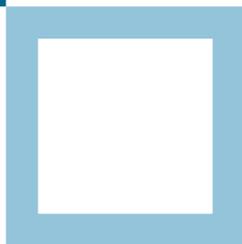
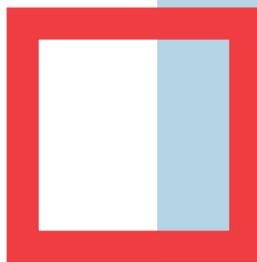
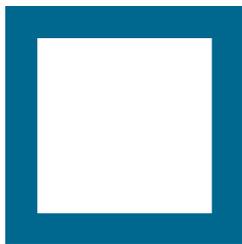


Personalised Learning: Building a New Relationship with Schools

Speech by
David Miliband,
Minister of State for
School Standards



North of England
Education Conference, Belfast,
8th January 2004

department for
education and skills



FOREWORD

This pamphlet provides the text of my speech on *Personalised Learning: Building a New Relationship with Schools* which I gave at the North of England Education Conference on 8 January 2004.



It outlines how personalised learning might become the defining feature of our education system; to provide an education to every child, which is tailored to their unique learning styles, motivations and needs.

I believe that this can be achieved if we develop a new relationship with schools which will give schools the time, support and information they need to focus on what really matters. By strengthening our school improvement processes, improving our data flows and working with schools to tackle problems we will ensure there is real focus on the central priorities of teaching and learning.

Above all, I want to see an education system that combines excellence and equity; that ensures every child receives the education they deserve. With the proposals outlined here, I believe we can rise to that challenge.

A blue-tinted handwritten signature of David Miliband.

David Miliband

Minister of State for School Standards

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Challenge

Over the last six years we have seen some outstanding success in our education system. Schools have focused on the core business of teaching and learning, and standards have risen. But we are facing a critical challenge in education: how do we achieve both excellence and equity?

Personalised Learning

The solution is to build on what the most successful teachers do best, to create an education system with personalised learning at its heart. This means a system in which every child matters; careful attention is paid to their individual learning styles, motivations and needs; there is rigorous use of pupil target setting linked to high quality formative assessment and marking; lessons are well paced and enjoyable; and pupils are supported by partnerships with others beyond the classroom.

Personalised learning can only be developed school by school. It cannot be imposed from above. If we want to make personalised learning the defining feature of our education system then we need to develop a new, more focused and purposeful relationship between the Department, LEAs and schools.

A New Relationship with Schools

The new relationship with schools will bring a sharper focus to our work at national level and strip out clutter, in order to release greater local initiative and energy. We want to free schools to focus on what really matters, give them more help in identifying their weaknesses, and more tailored and coherent support in putting them right.

We are proposing to trial the key aspects of the new relationship with local education authorities and schools. These are:

- **an intelligent accountability framework** which puts a premium on ensuring effective and ongoing self evaluation in every school combined with sharper edged, lighter touch external inspection and an annual school profile to complement performance table data;
- **a simplified school improvement process** in which every school uses robust self evaluation to drive improvement, and produces a single school improvement plan based on a smaller number of DfES output measures. Every secondary school will have access to a dedicated school improvement partner with whom they conduct a single conversation on targets, priorities and support;
- **improved data and information systems** which give schools the chance to take control of the flow of information through an online ordering system for all Departmental documents, and align the activity of the DfES and its partners to ensure that data is 'collected once, used many times';

- **a school profile** containing data about student performance and the school's own view of its priorities and performance. It will be light on bureaucracy (pre-populated), easy to access and powerful in impact, supplementing performance tables and replacing the annual statutory report to parents.

This is a challenging agenda, but one that is practical, worthwhile, and achievable. For LEAs and schools it offers greater clarity, simplicity and support; we will further reduce bureaucracy and free up more time to focus on the central priorities of teaching and learning. For parents it offers up-to-date and relevant information about different schools. And above all, for pupils there is the prospect that more and more institutions will deliver the vision of personalised learning that offers so much for their futures.

