



IMPROVING THE  
**ODDS**  
IMPROVING  
LIFE CHANCES

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ISBN: 978-0-7053-1142-7

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Produced for HMIE by RR Donnelley B55793 06/08

Published by HMIE, June 2008

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## Foreword

Why is it that some schools are more successful than others in improving achievement in literacy and numeracy for those pupils who have barriers to their learning? What is it that makes the difference for the lowest achieving 20% of pupils?

HM Inspectors visited a number of schools that were making a significant difference for lower-achieving groups of pupils, often in less advantaged communities. Inspectors wanted to find out what these schools had in common and what good practice could be found and shared.

Inspectors found common characteristics of effective practice in raising achievement for the lowest attaining 20% of pupils. These characteristics are described in this publication. The characteristics of effective practice which make a difference to young people's lives by improving their literacy and numeracy skills are not new or innovative. They are characteristics that should be present in every school, in every class, and in every lesson. In particular, they relate to:

- the quality of relationships between staff and pupils
- consistently high expectations
- opportunities to work collaboratively
- well designed opportunities for pupils to be actively involved in learning and to contribute to discussions
- the commitment to a shared vision of how to improve the quality of pupils' learning
- effective use of self-evaluation for improvement
- valuing and empowering staff, pupils and parents in order that they can work together to improve learning
- creating a climate of ambition and high aspiration for all
- ensuring that the school has a clear framework for teaching literacy and numeracy.

The quality of education that makes this significant difference to young people's lives is not being achieved in every school.

This report is intended to stimulate discussion. I hope it will enable practitioners in all schools to reflect on the quality of those core aspects of their work that make a difference to learning. In particular, the extent to which learners perceive they are valued as individuals and of course the quality of relationships with staff.

**Graham Donaldson**  
HM Senior Chief Inspector





# IMPROVING THE ODDS

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## Introduction

**The importance of pupils developing skills in literacy and numeracy can not be overstated. Literacy is fundamental to all areas of learning. It is a central strand of Curriculum for Excellence where developing literacy and numeracy is defined as a clear responsibility of every teacher. It unlocks access to the wider curriculum. Being literate increases opportunities for the individual in all aspects of life and lays the foundations for lifelong learning and work. Similarly, when pupils develop skills in numeracy, this helps to ensure that they make progress in other areas of their learning.**

The OECD report of 2007<sup>1</sup> identified a major challenge facing Scottish schools to *reduce the achievement gap that opens up about Primary 5 and continues to widen throughout the junior secondary years (S1 to S4)*. The report stated that *children from poorer communities and low socio-economic status homes are more likely than others to under-achieve, while the gap associated with poverty and deprivation in local government areas appears to be very wide*.

During 2006-2007, HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) gathered evidence of the approaches taken by a sample of primary and secondary schools which had been successful in



raising the achievement in English and mathematics of the lowest attaining 20% of pupils.

Recent research indicated that out of 40 countries included in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006, Scotland had a significantly larger proportion of pupils at the highest level of performance. However, we had an average number of pupils at the lowest level of performance. Scotland had the third largest gap between the lowest and highest attaining pupils. Where schools had fewer than 10% of pupils from disadvantaged homes, the average score for reading achievement was 547. Where schools had more than 50% of their pupils from disadvantaged homes, the average score dropped to 497. Scotland's mean overall score of 527 was significantly above the international average of 500.

Inspectors looked at the ways in which teachers effectively supported lower attaining pupils while endeavouring to close this gap. This report is based on the findings of visits to selected schools and also draws on evidence from HMIE's inspection programme. Inspectors found common features in the approaches which were effective in raising achievement. These features are explored throughout this report.

In the primary sector, the aim of the task was to identify schools which successfully raised the achievement of pupils who were in

<sup>1</sup> Reviews of National Policies for Education: Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland, OECD 2007



the lowest attaining 20% and to report on successful strategies. Inspectors identified schools with high free meal entitlement (FME) where pupils' performance in English language and/or mathematics was better than in similar schools. They visited 20 schools in thirteen authorities that met this criteria.

In the secondary sector, inspectors visited schools with high FME where pupils' achievements in English and/or mathematics was stronger than that in their other subjects. The task sought to establish if there were any common features in the approaches of English and mathematics departments in these schools which might inform practice in other schools. Inspectors also examined evidence from published reports and identified aspects of good practice in raising achievement for the lowest performing 20% of pupils. Similar features emerged from the primary and secondary schools. Aspects of good practice were found to be equally applicable across the two sectors.

