

Secretary
Mr Martin
Mr Wallace
Mr Green

LOW PERFORMING MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

I attach a copy of the report of the small ad hoc working group which was established to look at the problems of low performing maintained schools. As you will see the working group has been able to finalise a list of schools which could be regarded as low performing - while the majority of the schools are maintained schools there are also a number of controlled schools in this category. The report of the group also makes suggestions about the way forward the main elements of which are

- a. the establishment of an upper management tier of the maintained sector;
- b. a regular programme of inspections for schools on the list;
- c. a range of additional support measures for such schools.

I think that it would be useful to discuss the recommendations in the report to see how best they might be implemented.



J S SMITH

11 May 1987

Miss/Me Rando
6/5/91
Please PA.


5/6/91

REPORT OF WORKING GROUP ON LOW PERFORMING MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

BACKGROUND

1. A small ad hoc Working Group was established in October 1986 to examine the problems associated with low performing maintained schools. Membership of the Group was:-

J S Smith Chairman
M Whitten
T Shaw
G Orr
A Hart
J Livingstone
F Ferguson - Secretary

2. The objectives of the Group were:-

- a. to identify such statistical evidence as may be available and to confirm that there is a problem with this group of schools;
- b. to identify the main features which tend to push some maintained secondary schools into the "low performing" category;
- c. to examine ways in which the performance of such schools might be improved;
- d. to consider how any improvement plan might be implemented.

IDENTIFICATION OF SCHOOLS

3. The Group met on 4 occasions. The first task was to consider possible criteria to identify schools which might be regarded as low performing. There was some concern about equating performance of schools with examination results because most of the schools deemed as low performing draw their intake from the bottom 50% of the ability range (or lower) and are therefore constrained significantly in their efforts to achieve a higher performance as measured by their pupils' success in public examinations. The Group accepted, however, that the performance of pupils in public examinations is a

significant criterion for indicating school performance and took as its starting point statistical information relating to:-

- a. percentage of leavers in each school in 1983/84 without GCE/CSE qualifications;
- b. a Weighted Qualifications Index (WQI) score for each school based on the performance of the leavers in GCE O Level and CSE examinations and pre-vocational examinations (see Appendix I for details).

While the analysis of unqualified school leavers in a. above proved interesting it was considered to have limitations - eg a number of schools have a constructive policy of not entering pupils for examinations in which they are expected to perform poorly. Other schools enter all candidates and while a number do obtain some qualifications in many cases the qualifications obtained are of limited value. The Group considered that a more reliable indicator of examination performance would be provided by considering a composite score based on the performance of all school leavers in public examinations - the WQI score.

4. The Group prepared a final list of 29 schools on the basis of the two statistical indicators described in the previous paragraph. The WQI scores in the table (Appendix 2) can be judged against the fact that the overall WQI score for all maintained schools is 19.7 and for controlled schools is 21.6. The non-qualified leaver figure can be judged against an average figure of 33% for maintained schools and 27% for controlled schools. The Inspectorate judgement was that most of these schools should be regarded as low performing. In addition the Inspectorate identified a further 9 schools which, while having reasonable examination results, should be classified as low performing. Two lists are attached and consist of 38 schools. There are 25 maintained schools producing a total of 2,609 leavers and there are also 13 controlled schools producing a total of 1,062 leavers. While the problems of low performance are therefore concentrated in maintained schools a number of controlled schools performed equally poorly and the Group considered that these should be included in the exercise. The Working Group is satisfied that the schools identified in both lists do represent those presenting the greatest problems in relation to pupils who perform poorly at the end of their school career.

FACTORS RELATING TO POOR PERFORMANCE

5. The attached table also summarises a range of available information about the identified schools. Of the 38 schools 17 were boys only - and of these 14 were maintained schools. This clearly confirms earlier views that there is a particular problem in relation to boys maintained secondary schools.

The Group recognises that the association of low performance with boys' schools may in part be determined by the different maturation rates for boys and girls. Boys in the 11-16 age range are less mature physically and socially than girls and where other factors contribute to low expectation and motivation the added dimension of limited maturity may exacerbate low performance. If low performance was due only to the maturation rate then it would be reasonable to expect similar levels of performance in maintained and controlled single sex boys' schools. As this does not appear to be the case there must be other factors involved.

6. Although there are interesting exceptions most of the schools are catering for areas suffering from social deprivation and this is clearly illustrated by the percentage entitlement to free school meals. Related to this many of the schools suffered from rapidly falling enrolments - and it is difficult to judge whether this is cause or effect but in many cases the population of the school catchment has declined as a consequence of redevelopment giving lower density housing. The significant point is that there was a corresponding reduction in teacher numbers in schools which would clearly need additional support. The school with the most rapidly falling numbers was Cairnmartin in Belfast which as a result has lost 30 teaching posts over the past 5 years.

7. Over half of the schools had enrolments of under 400 (or just fractionally above it). This is the minimum enrolment figure for a secondary school suggested in our demographic trends documents before curriculum difficulties start to arise. The combination of falling rolls and size is therefore clearly placing strains on the curriculum offered by a number of the schools.