PERSONALISED LEARNING: BUILDING A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOLS

Last year in Warrington, I said that the route to higher standards of achievement in 2003 was to focus not on what we teach but on how we teach. And in the last year, when we have focused on good practice in teaching and learning, we have seen results:

- the Key Stage 3 Strategy delivered the first sustained rise in performance at 14, with improvement in every subject area and at every level;
- primary schools have maintained world class standards with continued progress in closing achievement gaps;
- reforms to teacher training have delivered the best generation of NQTs ever;
- over half our secondary pupils are now in specialist schools which, in aggregate, continue to improve faster than the rest;
- the Excellence in Cities strategy has meant that pupils in Gateshead, Wolverhampton and Hackney are now seeing improvement in GCSE achievement at two to three times the national average.

It is your efforts and hard work, and that of your schools, which have made all this possible – so thank you.

Of course, for system wide improvement, the underlying conditions also have to be right.

- Priorities for reform agreed and consistent: school leadership, workforce reform, specialism and collaboration, and partnerships beyond the classroom. The priorities last year, the priorities this year.
- Rising staff numbers: we have the highest number of teachers since 1984, better paid and better trained, with new levels of support from many more classroom assistants and support staff.
- Strong and purposeful relationships, with the compact detailing for every LEA the commitments of the Department and the Authority to school improvement.
- Public confidence strengthened by clear signs of progress, which this year means renewed momentum at Key Stage 2 and further improvements at Key Stage 3 and GCSE.
- Effective feedback from the classroom direct to the heart of Government, to ensure intentions are informed by reality. That is why establishing the Implementation Review Unit and the wider Workforce Agreement partnership has been, and will remain, so significant. I am determined that the IRU will work with us every step of the way.

We also recognise that this has been a difficult year in terms of funding. This is very frustrating given the rising investment in our schools. There is a broad consensus about what went wrong. We take our responsibility for that. We have been working very closely with our partners in local authorities and schools to put in place arrangements for the next two years designed to ensure predictability and stability. I pay tribute to the vast majority of local authorities, governors, and headteachers who have been working hard to implement these.

But I want today to return to teaching and learning. This is what holds the key to higher standards in 2004 and beyond. We have to face squarely the fact that for all the strengths of the system – and the year on year rises in GCSE attainment – nearly fifty per cent of students leave secondary school without five higher grades at GCSE. International studies tell us that our 10 year olds have the third highest levels of reading in the world, yet by the age of 17 we have the fourth highest drop out rate of any country in the industrialised world. This is what we have to change.

Personalised Learning

The experience of successful schools shows us how. Decisive progress in educational standards occurs where every child matters; careful attention is paid to their individual learning styles, motivations, and needs; there is rigorous use of pupil target setting linked to high quality assessment; lessons are well paced and enjoyable; and pupils are supported by partnership with others well beyond the classroom.

This is what I mean by 'Personalised Learning'. High expectations of every child, given practical form by high quality teaching based on a sound knowledge and understanding of each child's needs. It is not individualised learning where pupils sit alone at a computer. Nor is it pupils left to their own devices – which too often reinforces low aspirations. It can only be developed school by school. It cannot be imposed from above.

The question facing us today is simple: what do we need to do to make personalised learning the defining feature of our education system? I think it requires a new relationship between the Department, LEAs and schools, that brings a sharper focus to our work at national level, and strips out clutter and duplication through stronger alignment of all activity, in order to release greater local initiative and energy.

The aim is, and I am determined that the result will be, schools with more time to focus on what really matters, more help in identifying their weaknesses, and more tailored and coherent support in putting them right.

