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SEIZING SUCCESS 2007: NATIONAL COLLEGE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Introduction – picking up on previous session

I have been asked to talk to you about three things:

1. the organisation I lead and manage, the new Ofsted
2. the Review of Teaching and Learning in 2020 which I chaired last year and
3. what Ofsted looks for in leadership and management in schools, and what we find.

As Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, I have been concerned to root what I say in evidence, principally evidence from the inspection process but Steve Munby persuaded me to talk about personalisation as considered through the 2020 Review and in doing that, I will also draw on evidence collected by the Review.

(OHP 3) The new Ofsted's full title is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. It continues to be known as Ofsted but it is a new organisation, drawing on the strengths and expertise of its predecessors (OHP 4) - the Adult Learning Inspectorate, the functions relating to children's social care of the Commission for Social Care Inspection, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration and the old Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education.

The potential of the new Ofsted for making a difference to the life chances of children, young people and learners more generally is enormous. The great attraction of this new post for me was the notion of bringing the inspectorates together to make more of an impact, more of a difference. The scope of the new Ofsted is extremely broad. (OHP 5) It covers the full range of education and training provision for children, young people and adults, as well of the work of local authorities and teacher training providers; children's social care, and the work of the Children and Family Courts Advisory and Support Service. That means that at any one time, more than one in three people in England directly benefit from the services which we inspect or regulate.

With that comes great responsibility to carry out our work in ways which encourage those we inspect to *improve*, to be *user-focused* and to be *efficient and effective*, all of which are requirements on the new Ofsted under the Education and Inspections Act. (OHP 6) This has led to us defining our purposes as:

- serving children and learners
- driving improvement
- securing value

We have identified six key priorities in our new Strategic Plan - which is currently out for consultation (and I'd very much welcome your views). The priorities are (OHP 7):

- **Better outcomes** – an organisation with impact
- **Better inspection and regulation** – coherent, rigorous and proportionate
- **Better communication** – clear and authoritative

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- **Better consultation** – engaging with service users
- **Better value** – promoting and delivering value for money
- **Better ways of working** – delivering results through people and partnerships.

Having a single inspectorate for children and learners does not just cost less public money. It is directly benefiting children, young people and learners of all ages by focusing inspection activity on their needs and experiences regardless of organisational boundaries. We are ensuring that joined up services and support really are provided, and that they are of sufficient high quality to make a real difference to people's life chances. (Point regarding joining up – both internally and externally) Where before, for example, a residential independent school offering extended services might have been inspected by Ofsted, the Commission for Social Care Inspection, and in the past, local authorities, now all the services it provides are inspected by the new Ofsted. This is already enabling us get a really good picture of schools as a whole, and, importantly, the impact they are having on all of the five outcomes for children, across all their work. So we can make connections more effectively than ever before and focus more holistically on the needs of individual children and learners as well as services and a range of settings.

I was Chief Executive in Tower Hamlets when I agreed to chair the 2020 Review and when you work in an area like Tower Hamlets you are looking all the time for ways of generating more change and accelerating improvement. But before I move on to talk about the Review, and then leadership and management more generally, I want to remind you briefly of the context for the Review, and for all of us in fact. (OHP 8)

Although we have seen enormous improvement over the last few years – and there can't be a person in this hall who hasn't contributed to that improvement in some way or other – we know only too well how much more we have to do. In particular, the attainment gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots' is not shifting quickly enough. The Review Report described personalisation as a matter of moral purpose and social justice. It cannot be right that 20% of our children leave primary school without a solid foundation in literacy and numeracy. It cannot be right that over 10% of 16-18 year olds, young people on the cusp of adult life, are not in education, employment or training. And it cannot be right that pupils from the most disadvantaged groups are the least likely to achieve well and participate in higher levels of education or training.

These attainment gaps exist not because you don't care enough or don't try hard enough – all the signs are that you care very much and work enormously hard. These gaps are stubbornly persistent because the factors that contribute to them are complex and inter-related. These factors include deep seated social and socio-economic challenges. But they also include the individual attitudes, beliefs and expectations of parents, pupils and teachers.

