals and to establish the specific level of performance that the school aims to achieve when the pupils are next assessed. Once this has been established, it is possible to compare these results with the actual performance of the pupils in the most recent tests. The difference between the two is the performance gap for literacy and numeracy. An example is given at the bottom of this page.

Clearly there are difficulties and inconsistencies with this kind of analysis, one of which relates to the fact that a different cohort of pupils would be tested in the next round of testing. Although this is true, it should not distract from the main purpose of the exercise, which is to get some measure of the difference between the present performance of pupils and the performance goals the school wishes to set for them.

Once the pupil performance gap has been identified, the next step is to identify the staff skills needed to close this pupil performance gap. In the case of improving numeracy and literacy, it would be necessary to determine the extent to which the teachers teaching numeracy and literacy, as well as the staff as a whole, have the knowledge and skills they need to improve the performance of pupils in these two areas. In addition to assessing the staff needs in terms of classroom practice it is also necessary to determine the extent to which subject and/or phase heads, as well as others in leadership positions, have the necessary knowledge and skills to support the staff and to manage and monitor the improvement process. This staff needs analysis could take the form of a staff survey. From the results of the survey and the school's records of the qualifications and experience of the teachers, those responsible for managing the continuing professional development programme at the school, should be in a position to identify the specific professional developmental needs of individual teachers and of the staff as a whole.

The needs assessment survey could take the form of a questionnaire which all teachers are asked to complete. The aim of the survey is to determine the extent to which teachers feel confident that they have the knowledge and ability to teach literacy and/or numeracy at a level that will make is possible for the school to achieve its literacy and numeracy targets.

Numeracy and Literacy Performance Gap % of pupils passing National Benchmark Tests at Grade Level				
Year	Literacy		Numeracy	
	Grade 3	Grade 6	Grade 3	Grade 6
2006	67	45	51	52
Goal (2008)	80	75	70	70
Performance Gap	13	30	19	18

Staff Skills and Needs Survey	
We hope to improve the results of our pupils in the next National Benchmark Tests from their current levels to the level shown. We know that this will be a challenge but believe that with the support and commitment of our staff it can be achieved. The school will endeavour to provide staff and pupils with the resources they need to deliver these results, to the extent that our finances permit. In order to assess these needs and to help us provide this support we ask you please to complete this survey.	
Name	
Literacy/ primary language specific qualifications	
Years of experience teaching literacy/ primary language	
Age/ phase/grade you feel most competent to teach	
List any professional development/ training sessions relating to the teaching of literacy/primary language that you have attended in the past two years	
Were they of benefit to your teaching and would you recommend them?	
List any teaching resources you have used and which you have found helpful in teaching literacy/ primary language	
Are there any teaching strategies that you have used successfully with the pupils you teach to improve their literacy/ primary language competence?	
If "yes" would you be willing to share these strategies with your colleagues at a staff professional development session?	
Are you aware of any materials or teaching strategies that have been used by other schools to improve the literacy levels of their pupils? If so please provide details of these.	
What do you consider to be the three most significant obstacles to improving the literacy/primary language levels of the pupils at this school?	
For each obstacle listed make one practical suggestion on how best to overcome/ minimise the effect of the obstacles you have listed.	

A staff needs assessment of this kind achieves a number of important things:

- it brings staff into the improvement process from the start. This ensures that teachers start to take ownership of the problem and the process
- it provides an opportunity for individual members of staff to analyse and identify their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to the problem
- it provides a useful source of teaching strategies and resource materials which can be incorporated into any planned professional development programme
- it makes it possible for the school's best and most successful teachers to showcase their teaching strategies and materials to the rest of the staff. They can become the standard bearers for quality teaching
- it enables the school to identify and quantify the obstacles, whether real or perceived, that the teachers feel prevent them from achieving success
- it forces the teachers to make constructive proposals on how best to reduce or overcome these obstacles and in doing so ensuring that they take greater ownership of and commitment to finding solutions.
- it provides a useful focus for staff discussion around the issues of literacy/ numeracy and creates an opportunity to build consensus around school-wide strategies to address the problem

Once the information has been collected, collated and analysed the principal or school development team, depending on how the school operates and who is responsible for the professional development of staff, will be in a position to begin the process of putting together a strategy and supporting a professional development programme with the ultimate aim of addressing the pupil performance gap which the school has identified.