Some say that achieving excellence and equity is impossible. That 'more will mean worse'. But excellence and fairness are not opposites that have to be traded. In fact, they are the twin engines of progress. Giving every single child the chance to be the best they can be, whatever their talent or background, is not the betrayal of excellence. It is the fulfilment of it. The challenge for

education in the 21st century is to give the common basics of citizenship and working life to every pupil, while developing and nurturing the unique talents of each pupil.

There are five key processes that make this possible:

- Assessment for Learning that feeds into lesson planning and teaching strategies, sets clear targets, and clearly identifies what pupils need to do to get there;
- a wide range of teaching techniques to promote a broad range of learning strategies, facilitated by high quality ICT that promotes individual and group learning as well as teaching;
- curriculum choice, particularly from the age of 14, and the development of subject specialism;
- the organisation of the school, including the structure of the day and of lessons, using workforce reform to enhance teaching and learning and to ensure consistency;
- and links to services beyond the classroom, involving the wider community and families, parents providing strong support; and the engagement of LEAs in the agenda set out in the Every Child Matters Green Paper.

We want schools to challenge and support pupils, recognising that everybody has a different starting point and different aspirations. Yet to deliver personalised learning schools need challenge and support as well, tuned to the different needs of primary and secondary teachers, and the different needs of different schools.

The model of challenge and support, at the heart of the new relationship with schools, has to be built on solid foundations and clear principles:

- nothing is possible without strong institutions that are the champions of high performance, and have the confidence to innovate and collaborate thus generating further momentum of reform;
- progress depends on alignment of local and national priorities, programmes and activities, so that all parts of the system are working in common cause and with maximum effect;
- and we will really achieve take off when there is a maximum use of data and benchmarks by all those with an interest in pupils' progress, combined with a minimum of clutter and noise so that people can get on with the main job of teaching children.

This requires a concerted approach to whole school improvement. Over the last six years excellent teaching has been supported by some outstandingly successful innovation in our system, forged by programmes such as Specialist Schools, Excellence in Cities, Gifted and Talented provision, Extended Schools, or the Key Stage 2 and 3 Strategies. We should collectively be proud of these. But at the same time we should realise that the overwhelming evidence from Ofsted is that these programmes are most successful not as stand alone initiatives, but as part of a coherent approach to whole school improvement. Building this coherence is at the centre of the new relationship with schools; it is fundamental to further advance.

The three key aspects to this are: first, an accountability framework, which puts a premium on ensuring effective and ongoing self evaluation in every school combined with more focused external inspection, linked closely to the improvement cycle of the school; second, a simplified school improvement process, where every school uses robust self evaluation to drive improvement, informed by a single annual conversation with the education system on targets, priorities and support; and third, improved data flows, including to parents.

I want to address these three issues.

Intelligent Accountability

Accountability is in some ways the foundation of public services today. Without accountability there is no legitimacy; without legitimacy there is no support; without support there are no resources; and without resources there are no services.

Accountability should not be a necessary evil. Instead it should be a valuable tool. In the new relationship with schools, we need to move beyond defending the need for an accountability framework, and respond to those who want it to work better to promote high performance. What John Dunford calls intelligent accountability serves two functions: it helps the system learn from itself, and it shows the public that they are getting value for money.

It should boast the following elements:

- data that helps teachers develop themselves;
- data that helps school leaders promote high performance;
- data that helps parents support their children's progress;
- data that helps LEAs target resources;
- data that helps the DfES fine-tune its interventions to spread good practice;
- and of critical importance the combination of qualitative as well as quantitative data that is the foundation for any intelligent conversation about public service improvement.

To fulfil all of these requirements, the data upon which we base our accountability mechanisms must reflect our core educational purposes. It must be seen to be objective. And it must allow for clear and consistent comparison of performance between pupils and between institutions.

That is why we are committed to our system of national tests and exams. The tests provide a consistent external benchmark against which teachers can validate their professional judgement and parents can judge progress. We know the danger of low expectations: national achievement standards are the ladder of opportunity for all students, irrespective of class or background.