8. Most of the schools cater for the 11-16 age range. This may indicate that schools which offer extended courses are held in higher esteem by parents and are more attractive to more of the parents who have higher academic ambitions for their children.

9. While the present age of the School Principals in the Group varies, most of them have been Principal in the school for 8 or 9 years and most have been appointed as Principal in their early 40s. It is, therefore, disappointing that a number of these Principals have not been able to make a greater impact on the problems of the schools over such a timescale. However it is also worth noting that the majority of Principals in the maintained sector were promoted from within the school.

Perhaps most disappointing is that the schools have a very poor record of participation in the range of initiatives introduced in the secondary sector over the past 4 or 5 years.

THE WAY FORWARD

10. While the Group was clearly not in a position to examine low performance at individual school level it would, however, suggest that the problem should be tackled within the following framework:-

a. While the main problem of poor performance rests with maintained schools - particularly boys maintained schools, a number of controlled schools also produced disappointing results and should be included in any action plan for improvement.

b. The school meals statistics suggest that all of the schools - with the possible exception of Dundonald Boys - serve socially deprived areas and there is little which the school can do about this. Areas such as these are, however, also served by other schools which do not feature in the list of low performing schools. It would be worthwhile carrying out detailed investigations to contrast perhaps 2 or 3 of the schools in the group with neighbouring schools in the same area which perform creditably.

c. A sample of schools in the group should be included annually in the general inspection schedule. This would permit continuous monitoring and evaluation of progress and achievements in low performing schools.

d. Courses for senior and middle management (Head, VP, senior teachers and Heads of Department) should be devised and implemented. The courses should be followed up by the planned and co-ordinated intervention of a range of support agencies. The co-ordination of support should be in the hands of a designated member of the Inspectorate.

The courses would concentrate on curriculum, staff deployment, improvement of standards of work, teaching strategies and assessment.

e. The schools should be given staffing levels on a 3-year basis, to allow for planning and development. More generous staffing than normal would be required to allow for the necessary staff development programme.

f. Objectives should be set and progress evaluated.

g. Consideration should be given to the criteria for appointment of principals to maintained secondary schools.

h. Further support for individual schools may be available in the form of regular feedback of statistical information to schools by DENI. This feedback has already been identified by the 'O'Kelly Report' on management information systems for schools as being a worthwhile objective towards improving the information base from which schools operate.

i. It is clear that the Board of Governors has (or should have) a much more positive role in shaping the development of their schools. To that end it would seem appropriate that training of some kind should be provided in order that the training and development of senior management within the school could best take place with the support of a well-informed Board of Governors.

11. While it is suggested that further investigation into the causes of low performance needs to be carried out the initial survey does point to the fact that if the schools are to improve they will require additional support. In this respect 2 matters appear to be of key importance:-

a. It was felt that one significant reason why maintained schools featured much more prominently on the list than controlled schools was that the maintained schools sector lacked the proper structures to identify and deal with the problem. It seems clear that some agency beyond the school itself is required to deal with issues such as the appointment of the school Principal, encouraging schools to undertake curriculum initiatives and in particular considering the structural problems caused by a relatively large number of small schools. All of this points to the need for some sort of an upper tier to oversee the development of maintained schools.

b. These schools require extensive support which could be supplied by:

- i. the district Inspector - in liaison with ii., iii., iv., and v. below and in the context of his/her role at district level, including that of reporting inspector;
- ii. the subject specialist Inspectors in liaison with i., iii. and iv.;
- iii. the Area 11-16 Programme Team (to assist the school in review of aims and practice and identify priorities for development; to liaise with appropriate personnel to provide specific professional support beyond the resources of the Area Team);
- iv. the Area Board's advisory and secondment services in liaison with i., ii. and iii. above;
- v. CEM in liaison with iii. above and the school management authority.

Agreement to proceed on these or similar lines would be necessary at school, management authority and Departmental lines.

APPENDIX I

The **WQI** (Weighted Qualifications Index) is calculated in 2 stages as follows:

- a. A weighted score is assigned to each school leaver according to the number and grade of each qualification held by that leaver.
- b. The sum of all leaver's scores in each school is calculated and divided by the number of leavers in the school to give each school's WQI.

The weighted scores are assigned as follows:

For each, A level	grade A	score	13
.. ..	B	..	12
.. ..	C	..	11
.. ..	D	..	10
.. ..	E	..	9
.. ..	D	..	6
.. ..	F	..	1
O level	.. A	..	8
.. ..	B	..	7
.. ..	C	..	6
.. ..	D	..	5
.. ..	E	..	4
..	Ungraded	..	1
CSE	grade 1	..	6
..	.. 2	..	5
..	.. 3	..	4
..	.. 4	..	3
..	.. 5	..	2
..	Ungraded	..	1
Other Non-GCE/CSE	6

EXAMPLE: A leaver with 2 A levels each at grade A, and 6 O levels - 3 at grade A and 3 at grade B would have a WQI of 71.

$$(2 \times 13 + 3 \times 8 + 3 \times 7 = 71)$$

The attached histogram summarises the WQI scores for all Secondary Intermediate Controlled and Maintained Schools.