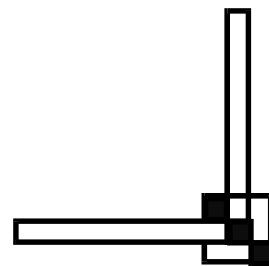


Achievement for All



Occasional Paper 2

“Achievement for All” A report on selection within schools by HM Inspectors of Schools.

Key Principles

“Achievement for All” is concerned principally with the means of **organising** pupils into classes or within classes and should:

- create conditions which motivate all pupils to make sustained progress in learning within a common curriculum framework;
- be flexible in responding to pupils’ academic, personal and social development;
- make it clear that the achievements and progress of each pupil are valued;
- promote teaching which builds on the prior learning and attainment of pupils;
- free teachers to spend most of their time on direct teaching and enable pupils to work effectively on challenging tasks;
- be feasible and appropriate in terms of expectations of teachers and pupils.

To ensure effective learning and teaching, teachers require:

- Information on pupils' prior attainment, which they have gathered themselves or which has been reported by previous teachers;
- Sufficient, sustained time with groups of pupils to enable them to assess each pupil's attainment regularly, to take account of preferred learning styles and to provide well considered feedback on pupils' progress;
- Access to good quality resources which support differentiation;
- A clear understanding of what pupils are expected to achieve;
- Carefully planned programmes or courses which provide an overall coherence for the work of the class;
- Good classroom management skills.

The service endorses all the above and recognises that they are achievable with the context of a mixed ability class. That is a class which is organised by criteria other than pupils attainment.

General Issues for Teaching and Learning

These requirements give rise to important general issues about effective learning and teaching which schools should address as part of any detailed review of methods of classroom organisation.

These are summarised below:

- Review present strategies for learning and teaching in line with advice contained in the Council's philosophy paper on Teaching for Effective Learning, and in the context of any current school policy on Effective Learning and Teaching;
- Use the agreed Improvement Planning process to undertake radical change;
- Ensure that links with the secondary school are developed across all subject departments and that mechanisms for the transfer of information are maintained and developed;
- Establish mechanisms within secondary schools to ensure that consistent and coherent approaches are adopted by departments to monitor pupil progress;
- Establish strategies for inter departmental liaison and collaboration in curricular areas;

- Ensure mutually supportive links are nurtured between the secondary school and its associated primary schools;
- Use information on pupils' prior attainments;
- Ensure that work is differentiated sufficiently to take account of differences in pupil attainment levels;
- Provide a good range of teaching approaches, varied in ways appropriate to the needs and learning styles of pupils; including opportunities for pupils to learn through individual work, group work (including when appropriate working in ability groups) and whole class work;
- Be in a position to demonstrate evidence of pupil attainment;
- Pay serious attention to the continuing requirement to improve attainment levels for all children;
- Monitor pupil performance to ensure that appropriate targets are being met;
- Monitor the effectiveness of the school's assessment policy and procedures;

- Establish mechanisms within co-operatives to ensure that consistent and coherent approaches are adopted by associated schools to monitor pupil progress;
- Take opportunities to reflect on classroom practice, and to debate educational issues with colleagues. One important and legitimate topic for reflection and debate is class organisation. The key principles (Section 2 of *“Achievement for All”*) should provide a useful stimulus for that process, as should the summary Performance Indicators recently published by HMI in *“How Good is our School”*.

More detailed advice on classroom organisation is contained in Classroom Management Secondary and Classroom Management Primary.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Class Organisation

A recent study of published research on class organisation carried out by Wynne Harlen and Heather Malcolm of the Scottish Council for Research on Education found that there was strong evidence to show that setting, while producing a statistically insignificant rise in the attainment levels of able pupils, leads to a statistically significant drop in performance of less able pupils as against mixed-ability organisation.

There is reason to believe that it is more difficult to sustain pupil motivation and an ethos in which all pupils feel valued where teaching groups are set, on a long term basis, by attainment. This is freely acknowledged in *“Achievement for All”* but is subsequently ignored in favour of the argument that the complexity of mixed-ability organisation makes it too difficult for teachers to manage. There is no doubt that the management skills demanded of teachers by mixed-ability organisation are considerable but this is an argument for greater support for teachers, not for the universal adoption of a form of class organisation which disadvantages large numbers of children.

Teaching Approaches

Class organisation is not the only factor which impacts upon the achievement of our pupils. The teaching approaches used have a highly significant contribution to make. *“Achievement for All”* recognises the need for a wide range of teaching approaches matched to the differing learning styles of pupils. Particular emphasis is placed on ‘Direct Teaching’. This does not equate with whole-class teaching, but implies a meaningful interaction between teacher and pupil(s) which can take place in a small-group or individualised situation as well as a whole-class lesson. In the real world of the classroom however, it is likely that

opportunities for work with individual pupils will be less widespread than group and class interactions.

Attainment Groupings

There is no doubt that for certain types of lesson and certain learning purposes, especially those involving direct teaching, grouping by attainment is the most appropriate form of organisation. For the most part this can be achieved within the mixed-ability class by creating teaching groups for short periods and for certain purposes such as reading groups or maths within the primary classroom. This type of approach is recommended for all stages and most curricular areas.