In the next issue we plan to look at the kinds of professional development programmes that schools can and do use as part of their commitment to the continuing professional development of their teaching corps.

Quality Assurance of the IQMS

There is more to the IQMS than pay progression and School Improvement Plans. It is also being used to implement a process of Quality Assurance for Public Education

The Integrated Quality Management System, or IQMS as it is more commonly called, is now in its third year of implementation in public schools and the teachers and principals ought by now to be familiar with its many acronyms. The three integrated management systems which constitute the IQMS are:

- Development Appraisal and Development
- Performance Management
- Whole School Evaluation

In the first year of its implementation (2005), the key element of the process was the baseline evaluation of all teachers using the 12 performance standards which are the measuring tools of the IQMS system. Standards 1 – 7 are used to measure the performance of post level 1 teachers, Standards 1 – 10 are used for Heads of Department (Education Specialists) and Standards 1 – 12 are used for Principals and Deputy principals. The first year (2005) of implementation was used to establish a base-line evaluation for every teacher in service. Teachers were then expected to prepare a *Personal Growth Plan (PGP)* and schools to use these *PGPs* to develop a *School Improvement Plan (SIP)*. Later in the year the first summative evaluation of teachers was conducted, which was then used to determine whether or not teachers met the requirments for a 1% salary notch increase in the following year. This in essence consitutes the *Performance Measurement* component of the IQMS.

In a similar way schools were expected to prepare a *School Improvement Plan(SIP)* and through the implementation of the plan improve their performance in the areas they had identified. The development of the *School Improvement Plan* constitutes the *Whole School Evaluation* component of the IQMS. This is essentially a three-phase process:

- School Self-evaluation, using 9 focus areas and the criterion questions provided in the IQMS documents
- The development of a *School Improvement Plan* based on the areas identified for improvement/change during the self-evaluation process
- The implementation of the School Improvement Plan with assistance from support structures in the EMDC (district offices)

The people responsible for monitoring the process and for providing feedback and reporting progress are the Quality Assurance units of the Provincial Education Department. I was fortunate earlier this year to have had an opportunity to meet Linda Rose, Head of the Directorate: Quality Assurance in the Western Cape Education Department and to hear first-hand how her directorate had set about its task of monitoring and assuring quality in the department. I also attended one morning of the week-long training sessions for prospective Quality Assurance facilitators who, once trained, will visit schools as part of the Quality Assurance process.

At its simplest level the function of the Directorate: Quality Assurance is to monitor the compliance of schools with prescribed processes and policies and to implement their development plans successfully. This is done using two processes:

- Data provided by schools and district offices, as part of the self-evaluation process will be used to check whether the goals and targets that have been set are met.
- External monitoring teams will be sent to schools to do a physical audit of the process to test its integrity and the integrity of the data provided by schools in their *School Improvement Plan*.

One of the interesting things that I discovered at my meeting with Ms Rose was that the decision about which schools should be Quality Assured (QA) was made by the DoE. The planning of the *Whole School Evaluation (WSE)* cycle for each of the selected schools was then done by the provincial *WSE* unit.

Once the decision has been made the identified schools are notified of the fact that they are to be evaluated four weeks before the on-site evaluation takes place. In the 4-week period prior to the on-site evaluation, which normally takes from 4 – 5 days, the school is required to provide the *WSE* team with the documents that they will require for the evaluation process. Although the list of documents required will vary from school to school, the basic list which all schools are required to produce is comprehensive and includes those documents schools need to have in terms of education policy. The documents, together with the School Improvement Plan, are scrutinised by the WSE team prior to the on-site visit. During this period the leader of the WSE team must, of necessity meet with the school's School Development Team to plan the programme for the on-site visit. Part of this planning will include the scheduling of meetings with the School Management Team, School Governing Body and other stakeholders within the school as well as making decisions about lesson observation of selected teachers and the scheduling of these. The team leader of the WSE team is expected to prepare and present an oral report to school stakeholders outlining the findings of the WSE team on the last day of the on-site visit and to provide the school with a written report of their findings within 4 weeks of the on-site evaluation.

