

Nigerian Schools Forum

My background .

Deputy Head of a secondary school in Chatham

Education officer in a London Borough

MP and government minister

Contributor book ~~Headship~~ in the 1990sq(Longmans 1989) Book,

Chairman Education, Children and Families Select Committee and predecessors
2012-19

Your Seminar is entitled

Education: Governance, Leadership and excellence and I note your discussions include:

The transforming effect of leadership and governance in schools

Quality, Teacher standards and pupil outcomes and what works

If I may I would break down my remarks as to the Why, What how and who to achieve these aims.

The WHY and WHAT is the purpose of education

As we know the word derives from the Latin to train or rear. Today our purpose is wider; it is not just as Mr Gradgrind in Charles Dickens *'Hard Times'* said

"Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts.

Education is about preparing young people for life including being fit for the world of work but also to be good citizens and rounded individuals. That ~~s~~ not to say that a firm basis of knowledge is not essential in any education system.

In the world of ~~fake~~ newsqit is knowing whether a supposed ~~fact~~or item of information is correct or not is based on whether it coheres with already confirmed facts and information.

Basic skills, like reading and a concept of number, inevitably must be learnt first before a child can progress. As a child develops it is important for them to enjoy learning, we can lead a horse to water but the desire to drink is one which has to be learnt and encouraged. Having seen children in schools in the developing world thirsting for education and prepared to walk shoeless to school it is depressing to see so many children in our own country proud to be ignorant. How often did I hear pupils from affluent homes tell me that their dad had left home at 15 and was now a successful self employed builder, decorator etc and that couldn~~d~~ teach them ~~enuff~~ink~~q~~

Education as children in many parts of the world have grasped is the way out of poverty and to a more fulfilling life.

Other skills which are developed as a child grows is the ability to transfer skills and knowledge from one area and use to understand it how it fits in the context of another. To take just one event, the invasion of Europe on D Day in 1944. Without a knowledge of the history which led up to the event, the geography of Northern France, the developments in medicine, particularly use of penicillin, invention of the Mulberry harbour to provide reprovisioning of the invading forces a student will merely have a collection of unconnected facts without understanding how they are part of the bigger picture.

For a teacher there is no greater pleasure than seeing young people researching for themselves and getting enjoyment from expanding their knowledge and skills.

Teachers who inspire led to children who aspire.

Often it can be as simple as showing a child from a home without books the joy of reading and owning books. I recall when I taught in Chatham the battle we had to get the drama department to move away from kitchen sink drama and show them that what they saw on East Enders and often in their own home was not the limit of their aspiration and abilities and that there was a wider world and greater horizons.

It saddened me to visit a school very recently where the head teacher when asked about secondary school tests poo poed them. Not a child in his year 6 had been encouraged to consider a grammar school. As I could not help responding to his anti-test ethos, life is full of tests and exams and I wouldn't want to be operated on by a surgeon who hadn't had to pass exams or be taught by an unexamined and tested teacher.

A poverty of aspiration can damage a person for life.

As a teacher I always encouraged children to have hobbies and interests. As a child I collected stamps. I learnt about the geography, history, currency, language of each country. Putting them in stamp albums placing them in country and chronological order and using stamp catalogues taught me useful administrative skills. One of my nephews, now a city solicitor, was an expert of First World War medals by the time he was 15.

As Socrates would ask ~~what~~ what is a good school?

Every school leader needs to be clear about their mission and their values. What is taught, how it is taught is of course central to how we develop the curriculum.

Schools are of course are much more than that.

A disciplined environment is essential if learning is to take place. Too often low level disruption makes the task of the teacher and the learner very difficult. It only takes one or two constantly talking and disorganised pupils to ruin a well planned lesson. School leaders need to ensure that not only do staff, have what the late Michael Marland called 'the craft of the classroom' but that teachers are supported when they tackle indiscipline.

Parents have to be supportive.

How often do we read in the local papers of the angry mother, arms folded protecting about some school rule which their little darling has infringed?

Teaching can be a tough call in a society of slick presentation, shoddy values, particularly in the media and homes where discipline is non-existent or arbitrary and capricious and where education is not valued.

The Hidden Curriculum plays an equal role in the life of every school.

How staff treat each other, how they treat the pupils, how the pupils treat each other are constant lessons. A school without a clear vision and ethical values cannot provide a good education. We have to remember that for children from chaotic and impoverished homes and I don't mean financially impoverished, school is the one place where they should see an ordered, structured and nurturing environment. The best schools instil a sense of esprit de corps and give pupils responsibility and motivate and reward staff and students.

From what have already said it will be clear that I believe that strong leadership is essential for a good school.

Good Leaders provide vision and direction.

They have a firm set of philosophical beliefs.

They have good communication skills and are able to articulate ideas in a clear and simple way.

They have good inter-personal skills; a sense of humour always helps, and work collaboratively with colleagues.

I once worked with a Head who called herself a benign autocrat . as I said to her; I wasn't sure about the benign bit. She was however open to persuasion and had a powerful intellect which enabled her to see where her predecessor had failed and what needed to be done to transform the school. She gave heads of department the autonomy to decide between themselves distribution of the equipment and books budget. She introduced department and school evaluation and performance management. She built a strong senior leadership team and when she was away for a term on sick leave the school continued on the path she had set to improve itself.

This was in the days before Ofsted, league tables and the collection of data. We analysed the examination and year test results identifying the weak teachers and instilled a new discipline framework supporting staff to deal with recalcitrant pupils. Within a short time the school's reputation was vastly improved as was the morale of staff and pupils.

I am delighted to see the use of the term 'pupil outcomes' on your agenda. For too long many schools have lost sight of their ultimate role. Whilst a strong supporter of testing and examinations it is not simply about pupil output measures. Whilst pupil outcomes are more difficult to measure, it is these which we seek. Do our students leave school, as I said earlier, as well educated, well rounded people ready to play their part in society and to be happy and responsible adults?

You will also be discussing in conjunction with Leadership- school governance.

Whilst the Head and his or her team give clear leadership to the school and manage the day to day running of the school, the Governors have an equally important role.

A strong governing body will act as a critical friend to the school leaders through oversight of the school's policies, finance and performance. They will ensure that school not only strives for excellence but also looks to ensure that the outcomes of the most disadvantaged pupils are improved and the gap between them and the best performing is narrowed and that each child is working to maximum of their potential.

You have an interesting day ahead of you and I wish you well.

It now gives me great pleasure to launch NEED