

## Inspire within the wider setting

Celebration events were held, in Birmingham Council House, in recognition of the schools and day nurseries that had successfully embedded 'Inspire' as part of their whole-school plans, year on year; and ones that had shown consistent use of Keeping Up with the Children programmes to raise standards in their organisation. These were not awards ceremonies – all schools will reach the same position over the next year or two (if they wish) – it was a celebration of the city having reached a new position in its work with parents and families.

A keynote input by Geoff Bateson, Partnership Manager of the Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership put this work in its bigger context. The text of this input is reproduced here.

I am always pleased to come to days like this as it gives me the chance to link the grand ideas from the Core Skills Development Partnership, through the developments within partner organisations, delivered through schools, nurseries etc, and having real impacts at the end of the day.

The Core Skills Development Partnership was established in 1995 by all key education and training agencies signing up to a collaborative approach to bring about change in levels of literacy and numeracy. The Partnership is a set of agreements between these agencies – the City Council, Health, Learning and Skills Council, Connexions, Jobcentre Plus, Voluntary Service Council etc.

This has three key components:

- It is closely focused on literacy, numeracy and language
- It is a regeneration partnership – dedicated to supporting things that make a real difference
- It is a whole-city programme – focusing on things that make real differences everywhere, for all people – all parents/all children/all settings/all Birmingham.

The vision was that Birmingham might become 'a self-sustaining literate and numerate community' – that there would be enough skills and support from enough parents for all pupils to succeed; and that these pupils would grow into skilled adults able to support developments in future generations. This meant creating enough momentum in the system, for it all to become self-sustaining.

But how many parents is enough to create such momentum? There are some broad calculations: 11,000 children in each year group; 16 years worth of children in one whole cohort who are born, move through school and on into young adulthood. If the majority of children have at least one parent engaged with their learning – that means, at any one time, 100,000 parents engaged in a consistent way with their child's learning and what is happening (in curriculum terms) through the first years of life, on into the city's nurseries/day nurseries/schools ... every year. A seemingly impossible number to be reaching at any one time.

In 1995, as the Partnership was being established, I had four weeks to test out the reality and the rhetoric for claims about good practice at that time. Much of what I saw was heavily self-promoted, but in reality was work done with small numbers,

with special funding, and highly dependant upon one or two enthusiasts. None of it would stand stretching to cover all parents in all settings in ways that allowed it to continue from school's own normal budgets.

The projects – and they were all one-off projects – described themselves as doing really well if they managed to get up to 10 parents involved in a school. Across the whole of Birmingham, at any one time, there were barely 200 parents involved in their child's learning in any live and meaningful way. Most of the work consisted of a lot of rhetoric on a small base of reality and, like an inverted pyramid, I hardly had to look at it before it began to wobble.

In one part of the city a different approach was being taken – stripping out what made things work, checking them for reality with schools, reconstructing the bits into a better pattern, testing this out – slowly building a programme that was real, was sustainable, that worked for large number of parents, that worked in every case, that brought in fathers as well as mothers, and which was founded on the current learning experience of the child.

This programme was taken up by larger and larger numbers of organisations, under the name 'Inspire', and was:

- simple and robust enough to work every time
- open enough to be done in the organisation's own ways i.e. allowed for creativity
- curriculum driven – rooted in the current day-to-day learning experiences of the children
- connected across to other initiatives and strategies
- bringing no additional bureaucratic burden for teachers or schools
- not a distraction for teachers from their prime concern with the learning of their pupils
- able to be translated across a range of different contexts

This event, to recognise the position Inspire has reached within the city, marks a permanent tipping of the balance – a kind of breakthrough point; a critical mass beyond which absolute enthusiasm for Inspire and Keeping Up with the Children and Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy, will carry it further into every classroom of every school.

The numbers are now huge. The numbers are such that, whilst growing too quickly to count, they are on an unprecedented scale. This is something no other city has even begun to match. Think about the maths:

The settings here today are the front runners; the ones that have 'got there' e.g. established Inspire in every class throughout the whole school as a regular set of workshop experiences for parents and children. There are now 140 settings that have achieved this – involving more than 28,000 parents.

Behind the front runners, there are larger numbers of organisations who have nearly got there – who have established Inspire throughout more than half of the organisation – or who are beginning to establish it in some classes. Add these up

and you get at least another 12,000 parents i.e. more than 40,000 in all.

By next year this 40,000 will have increased (as more schools 'get there') and by 2006 – when the aim is for this activity to be supporting all pupils and all parents in all classes in all schools and day nurseries that want it, it is likely to have increased again to more than 60,000 parents!

Of course, engaging the majority of parents in this way makes it easier for them to further engage in Keeping Up With the Children or with Family programmes. So today we are also recognising the huge volume of these programmes across Birmingham, and especially celebrating successes through Keeping Up With the Children – a programme that follows the same principles:

- linking directly into child's current learning experiences
- delivered via teachers in range of settings
- having a fixed framework that works, whilst at the same time allowing some creativity of local variation

When we link the whole of this together into one whole package of support to families it becomes something that isn't happening anywhere else on this scale, quality and impact – once we add in Inspire; Keeping Up With the Children; Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy; programmes such as Bookstart (via libraries); Flying Start (via Pre School Workers); the family learning team's Early Start activities etc – then the 100,000 is there in our grasp.

I want to end with impact – the 100,000 is there in our grasp, and I have dwelt on that number, but the number itself is insignificant – what it signifies is a breakthrough to more than 50% of parents in the city actively linking into their child's learning. That means parents talking to relatives/friends/parents in the playground, on the bus going home or at the shops are more than 50% likely to have their own experience reinforced and validated.

Compare this with 6 years ago when a parent might turn to a relative and say 'we did this wonderful stuff today ...' and the other parent would say 'I wish our school did stuff like that ...'. Now if 3 parents are talking, at least 2 will be talking about a shared experience and the third will be motivated to seek it out. That's what I meant by momentum and critical mass – and we're there.

Within two years, Birmingham will have a realistic chance of having the necessary critical mass of aware and skilled parents, having sufficient whole city momentum, able to better support their children (who are already being 'enhanced' by the work done by schools, libraries, nurseries etc) to begin to see a realism in the aspiration for Birmingham to become a self-sustaining literate and numerate community.

All of this is down to the organisations across the city, such as the ones here today. As a city we've really got things to celebrate and more to strive for.