

# **National Standards for Headteachers in focus**

## **Nursery schools**

### **Contributors:**

Wendy Scott  
Barbara Riddell  
Sian Rees-Jones  
Liz de Keller  
Caroline Roberts  
Tess Robson  
Judy Donnelly  
Julie Morrow

## Introduction

A group of headteachers from nursery schools met to create this focus piece on the National Standards for Headteachers. What follows is a composite of their experiences and of how they perceive their role in relation to the opportunities and challenges of working in a nursery school.

## Shaping the future

Critical to the role of headship is working with the governing body and others to create a shared vision and strategic plan which inspires and motivates pupils, staff and all other members of the school community. This vision should express core educational values and moral purpose and be inclusive of stakeholders' values and beliefs. The strategic planning process is critical to sustaining school improvement and ensuring that the school moves forward for the benefit of its pupils. (National Standards for Headteachers, DfES 2004: 6)

### **Supporting the development of shared values in a multi-professional staff team through assignments for a Diploma in Early Years Leadership and Management and the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership**

The headteacher of a maintained nursery school in an area of high deprivation has experienced major changes to the structure of the school and thus to her role over the past five years. In 2001, the school was amalgamated with a nearby social services nursery, thus incorporating a group of younger children who attended all day, and the staff who worked with them. It became a designated Early Excellence Centre the following year. The governing body, which had been a committee of the governors of a neighbouring primary school, was fully constituted, and took over responsibility for a delegated budget. It expanded over time to include representation from a wide range of stakeholders, including two local Sure Start projects; this works in conjunction with the Children's Centre Partnership Board. The school is now part of the first wave of Children's Centres, and has had to face staff remodelling, including the introduction of preparation, planning and assessment time and changes to management allowances just as Early Excellence funding has come to an end, leading to a budget shortfall.

Dealing with the resulting uncertainty and change has been demanding for all the staff. However, the headteacher was determined to maintain the quality of provision as the services on offer expanded to include adult learning, parenting support and outreach as well as childcare and early education. She wanted to ensure that although they came from diverse disciplines with different cultures and expectations, the staff subscribed to common principles and were able to function as a mutually supportive team. Initially, she used her assignment as part of a Diploma in Early Years Leadership and Management to introduce a system of work shadowing, which gave staff from education and social services the opportunity to observe each other at work, and also enabled her to dedicate time and thought to following up the results of these sessions. As an intuitive leader herself, she was aware of the importance of developing trust and self-confidence in the staff, so that a learning community could emerge.

Feedback and evaluation showed considerable success in achieving a cohesive and reflective team within the Early Excellence framework, with staff able to learn from each other and express common values in their practice. The accommodation was

adapted, and there was continuing dialogue about systems and approaches, resulting in a school improvement plan focused on developing a common approach to building relationships and learning and teaching. This provided an agreed overview of expectations and standards.

Managing a Children's Centre is more complex still, involving the coordination of different models of early education, childcare, family support and adult learning in the community. Internal evaluation and an Ofsted inspection raised questions about consistency, as shift patterns and part-time working meant that some staff had no access to regular staff or team meetings. Aware that further uncertainty and change lay ahead, the headteacher decided to take up an invitation to join the first pilot cohort of the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL), which is equivalent to the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers. This gave her the opportunity to develop her thinking through a purpose-designed course, alongside colleagues facing similar challenges. Her aim was to work towards distributed leadership at all levels of the organisation, helping others to take responsibility for their own professional understanding and development so that they could in turn enable parents as well as colleagues to become active partners in developing services.

Initially, the headteacher shared activities she had experienced on the course with the senior management team and then repeated them as a whole centre exercise to help all the staff to become aware of their subconscious assumptions, to acknowledge their feelings, to understand others from different backgrounds, and to reflect on the principles that are non-negotiable for them as individuals and as a group. It was essential to establish trust, and offer a secure and supportive environment so that staff felt able to share their true feelings and concerns and become self-directed learners. The headteacher believes that members of an organisation need to take responsibility for their own learning, rather than relying on authorities and professionals to provide training and development opportunities, and has found the emerging literature on mentoring and coaching as well as monitoring helpful. Her courage, integrity and honesty in confronting her own experiences have provided a model for others in the centre and in the wider community. These attributes continue to be needed as national initiatives demand new structures, management arrangements and clusters of services, through proposals for extended schools as well as Children's Centres.