In 2020, the children who started in reception classes last September will be entering higher education or employment. Fourteen years is one entire school generation. Many new school leaders in 2020 are now in their early years of teaching or still studying – some of them, I hope, are in the hall today or tomorrow or Friday. Many of the parents of children who start primary education in 2020 are fast coming to the end of their own schooling. We all of us need to work towards a society in which: (OHP 9)

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- A child's chances of success are not related to socio-economic background, gender or ethnicity
- Education (and indeed, social care services) are designed around the needs of each child, with the expectation that all learners achieve high standards
- All leave school with functional skills in English and Mathematics but also understanding how to learn, think creatively, take risks and handle change
- Teachers use their skills and knowledge to engage children and young people as partners in learning, acting quickly to adjust their teaching in response to pupils' learning
- Schools draw in parents as their children's co-educators, engaging them and increasing their capacity to support their children's learning.

The Review Team saw personalising learning as central to turning this vision into reality and transforming our education service between now and 2020.

Elements of this vision will be familiar to all of you since they are at the heart of the very best learning and teaching. However, that does not mean achieving it at whole system level will not be challenging. In fact, based on where we are today, achieving these goals for all children, presents a significant challenge. Many schools are already showing what can be done and I can see from the list of participants that includes many here today.

In practice however, for most schools, personalising learning is likely to involve making distinctive changes to accelerate improvement and progress.

What all of us on the Review Group very quickly came to realise was that there is no single view of what personalised learning is. In some ways, this is a strength – it means that schools, as they start to think about what personalised learning means for them, can take ownership of the idea and shape it into something that works in their context, for their pupils. However, as is so often the case, this strength can also be a weakness, because with no common understanding of what personalising learning entails it can be easy for people to reject it entirely.

Even within the Review Group, we found it easier to agree on what it was not than we did to agree what it is. It is not the same as individualisation, with a different programme being designed for every child. Nor is it simply a case of pupil 'choice' or 'voice'. It is not just about technology, either, though clearly the potential of technology to enable and enhance learning is far from being realised in many schools. In the end, we chose both to offer a simple statement of what we felt personalised learning means and, through our report, to map out the main territory it covers. Those of you who have read it will judge how successful we have been. For us – and here I quote from our report (OHP 10) – personalising learning means taking a highly structured and responsive approach to each child's and young person's learning, in order that all are able to progress, achieve and participate. It means strengthening the link between learning and teaching by engaging pupils – and their parents – as partners in learning.

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These two threads – a relentless focus on the progress made by every child and young person, and increasing pupils' ownership of their own learning – come together in assessment for learning. I see that as the core element of personalising learning with the biggest potential to transform education.

To make this point, I want to use the research undertaken by Professor Dylan Wiliam, now at the Institute of Education, University of London. I want to focus for a few minutes on his vision of assessment for learning and the enormous potential it has for system change. (Warm up act for this workshop)

But before I do that, I want to highlight what Ofsted has had to say about assessment. Inspection evidence shows that despite gains made in the quality of teaching over the past decade, assessment remains the weakest aspect of teaching and is proving to be the most difficult to improve. One in four school inspection reports mentions assessment as a key issue for improvement. I reported last October in my first annual report as HMCI that weaknesses in teachers' use of assessment information often hinder pupils' learning. And Ofsted's evaluation of the fifth year of the Secondary National Strategy suggested that despite nearly three-quarters of all secondary schools identifying assessment for learning as a key priority, it was good in only a minority of schools and unsatisfactory in a quarter.

We thought hard in the Review Group about why this might be so and invited Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam to come and talk to us. They helped us see assessment for learning as a complex, joint activity between teacher and pupil. It should help teachers identify what pupils have and have not achieved, while pupils increase their understanding of the standard expected, their progress towards it and what they need to do to reach it. It is indeed a relentless focus on the progress made by every child and young person. The vital thing here is the classroom and what is going on inside it. Leadership starts in the classroom with the teacher – but that doesn't in any way lessen the importance of the head and senior managers, indeed, it reinforces their role in supporting learning. (OHP 11)

Dylan Wiliam uses research to demonstrate that if you are in one of the most effective classrooms you will learn in 6 months what those in an average classroom will take a year to learn. And if you are in one of the least effective classrooms in that same school, the same amount of learning could take 2 years.

