

department for

education and skills

creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

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Chief Executives
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5 July 2004

Dear Chief Executive/Chief Education Officer/Director of Social Services,

PRIMARY SCHOOL STANDARDS – CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

Our two key documents last year, "***Excellence and Enjoyment***" and "***Every Child Matters***", may have had different starting points but they shared a central goal – every child having the opportunity to fulfil their potential. As we have pursued with partners in local government the demanding agendas which both documents set out, some commentators have identified competing priorities. Does a relentless commitment to literacy and numeracy in primary schools as the building blocks for educational achievement distort the wider vision for children's well-being set out in "***Every Child Matters***"? Do the changes in leadership and accountability for children's services in local authorities dilute the energy and focus needed to raise standards further in primary schools?

Our clear answer is that there is no contradiction. High educational standards and a wider concept of well-being go hand in hand in achieving better outcomes for children. Children learn better when they are safe, healthy, active and enjoy life. And educational achievement in primary schools is critical for transforming the life chances of children. So the efforts of schools to raise standards are reinforced by school improvement strategies that incorporate wider interventions with vulnerable children and families, especially in communities where there is significant disadvantage.

We know that many of you, as you approach the programme of change across all school and children's services, already have a clear vision for aligning work on school effectiveness, vulnerable children and community development. But a number of colleagues at the recent conference on primary school standards - a record of which is being sent to you - said that they would welcome further confirmation of the leadership role we expect you to play in local authorities. For us there are three consistent themes around which you might set your local



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

priorities for change and which are central to our ambitions for raising standards further in primary schools and ensuring the well-being of all children.

- **Personalisation** Many pupils face barriers to enjoying and achieving – some mild and some profound, some short term and some permanent. Instead of a deficit model that provides uniform services for most children and only offers tailored support when, for example, the SEN or child protection process defines more complex needs, our reforms should support efforts to raise standards by personalising learning, focusing on the needs and aspirations of each child and tackling barriers to progress. For pupils with additional needs, support must be tailored to their individual circumstances, bringing together input from different professionals or services as appropriate.

This concept is at the centre of the model of “precision” which was explored at the primary standards conference, where teachers are going beyond their earlier experience of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies to use *Assessment for Learning* to monitor progress and pinpoint the areas of learning which each child finds a challenge. For that we need systems which are rich in information which is understood and shared. And we need to recognise the key role of parents and families and to engage and support them in helping their children develop.

- **Collaboration** The vision of responsive services requires new ways of working and collaboration between schools, increasingly working in networks to share and generate excellence. Our pilots for the New Relationship with Schools explore the means for a simpler, less bureaucratic regime for primary schools in this new environment, and the new offer of support from the National Primary Strategy will underpin it. We hope you will have our proposals for the New Relationship, both in the primary and secondary context, in the document we published on 15 June. But the vision also requires closer working between schools, communities and specialist services to offer the extended services which are among our most important commitments in “*Every Child Matters*”.

The new system for children’s services set out in “*Every Child Matters*” and the Children Bill puts the emphasis on identifying problems early and handling them effectively. A more integrated approach should make it easier for children and their parents to access support, quickly and simply, to prevent problems escalating, to respond to the needs of children in the round and to support effective teaching and learning. The leadership given locally by the Director of Children’s Services should play the key role in ensuring that education, social care and health services work together more effectively to achieve this.

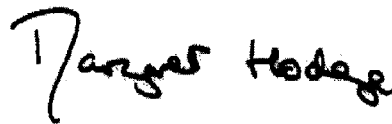
- **Workforce reform** The school workforce reforms show what can be achieved when teachers work as part of a wider team, calling upon a range of support in personalising the learning for all pupils. The Green Paper reforms, to develop a more coherent, stable and flexible children’s workforce, adopt the same themes of team work. Both schools and specialist services will benefit from increased co-location of services, giving easier access to a wider range of professionals in the school environment to whom parents and pupils needing specialist help can be referred. This is a further crucial area of alignment where local authorities can lead the way.

We have set these comments in the context of primary standards but they apply equally to Sure Start, secondary schools and to the opportunities we offer to 14-19 year olds. If children and young people are to reach their full potential we need to recognise and respond at every stage to the factors which help or hinder their achievement and wider development. The Department's forthcoming five-year plan will set out how we aim to embed this understanding across all our policies. It will also emphasise how the Department itself is continuing to change, along with other government partners, to bring about the cultural shift necessary for this shared agenda.

In the coming weeks there will be further important opportunities to explore these themes to secure the alignment and integration of support which will lead to higher standards for all children inside and outside school. A series of discussions are planned on the themes of the DfES plan following its publication. More specifically, on 6 July your school improvement teams are meeting, under the auspices of the Primary Strategy and the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, to develop their own responses to this agenda. And the ConfEd Summer Conference will pick up the debate on 8 July. We want by the autumn to be in a position to explain in practical terms what *"Every Child Matters"* means for schools and the other key partners like the NHS. We hope you will use these opportunities to work with us in developing concrete proposals for securing our shared goals.



DAVID MILIBAND



MARGARET HODGE