This example illustrates the following knowledge requirements, professional qualities and actions needed by the headteacher to achieve the core purpose identified within this standard.

Knows about:

- local, national and global trends
- ways to build, communicate and implement a shared vision
- strategic planning processes
- strategies for communication both within and beyond the school
- leading change, creativity and innovation.

Is committed to:

- a collaborative school vision of excellence and equity that sets high standards for every child and family, and all members of staff
- the setting and achieving of ambitious, challenging goals and targets
- inclusion and the ability and right of all to be the best they can be.

Is able to:

- think strategically, build and communicate a coherent vision in a range of compelling ways
- inspire, challenge, motivate and empower others to carry the vision forward
- model the values and vision of the school.

Actions:

- ensures the vision for the centre is clearly articulated, shared, understood and acted on effectively by all
- works within the school community to translate the vision into agreed objectives and operational plans that will promote and sustain school improvement
- demonstrates the vision and values in everyday work and practice
- motivates and works with others to create a shared culture and positive climate
- ensures creativity and innovation to achieve excellence
- ensures that strategic planning takes account of the diversity, values and experience of the range of agencies involved in the Children's Centre.

### **Leading learning and teaching**

Headteachers have a central responsibility for raising the quality of teaching and learning and for pupils' achievement. This implies setting high expectations and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of learning outcomes. A successful learning culture will enable pupils to become effective, enthusiastic, independent learners, committed to life-long learning. (National Standards for Headteachers, DfES 2004: 7)

### **Extending children's learning through imaginative play**

The headteacher of a small nursery school worked very hard to maintain the high quality of child-initiated work she values for her pupils over a period when there was an almost complete change of staff. The new teachers and nursery nurses were not as experienced as the staff they replaced, and in most cases had not been trained in how to extend children's learning through play. The headteacher therefore needed to lead by example.

The arrival of many new staff coincided with an unusually high turnover of full-time children in the school. The new group was predominantly boys, most of whom were learning English as an additional language. The headteacher observed that three boys, all now attending full time, were beginning to play together at the bottom of the garden. Their play, which was centred on Spiderman adventures, involved lots of rushing about, falling over and quarrelling. Based on her knowledge of recent research, the headteacher wanted to counter the tendency of some staff to ban this kind of superhero play, but knew she needed to help the children to develop their ideas. She started by sharing an encyclopedia of mythology with them, and encouraged them to think of ways of overpowering Baba Yaga, their chosen monster. She suggested they should employ reason rather than relying on weapons, since the witch was so strong.

The children constructed increasingly elaborate traps for Baba Yaga from the open-ended resources available in the nursery school garden, and talked at length about ways of improving their strategies when looking at photographic records of their improvised contraptions. They articulated their ideas in relation to what they were

doing, and their planning, creation and review developed in complexity over the following days and weeks in response to the stimulus provided by the headteacher through her open-ended questions. This provided convincing evidence, for parents as well as staff, of the need of all young children, especially those in the early stages of learning English, to express and explore their thoughts through action. It also encouraged other children, who adopted different villains, to join in until most of the full-time children became engaged in the play. The linked activities expanded across many areas of provision and took up most of the day.

The children's sophisticated social development became evident to the staff, who could see how far they had moved from the quarrels of the early days. Even the youngest children showed a great deal of mutual support as they explored the boundary between fantasy and reality. Children's awareness of moral issues developed from initial simplistic distinctions between good and evil to thinking about forgiveness and redemption. They found increasingly effective ways of following up their complex ideas, including searching for information in books, 2D and 3D representation, expressive movement and emergent writing.

Guided by the headteacher, other staff became involved in extending the children's ideas in ways that matched and extended the underlying structures of their thinking. They helped children to relate to rules of engagement through demonstrations of fencing and chess, to build up an understanding of ancient weaponry through a museum visit, and to work out puzzles and mazes at first hand.

Through this work, which developed over a year, new staff came to appreciate the importance of knowledge of individual children as well as of the curriculum, and the value of following up children's interests through carefully resourced play. They developed confidence in using content that actively engaged the children, thus helping them to gain skills and understanding as well as knowledge across all areas of learning. Through direct leadership of learning and teaching, the headteacher was able to demonstrate the value of open-ended resources and uninterrupted time. She introduced parents, governors and other visitors as well as the staff to a deeper understanding of rigorous responsive teaching in the early years. This meant that they came to discern the underlying principles, value the processes of learning, sustain children's motivation to explore and experiment, and appreciate the importance of allowing uninterrupted time for consolidation as well as extension of skills and knowledge.

