

# Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF): **21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools – a World Class Education for Every Child**

## A response from the General Teaching Council for England

### Introduction

- 1 The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) is the independent professional body for the teaching profession. Its main duties are to regulate the teaching profession and to advise the Secretary of State on a range of issues that concern teaching and learning. The Council acts in the public interest to contribute to raising the standards of teaching and learning.

### Overarching comments

- 2 The GTC welcomes the opportunity to comment on the government's vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century schools. The Council has endorsed and promoted the notion that schools should promote the wellbeing of children and young people, as well as support their learning. It has welcomed those initiatives such as extended schooling and learning networks where partnership and collaboration improve schools' effectiveness in teaching and learning, and beyond. It has expressed concerns about initiatives that threaten to isolate schools from their near neighbours and other services that support children and families.
- 3 The Council welcomes the recognition that the vision is not implausibly futuristic, but reflects current best practice. The challenge is therefore how to support all schools to emulate the best. What is not clear from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools document is what legislation would serve this end. If some schools are already embodying this vision, then there is no legal obstacle to its realisation. Careful consideration is needed as to whether legislation is not too blunt an instrument to secure progress towards this vision across all schools. The Council will be receptive to a case that might be made, but it has not heard it yet.

### *A vision for teaching?*

- 4 21<sup>st</sup> century schools is presented as a vision for schools, and yet it provides no insights into the government's vision for teaching. Most of what it says about learning is encapsulated in the notion of personalisation. There are many references to the fact that teaching and learning are the 'core mission' of schools. The document refers to 'schools' undertaking diverse roles in relation to children,

rather than the people in schools. Of course, there are growing numbers of school staff who are not teachers, and who are well placed to play a role in children's wider well-being, family liaison and so forth. Nevertheless, it is inconceivable that the vision has no implications for the work of teachers – including what and how they teach, and how they interact with children, young people, families and other services. There is also very little about teachers and teaching in the *2020 Children's Workforce Strategy*, and while there is more in the Cabinet Office white paper, *Excellence and Fairness* the policy development in this area seems disjointed. There is a danger of a gap opening up between the vision and the practice of many teachers, which could be avoided by:

- better communication and discussion of this vision with teachers
- a stronger articulation between this vision and the professional standards for teachers (including head teachers)
- more opportunities for high quality inter-professional development for teachers and other children's workforce practitioners.

#### *Funding and accountability of institutions or for outcomes*

- 5 The vision is right to identify the key role of schools in securing good outcomes for children and young people. It is right to recognise that changes to both funding (the DSG review) and accountability are required. Schools need clarity about the resources that are available for what this consultation refers to as their 'core mission'. This includes an element of funding that supports partnership work in pursuit of wider outcomes for children and young people, to which they make a contribution. In practice it is not always possible to draw such a clear distinction between the two, but what is clear is that it is not in the interests of children for resources to be diverted from teaching and learning in to other essential provision.
- 6 The proposals for the school report card (the only concrete proposals associated with the vision at this stage) are narrowly focussed on traditional school accountabilities. It is surprising that the one reference to partnership in the school report card is based on inputs not outcomes, and that consultation respondents are invited to consider whether it should be included at all. The GTC supports the notion that schools should be accountable for what they do but this focus is curiously at odds with the thrust of the vision as a whole. The GTC is responding separately to the report card proposals.

## Responses to consultation questions

- 1. Do you support the overall vision of 21<sup>st</sup> century school system?**
- 2. Is there anything missing from the vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century school system?**

1.1 See overarching comments.

1.2 The GTC welcomes the recognition that schools are concerned with preparing children and young people for life, and that this responsibility means having a regard for their wellbeing as well as their educational outcomes. In one important regard, the legislative framework is already in place, now that schools have been included in the duty to promote the well being of children and young people. The vision is light on the role of teachers and teaching. The theme of participation of children and young people could come through more strongly; it is there principally in the important but limited notion of individuals having a say about the services they receive. The vision is clear about what is needed from schools to achieve the vision, but less specific about what parents and children and young people themselves need to contribute to realise the vision. The Good Childhood report from the Children's Society is the latest study to argue that parental attitudes and behaviours are critical to children's well being, learning and wider development.