What accounts for these very different rates of learning? Dylan's work tells us the most important difference between the most and least effective classroom is the teacher. This isn't down to subject knowledge. It's what they do rather than what they know. And we picked up in the Review on his argument that the single most important thing to change in teaching practice is the minute-to-minute and day-by-day use of assessment. That's AFL. The kind of formative assessment that really impacts on a pupils' achievement can't wait until the books are marked or even until the next lesson. If pupils have left the classroom, and you have to wait until they are back before you've adjusted your teaching you're already into catch up. Let me just show you Dylan's comparison of the effects of teachers' use of AFL with other kind of educational intervention: (OHP 12)

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Intervention	Extra months of learning per year	Cost per year
Class-size reduction (by 30%)	4	£20k
Increase teacher content knowledge from weak to strong	2	?
Formative assessment/ assessment for learning	8	£2k

AFL not only works but works more cost effectively than other strategies. It represents a good investment for us.

So how do you do it? Leaning heavily on work Dylan had done with Marnie Thompson, the Review identified five core strategies which, along with better evidence about children's needs, can help better assessment for learning. In short these are: (OHP 13)

- **Questioning** – engineering effective classroom discussions, questions and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning
- **Feedback** – moving learners forward with feedback
- **Sharing learning expectations** – clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success
- **Self assessment** – activating pupils as the owners of their own learning
- **Peer assessment** – activating pupils as resources for one another.

These strategies are not soft and woolly, they are focused and demanding. There are various techniques for applying these strategies in the classroom. The approach is immensely practical. Just as a pilot guides a plane by taking constant readings and making technical adjustments because of wind, weather, air traffic and so on, so AFL requires a teacher to do the same. Teachers can select from a range of techniques that best suit their style, the context in which they are working and the most important of all, the needs of their pupils. However, it is still hard and probably harder than it at first appears. It takes time to undo old habits and ingrained practices. And practice has to be focussed and sustained over time too. It therefore needs constant support, reinforcement and excellent continuing professional development.

Dylan Wiliam argues persuasively for a very particular focused approach which he calls 'teachers as a learning community' (TLC). This is a model of teachers working together, over a sustained period to build the collective knowledge base in a school. The focus is on classrooms and on growing teachers expertise by very careful collaborative reflection on practice but with accountability, albeit supportive accountability, to the TLC. It's precision, precision about learning and teaching, that's important here.

This links well with the features of high quality continuous professional development Ofsted reported on last year in our report, *The logical chain: continuing professional development in effective schools*. (OHP 14) The 2020 Review identified 7 key elements:

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- Much of the activity should be school based, with a sustained focus on improving learning and teaching. This is not to say that external courses have no place, rather, that such courses are not enough in themselves to effect transfer of knowledge and skills.
- Much of the activity should be closely integrated with, and run parallel to, the daily or routine practices of teachers, since it is here where change is most difficult but also most needed. This entails sustained work with teachers in their classrooms.
- Much of the activity should involve teachers working together in small teams. This allows teachers to learn from each other and keep each other focused on the task. It also makes individual teachers accountable to their peers for effecting the changes they promise to make, making it more likely that they will do so.
- Knowledge and skills transfer is usually slow and takes time to perfect and embed. Everybody would prefer an easy quick fix, but improving learning and teaching is often slow and hard, Making small, incremental changes is more likely to result in sustainable change. Those in the audience who have worked with me will know how difficult it is for me to advocate "slow"!
- Teachers need to be able to have some choice about the practices they change and the techniques they use. Within areas where change will make a difference (often defined in terms of whole-school priorities), there are often a number of different approaches. Giving teachers the choice about the specific changes they make will mean they are more likely to take responsibility for them, while allowing for collective and consistent strategies to be developed school wide.
- Teachers need to see unfamiliar new practices being used in practice. It is not enough for teachers to read or to be told about effective learning and teaching. They need to see it in real classrooms for themselves and be able to question the staff and pupils. (Woodhead e.g. Sunday Times, Nelson Thomlinson School in Cumbria).
- Teachers need to be coached and supported as they wrestle with the transfer of knowledge and skills. The potential of new technologies to support this (as indeed, the preceding point) is not well realised. For example, e-mentoring between teachers may support better knowledge and skills transfer.

The 2020 review concluded that this sort of model of continual professional development was essential if assessment for learning was to be embedded and effect real systematic change. And whilst this may seem to be common sense, it is not common practice: as Ofsted reported in *The logical chain*.

I want to finish with the third thing Steve asked me to cover, some further reflections on the changing responsibilities of school leadership and the characteristics of successful leaders. I am mindful though that you have had a long day. (Reference *St Custard's*, by Geoffrey Willans).