Inspectors interviewed headteachers, principal teachers and other members of staff with responsibility for monitoring the progress of the lowest achieving 20% of pupils. They observed learning and teaching and discussed provision with primary class teachers and secondary subject teachers. They met groups of pupils to discuss their learning experiences and to gather their views on what they thought had helped them to be successful. In a few primary schools, inspectors met groups of parents to discuss the support they had received.

**Pupils thought that the teachers were all really good and were very good at explaining things. They felt pupils worked hard because teachers encouraged pupils not to be afraid to try and did not shout if they got things wrong. They also liked it that teachers wrote helpful comments in their jotters and felt it "gave them a boost".**

The focus of this report is on recognising good practice and promoting action for improvement. It builds on earlier findings in *Missing Out*, HMIE 2006, which identified that schools which were successful in raising the achievement levels of all pupils demonstrated the following characteristics:

- teaching that provided the highest quality learning experiences
- leadership and a shared mission
- partnerships, including those with parents and families
- reflection on practice that valued people
- an ethos of ambition and achievement.

These characteristics are closely reflected within the dimensions of an excellent school illustrated in *Journey to Excellence*, HMIE 2006. A key aspect of achieving excellence in schools is ensuring that those children at risk of missing out on educational success do not. The success of the journey towards excellence rests on teachers learning from each others' good practice and building on it to improve the odds for those children at risk of missing out and in need of more choices and more chances.

In this report, inspectors considered the following key questions.

- What aspects of teaching make a difference for pupils?
- How do teachers engage pupils effectively in their learning?
- How does leadership for learning impact on achievement?
- If schools value and empower their staff, pupils and parents, how does that improve literacy and numeracy?
- How does the school develop pupils' positive attitudes to learning and motivate them?

#### What aspects of teaching make a difference for pupils?

Pupils readily identified the characteristics of effective teaching. They spoke warmly of teachers who listened to them and made them feel valued and of being encouraged to have their own opinions and share them regularly. They liked it when teachers expected them to work hard. For example, a pupil summing up for his group said, "I don't want to let my teacher down, so I try as hard as I can." Pupils also appreciated teachers who were friendly and had a sense of humour and who maintained high expectations within an orderly working climate in the classroom. (More is said about the impact of ethos and the environment for learning, teaching and achievement later in this report).

**When targets were set by pupils after discussions with teachers, pupils were determined to stay on target. When teachers linked assessments to targets, pupils were keen to do well and felt this was due to the teacher being interested in them.**

In primary schools, improvement in achievement had taken place when pupils were given opportunities to be actively involved in their learning, through for example engaging in discussion groups, giving demonstrations and working collaboratively in pairs or small groups. When pupils were encouraged to take responsibility for their learning they were usually enthusiastic and responded well to their teachers. In some instances this involved pupils deciding how their progress would be evaluated or in evaluating each other's skills. Where pupils were able to discuss ideas or strategies with each other, for example, when solving problems, they felt that they achieved a greater understanding. Pupils engaged enthusiastically with learning when they understood the purpose of lessons and were clear about what they had to do to improve their learning.

In secondary English language and mathematics departments pupils worked most effectively when they were encouraged to collaborate to achieve goals, for example when producing a class magazine or wall displays of project work. Pupils felt valued when they were encouraged to contribute to discussions and express personal opinions. They felt that such activities helped them to develop confidence and a range of group working skills.

**Staff thought that stability in staffing, depth of experience and knowledge of the curriculum enabled them to provide a very positive learning experience. Staff felt that their confidence enabled them to respond to emerging themes during a lesson and that they could do this with ease.**

Teachers, in discussing those features which they felt made a difference, emphasised the importance of stability: reliable, committed staff and strong teamwork, and secure routines, discussed and agreed with pupils. They felt it was important to have time to talk with colleagues about learning and allow for opportunities to share and reflect on current practice. They spoke of a stable working environment as a core from which creative approaches to teaching, learning and meeting needs grew, and also commented on the impact of a shift in balance. "When one or two new colleagues joined the staff, we were able to explain our school culture and values and involve them fairly quickly in our ethos of improvement. If there was a high turnover of supply staff it was much more difficult to ensure these consistencies."