- 3. How can we support stronger partnership with parents for the purposes of teaching and learning and wider school activities?**

3.1 The GTC recognises that parental engagement does support good educational outcomes, and recognises also that not all schools' culture and practice encourage and support parental engagement. There is still a need for greater specificity about the nature of parental engagement that has the most positive impact in the training and development of the school workforce. The Council also recognises that many schools make extensive efforts to engage parents and the returns for their efforts can be slight. This suggests that the focus should be in part on improving school practice, and in part also on the help for parents with one of their most important responsibilities, that of supporting their child's learning and development. The GTC welcomes the additional resources and effort going in to parental support and trusts that support for parents to engage with their children's education is a key focus.

3.2 The GTC is keen to play its part and to this end, has strengthened references to working with parents in its code of conduct and practice for teachers, currently the subject of consultation. It has also consulted parents and carers in the development of this code, and of the statement of values for integrated working with children and young people, which received government endorsement in *Building Brighter Futures*.

- 4. Do you agree with the description of an effective system for early intervention?**

4.1 The GTC would supplement the description provided in this way:

- Children's Trusts commissioning the right services at the appropriate level

4.2 Early intervention means referral needs to be possible before needs are profound.

4.3 The GTC believes that early intervention also requires better practice around transitions. Children's services should be building a body of evidence about each child as s/he progresses, and yet too often practitioners either do not receive, or do not use, data from a previous phase.

**5. *What additional support is needed to enable schools to extend their role in developing sustainable and cohesive communities?***

5.1 With reference to co-located services, the GTC would like to see a focus on maximising the benefits of co-location. It appears that for some schools there is a greater degree of integration taking place between the school's 'core mission' and some of the other activities that are taking place on site; in other cases perhaps all they share is a site.

5.2 The GTC has worked extensively with teachers and schools on their responses to the various equalities duties and has advised the government that more support is needed, on the part of schools, and on inspectors with reference to schools' accountability for their practice in this regard.

**6.(a) *Which do you think would be a more effective partnership model: (a) a single partnership which delivers as far as possible across a range of collaborative activity or (b) a number of fluid partnerships which form and change to deliver different activities?***

6.1 Schools participate in different partnerships for different purposes – for example, their professional development partnerships will of necessity be different from their partnership work on wider children's outcomes. Schools need support to think about the particular characteristics of integrated working/multi-agency partnership, which are subtly different from those of partnerships between educational institutions. There are opportunity costs associated with partnership working, and there may be practical limitations to the number of partnerships that can be sustained at a given time, however worthy the focus.

6.2 Schools have been encouraged to develop a distinctive ethos, and the government has emphasised the correlation between a strong ethos and school success. Partnership should not undermine the ethos of the individual schools involved, and partnership governance needs to have regard to striking an appropriate balance between individual and collective priorities.

**6.(b) *How best can the performance/impact of schools and other services be recognised and monitored?***

6.3 This is too big a question to be addressed in this context, but the GTC is clear that the current balance of accountabilities is not fit for purpose, and is pleased to see this acknowledged in the school report card consultation. Specifically, individual institutional accountability, while fit for particular purposes, is a limited instrument for the vision of schools at the heart of better integrated children's services set out in *21<sup>st</sup> century schools*.

**6 (c) Other than how we measure performance, what are the key changes that need to be made to drive the development of stronger partnerships?**

- 6.4 Consideration needs to be given to what local support is available to schools in meeting their duty to support wellbeing, of which partnership working is but one dimension. For example, are the appropriate links in place between local authority school advisers and children's workforce development advisers? Are school improvement partners well placed to provide support and challenge across the full range of a school's activity?
- 6.5 There is a small but emerging research and evidence base about effective integrated/multi-agency work that needs to be brought to school audiences in an accessible form.
- 6.6 The GTC is aware from its evidence gathered from schools that they avoid short-term partnership work as they cannot afford to invest a lot of time and energy in endeavours where funding ceases up just as they are becoming fruitful for participants.
- 6.7 There may be a case for strengthening the relationships of both schools and other children's services to the delivery of targets in the Children and Young People's Plans. In such a scenario, schools would first need a much stronger role in the development of plans and agreement of local targets. Depending on the targets, additional resources might be required for schools to play a stronger role in local efforts to secure wider outcomes, whether via the DSG or another mechanism.