Principals and teachers are likely to experience some levels of anxiety on hearing the news that there is to be an on-site audit of their systems and processes. Being subject to this kind of scrutiny is never easy and it is inevitable in these circumstances that one thinks of all the things that have been done that have not quite measured up to one's expectations. In the end this is what quality assurance is all about. The good thing about it is that if it is implemented in the way that it is meant to be implemented we should see a steady improvement in the quality of performance of our public schools. Ms Rose has assured me that this will happen in her province and that schools will not only be expected to implement recommendations made by the *WSE* team, but that the team and district officials from the EMDC will follow up in this regard.

Interestingly the mandate of the Directorate: Quality Assurance is not limited to assuring the quality of the performance of schools. Its responsibility extends to monitoring, evaluating and assuring the quality of performance of all component structures of the Provincial Education Department. This is a positive development because the shortcomings of the PEDs and their district officials are, incorrectly, seldom considered to be factors in the poor performance of Public Schools. In this regard it was clear from my discussion with Linda Rose that she and her department see Principals and Circuit Managers as the key drivers of school improvement and it is they that in the first instance need to be held accountable for the performance of their schools - the Principals because the leadership and management of their school are their core function and the Circuit Managers because they are the line managers responsible for monitoring the performance of the Principals and schools in their circuit and for initiating interventions when these schools underperform.

Further information can be obtained from the Drectorate: Quality Assurance (WCED) website at:

http//wced.wcape.gov.za/dqa

Curriculum-related policy matters

Amendments to the programme and promotion requirements for Grades 10-12 (Published in Government Gazette No. 29851)

Subject combinations:

From 2008, Grade 10 learners will not be allowed to offer the following subject combinations:

- Computer Applications Technology and Information Technology
- Consumer Studies and Hospitality Studies

Promotion requirements:

The promotion requirements for Grades 10-12 are now as follows: A learner must achieve 40% in three subjects, one of which is an official language at Home Language Level, and 30% in three subjects, provided that at least a complete portfolio of evidence in the school-based assessment component is submitted in the seventh subject.

This means that condonation will no longer be permitted. A pupil may, however, fail one subject, provided that a portfolio of assessment evidence is submitted for that subject.

Grade 12 Mathematics: Optional Paper (Paper 3)

The national Department of Education has provided clarity on the optional Mathematics Paper (Paper 3) in Grades 10-12 (DoE Circular S4 of 2007). Paper 3 is an optional paper and will not count towards the promotion and certification of National Senior Certificate candidates. Performance in this paper will be indicated in a separate statement which Higher Education Institutions will be able to use in the management of admissions to specific programmes and faculties.

The DoE expects that the Assessment Standards that are covered by this optional paper will become compulsory after 2010 and therefore encourages teachers to teach the content relating to these Assessment Standards.

Requirements for offering of technology subjects in Grades 10-12

The national Department of Education has announced specific requirements regarding infrastructure and equipment which schools must comply with if they wish to offer one or more of the subjects Engineering Graphics and Design, Civil Technology, Electrical Technology or Mechanical Technology (DoE Circular S5 of 2007).

In this Circular the Department also recommends that pupils be permitted to offer only one of the subjects Civil Technology, Electrical Technology or Mechanical Technology and that Engineering Graphics and Design be taken in combination with whichever one of the three is selected. Engineering Graphics and Design relates to sections of all three of the subjects and is meant to complement them.

The announcement provides no advice for schools that currently offer the subjects but which are not complying with these requirements. Neither does it provide information on safety requirements.

Western Cape Education Department Conference

Quality in Education

hosted by the Directorate: Quality Assurance

24 & 25 August 2007

College of Cape Town, Crawford Campus

For further details contact Faith Cartwright at footprints@netactive.co.za

Leadership - how to go from good to great

We take another look at the writings of Jim Collins on leadership and consider how his findings on "Good to Great in the Social Sector" can be used by principals as drivers of success in their schools

In our April issue we looked at some of the research findings of Jim Collins and his team on the characteristics of what they call "good to great companies" and their leaders, and which are described in his two books *Good to Great* and *Built to Last*.[1] More recently, Collins has published a monograph with the title *Why Business thinking is not the answer, Good to Great in the Social Sector* [2] in which he looks at successful "social sector" organisations such as public schools, hospitals, NGOs and aid agencies, and in which he rejects the idea that social sector organisations should simply become more like business.