This example illustrates the following knowledge requirements, professional qualities and actions needed by the headteacher to achieve the core purpose identified within this standard.

Knows about:

- the development of a personalised learning culture within the school
- models of learning and teaching
- principles of effective teaching and assessment for learning
- strategies for ensuring inclusion, diversity and access
- using research evidence to inform teaching and learning.

Is committed to:

- raising standards for all in the pursuit of excellence
- the continuing learning of all members of the school community
- the entitlement of all pupils to effective teaching and learning

- choice and flexibility in learning to meet the personalised learning needs of every child.

Is able to:

- demonstrate personal enthusiasm for and commitment to the learning process
- demonstrate the principles and practice of effective teaching and learning
- initiate and support research and debate about effective learning and teaching and develop relevant strategies for performance improvement.

Actions:

- establishes creative, responsive and effective approaches to learning and teaching
- ensures a culture and ethos of challenge and support where all pupils can achieve success and become engaged in their own learning
- demonstrates and articulates high expectations and sets stretching targets for the whole school community.

### **Developing self and working with others**

Effective relationships and communication are important in headship as headteachers work with and through others. Effective headteachers manage themselves and their relationships well. Headship is about building a professional learning community which enables others to achieve. Through performance management and effective continuing professional development practice, the headteacher supports all staff to achieve standards. To equip themselves with the capacity to deal with the complexity of the role and the range of leadership skills and actions required of them, headteachers should be committed to their own continuing professional development. (National Standards for Headteachers, DfES/0083/2004: 8)

### **Professional development through secondment to the local authority, while ensuring the security of children, parents and staff over a period of change.**

A very experienced nursery school headteacher has been extending the services based at the school over several years. Her efforts have been recognised by the designation of the school as an Early Excellence Centre, and by her recent nomination as Lancashire's Red Rose Teacher of the Year. The school has now become one of the first Children's Centres in the county. The headteacher has been seconded to work with the local authority Sure Start early years and childcare department on projects to develop a toolkit for integrating day care and education, and to support inclusive care for children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities. She has also been asked to help to extend family support, and work with health services to develop a strategy for language and communication. Developing models for the proposed increase of free entitlement to nursery education sessions is a longer-term project that is benefiting from her expertise and experience.

She welcomed this opportunity to contribute to the strategic development of early years services more widely, realising that it would offer very good professional development. Working with others to develop plans across three teams within the local authority has helped to improve her leadership skills, and given her invaluable experience in multiagency project management, including fostering effective discussion between professionals from different agencies. She has a better understanding of national policies, and the complexity of putting them into practice. It has also enabled her to represent the perspectives of colleagues working in the field

at local authority level, and to contribute significantly to mutual understanding. She finds that engaging constructively with these wider issues is motivating.

However, the headteacher recognises the pressures on all the staff due to the transition from Early Excellence to a Children's Centre, and has arranged for her secondment to be part time and flexible so that she can continue to stay in close touch with the centre, providing guidance and support through the changes. She has negotiated an additional allowance for the deputy headteacher of the centre to take account of the extra demands on her, and the secondment is being used constructively to enable other staff in the centre to develop their skills by taking on further responsibilities. Adjustments have been needed, but any difficulties uncovered have been honestly acknowledged and addressed. The new arrangements within the centre have raised awareness at all levels. As a result, staff are more conscious of the impact of the *Every Child Matters* agenda, and how to address it in practice.

The headteacher too has gained insights and skills, in addition to a wider network of professional contacts to add to those involved in the action learning set suggested by her Business in the Community partner last year. She has found that standing back from the immediate demands of headship has enabled her to refine her understanding of the priorities and values of other services, and to find ways of promoting multiagency discussion and shared planning. She has extended her capacity to listen to children and parents, especially those with particular needs, and has developed her ability to assimilate a wide range of information from research and guidance into a coherent and accessible report. These attributes are all relevant to her complex role as headteacher of an influential Children's Centre, and making them explicit benefits colleagues in other centres as well as the staff and families she works with directly. Her experience can also encourage and help headteachers and governing bodies involved in developing extended schools, and senior staff working within the local authority who are bringing together services for children and families.