Our commitment to the national tests has not precluded change and development, either to the tests themselves, or to the way in which results are reported. We have demonstrated our willingness to listen to reasoned argument through the changes to Key Stage 1 assessment that we are now piloting in a quarter of primary schools, through the revisions to target setting at Key Stage 2, and through the introduction of value added measures into school performance tables.

Test and exam results are a vital indicator of educational success, and when the rigour they bring is lost, the evidence from the history of the English education system is that it is the pupils in the poorest communities who suffer most. But we can improve the way school performance is reported and evaluated, both by the school itself and externally, as we move towards a more intelligent accountability framework.

Both self evaluation and outside evaluation are vital to the new relationship. Our interest is in promoting quality outcomes, not policing in detail every activity that might contribute to how those are achieved. The new relationship will encourage schools to reflect honestly on how they can serve their students better – self evaluation at its best – and bring an expert professional eye from outside the school – inspection and challenge at its best. To do this we will build on and extend successful practice.

Many schools have taken serious steps towards self evaluation – and Ofsted’s moves to stimulate self evaluation in advance of inspection have been widely welcomed. In the best schools, regular appraisal of how students are progressing, and how the core systems of the school are working, are part of the routine of good management. These schools then use this information to determine their own priorities to raise standards. The time is right to embed honest, hard edged self evaluation across the whole system. This needs to be data rich and workload light, consistent with the aims of the workforce remodelling agreement. We propose to do that in three ways.

First, we will work with the profession to create a suite of materials that will help schools evaluate themselves honestly. The balance to strike here is between making the process over-prescriptive, and making it just an occasional one-off event. In the best schools, it is continuous, searching and objective.

Second, Ofsted will shortly be making proposals on inspection, which take full account of a school’s self evaluation. A critical test of the strong school will be the quality of its self evaluation and how it is used to raise standards.

Third, the Government and its partners at local and national level will increasingly use the information provided by a school’s self evaluation and development plan, alongside inspection, to inform decisions about targeting support and challenge.

When it comes to external evaluation, the key is to make the process of inspection as useful to schools as possible, supporting self improvement where it is present, spurring it where it is not.

The integrity and robustness of the current inspection process has played a vital part in the improved levels of achievement we have seen over the last six years. This model has served the education system well, but it is right to seek improvements that will deliver a sharper focus, lighter touch and clearer link to school improvement. That is why I applaud David Bell's readiness to address with an open mind the following issues:

- whether the full section 10 inspection is an appropriate use of resource, and whether shorter, sharper inspections would achieve more;
- whether the bureaucracy, and frankly over preparation, associated with the current notice period for inspections could be tackled;
- whether the current length of the inspection cycle is appropriate to the current phase of reform.

Ofsted will be publishing proposals in about a month's time, with a view to early trials of alternative models of inspection.

But we also know that Ofsted inspections are not the only judgement on school performance. The performance data published on a raw and value added basis is and will continue to be an important feature of our system. I believe parents have a

right to information about the performance of individual schools, in a form which allows them readily to make comparisons with other schools. We cannot return to a world where Ministers, officials and probably teachers know the performance of schools, but the public do not.

But intelligent accountability requires that schools and parents be confident that performance is being compared on a like-for-like basis. There is a flourishing debate as to whether we should take account of more than prior attainment when we calculate the value added by schools. I am committed to playing a positive part in that debate. Over the coming months, we shall be consulting widely as we move towards a model of value added which commands the confidence of all.

But statistics do not tell us everything. To supplement the data contained in performance tables, parents also have a right to a broader and deeper understanding of what the school is doing. We think the answer lies in an annual school profile which would replace the annual statutory report to parents and increase flexibility around the statutory elements of the school prospectus. The school profile would contain standardised comparative performance data about a school and its students, which could be automatically derived from information held on the National Pupil Database, coupled with information provided by the school on its own view of its priorities and performance. It will be light on bureaucracy, easy to access and powerful in impact. It will place new and challenging information in the public domain.