Collins suggests that building great organisations proceeds in four phases

Stage 1: Disciplined people

This is about having the right people doing the right job. It is about leaders who are committed to the organisation or cause and who are committed to employing and/or assigning jobs and tasks to people who will support the organisation's goals and who have the ability and commitment to deliver on these goals. It is also about moving out those whose support is questionable or who are unwilling or unable to deliver.

Stage 2: Disciplined thought

This is about two things:

• A willingness to confront the brutal facts of the organisation's current reality. It is about not shying away from problems that face you but equally it is about having faith that you will ultimately prevail despite the odds that may be stacked against you.

• Understanding your strengths, what drives you and what you do best. It includes finding and getting access to the resources that you need without compromising your integrity or your commitment to your goals. (What Collins calls the "Hedgehog concept")

Stage 3: Disciplined action

This involves the establishment of a culture of discipline such that those working in the organisation have the freedom to act without the need for hierarchical structures (bosses) because everyone has a clear understanding of their individual responsibilities and all are committed to the organisation's goals. It is the persistent effort arising from disciplined action that builds the momentum necessary to achieve enduring success. (What Collins calls the "flywheel effect").

Stage 4: Building greatness to last

The final step requires the organisation's leader(s) to take a long-term view of their organisation – to think about it beyond their tenure so as to ensure that it endures as a great organisation. To do this leaders need to encourage innovation in terms of process and strategies to ensure that the organisation stays ahead of its changing operational environment, while preserving the organisation's core values.

What makes Collins's findings so interesting and the message they deliver so powerful is a consequence of the strategy he and his team used to identify and define what he terms "great organisations". They used a three stage process to distinguished those organisations that are great from those that are merely good:

• Firstly, they identified the good – from organisations operating in the same business or social environment they selected those that performed best. This was based on objective criteria appropriate for the environment in which organisations operated. For businesses it was return on investment. For social sector not-for-profit organisations like schools, aid agencies, hospitals and orchestras it was things like reputation and the ability to attract funds or volunteers. Ultimately for these organisations the measure of quality was performance relative to the organisation's stated mission.

• Secondly, they searched amongst the good to find those that, at some point and as a consequence of some purposeful commitment to a desired and ambitious goal, had moved ahead of the rest, outperforming them for a significant period of time (15 years)

• Thirdly, they searched amongst the good organisations operating in the same business or social environment for a similar organisation which for the period under review had faced the same or similar operating environment and challenges, but which had been unable to make the move from good but ordinary, to being a truly great organisation. It is what they discovered in this part of the study which provided the critical material for the *Good to Great* and which it seems, from their most recent research, to apply equally well in the social sector to organisations like schools. Of these, perhaps the most significant for our current situation in this country is that the great organisations were able to prosper despite the challenges and setbacks they faced - setbacks that had derailed, overwhelmed or stunted the progress of their institutional peers.

What differentiated the great organisations and their leaders from their less successful peers was that they did not allow external factors or forces to distract them from their purpose. More importantly they did not blame external factors for their failure to deliver. What they did and what distinguishes them from their more ordinary peers, was to make a plan to manage and overcome the challenges. Through foresight, initiative, hard work and commitment to their goals, they were able to reduce or eliminate the impact of the obstacles and contrary forces thrown up by the environment in which they operated and in some instances were able to use these to improve performance and leverage greater success.

What are the lessons from this for schools and school principals?

• Have ambition for your school. All the good to great organisations and their leaders had ambitious goals. Businesses wanted to be number one in their particular business sector, while the social organisations had very clear, specific visions of what they wanted to be. Try to be the best in at least one sphere of schooling, in your circuit, your district, your province or in the country.

• Let your goals be GOALS not goals. The good to great organisations had what Collins called "big hairy audacious goals". They need to be goals that will challenge and excite you and your staff and will make a real difference to the lives of the pupils of your school.