This example illustrates the following knowledge requirements, professional qualities and actions needed by the headteacher to achieve the core purpose identified within this standard:

Knows about:

- the significance of interpersonal relationships, adult learning and models of continuing professional development (CPD)
- strategies to promote individual and team development
- building and sustaining a learning community
- the relationship between managing performance, CPD and sustained school improvement
- the impact of change on organisations and individuals.

Is committed to:

- effective working relationships
- shared leadership
- effective team working
- CPD for self and all others within the school.

Is able to:

- foster an open, fair, equitable culture and manage conflict
- develop, empower and sustain individuals and teams

- collaborate and network with others within and beyond the school
- challenge, influence and motivate others to attain high goals
- give and receive effective feedback and act to improve personal performance
- accept support from others including colleagues within the local education authority (LEA).

#### Actions:

- treats people fairly, equitably and with dignity and respect to create and maintain a positive school culture
- builds a collaborative learning culture within the school and actively engages with other agencies and schools to build effective learning communities
- ensures effective planning, allocation, support and evaluation of work undertaken by teams and individuals, ensuring clear delegation of tasks and devolution of responsibilities
- develops and maintains a culture of high expectations for self and takes appropriate action when performance is unsatisfactory
- regularly reviews own practice, sets personal targets and takes responsibility for own personal development
- manages workload of others to allow an appropriate work/life balance.

### **Managing the organisation**

Headteachers need to provide effective organisation and management of the school and seek ways of improving organisational structures and functions based on rigorous self-evaluation. Headteachers should ensure that the school and the people and the resources within it are organised and managed to provide an efficient, effective and safe learning environment. These management responsibilities imply the re-examination of the roles and responsibilities of those adults working in the school to build capacity across the workforce and ensure resources are deployed to achieve value for money. Headteachers should also seek to build successful organisations through effective collaborations with others. (National Standards for Headteachers, DfES/0083/2004: 9)

### **Managing a maintained nursery school over a period of expansion and change**

This Beacon nursery school is situated in a ward that falls in the 20% most deprived areas in the country. The headteacher believed that the life chances of young children and their families could be enhanced further by providing additional services in an environment that parents knew and trusted, and through extending the collaborative work with other community projects and agencies. She was determined to extend services while maintaining high quality education at the core of the school's work.

She had collected a wealth of evidence from the school's own rigorous self-evaluation processes, data from other professionals working in the community and information from the voluntary sector and drew on this information to write a proposal to extend joint working and the range of services available on the school site. This document was used to influence key personnel within the LEA and other local authority agencies, and formed the basis of a successful bid for the school to be designated an Early Excellence Centre in 2002.

The school's building was extended with funding from the LEA, Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). The



headteacher was totally involved throughout the whole process as she knew that this new environment had the potential to influence ways of working and affect the mood of everyone who used it. She realised that it was vital that all involved understood and believed in the ultimate vision. Recognising the additional pressures that the building work placed on the whole school community, she ensured that everyone had access to constantly updated information.

In addition to the existing staff, a new team was being created to support the aspirational work of the extended services. As the team grew it became evident that a carefully planned induction programme was essential so that each individual and service could gain appreciation of others' work, their interdependence, and an understanding of how they fitted in to the overall aims and objectives of the centre. Staff from the school team and those offering extended services worked jointly to plan and complete this programme. The thoughtful and sensitive management of change with all staff was key to the success of the developing centre.

The foundation for the evolution of these services has been the development of a shared vision with partner agencies and the local community. Not all personnel who offered services at the centre were directly line managed by the centre team. The headteacher and project manager for the extended services invested a considerable amount of time in negotiating joint working practices at both 'grass roots' and strategic levels. In-service training days often include staff from across all agencies and local voluntary groups as well as the diverse school and centre team, depending on the focus. These developments will be further supported as the governing body

The headteacher considers it essential that all groups take an active part in the school/centre's process of improvement planning, and she is currently looking at ways to ensure that each service reviews its effectiveness, using agreed monitoring and evaluation processes. The information this generates will be the basis for future action planning.

This example illustrates the following knowledge requirements, professional qualities and actions needed by the headteacher to achieve the core purpose identified within this standard.

Knows about:

- models of organisations and the principles of organisational development
- principles and models of self-evaluation
- principles and strategies of school improvement
- project management for planning and implementing change
- policy creation, through consultation and review
- informed decision making
- strategic financial planning, budgetary management and principles of best value
- performance management
- personnel, governance, security and access issues relating to the diverse use of school facilities
- legal issues relating to managing a school including equal opportunities, 'race' relations, disability, human rights and employment legislation.

