

Time to talk

What more can we do to inspire unmotivated and disaffected children to learn? How can we persuade parents to play a larger part in instilling social responsibility in the citizens of the future? And is it too late to turn back the tide of celebrity culture?

These were some of the big issues at the heart of talk2learn's contribution to the government's 'Our Children, Time to Talk' debate on improving the lives of children and their families.

Personalised learning was the way forward to meet the needs of all children, said Jan Elliott, Deputy Headteacher at a junior and infant school near Bradford, but it was constrained by the 'one-size-fits-all' approach demanded by the government's literacy and numeracy guidelines.

"I work in a very good primary school where our results are good," she said. *"Ofsted are due to come to us soon but what are they really wanting to see* – innovation or 'straight jacketing' to conform to national initiatives?"

Deborah Coad, Curriculum Area Leader for English at a secondary school in Surrey, felt some children from well-off families were not motivated to learn because they were used to "being handed everything on a plate".

She added: "While we consider the important step of narrowing the social division, we also need to consider the very different needs of those who may be victims of the cash-rich, time-poor society many of them live in."

Jacqueline Mickiewicz, Head of Business Studies at Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School in Buckinghamshire, suggested disaffected children should be able to learn in the workplace.

"We have children who do not like the whole school ethos and I worry that we do them no good by insisting that they sit GCSEs rather than allowing them to do something more vocational."

Karen Deakin, Assistant Principal at a special school in the West Midlands, described how her 'below average' 11-18-year-olds had



individualised timetables, a named co-educator and a learning for life officer with just four attending school full time.

"The community aspect is such a learning opportunity for these young people. To be spoken to pleasantly is often a new experience. We know every family individually; we get involved in all aspects of their children's lives and to support the families we also do respite at weekends and in the holidays."

One school leader said that schools found it hard to combat today's celebrity-obsessed culture.

"We are afraid to tell parents that they have a duty to raise the citizens of the future. I often feel that the die is cast before they arrive in school and I do not believe in institutionalising the under 5s with dawn to dusk childcare."

Another school leader said the best way to help youngsters was to improve their social and communication skills.

"The emphasis in the early years of primary school should be firmly on these 'softer' skills, though they are much harder to measure."

But one contributor felt the real skill children needed to learn was how to think:

"I highly recommend Philosophy for Children. Teach them how to think and learn and then the desire to improve will follow."

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