• The GOALS should drive you and all who work with you and all who are involved in the school. They should be the focus of all that you do and should determine your and your school's priorities.

• Define your GOALS for the school in ways that everyone can understand. Make them part of everything that you do or say until they become embedded in the fabric of the school to the point where the school and its goals become synonymous.

• Choose, support and reward teachers and other staff members who share your vision for the school. Be generous with praise and reward for those whose efforts move the school in the direction of these goals.

• Be fierce in your resolve. Don't let miscellaneous issues and detractors distract you from your purpose.

• Have faith that you will prevail. Take a long-term view. Do not let setbacks and obstacles diminish your vision. Rather see them as opportunities to hone performance in testing times and to develop new and valuable skills for the future.

• Do not compromise and accept no excuses. To be great is to be demanding about results. As Collins puts it: "Greatness is not a function of circumstances. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of choice, and discipline." The truth of this is borne out by the achievements of a range of schools across the country which have produced and continue to produce results which are extraordinary in relation to their circumstances and in comparison to other similar schools with equivalent or even better circumstances. They are proof that principals and teachers can and do make a difference when and if they are willing to do so.

References

1 Collins, J. *Good to Great.* Random House, London (2001) & Collins , J. & Porras, J. *Built to Last*. Random House, London (2000).

2 Collins, J. *Why Business thinking is not the answer. Good to Great in the Social Sector*. Random House. London (2006)

media (print, radio, television and the internet) to inform prospective teachers of employment opportunities.

• the forging of partnerships with teacher education institutions

Close working relationships with education institutions help in two ways. Prospective teachers can be directed to the local teacher training institutions and these institutions can, in turn, keep their students informed of financial incentives such as bursaries and of employment opportunities available in their district

• the evaluation of the appointment process

The authors suggest that prospective teachers may be deterred from applying for teaching posts because the process of applying is too cumbersome and time-consuming and that there is a need to reduce the paperwork and simplify the process.

• the provision of financial incentives

Financial incentives, including "signing bonuses" which are paid up front for teachers who commit to teaching in a specific school or district for a number of years, have proved to be successful in some districts as are other financial incentives such as monthly housing stipends (subsidies). The authors caution that financial incentives alone are not enough to retain teachers and need to be coupled with other strategies such as teacher induction programmes, professional development, supportive leadership and teacher collaboration opportunities during the school day.

With the increasingly critical shortage of qualified and experienced teachers in South African schools, particularly in scarce subjects such as Mathematics, Mathematical Literacy, the sciences and the languages the time may have come for school districts and groupings of schools to get together and consider similar strategies to attract and develop high quality teachers. The PEDs and teacher training institutions could certainly help in this regard but as it is schools that face the problem at first hand, it is perhaps time for them to take the lead.

Factors that make a difference in schools ...

Good teaching and good learning make up a school's bottom line. It is what schooling is about and is the core function of a school. Disappointingly, many schools pay only lip service to this.

The first requirement for good teaching and good learning to prosper in a school is the will of the principal to make it work. It's about priorities - about making this the main thing. If it is to be a school's priority, then it must be talked about all the time and must influence every decision made.

The following checklist is a useful test of whether good teaching and learning is indeed the main thing at a school.

☐ Lessons are never interrupted by intercom announcements or by teachers or pupils from other classes who come to the door.

☐ Teaching days are not lost to sporting events and cultural functions.

☐ Teaching starts on the first day of the school year.

☐ Teaching takes place on the first and last day of every term.

☐ The absentee rate for pupils immediately after the exams is not different from that during the normal period of the term.

☐ During the examination period pupils come to school on the days when they are not writing examinations as well as on the days when they are writing.

☐ All pupils have their necessary textbooks.

☐ The system of issuing and recovering textbooks is effective and more than 95% of textbooks are returned.

☐ Pupils pay for textbooks that they lose.

☐ All pupils have the stationery they need.

☐ The school has a homework policy.

☐ All teachers set and check homework according to the homework policy.

☐ All assessment tasks are marked and returned to pupils within five school days.

☐ There is follow-up when pupils miss tests and examinations.