Is committed to:

- distributed leadership and management
- the equitable management of staff and resources
- the sustaining of personal motivation and that of all staff

- the developing of a safe, secure and healthy school environment
- collaborating with others in order to strengthen the school's capacity and contribute to the development of capacity in other schools.

Is able to:

- establish and sustain appropriate structures and systems
- manage the school effectively on a day-to-day basis
- delegate management tasks and monitor their implementation
- prioritise, plan and organise herself and others
- make professional, managerial and organisational decisions based on informed judgements
- think creatively to anticipate and solve problems.

Actions:

- creates an organisational structure that reflects the school's values, and enables the management systems, structures and processes to work effectively in line with legal requirements
- produces and implements clear, evidence-based improvement plans and policies for the development of the school and its facilities
- ensures that, within an autonomous culture, policies and practices take account of national and local circumstances, policies and initiatives
- manages the school's financial and human resources effectively and efficiently to achieve the school's educational goals and priorities
- recruits, retains and deploys staff appropriately and manages their workload to achieve the vision and goals of the school
- implements successful performance management processes with all staff
- manages and organises the school environment efficiently and effectively to ensure that it meets the needs of the curriculum and health and safety regulations
- ensures that the range, quality and use of all available resources is monitored, evaluated and reviewed to improve the quality of education for all pupils and provide value for money.

### **Securing accountability**

With values at the heart of their leadership, headteachers have a responsibility to the whole school community. In carrying out their responsibility, headteachers are accountable to a wide range of groups, particularly pupils, parents, carers, governors and the LEA. They are accountable for ensuring that pupils enjoy and benefit from a high quality education, for promoting collective responsibility within the whole school community and for contributing to the education service more widely. Headteachers are legally and contractually accountable to the governing body for the school, its environment and all its work. (National Standards for Headteachers, DfES/0083/2004: 10)

### **Establishing coherent accountability for extended services and different agencies in a Children's Centre based on a maintained nursery school**

The experienced headteacher of a maintained nursery school has had to address the demands of the formal constitution of the governing body, including the full budget that was delegated in 2004, alongside her wider responsibility as headteacher of an Early Excellence Centre, now a Children's Centre, based on the original school.

The governing body has been extended to include representation from all the services involved in the centre. The headteacher secures the centre's accountability to the local authority by keeping the link inspector informed of developments, which are then reported to the director of children's services. Nationally, she is accountable through Ofsted, which involves nursery education inspections and registration for day care as well as Section 10 school inspection. The latter has recently involved the whole centre, in common with all schools, in a detailed process of self-evaluation, thus ensuring that accountability is shared with the whole staff team and the governing body. Other agencies based in the centre have further lines of accountability, which must all be satisfied.

Because the headteacher is committed to an integrated approach, she is directly or indirectly involved in monitoring the effectiveness of all the following provision:

- Higher and further education services: training for parents and staff, from the Foundation degree to NVQ Level 3/2 qualifications. Student nurses, teaching students, diploma childcare students have placements, as do work experience students from the local secondary schools. The centre shares accountability for many students with their originating schools or colleges, and this includes the decision about where to place students. The headteacher has become an accredited NVQ assessor.
- Library service: there is a library on site.
- Health services: a specialist nurse practitioner is on site five days a week; there are also health visitor groups, speech and occupational therapists, and other visiting specialists for children with special educational and other needs. A physiotherapist runs a 'School for Parents'.
- Social services: a family support worker team who organises supervised contact time as well as core group and review meetings is based on site.
- Jobcentre Plus: an Action for Jobs adviser based in the centre offers advice and support to adults returning to training or employment.

The welfare of the children and their families is the headteacher's primary concern. The major expansion of the centre is in line with government proposals both for Children's Centres and extended schools. The headteacher involves herself in developing the quality of all aspects of the centre's work, and ensures that the governing body has full oversight of all developments and sufficient and clear information so that they can monitor progress. Stay and play sessions, crèche facilities a playgroup as well as day care for children from a few months old, and extended places for three and four-year-olds whose parents want more than their entitlement to a part-time nursery education place, have all been introduced. The headteacher has worked to ensure that all staff are committed to the kind of responsive service the centre aims to provide, in line with their shared sense of accountability to the children, families and the community that they serve.