I see the profile as a short accessible document setting out the following information:

- data on students' attainment and progress, set against benchmarks for schools in similar contexts;
- how the school serves all its students, not just the average student;
- the most recent assessment by Ofsted, set against the school's own self assessment;
- what the school offers, in terms of the broader curriculum;
- how the head and governors see the priorities for future improvement;
- what the school offers the rest of the system.

We want to see the profile become an important part of educational discussion in the home and the school, as well as in Whitehall. But it is vital to get the contents and compilation right. So in the next month or so we will be launching an open consultation. By September 2005, we want schools to have a profile that reflects the breadth and depth of what they do.

The Single Conversation

The second area I want to address concerns the relationship of schools to the multiple programmes and partners in the wider education system. We want to see these relationships streamlined and synchronised, to put the school's needs at the centre of a clear and confident set of relationships.

We have begun to do this for primary schools. In *'Excellence and Enjoyment'* we said that we wanted to see primary schools setting their own challenging targets for pupil attainment at Key Stage 2; developing the distinctive character of their schools; being more creative and innovative in how they teach and organise themselves. In return we undertook to cut unnecessary burdens which distract schools from their core business; to maximise schools' flexibility; and to offer primary schools more coherent support through the new primary strategy. The compacts with LEAs are helping us to do this.

Building on the start we have made in primary, we now need to respond with a similar sense of vision and purpose to the challenge posed at secondary level, where the complexity is, if anything, greater.

I want to forge a new relationship with schools in which DfES and LEAs' support for secondary schools is more closely integrated, draws on the proven expertise of those in the field, including serving heads and leading schools, and offers a substantial reduction in burdensome bidding and reporting requirements. This new relationship would have the following characteristics:

- every school is able to have a single conversation about its development priorities, its targets and its support needs;
- the school's targets are set against a clear picture of national priorities, and are based on rigorous self evaluation and local needs;

- there is a continuing simplification and rationalisation of funding support for school improvement;
- a single plan, based on a school's self evaluation, will satisfy all monitoring requirements;
- schools are held accountable for pupil outcomes, not process measures or filling in the correct form.

I want to dwell briefly here on the first of these points. I am clear that every successful institution benefits from the candid, critical and ongoing advice of respected third parties – preferably people with a proven track record in the field. The development, with the NCSL, of the consultant leaders' programme in the primary sector – now engaging 1000 of the finest primary heads in the country to help 4000 other schools – is a good example of this.

To refine the model we intend to develop with five or more LEAs, as an extension to the compact process, the concept of a 'single conversation'. This will form part of a wider engagement with those LEAs on developing and trialling the whole system I am setting out today.

We will work with the LEA to provide a credible and experienced practitioner – a school improvement partner, in many cases someone with current or recent secondary headship experience – to act as a critical friend to the school and be authorised to approve – on behalf of the LEA and DfES – the performance targets set by the head and governing body of the school. They would also

be available to debate and advise on priorities and support needs, and assist with implementation support where necessary.

This single conversation will reduce the multiple accountabilities and reporting requirements that too many schools face. DfES and LEA school improvement programmes for secondary schools could then be re-engineered to support and dovetail with these new processes. This will mirror the steps being taken to integrate primary programmes and to provide more coherent support for primary schools, overseen by a single primary strategy manager in each LEA.

None of this will be simple or easy to accomplish either for the DfES or for LEAs. It will be important that our proposals are developed in close discussion with national and local partners, particularly at headteacher and LEA level, and ideas tested in practice before being developed widely. A key feature of ensuring success will be a broadly based high level consultative group which I would like to include colleagues from local government, schools, governing bodies, national partner agencies, the Implementation Review Unit and the professional associations.

