

Enhancing young people's educational experience

17 may 2004

Schools provide education to all children and young people, but they cannot always go it alone. Teachers are working with an increasingly diverse student population. For the majority of pupils their efforts are quite successful. But there comes a time when a school has to confront the limitations of its capacities. Some pupils require specific support because of their problematic backgrounds; others have special talents that go unrecognised. However, limitations can be overcome and the Education Council holds the view that schools can achieve this by forging partnerships and collaborations with third parties. The breadth of academic diversity that schools can deal with can thus be significantly increased.

In this advisory report the Council explores ways to better serve the increasingly varied educational needs of young people, especially through collaboration between schools and with other bodies and professionals.

Focusing on youngsters with problems and youngsters with special talents

Young people with (behavioural) problems inside and outside school and young people with special talents pose a great challenge to schools. For this reason, the advisory report highlights two groups of children and young people (hence referred to as 'youngsters'):

- youngsters with psychosocial problems, which often translate into behavioural disorders;
- youngsters with special talents who are not or not sufficiently challenged at school.

Although the report uses the term 'youngsters with special talents' to refer to young people that excel in a particular area, the Council wishes to stress that *every* young person possesses talents that should be tapped into. In practice, the two groups of youngsters overlap: youngsters with problems may have special talents and -vice versa- youngsters with special talents may experience problems. Figuratively speaking, both groups mark the boundaries of educational provision. How much academic diversity can schools accommodate?

Services inventory

The Education Council has compiled an inventory of services available to both groups of youngsters and identified the strengths and limitations of current provision. Existing provision for *youngsters with psychosocial problems* addresses a wide variety of problems that may arise at home, at school and/or in their spare time. In taking stock of the services for *youngsters with special talents* the Council has looked at four talent areas:

- academic talent (giftedness);
- artistic and cultural talent;
- sports talent; *and*
- entrepreneurial talent.

Depending on the nature and seriousness of the problem or issue a youngster can go through three stages of service provision. The Council distinguishes the following consecutive stages:

- services offered within the school system (school-based support targeted at all pupils);
- services jointly developed by schools and relevant external parties to supplement the school-based support structure; *and*
- services provided outside the school system, under the direction of external bodies.

Proposals of the Education Council

Starting points

The Council proposes the following starting points for the alignment and collaboration of schools with external parties:

- Schools retain primary responsibility for the (learning process of the) pupil as long as possible.
- In order to live up to this responsibility schools are sufficiently equipped to enlist the services of external bodies.
- If the pupil needs highly specialised support, schools delegate responsibility to external bodies but continue to monitor the (former) pupil's progress.
- Enlisting the support of and delegating responsibility to external bodies occurs in a cost-effective manner (with minimal bureaucracy).

Services for youngsters with psychosocial problems

The Council holds the opinion that the school context, the curriculum and the school-based support structure form the basis for the prevention and management of youngsters' psychosocial problems. This is why schools should first of all optimise their internal processes and resource utilisation. For a number of pupils this will not be sufficient. In those cases, schools should liaise with and/or provide referrals to outside agencies.

The Council has formulated a set of recommendations to strengthen relations between schools and outside parties through increased diversity of service provision. The three most important recommendations are set out below.

(1) Operational teams

School-based support services need to be aligned with external support services. The support teams which already exist in many schools have links with outside support agencies. The collaborative work is to be carried out by new-to-be-established operational teams. Collaboration between schools and outside specialists in operational teams is a promising development that may make an important contribution to a sound support structure. There are, of course, other collaborative models as well. What is important, though, is that collaborations are properly structured and that continuity is ensured. In view of the broad range of specialties involved, the Council recommends that, in part, operational teams should serve more than one school and that they should be integrated into existing partnerships. The government could take a lead role in commissioning evaluative reviews of the performance and achievements of the different kinds of operational teams.

(2) Enlisting experts

Schools should have an important say in the composition of the operational teams and the use of outside experts. This is to be achieved through a system that entitles schools (the partnerships) to hire experts in specific areas. The government could initiate pilot projects to try out different versions of such a system. For practical reasons the scheme may initially be restricted to youth services agencies, but the Council recommends that in the long run the scheme should be rolled out to other public-sector bodies (such as the police) as well.

(3) From-eight-to-eight scheme

There is, as yet, no provision for youngsters with severe behavioural problems who neither belong in special education classes nor within the youth justice system. The Council recommends developing provision for these youngsters, provisionally entitled 'From Eight-to-Eight Scheme'. Further, the Council recommends that the government should commission and fund pilot projects to gain experience with different variants of the scheme and to determine the best placement method. The scheme may eventually be incorporated within existing arrangements. The Council emphasises that the youngster will not be placed in a disciplinary programme but rather in an educational programme supplementing (preventive) measures that may or may not have been taken collaboratively with third parties. For a youngster to qualify for the scheme, the school or the operational team should be able to demonstrate that a high-quality support and guidance programme preceded the placement request.

Services for youngsters with special talents

Schools are well-placed to identify and encourage talented youngsters: they are often the first to recognise budding talents and seek appropriate support. As to *academic giftedness*, responsibility for providing adequate support lies with the school, which will liaise with experts and agencies. As to the talent areas of *art, culture* and *sports*, responsibility for the talent development process will

normally be assumed by outside agencies. The school, however, continues to be responsible for providing instruction and ensuring academic success.

Educationally, the talent area of *entrepreneurship* is still in its infancy. For this reason, it is difficult to specify the duties and responsibilities of schools. However, the Council recommends analysing existing knowledge and practices for the purpose of further (policy) development.

Further, the Council recommends revising existing legislation and regulations regarding all talent areas so as to enable schools to provide tailor-made education to youngsters with special, academic or non-academic, talents. Teacher education programmes should equip schools with the tools they need to provide appropriate support to youngsters.

Experiences to date – such as the collaboration between schools, sports organisations and the government in the so-called LOOT-model (LOOT-schools combine classroom education and athletic training) – are proving helpful in the further development of differentiated support options for youngsters with special talents. The Council recommends that current policy efforts in the different talent areas (such as the artistically-oriented school, the LOOT-licence, and the Information Centre for Gifted Children) should be fitted into a joint framework. Such a general framework will allow for the development of further specifications, depending on the talent area.