☐ Lessons start and stop on time.

In a study by Kaplan and Owings[1] reviewing the research findings linking teacher quality to pupil achievement, they distinguish between *teacher* quality and *teaching* quality. Teacher quality concerns the "inputs" the teacher brings to the school. These include their aptitude, professional preparation, qualifications, prior experience, as well as their racial, cultural and socio-economic profile. Teaching quality, on the other hand, refers to the teacher's ability to teach – what the teacher does to promote pupil learning inside the classroom. The factors which relate teacher quality to increased pupil achievement include

• verbal ability (*note*: this is the verbal ability of the teacher)

• content knowledge

• education coursework on teaching methods in their discipline

• on-going voluntary professional learning

• enthusiasm for learning

• flexibility, creativity, and adaptability

• amount of teaching experience (once a teacher has taught for three or more years the differences associated with experience are marginal)

• demonstrated skill in asking pupils higher-order questions and probing their responses

• class sizes, planning time, opportunities to work with colleagues, curricular resources.

Interestingly, in one study[2], they note that "the aspects of teaching quality measured in this study have an impact seven to ten times greater than that of class size".

Indicators of teaching quality include the following:

• the teacher attracts pupils' attention and interest in learning through creative and varied learning activities

• the teacher provides direct instruction in specific skills and knowledge

• the teacher provides ongoing and varied assessment (formative and summative)

• the teacher teaches and tests the curriculum so that all pupils have opportunities to learn content and skills

• the teacher uses the results of assessment to make decisions about future teaching strategies in order to improve the learning of all pupils.

The recommendations listed below are strategies based on these research findings, which principals can use to support good teaching and learning in their schools. Principals should:

• Work closely with subject teachers.

• Talk continually about the importance of good teaching.

• Observe teachers teaching. Discuss their observations with the teachers.

• Visit classrooms frequently for short periods of observation.

• Identify examples of best practice in the classrooms they visit.

• Give teachers specific positive feedback on what they have observed.

• Hire well qualified teachers with a verifiable

record of good teaching.

- Establish a system for sharing ideas and examples across the staff.
- Include teacher achievement, and failure prevention, as criteria for evaluating teacher performance and remuneration.
- Establish a policy which ensures that when the timetable is drawn up each teacher is allocated both high performing and academically weak class groups.
- Establish a system which rewards teachers who are successful teachers of struggling groups.
- Establish a mentoring and coaching system for new and beginner teachers.
- Allocate time, preferably during the school day, when subject teachers can meet to discuss best practice.
- Establish a system that ensures that subject heads observe and report on lessons taught by members of their subject team and that members of the subject team have opportunities to observe one another's lessons and lessons taught by their subject head.
- Plan the programme of professional development for the school year so that most of the programme is devoted to issues related to best teaching practice.
- Establish a system that investigates rigorously the reason for pupil failure and that ensures strategies are put in place to address this failure.
- Provide teachers and subject heads with theresources, including financial resources, that they need. Insist that they justify the costs in terms of better teaching and improved results.
- Encourage and provide the resources teachers need for their own professional development such as attending seminars, conferences and professional development workshops relating to their teaching.

Other research in America based on schools which achieved high levels of success with children from low socio-economic circumstances identified a number of common factors. These included:

- a strong commitment within the school community to the belief that all pupils can achieve
- school principals who demonstrated strong leadership and who recognised that leadership must extend to the classroom
- school principals who understood that accountability, commitment and motivation grow with involvement and who, because of this, sought to develop teams with a strong sense of ownership for changes made in the school.

A number of key strategies used by the principals who turned around under-performing schools have also been identified by research. The most critical factor in achieving success was the need to raise the expectations of staff, pupils and parents, and the need to make pupils believe in themselves, when they and their parents doubt their ability to succeed. The key elements of the improvement strategies of these schools included the following:

- the need to change the culture of the school: this involves building relationships and developing self-belief in order to counter the sense of helplessness that characterises these communities. As a first step there is the need to contrive small successes in order to create the self-belief that things can change. Once small but modest gains have been made, progress becomes easier as self-confidence and capacity grows.
- focusing on teaching and learning: this is closely related to the needs of the staff, and the need to create a sense of community and commitment to the school. Principals need to appoint new teachers who are of high quality and who are suited to the school's particular needs.
- reviewing the school day: this needs to be done to increase teaching time, to provide time for the completion of homework assignments and course work, and to encourage pupil involvement in a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- the purposeful use of data: the use of data (mainly pupils' results) to establish targets, to monitor and track progress, to challenge the status quo at the school and as a means of convincing people that the work they are doing is having a beneficial effect.