Information and Data Management

The third area concerns data and information. Data helps teachers, heads of department and the senior leadership team identify underperformance, and do something about it. In this sense it is the most valuable currency in school improvement. When data makes it evident that the same pupils are thriving in history

but struggling in geography, decisions about performance management and professional development suddenly become much clearer.

But data needs to be available and collected in a simple and effective form. Schools are infuriated when different bits of government make their own data collections and waste valuable time and effort at school level. That is why I want to deliver a system where data is collected once but used many times. Where possible this data should simply be material that schools produce for their own purposes. That is why I can say today that:

- we are working with our national partners in the education system to develop a set of binding protocols to ensure that we realise the full benefits of the national pupil level data that is now available through PLASC. This should, for the first time, make a reality of the statement ‘collect once, use many times’;
- we plan to extend the approach which has proved successful in the collection and management of pupil level data, to the data which is currently collected on adults in the workforce, and on school and LEA level information. This will make possible a single system wide data collection system for all types of data held by a school or LEA;
- finally, we are consulting with schools, LEAs and other partners on developing a core data set which is based on the information schools need for their own management purposes, and then use this to drive the data demands of the education system.

Second, schools – above all heads and governors – complain that they are wading through mounds of paper. In fact there has been progress. Since 2001 the volume of communications which have been sent to all schools by the Department has been reduced by over 50%.

But school leaders, heads and governors, are discerning people. We have asked ourselves the question – is the information we send to schools the information schools need? It is my view that schools are best placed, using their own professional judgement, to choose what information they need from the Department and when they need it. This is the thinking behind the development of an online ordering system, providing an online catalogue of the information and resources that are available to support schools. This system is currently being piloted in three LEAs, and if successful, would mean that:

- the documents and resources that we would normally send to all schools will be available online, easy to find, with detailed summaries;
- schools will be able to choose whether to download electronic versions or order paper based copies of the information they need in the multiples required to be delivered to their school;
- schools will be kept up-to-date with the latest additions to the online catalogue via a regular email notification – providing a direct web link to the latest information available online.

Initially the system will be for all Departmental information and resources. However, if our pilot is successful, we will aim to expand this service to include our partners across government. The pilot will tell us how effective the new system is, but I believe that this is the way forward for the future. It puts heads, governors and teachers in control of the information they choose to receive, when they receive it, and in the format they require.

Conclusion

The agenda I have outlined today is substantial and challenging, but positive and practical.

For schools it offers more clarity, simplicity and support. For LEAs it offers professional roles, responsibilities and relationships that are positive and relevant. For parents it offers up-to-date and relevant information about how different schools are fulfilling their missions. And above all for pupils it offers the prospect that more and more institutions will be able to deliver the vision of personalised learning that offers so much for their futures.

The proposals have been developed significantly from the pioneering work of the Implementation Review Unit, which was set up by the partners to the National Agreement on Workforce Reform, and I pay tribute to their efforts and look forward to working with them as this agenda progresses. The proposals now need to be worked up collaboratively with all those at national and local level who have an interest in the future of the education system. That consultation will be serious and begin immediately.

Development work in the field with LEAs and schools will test the proposals I have made, and those on which David Bell is working. Many of the benefits can be delivered without legislation, and we will get on with those as fast as is sensible.

The rationale is clear. The strength of the schooling system lies in its schools – its teachers, its support staff and its governing bodies. If they are left to themselves, many will prosper, but our history shows that some will struggle. That is why the role of central and local government is not to run schools but instead to help them build capacity to meet student need, and to act as the collective voice of concerned parents, tackling underperformance where necessary and supporting improvement where possible.

We all want an education system that combines excellence and equity, that ensures that every child receives the education they deserve. I believe that with these proposals we can rise to that challenge. I look forward to working with you to put them into effect.

We are interested in any feedback on the content of the speech, in particular the proposed new relationship with schools. Please email any comments to: **nrws.feedback@dfes.gsi.gov.uk**