For example, the headteacher observed that many children are now enjoying activities and services well before the age of three. Attending the centre with their babies and toddlers parents and carers, including childminders have access to a range of groups and get to know the centre well. They thus have time to develop confidence and become more positive about questioning staff and governors. A culture of continuing improvement has been established, and parents are invited to reply to a questionnaire each year, giving their views on the range of services available. This complements the annual audit done with the staff.

The headteacher considered that the children attending additional hours to meet the needs of their parents in training or employment required better continuity over the long day, which could be from 8.00am–6.00pm. Changes to the use of the building and routines were agreed, so that children did not move from their classroom to the

day care rooms during the day, but stayed in integrated provision with the same group of staff. Shifts were worked out to ensure that key staff were present for the core day, and that children coming in early or staying late were with people who knew them well, sharing information with their parents and carers. The system depends on staff being flexible, and demands very detailed planning so that required staffing ratios are met for the fluctuating number of children attending for varying amounts of time each day.

Continuity of assessment was assured through a key person system that linked more than one member of staff to each family, thus ensuring that there was back-up over holiday periods or if a member of staff was absent for any other reason. The headteacher, while acknowledging the anxiety staff might feel about change, was convinced that it was right to combine the provision for care and education for the children.

A focus on the five outcomes for the *Every Child Matters* agenda has helped to establish a shared philosophy and a common vision through the centre improvement plan. The opportunities the headteacher provides for CPD, leading to further qualifications for all staff wanting to make progress in their careers, is an expression of her sense of accountability to the staff. Their terms and conditions of service have been harmonised in consultation with the local authority. The headteacher, her deputy, and the family services coordinator have agreed alterations in their contracts, so that they all have the same leave entitlement and no longer have a situation where some of the senior management team work mainly school terms only. They ensure that two of them are always on duty in the centre. The deputy is now employed 0.5 by the local authority as a Foundation Stage consultant, which means she can promote links with other settings in the neighbourhood. There are plans to involve childminders further, and to build on existing outreach work into the community.

This example illustrates the following knowledge requirements, professional qualities and actions needed by the headteacher to achieve the core purpose identified within this standard.

Knows about:

- statutory educational frameworks, including governance
- public services policy and accountability frameworks, including self-evaluation and multiagency working
- the contribution that education makes to developing, promoting and sustaining a fair and equitable society
- the principles and practice of quality assurance systems, including school review, self-evaluation and performance management
- stakeholder and community engagement in, and accountability for, the success and celebration of the school's performance.

Is committed to:

- principles and practice of school self-evaluation
- high quality education and care provision
- the principles of integration
- all children enjoying and achieving to their full potential
- the school working effectively and efficiently towards the academic, spiritual, moral, social, emotional and cultural development of all its pupils
- individual, team and whole centre accountability for pupil learning outcomes

- supporting the whole child and their family
- developing a range of services that meet and match the needs of the local community
- meeting the objectives of the Children's Centre programme.

Is able to:

- demonstrate political insight and anticipate trends
- engage the whole centre community in the systematic and rigorous self-evaluation of the work of the school
- combine the outcomes of regular centre self-review with external evaluations in order to develop the centre
- manage a range of services within the integrated centre.

Actions:

- fulfils commitments arising from contractual accountability to the governing body
- develops a centre ethos that enables everyone to work collaboratively, share knowledge and understanding, celebrate success and accept responsibility for outcomes
- ensures individual staff accountabilities are clearly defined, understood and agreed and are subject to rigorous review and evaluation
- works with the governing body (providing information, objective advice and support) to enable it to meet its responsibilities
- develops and presents a coherent, understandable and accurate account of the centre's performance to a range of audiences including governors, parents and carers
- reflects on personal contribution to centre achievements and takes account of feedback from others
- offers the centre as a training base for early years practitioners from maintained and non-maintained settings.

### **Strengthening community**

Schools exist in a distinctive social context, which has a direct impact on what happens inside the school. School leadership should commit to engaging with the internal and external school community to secure equity and entitlement. Headteachers should collaborate with other schools in order to share expertise and bring positive benefits to their own and other schools. They should work collaboratively at both strategic and operational levels with parents and carers and across multiple agencies for the well-being of all children. Headteachers share responsibility for leadership of the wider educational system and should be aware that school improvement and community development are interdependent. (National Standards for Headteachers, DfES/0083/2004: 11)

### **Working with parents whose first language is not English**

The Dorothy Gardner Centre in North Westminster was one of the first integrated centres established in the 1970s. Day care and a variety of support services for parents and carers operated as an integral part of the maintained nursery school that formed its core. The centre is well established within its diverse and disadvantaged inner-city community. Since 2003 Dorothy Gardner has been working closely with a neighbouring nursery school to acknowledge and celebrate the cultural and linguistic diversity in the area. The nurseries have recently become a formally federated school, retaining their separate identities, but having one governing body. It is

intended that this form of governance will strengthen collaboration on a number of schemes that will benefit the local community, including the development of a cluster of Children's Centres.