**7. What leadership and accountability arrangements are needed for local partnerships to secure a shared focus on improving outcomes for all children and young people?**

*Leadership:*

- 7.1 The Children's Trust is the obvious locus for leadership, as it incorporates public, voluntary and private sector providers, local authorities and health partners. The recent Audit Commission report on the functioning of the Trusts suggests many are still some way from playing this role effectively, which is a case for making the Trust model work, not for creating an alternative forum for leadership. The GTC welcomes the government's intention to strengthen Children's Trusts. However, within localities there will be many other partnerships supporting specific areas of work. These will typically be multi-agency in character, with some integrated working. School leaders and others may benefit from professional development that considers the particular characteristics and challenges of leadership in these contexts, such as identifying and being accountable for shared goals, or decision-making beyond one's sphere of expertise.

*Accountability:*

- 7.2 If there is a business case for diverse and mutable partnerships, they cannot be subject to a 'one size fits all' accountability arrangement. The GTC understands and shares the government's interest in outcomes, but it may be necessary to draw on

other, softer data such as user and stakeholder perceptions, particularly while partnerships are in their infancy. The GTC is aware that at Trust and LA level there is much use of results or outcomes based accountability and it is not clear that these approaches are always shared at school level. For example, many teams and services within authorities are developing means of measuring soft outcomes – for example in the context of CAF interventions – that may be of interest to schools. Above all, accountability needs to be seen to be fair. Schools and other services will share collective responsibility for wider goals if it is clear that they will be held to account for what it is in their power and sphere of expertise to influence. The complex issues around accountability are being explored by GTC in more detail in the next few months.

**8(a) What are the main challenges to the children's and young people's workforce in delivering the vision of the 21<sup>st</sup> century school? (b) How might we address these?**

8.1 The GTC will be responding separately to the 2020 Children's Workforce Strategy, so will provide a summary response here. First, the GTC continues to urge the government to be clear that Every Child Matters is not something that head teachers or support staff do, or the responsibility of certain postholders, but it should also have an impact on teachers and teaching. This has not been a strong enough message, and in its absence, ambiguity has flourished.

8.2 Second, the most precious resource and main cost in schools is teacher time. Most of that resource is quite rightly deployed on teaching, and some of the work that is implied by the vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century schools will not need teacher involvement at all. Nevertheless, the vision implies that teachers –as well as others where appropriate – will need to spend more time engaged with parents and carers, and more time in activities associated with identifying and planning to meet individual pupil needs, whether through personalisation in the case of educational needs, or via early identification of additional needs, teams around the child, and so forth.

8.3 Third, teachers are still experiencing real challenges playing the role expected of them in early intervention, and swift and easy referral, because of the quality and sufficiency of services around the school. They commonly complain that thresholds for access to support are so high they preclude prevention – children or families need to be in crisis before they qualify for support. The government's review of social work practice, and work to strengthen Children's Trusts, may have a positive impact on these concerns.

**9. Is there a need for any further guidance that would help create a system of 21<sup>st</sup> century schools?**

9.1 The GTC has indicated throughout its response where it thinks further support is needed.

**10(a) Do you agree that the seven areas discussed in chapters 3 and 4 are the key issues to be considered in a White Paper on 21<sup>st</sup> century schools? (b) Are there any other issues you think should be considered?**

10.1 The GTC agrees the seven areas map the territory of a vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century schools, with the addition of a vision for teaching. Whether each needs to be the focus of a White Paper depends on what legislative proposals may be proposed under each area and the GTC cannot comment without (a) specific proposals, and (b), the evidence base for each.

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