Despite differences of scale and some of the circumstances in the schools visited (for example, the wide range of class sizes or the way pupils were organised into classes), there was strong concordance in the views of what improved the odds for all pupils, and particularly for those facing the biggest challenges or multiple barriers to learning.

- Have high expectations: deprivation does not mean young people are unable to learn and achieve success; "Aim high, but don't forget the TLC", as one headteacher said.
- Be open-minded: to pupils' ideas and suggestions, to new approaches and change.
- Make learning relevant: provide valid contexts for pupils; help them to see how they can use their existing skills and develop them further; don't waste learning opportunities.
- Keep pupils engaged: vary teaching approaches, including multi-media and information communications technology (ICT), and homework; use questioning to develop thinking and spark curiosity; exemplify lifelong learning in your own behaviour.

- Develop and celebrate pupils' self-belief and independence: *"Teachers know what we're capable of. If a teacher doesn't believe in you, you don't believe in yourself."*
- Share: learning intentions, standards expected, feedback, responsibilities; help pupils to map their progress during lessons by returning to and reviewing the intended outcomes; engage pupils in taking the lead in lessons; discuss pedagogy regularly with colleagues and share effective practice.
- Be flexible: follow fruitful tangents arising from group and class discussion; respond to topical events and issues; change the composition of groups to meet the learning purpose; provide pupils with choices.

One of the barriers which teachers, principal teachers and senior managers identified as an issue in raising achievement was the challenging behaviour of some pupils which increased the risk of them missing out on learning. Pupils also commented on the need for behaviour to be good so that they could learn and make progress. Schools had introduced a range of approaches and resources to help meet specific behavioural needs. Inspectors found that those staff who had made headway in promoting positive behaviour and attitudes amongst disengaged pupils had often received specific training in, for example, de-escalation techniques and restorative practice.

A favoured approach to improving the odds in the schools visited was to include lower achieving pupils in as wide a range of enriching activities as possible, to identify and showcase individual talents and reinforce positive attitudes to school and learning. In many schools, specific initiatives such as nurture groups, breakfast clubs, supported study, home link projects and alternatives to exclusion helped create an environment which further promoted positive attitudes and provided pupils with additional support.

#### How do teachers effectively engage pupils in their learning?

##### 'Better learning leads to better life chances'

**"It's important to have fun.....if you enjoy it, you listen more and do better."** The view that learning worked when it was fun was echoed across the schools visited. 'Fun' came in a variety of forms.

**"I love Maths starter problems. They make my mind work."**

**"I like feeling that I'm being kept on my toes and always have different things to do."**

**"The weird thing is that it (Accelerated Reader programme) makes you want to read even more."**

**"I enjoy hearing other people's views in group discussions, it helps you see differently... like looking through someone else's eyes."**

As well as enjoying learning, pupils and teachers identified active involvement in learning as a key feature of success. Effective teachers prepared varied contexts and resources to engage pupils in exploring aspects of mathematics and language, building on existing skills and confidence but progressively challenging pupils to develop. In order to achieve a positive climate for learning, teachers used praise effectively to promote positive behaviour. Pupils spoke of what it meant to achieve success by their own efforts. **"My teacher makes me use my own mind. Sometimes I don't think I can manage but she says she wouldn't give me the work if she didn't think I could do it. And so I do it."**

**Pupils thought that teachers were very encouraging and helpful. "They helped if you were stuck" and made sure everyone received a suitable amount of attention. Pupils felt all teachers expected them to work hard. They felt that everyone could make progress and move up a level. They were positive about personal learning planning. They saw a clear purpose in learning as future preparation for life and also commented "Learning is fascinating."**

In primary schools, teachers used questioning skilfully to develop pupils' understanding and reasoning and encourage them to think deeply about what they were learning. In a number of instances, teachers used pupils' responses well to expand on themes and develop ideas. Pupils engaged enthusiastically when interactions between teachers and pupils were of a high quality.

In secondary schools, pupils engaged most effectively in learning when they were allowed to collaborate on tasks and were given choice and variety in how to complete tasks. Pupils particularly valued constructive feedback which indicated how they could improve their learning.

In some instances pupils require focused, individual support in order to engage with curricular materials appropriate to their age and stage of development. Research confirms that this type of focused support is most effective when it is provided at the early stages and takes account of all aspects of a child's development.


**Early intervention schemes should be located within the wider framework of efforts to overcome educational disadvantage. Successful interventions take account of a number of factors including:**

- designing a mixed and comprehensive strategy
- making contact with parents and outside agencies to form a broad strategy of intervention.<sup>2</sup>



In a number of schools, early intervention was provided to help individual pupils develop physical, social and emotional skills prior to or in conjunction with the development of literacy and numeracy skills. In one such school, baseline screening included assessment of pupils' motor skills. Health and education services had then collaborated successfully to provide a programme of activities to support individual pupils in the development of fine and gross motor skills. This often involved staff in providing a balance of support for pupils extracted from their regular classes and support for individuals and groups within classes. In order to target this support effectively individualised educational programmes (IEPs) were produced for some pupils. Where pupils and parents were involved in the development and monitoring of IEPs they were likely to be more committed to ensuring that the individual targets were met. Intervention at all stages had a greater impact when support agencies collaborated effectively. This is evinced by the Joint Scottish Government and COSLA policy statement:

"The benefits of early intervention can only be realised by prioritising resources across local government, the health service and the entire public sector."<sup>3</sup>



Personal choice also featured strongly in pupils' descriptions of 'good learning', for example using their skills in terms of their own interests and knowledge. In one instance, a secondary school pupil with an enthusiasm for fishing was encouraged to create a database of the species of fish which swam in the local river. Whilst another pupil, who had some difficulty with reading was able to compile information from a range of sources and write a detailed article on basketball. By contrast, pupils also spoke of times in mathematics lessons when they had done no more than copy down a procedure given by their teacher, followed by lots of identical examples for practice. They felt that things had improved when mathematics stopped being something 'done to them', when they had to think for themselves and apply their mathematical skills in real life contexts.

Pupils spoke of their sense of satisfaction and achievement when they worked collaboratively, for example to solve a problem or prepare an extended piece of project work. Group and partner work was much less frequent in mathematics lessons than in English. Some pupils talked about the value of being able to think and work on their own for mathematics, although they would have liked more chances for group work and for "real-life maths".

The majority of pupils said they knew how they were doing in their coursework and what they needed to do to improve. They liked formative assessment strategies such as 'two stars and a wish' feedback: "Nobody ever gets three stars or three wishes. We know we can always make something better." Increasingly, pupils were assessing their own and each others' work. This was effective when they understood clearly the standards expected and had been taught how to offer constructive comment and editing. Teachers commended pupils for respecting one another during peer assessments and added that, more often than not, pupils were rather hard on themselves.

**A wide variety of extra curricular activity was offered to all pupils and uptake of this was encouraged and carefully monitored. Staff felt that this was a motivator for pupils to attend school.**

Pupils and teachers identified the positive impact of out-of-school hours activities on confidence and achievements. These included problem-solving and enquiry challenges, quizzes set by older pupils for younger pupils, ICT-based competitions, book groups, writing 'blogs' and updating school websites, involvement in school shows and Burns' Suppers, and learning a musical instrument. Pupils who had gained confidence and were achieving well in out of school hours activities were able to describe how such experiences had enabled them to better engage in more formal learning activities. Generally, schools were still working on how best to chart and capitalise further on the links between pupils' wider achievements and their performance. Pupil profiles and school tracking systems indicated where there had been improved attendance, more readiness to participate in clubs, events and additional study; and 'good citizenship' activities, for example, paired reading or mathematics, buddying and community service.

**Teachers reported that the headteacher valued her staff highly (there were no "put-downs" for anyone in the school) and had high expectations of them. There had been a whole school focus in developing teaching for effective learning strategies. All teachers had been trained in the approaches and were very clear about what the expectations were for them in terms of their classroom practice. "This is not a school where you learn about new approaches, but don't use them"**

**The principal teacher's approach is leading from the front. He is always keen to take on new ideas, doesn't expect others to do what he can't. He encourages staff to develop their own leadership of learning and to take the lead within the department.**

**The assessment information becomes included in the individual child's profiles. This information and approaches to delivering high quality learning and teaching become a focus during the headteacher's classroom observations. Following the observations, discussions take place between the headteacher and the class teacher. The discussion is about developing the whole child, focusing on social, emotional and behavioural needs as well as progress in learning.**

### How does leadership for learning impact on achievement?

Inspectors identified a strong link between effective leadership and improvements in achievement.<sup>4</sup> In the schools visited, effective leadership for learning was regarded by teachers and managers as the driving force behind raising achievement for all in their schools. The leader, usually identified as the headteacher or principal teacher, had a clear vision for improving pupils' life chances: (s)he *"believes the school should fit the child, not the child fit the school"*. Central to their improvement planning was the question *"How does this benefit the pupils?"* By involving staff in planning and prioritising improvements to help achieve the school's vision, effective leaders fostered a shared sense of purpose, taking staff beyond their day to day operational responsibilities. As one group of teachers said,

**"We don't know how she manages to involve us in everything and persuade us to take things on, but she always does. She's inspirational."**

**The slogan ABC (attitude, behaviour, commitment) represents the shared value system created through discussions with pupils, staff and parents. Visible throughout the school on posters the value system underpins daily life.**

**Pupils valued the regular supported study opportunities such as the Easter School. They felt that revision packages helped them to organise their learning.**

Teachers described effective leaders in terms of having established personal and professional credibility and leading from the front: they *"walk the talk"*. At all levels, leaders showed strong commitment to pupils' learning and achievement and had shared their aims and high expectations with colleagues, pupils and parents. Their commitment and focus commanded respect. Effective leadership had most impact in schools where collective drive had been developed and where all stakeholders had a part to play. In the schools sampled there was a clear connection between effective committed leadership and improvement in achievement for the lowest 20% of pupils.

An important feature of purposeful leadership was the establishment of a strong culture of self-evaluation for improvement. This included the rigorous analysis of data by school and department managers and the engagement of staff in discussions to identify strengths and areas for development. For example, tracking pupils' progress and achievement challenged teachers to reflect on and discuss aspects of learning and teaching to meet the needs of their pupils more effectively.

**Parents are encouraged to participate in their children's education. At the start of each session they are provided with a report explaining the targets that their child will be working towards. This is reissued at the end of the session detailing the progress that their child has made in achieving these targets.**

**Parents are actively encouraged to be involved in the daily life of the school, for example, by telling traditional stories from their own culture. The headteacher successfully promotes the use of the school as a community resource. The school building is used as a meeting place for a number of parent and community groups. These include activities such as Polish language classes. A member of bilingual staff provides support for parents by acting as translators.**

Information from monitoring pupils' behaviour enabled staff to identify and share successful approaches to managing their engagement in the learning process. A number of schools actively sought the views of pupils and parents as part of their planning for continued improvement. This information was then used effectively as the basis for agreeing values and aims. The resulting impact was greatest where the responsibilities of teachers and learners in achieving these aims were clear and sufficiently detailed.

**In one secondary school, a parental liaison officer appointed by the Council's Integrated Services Department organised courses and workshops for parents. These included computer courses and advice on how they could support their children's learning.**

**The school encourages parents to come into the school to work with children by attempting to take the formality out of visits. Pupils issue invitations to parents to come to an open evening where pupils put on productions or lead the open night. On these occasions, resources were on display, with members of staff on hand to discuss them with parents.**

Effective leadership skills which had an impact on pupils' achievement were usually complemented by sound management skills. Teachers identified the importance of having a clear framework and consistent procedures to support successful learning and teaching. For example, they talked about the benefits of having course guidelines which included concise advice on resources, approaches to teaching and learning, assessment, and tracking and monitoring pupils' progress. Teachers said that this kind of secure framework freed them to plan creatively to support effective learning. Throughout the session, they had the opportunity to discuss learning and teaching and to share good practice with each other.

**If schools value and empower their staff, pupils and parents, how does that improve literacy and numeracy?**

Inspectors found that in schools which were working successfully to raise pupils' levels of achievement, pupils, parents, staff and partners were all clear about their responsibilities. The schools had all developed supportive cultures where individuals felt valued and knew that their contributions were making a difference.

**The home link teacher worked alongside the nursery class teacher in order to identify families in need of support at an early stage. Through her work as a parents' advocate she had gained the respect and trust of parents. This had led to a high level of collaboration between parents and school staff to provide effective support for specific pupils.**

In a number of primary schools visited, staff had been successful in involving parents in various aspects of the work of the school. Arrangements were put in place to enable all parents to attend parents consultation meetings. These included providing interpreter and crèche facilities. Parents particularly appreciated opportunities to learn about the curriculum through workshops and to be directly involved in their child's learning by attending 'soft start' or activity sessions in their child's classes. In secondary schools, pupils spoke positively about the support offered during supported study sessions. They benefitted from collaborative working amongst staff in departments where everyone was working together towards a common goal. Staff considered that they worked most effectively when there was shared leadership and collegiality within departments.

Staff empowered pupils to take responsibility for their learning by ensuring they understood what and why they were learning. This was often achieved by working with pupils to set realistic targets. Pupils spoke about the importance of a supportive classroom environment where they felt confident about contributing and knew their opinions would be listened to. They considered that in such an environment, discussion often helped them to clarify their thinking and to appreciate other points of view. Where pupils' achievements were celebrated this motivated them to try even harder. Pupils described how helpful comments in jotters boosted their confidence as they could clearly see what they had achieved and were clear about how they could improve things further. This enabled them to appreciate the relationship between application and success. The extent to which pupils successfully engaged in tasks was often dependent upon the level of enjoyment or challenge that they experienced.

**The use of circle time is highlighted as a key approach in promoting positive behaviour. The school psychologist is involved in working with groups of pupils in assisting them to address anger management.**

When staff were clear about targets they felt better equipped to make a difference. Where schools were data rich and staff were supported to use this data effectively to track pupils' progress, they were able to ensure that resources were targeted appropriately and were having an impact on improving achievement. Staff talked about being empowered to evaluate and change approaches that did not work. In such instances, staff felt encouraged to try different approaches and they demonstrated a strong sense of collegiate as well as individual responsibility.

**Pupils thought teachers believed in their abilities "Teachers tell you they believe in you. They say 'we wouldn't give you this work if you couldn't do it' they give you targets – if you reach it, it pushes you up a step. They give you extra help if you need it".**

The schools visited provided a variety of examples of how valued partners had been involved in improving literacy and numeracy. Where schools had been able to provide a base for community and family learning this had helped to break down barriers and develop the concept of life long learning. Parents described the value of workshops which had provided them with the skills, knowledge and confidence to support their children's learning. In some instances, schools used ICT effectively to provide details of course materials or of websites that could be used to reinforce learning. Parents described the importance of regular communication in enabling them to be involved in their children's education. They felt more empowered to support their children's education when they received regular, detailed information about their children's attainments and achievements, and guidance as to how they could support their learning at home.

**There are very effective procedures in place to promote positive behaviour. Unacceptable behaviour is tracked and appropriate sanctions taken. One member of staff carries out the role of behaviour coordinator and provides advice to others on classroom organisation and behaviour management. The school works closely with other organisations to provide support for pupils experiencing behavioural difficulties. These include the hospital outreach team, educational psychologist and child and family psychiatry unit.**

**In one education authority Children's Services provided a range of coordinated support from a range of organisations. These included Circle of Friends, Seasons for Growth, FRIENDS and play therapy. Youth counselling provided an important service to young people of secondary age.**

Partnerships with other professionals were most successful when the individuals concerned identified strongly with the school and worked as an integral part of the team. For example, home-school link workers had successfully supported individual parents or small groups in order to help them develop confidence in working with the school to support their child's learning. Other factors which made a difference for pupils with additional support needs included inter-agency working, using professional skills appropriately and ensuring effective communication between different agencies, such as psychologists and speech and language therapists. In some authorities, local librarians worked closely with schools to support out of school learning. This included stocking appropriate texts to support course work, ensuring that relevant websites were bookmarked for younger users, and running reading clubs for targeted groups. In such cases, individuals felt they were making a genuine difference.

In order to engage effectively with learning, some children and their families required support from a range of professionals. In some instances, a range of agencies and services for children worked well together to give coordinated assistance that took account of changing circumstances. Staff worked very effectively with children to meet their social and emotional needs. Children in education were helped by an innovative variety of services to support their social and emotional development.

#### **How does the school develop pupils' positive attitudes to learning and motivate them?**

High expectations, complemented by positive, purposeful relationships between teachers and pupils, were a notable feature in successful schools and departments. Teachers shared with each other a core belief in the importance of literacy and numeracy in improving the life chances of their pupils: *"We're a department where we all believe that what education can do for you matters"*. These schools and departments were child-centred and focused on achieving the best for, and with, their pupils. Together, they worked to provide a positive and achieving ethos to motivate and inspire their pupils.

For their part, pupils identified the quality of relationships with their teachers as a key feature of successful learning. They felt that strong positive relationships fostered a sense of mutual trust and respect, and that they were valued as individuals. They believed that they were encouraged to achieve and this, in turn, impacted on their motivation for learning, *"..and in my head I hear her (the teacher) saying, 'Aim high!' and this pushes you on"*. Teachers' inspirational ambitions for their pupils meant that pupils knew that they mattered and their self-belief increased. Underpinning the efforts of teachers to establish a learning environment where all pupils were motivated to achieve was the claim expressed by one headteacher, *"There is not a child we could have done more with"*.

In classes, to develop positive relationships and promote a successful learning environment, teachers established clear boundaries, in terms of attitude, commitment, behaviour and effort. They recognised the importance of boosting pupils' confidence and instilling a 'can-do' attitude. A support for learning teacher commented, *"Pupils leave this class with a sense of achievement. In this teaching environment the 'non-attentive' pupils are responding positively"*. Teachers consistently made judicious use of praise to encourage and motivate pupils, and to develop confidence and optimism. Pupils were encouraged to achieve, and they felt that their success was recognised and celebrated. Teachers used a range of approaches to valuing pupils' work and sharing their achievements, including:

- attractive displays of photographs and work to develop their confidence;
- the use of an 'Achievers' Wall' to demonstrate and celebrate good work and draw attention to significant achievements by individuals or groups; and
- awards and stickers for successful pupils based on a range of criteria including assessment results, attitude, behaviour, homework and commitment, to boost self esteem.

Recognition was not focused solely on attainment: it was more broadly based and well targeted to include good work or homework, neat presentation and productive team working. Teachers provided helpful feedback on their work and progress routinely to pupils and, as a result, pupils were clear and confident about their strengths and what they needed to do to improve. Expectations of pupils and teachers about behaviour, engagement and performance were consistently high. Pupils responded well to the shared understanding of relationships and to the ethos of mutual respect. The development of these common values underpinned the culture of achievement within the school or department.



## Conclusion

### What aspects of teaching make a difference for pupils?

- The quality of relationships between teachers and pupils, in particular the mutual respect and trust fostered in schools.
- Consistently high expectations, encouraging pupils to “*be all they can be*”.
- Well managed opportunities for pupils to work and learn collaboratively.

### How do teachers engage pupils effectively in their learning?

- By providing them with a variety of stimulating of activities therefore relevant to real life.
- Through actively involving them in learning. By giving them personal responsibility for thinking things through and by taking part.
- By giving pupils opportunities to make and act on personal choices.

### How does leadership for learning impact on achievement?

Effective leaders:

- Develop and share a clear vision of how to improve the quality of pupils’ learning experiences and the teaching process.
- Strengthen teamwork by building on effective practice and successful collaborations, including partnerships across the curriculum, with other schools and agencies and with parents.
- Show commitment to lifelong learning and professional development.
- Use self-evaluation for improvement judiciously to confirm strengths and identify and prioritise areas for development.

### If schools value and empower their staff, pupils and parents, how does that improve literacy and numeracy?

- Schools share information and expertise across the sectors to support continuity in learning.
- Teachers help pupils to see the links between application, commitment and success.
- Senior managers trust teachers’ individual and collective professionalism and develop a sense of accountability.
- Schools inform parents about their children’s education and involve them directly wherever possible.
- Staff maintain strong links with relevant external agencies to develop and coordinate appropriate support to meet pupils’ needs.

### How does the school develop pupils’ positive attitudes to learning and motivate them?

- Through practices which supports and promotes the belief that people and education matter.
- By creating a climate of ambition and high aspirations for all.
- In their commitment to boosting self-esteem and developing a ‘can do’ attitude in all pupils.
- By praising and celebrating achievement across a wide range of activities.

**Inspectors established that of all the features identified by pupils, teachers and senior managers as key to improving the odds, the most important was the quality of the relationships between staff and pupils throughout the school or department. The characteristics of high quality relationships were mutual respect and trust, high expectations and aspirations, and self-belief: a shared ‘can do’ attitude.**

There was also a powerful core belief: **“Everybody matters and people make the difference.”**

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ISBN 978-0-7053-1142-7



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