Primary Schools

The first relevant recommendation is that, in primary schools, attainment groups should be the principal means of organising pupils in aspects of English language and mathematics. It is important that pupils are working at similar reading and basic number skills. The grouping is for a specific purpose and a limited duration and is balanced by other periods of time when pupils are in social or mixed-ability groupings for these subjects, thus avoiding the adverse effect on motivation and self-esteem which can stem from a system based exclusively on organisation by attainment.

The recommended introduction of widespread attainment grouping for other areas of the primary curriculum is accepted, with the stipulation that the grouping is for a particular aspect of the curricular area and not continued for the child's whole experience of the subject. There is a need for continuing flexibility in the system of grouping deployed within primary classes so that consideration can always be given to the potential impact of grouping on the personal and social development of pupils.

Many classes in Argyll and Bute are organised on **multi-staged composite** lines which span several levels and planning stages of the 5-14 curriculum and would make any attempt to organise teaching as a class totally inappropriate. Teachers in Argyll and Bute have worked very successfully within multi staged composite classes for many years. It is therefore unnecessary to radically alter the organisational structure of such establishments.

Secondary Schools

In secondary schools, however, there are certain subject areas where the nature of the skills and concepts to be covered and the nature of progression itself makes direct teaching particularly difficult without consistent setting by attainment.

There is general recognition that attainment groups should feature in the range of organisational strategies used in secondary schools, but the blanket recommendation that broad-band setting should be introduced for English and mathematics in S1 and for other subjects in S2 is at variance with current research and educational thinking. Different types of grouping are appropriate for different purposes. There is a widespread consensus that mixed-ability and social grouping have their part to play in giving pupils a broad experience of learning, as well as attainment grouping within the mixed ability class. There is, moreover, a likelihood that some pupils would find themselves in low attainment groups for all or most subjects, with the attendant impact on motivation and self esteem which such placing would bring. Another problem associated with rigid setting is that, as time goes on, the possibility of pupils moving from one set to another becomes more and more unlikely. This would require substantial individualised teaching to make the move possible without severely disadvantaging the child's performance in the new group.

English

English is a subject where mixed ability class organisation (with the possibility of attainment grouping within the class) is appropriate. Certain language activities, such as the development of independent reading skills, lend themselves to attainment grouping. Research evidence shows that mixed ability grouping can be advantageous to all pupils in other areas of the language curriculum especially in small group discussions.

Mathematics

In mathematics it is acknowledged within the report that there is a strong case for introducing an element of broad-band setting at some stage during S1. This is based on the linear and progressive nature of mathematics and on the findings of research that a wide gap in attainment can open up in a single class over the seven years of primary education.

Science

In the case of science there would appear to be a consensus that the experiential nature of the curriculum renders rigid setting unnecessary in S1 and S2. There is a strong case for a measure of attainment grouping within the mixed-ability class along with other types of group organisation for different purposes as described for the primary sector.

The breadth and variety of the S1/2 science curriculum are cited as reasons for avoiding an overly rigid system of class organisation since pupils are likely to exhibit different ability levels in different areas of the subject. The temporary creation of attainment groups is seen as an appropriate strategy for supporting less able pupils and extending more able pupils in the investigative component of the subject.

Modern Languages

Certain areas of modern languages lend themselves to a mixed ability approach. These include the cultural and social background to the learning of the language as well as the development of appropriate phrasing and accent which do not necessarily correlate with an ability to understand and deploy accurate grammatical structures. Generally speaking teachers of modern languages are in favour of retaining mixed-ability classes throughout S1 but believe that broad-band setting should be introduced at some point during S2 to facilitate the direct teaching of grammar and syntax.

Guidance Issues

A review of the role of guidance staff in monitoring and supporting pupil progress over S1 and S2 is recommended in "*Achievement for All*". There is a consensus that an overview of progress across subjects is highly desirable to increase the detection of under-achievement at a stage early enough to allow effective intervention. Schools should ensure that such arrangements are in place.

Primary/Secondary Liaison

As indicated above there are factors other than class organisation which have a significant effect upon pupil achievement at the upper primary and early secondary stages. Argyll and Bute Community Services will support schools to improve achievements by raising awareness and developing the necessary skills in key areas including primary/secondary liaison.

The quality of transition arrangements between primary and secondary schools plays a crucial role in ensuring progression and continuity from primary to secondary school.

Evidence of good practice exists between co-operatives and their associated secondary schools where a range of strategies has been employed:

- Bridging units planned collaboratively by both primary and secondary colleagues;
- Planned programme of P7 induction;
- Visits by guidance staff to associated primaries in order to meet pupils about to make the transition;
- Meetings between relevant primary and secondary staff to exchange key information;
- Voluntary involvement of the senior secondary staff in P7 parents' evenings;
- Regular written communications with P7 parents;
- Joint primary/secondary in-service training on aspects of 5-14 curriculum;
- Parents workshops prior to transition;
- Transition documentation devised by co-operatives and relevant secondary schools.

Pupil Achievement

The teaching approaches used at upper primary and early secondary have a significant impact upon pupil achievement at this stage. Since mixed-ability organisation will continue to be the norm, it is important that teachers have every support in the development of skills in the processes of differentiation and managing learning within a variety of class, group and individual contexts.

These skills are identified in detail in the philosophy paper Effective Teaching and Learning and in the classroom management and organisation papers

This policy will be reviewed in session 2006/07.