Educational quality flows directly from the quality of the school management, and it starts with the principals. It *is* possible to make a difference.

References

This article is based on Chapter 8 of Alan Clarke's *The Handbook of School Management*, published by Kate McCullum and distributed by Macmillan. The price is R275 including VAT and the book can be obtained from Macmillan South African (Pty) Ltd.
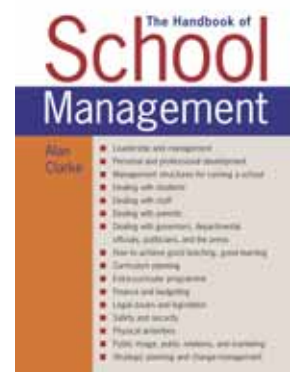
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Policy Update

Background

On 4 May Minister Pandor published the Education Laws Amendment Bill, 2007 for public comment. At the time, the Bill evoked strong reaction largely as a result of three aspects, as follows:

1.   formal provision in SASA for what is essentially a policy on random searching, seizing and testing for drugs.

2.   the unfortunate wording of a notification to SGBs concerning school underperformance as a *written warning*.

3.   an attempt to prevent the principal from giving evidence on behalf of the SGB against the Minister, the MEC or the Head of Department in any court case in which these three are cited.

What was not generally covered is the proposed amendment that has the greatest implication for education policy formulation in South Africa. Through this proposed amendment to the National Education Policy Act the Minister seeks to remove the existing compulsion on her to establish a broad consultative and advisory body called the National Education and Training Council.

National Education and Training Council and consultation

At present this Council is a compulsory statutory body which should have been called into being immediately after the legislating of the National Education Policy Act in 1996. This Act makes it very clear that the Minister had to establish such a council for advising on broad policy and strategy for the national education system and for advancing integration of education and training. This council had to be representative of the main national stakeholders in the national education system.

The then Minister and all his successors have clearly failed to obey an instruction of Parliament by not implementing this council. Even though regulations for this council were published in 1999 and nominations called for, nothing further was done.

What makes this failure to implement even more significant is the fact that the Minister is required to determine education policy at national level only AFTER consulting various consultative bodies *including this council*. There is therefore a very strong case to be made that all national policy that has been put into place since 1996 is in fact open to question on procedural grounds.

The Minister is now choosing to make the establishing of the NETC an optional function and has called for nominations for a Chair and members.

Random search and seizure and drug testing at schools

SM&L welcomes the attempts to control and to eliminate the presence in South African schools of drugs and dangerous weapons. However, for these to be effective they must be practically implementable. The comments below should be seen in this light.

As readers of *SM&L* will be key in the implementation of these proposed provisions, the following bullet point observations may be useful even during the consultation stage of the legislation:

•   the impracticality of the definition of *dangerous object* particularly as all of the objects concerned fall outside the definition if used for educational purposes

•   the lack of clarity of the definition of *illegal drug*

•   the requirement to take into account five very broad factors, including the consideration of evidence, before embarking on a random search negates the importance of this type of search being virtually immediate in order to deal with reasonable suspicion

•   the difficulties that arise concerning the searching of learners whose faiths do not allow for this except under very strict circumstances

•   the involvement of the principal in the delivery of the objects or drugs to the police – a lengthy and cumbersome process – particularly as many schools are situated long distances from police facilities

•   the understandable requirement to inform parents of the conducting of a urine test but with a limitation of the further requirement to inform parents of the outcome only if it is positive

•   the need for Learner Codes of Conduct to be re-written to include measures for counselling

•   what has to be done if a learner refuses to be searched despite the legislated provisions

•   there are obviously significant issues of finance, resources and training involved