Some of you may know that I have been a headteacher myself. But I know that there have been many changes since my time. Heads today have responsibilities way beyond anything their predecessors experienced. I recognise as a fact of life that you work within a rigorous regime of being accountable – to government, to Ofsted, to parents and to children. But

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please know that during my period of tenure as Chief Inspector I will do all I can to ensure that inspectors do not get in your way, that inspection will support and promote your ambitions for the performance of the children and young people in your schools, and that Ofsted's interventions will be increasingly proportionate to risk.

Looking back through our early inspection frameworks helps illustrate our changing expectations. For example, the 1996 framework required that inspectors should evaluate the extent to which "strong leadership provides clear educational direction for the work of the school". Compare this with the current framework, in which the expectation is that leadership is shared and the guidance and descriptors that inspectors use when grading leadership and management emphasise (OHP 15):

- its impact on learners' achievement and well-being
- achievement of improvement
- the creation of a common sense of purpose
- effective self-evaluation
- sensitivity to the views of stakeholders
- and effective and efficient use of resources
- good governance.

Another feature of the past 15 years has been a growing confidence in the ability of our senior managers to promote improvement. This conference is called, "Seizing Success". Quite right. You are a success story. There would be many chairs of major corporations who would give their eye-teeth for leaders of the calibre we have in many of our schools today. Ofsted's last annual report indicated that leadership and management of schools are outstanding or good in well over half of the schools we inspected – 62 percent of primary schools, by the way, nearly two-thirds. This is a high figure, and one which must surely give us confidence in the capacity of schools and the system as a whole to continue to improve. It is not only encouragingly high; it has improved over the years. And the work of the NCSL offers much to support that improvement.

Ten years ago Ofsted judged that "reviewing of the school's work" – the precursor to self-evaluation – was good in only 31 percent of schools and unsatisfactory in 36 percent. In my last annual report I reported that fifty-four percent were good or better; and only seven percent unsatisfactory. What a difference. Self evaluation is a strength of pretty much all the schools in which we judged the leadership and management to be good or better – in essence, you can't have one without the other. But we are not there yet, so let me add the traditional Chief Inspector's cautionary "however". The last annual report is clear: "monitoring and evaluation, including the work undertaken by subject leaders, remain the weakest elements of leadership and management". And we found in the report I mentioned earlier on continuing professional development, *The Logical Chain*, that the weakest link in the CPD chain was the way schools evaluated the effectiveness of their professional development activities. And few of the survey schools inspected as part of that review evaluated the impact of professional development on their staff's management skills.

We have found too that a particular feature of very effective leadership is that it is distributed: with staff given responsibility for making decisions and pioneering new ideas. The building of leadership capacity in depth is particularly important in schools facing challenging circumstances. Some of the saddest situations encountered by inspectors are those where a headteacher has led a school out of special measures and then left. Because leadership has

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not developed sufficiently at other levels, the school lacks the capacity to sustain its improvement and relapses, losing all the gains that have been achieved.

One of the other common features of successful leaders is that they are confident to innovate. I am sometimes told by those being inspected that they work in a certain way because "Ofsted will want to see it like this". Let me stress, that is not the case. What Ofsted wants to see is what works for children and young people.

But the inspection system will not stand still. Quiet properly we are asked to justify what we do. What difference do we make? I am confident we have robust responses to questions like that, but I think there is much more we can do. I want the new Ofsted to be respected worldwide for the impact it makes on the system it regulates and inspects. It should influence, focus and incentise improvement and also the development of modern, innovative, user-focused services. I think we can make more of a difference where more of a difference is needed. I think we can make better use of the vast store of inspection evidence and the wisdom of our inspectors to provide insights into provision and to guide the national agenda. Finally, I want to see Ofsted develop as an organisation with a passion for learning, and that we give support to your learning.

When I was looking at the NCSL website and thinking about this presentation, my attention was taken with a Practitioner Enquiry Report with the wonderful title of *Passion and Intuition: the impact of life history on leadership*. The author Richard Parker identified similarities in the way the heads in his study carried out their roles:

- they were all intensely competitive
- none of them suffered fools gladly
- they were well driven by a passion to do the best for the people in their respective schools and had the highest personal and professional standards
- but all had low boredom thresholds.

As we approach 7.30, I am very conscious of your boredom thresholds! Let me wish you all success as we approach the end of another academic year, and a fruitful and reflective conference over the next couple of days.

Thank you.

Christine Gilbert