The headteacher believes that including parents as learners alongside their children is part of a holistic approach to education and provides a range of imaginative and accessible support and development opportunities for families. The centre has always given great emphasis to maintaining a particular focus in relation to parents whose first language is not English. This has been followed up in various ways.

A partnership has existed between the nursery school and the local adult education college for several years. The college has provided tutors to teach English classes for parents, and receives funding for them as students. The nursery runs a crèche for their children. Realising that there was shortage of crèche workers, the nursery set up a further course with a tutor from the college to train parents in the skills required for crèche work. Having successfully completed the course, several of them are now employed by the nursery.

The headteacher recognises that enjoyment of food is a powerful way of bringing people together. Many of the parents come from cultures that value the importance of sharing food, and are themselves very good cooks. As part of promoting healthy eating as well as family literacy, the nursery has started family cookery sessions, facilitated by a tutor from the college. For five weeks a group of parents and their children meet to read and write recipes, and then prepare and cook a dish. The classes provide parents with a relaxed and enjoyable opportunity to develop their skills and mix and talk with parents from different backgrounds, as well as to participate in learning with their children. A member of the nursery staff team is released to participate in the sessions and to develop relationships with the parents, as well as to plan follow-up work with the children.

The regular drop-in available for families who may not yet have a nursery place is particularly welcome in an area where the population is transient and where many families arrive with serious difficulties. The nursery takes a proactive approach to health promotion, and invites the community dietician and a dental therapist as well as local health visitors in to work with parents and children on site. In addition to collaborating with the local Sure Start and a voluntary nursery for children with complex special needs, the headteacher has initiated a family inclusion project, supported by a member of staff who highlights the competences and interests rather than the deficits of children with special needs. This approach has been widely disseminated, and is further supported through a partnership with the Anna Freud Centre, which provides a child psychotherapist who works in the nursery one day a week. It also funds an Arabic-speaking therapist who runs a group for parents each week.

When funding was available from the local Education Action Zone, the school was able to establish partnerships with artists, potters and musicians who worked with parents as well as children and staff, thus both drawing on and enhancing the rich and varied cultural heritage in the area.

This example illustrates the following knowledge requirements, professional qualities and actions needed by the headteacher to achieve the core purpose identified within this standard.

Knows about:

- current issues and future trends that impact on the school community

- the rich and diverse resources within local communities – both human and physical
- the wider curriculum beyond school and the opportunities it provides for pupils and the school community
- models of school, home, community and business partnerships
- the work of other agencies and opportunities for collaboration
- strategies that encourage parents and carers to support their children's learning
- the strengths, capabilities and objectives of other schools.

Is committed to:

- effective teamwork within the school and with external partners
- work with other agencies for the well-being of pupils and their families
- involvement of parents and the community in supporting the learning of children and in defining and realising the school vision
- collaboration and networking with other schools to improve outcomes.

Is able to:

- recognise and take account of the richness and diversity of the school's communities
- engage in a dialogue that builds partnerships and community consensus on values, beliefs and shared responsibilities
- build and maintain effective relationships with parents, carers, partners and the community, that enhance the education of all pupils.

Actions:

- builds a school culture and curriculum that takes account of the richness and diversity of the school's communities
- ensures learning experiences for pupils are linked into and integrated with the wider community
- ensures a range of community-based learning experiences
- collaborates with other agencies in providing for the academic, spiritual, moral, social, emotional and cultural well-being of pupils and their families
- creates and maintains an effective partnership with parents and carers to support and improve pupils' achievement and personal development
- seeks opportunities to invite parents and carers, community figures, businesses or other organisations into the school to enhance and enrich the school and its value to the wider community
- contributes to the development of the education system by, for example, sharing effective practice, working in partnership with other schools and promoting innovative initiatives.

## **References**

DfES, 2004, *National Standards for Headteachers*, DfES, London