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talk2learn highlights

Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives

Issue 2a

In case you missed it...

Recent highlights from NCSL in Dialogue, talk2learn's online community for national education debate

Also available as a podcast

Heading higher

David Bell, Permanent Secretary for the DfES, met with a mix of support and challenge on some of the pressing issues for school leaders emanating from the Every Child Matters agenda when he took part in a talk2learn hotseat to discuss how education policies support the drive for higher standards for every pupil.

There was widespread support for the ECM agenda in principle, but some contributors were concerned at the realities of its implementation.

Challenged on the 'babysitting' question, which he acknowledged as a familiar issue, Bell said that extended schools' services would meet an important need by helping working parents to support their families. "Parents, especially lone parents, have always needed good, reliable childcare and we want provision to be of good quality – the sort of care that can be provided through extended schools" he emphasised. "So I hope you'll agree this is a business DfES should be in." Another school leader supported Bell's response, adding that parents will be able to rely on quality care for their children and ensure that these children have a voice and are valued by other adults.

One contributor welcomed the shift to greater personalised learning as a means of supporting every child in her primary school to achieve, but had reservations about the future:

"What will happen when they leave me and enter the world of pressure to perform in exams, and some teachers who feel threatened by inspection in the secondary phase?". Bell addressed this concern by saying that personalised learning should be applied throughout the school system and beyond.

He went on to state that the QCA were currently looking at how to bring the KS3 curriculum up to date and drew attention to the 2020 review, which focuses on what teaching and learning should look like at the end of the next decade, including how learning can become much more personalised.

"Creating opportunities for greater involvement in the wider



community and working as an extended school certainly offers challenges," reflected another school leader. Bell recognised that "the same approach does not always work in different contexts" but there were already some excellent examples of it working well.

In particular, the incorporation of education into children's services was questioned, but Bell put up a strong defence:

"Having directors of children's services is the right way forward because we need to bring services together more effectively than we have done in the past – children's ability to learn is inextricably linked to their whole well-being, not just their experience in school."

The position of special schools was highlighted by one school leader, who asked how the continued closures of special schools were consistent with the drive for higher standards for every pupil. "The majority of our pupils have complex, significant needs and have already tried mainstream before they come to us. We will close next July and we are truly fearful for the future of our children. Higher standards for every pupil does not mean the same provision for every pupil." Bell said that special schools would have an important and continuing role as centres of expertise, adding: "My understanding is that LAs should set out how good quality provision will continue to be made for those children who might otherwise have attended a closing school".

If you are not yet a member of talk2learn and would like to join, more information is available at www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities