

Transforming Schools: A Discussion Paper

Response to Estyn's discussion paper, May 2007

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Aspect fully endorses the basic argument that the quality and standards of education have improved over the last 20 years while recognising that the system is still beset by gender, ethnic and socio-economic inequalities. As an association, we support the need for fundamental change in schooling rather than marginal incremental modifications of an out-of-date model if pupils are to be equipped for the fast-changing and complex global world of work and leisure of the 21st century.

The extracted features of provision in need of review taken from *Excellent Schools: A Vision for Schools in the 21st Century*, are worthy of continued emphasis. Far greater and pupil-sensitive flexibility in school organisation and in provision is vital. Developments in schooling should always be responsive to individual learners' holistic needs and although Aspect supports each of the ten identified ways forward, we would suggest that in this context, consideration of northern and eastern European social pedagogical models would have been appropriate.

Social pedagogy approaches and small group work offer potential value in tackling disengagement, disaffection and underachievement. Pedagogue roles that deliver learning, care and upbringing as inseparable, interconnected parts of life epitomise the kind of personalisation of learning that *Transforming Schools* promotes. This aligns well with alternative curriculum delivery methods totally personalised to each pupil and individual learning pathways that takes account of preferred pace and style of learning.

One other issue that *Transforming Schools* could have incorporated into the arguments is the contribution that can be made by targeted youth support especially for young people at risk of poor outcomes. Youth services working with schools can offer exciting and appropriate alternative curriculum models that engage and raise the participation and achievement of more young people.

Nevertheless, each of the detailed 'ways forward' is to be applauded. In particular Aspect welcomes the following:

- the skills curriculum – focus on cross-stage planning and the promotion of individual thinking and learning skills
- collaboration and the needs of the 14–19 age range – the flexibility built into the Learning Pathways agenda
- the values curriculum – as a way of enhancing social responsibility
- bilingualism, meeting the needs of the community and small schools – all as reflecting the importance of locality with regard to culture, social coherence and widening opportunities
- school design – in showing the importance to learning of environment as well as modern facilities
- schools and technology – given the imperative of modern ICT in support of learning
- staffing – with its recognition of diverse roles alongside professionalism
- leadership and management – as a key element without which schools cannot deliver quality education.

In overall terms *Transforming Schools* is well argued and pertinent throughout, offering a succinct account of contemporary pressures on the evolution of learning. It provides a sound basis for the further debate necessary for translating its aims into action.

Copies of Estyn's *Transforming Schools: A Discussion Paper* can be read in full at www.estyn.gov.uk.

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