

Quality Education News

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The Editor gets in the first words ...

Dear Friend of Quality Education

Welcome to 2010, the FIFA World Cup and the Chinese Year of the Tiger. Apparently the Year of the Tiger is meant to be a big, bold and brave year. May Bafana Bafana play that way in the opening game against Mexico. This year nothing is meant to be done in a small, timid way. Advice given to help handle a tiger-paced year is, "Hang on to your sense of humour and let things sizzle out!"

When the excellent results of the IEB (Independent Education Board) examinations were recently announced, a radio talk show host invited comments. There was fulsome praise for the 97.4% pass rate. Yet there was one angry phone-in. This listener argued that the majority of the IEB schools have superb teachers and teaching resources. School fees are often very expensive. Why, he argued, isn't there a 100% rate?

As the listener vented his anger, his way of thinking became evident. If school fees cost so much, the child should be guaranteed a pass. That's faulty thinking. It's not the money that guarantees the pass but something far more important.

The highest achiever in the IEB examinations was Catherine Paverd. Eighteen-year old Catherine obtained eleven distinctions. She was interviewed by Ufrieda Ho of *The Star*. This scholar of exceptional achievement at the De La Salle Holy Cross College, Johannesburg gave this advice to students:

Listen intently in class; give 110% ...and don't think that if something is just okay that it's ok.

To guarantee achievement, there's the need for a person to be values-driven. Values such as courage, hard work, passion and perseverance get you over the winner's line. In the SAQI five-pillar Quality in Education model, Values is the first and most important pillar.

Good schools are always improving. Progressive South African teachers and education department officials look at what's happening beyond the Limpopo River. Certain of their observations have been brought into our school system. To mention a few: interactive whiteboards, the National Teaching Awards, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) and outcomes based education (OBE). Their suitability for South African schools isn't always guaranteed. Think, for example, of the unintended negative consequences of OBE on especially the millions of children in poorly resourced schools.

If the IEB matric results were outstanding how do the National Senior Certificate results compare? The comparison is brutal. There was a pass rate of only 60.6%. South Africa spends 17.4% of its annual budget on education (compare this to 12.5% in the UK) but our results are – in the big picture – abysmal.

Jonathan Jansen and other eminent South African educationalists are calling for the re-introduction of some form of school inspection system. If we want to improve our schools, we – as with medical doctors – need to know the present level of educational health. Once there's been an accurate diagnosis, treatment can begin. This is where Ofsted and the whole school evaluation (WSE) system can become truly relevant.

This issue of *Quality Education News* looks at some of the issues to take note of around Ofsted. In Britain, Ofsted has made undoubted positive contributions to improving education. Yet there has also been virulent criticism about the manner in which it does whole school evaluations. We need to South Africanise (is there such a word?!) Ofsted to our unique situation. Accept the best aspects of Ofsted; adapt or reject the rest.

Sincerely

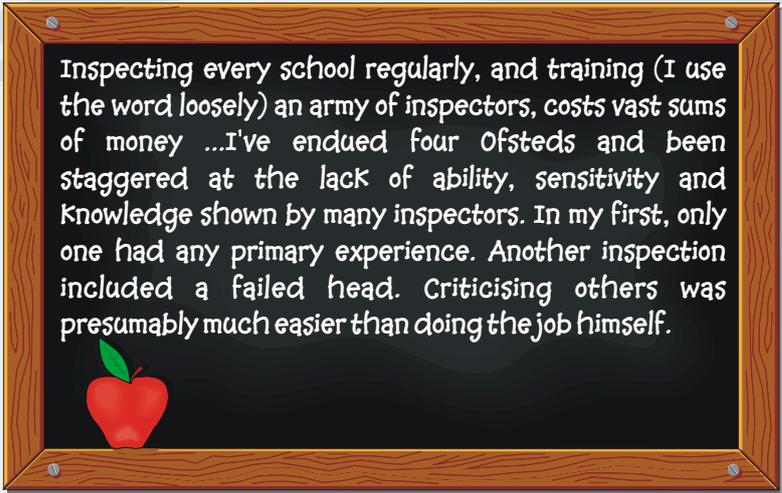
Richard Hayward



This newsletter is edited by SAQI and distributed to those schools benefiting from their participation in the MySchool programme. MySchool acts as a conduit which raises and delivers essential funding for education and social development on a sustainable basis. This enables members of the community to participate in the future development of our nation.



Making Ofsted evaluations positive experiences



Inspecting every school regularly, and training (I use the word loosely) an army of inspectors, costs vast sums of money ...I've endured four Ofsteds and been staggered at the lack of ability, sensitivity and knowledge shown by many inspectors. In my first, only one had any primary experience. Another inspection included a failed head. Criticising others was presumably much easier than doing the job himself.



Mike Kent, a primary school principal, in [It's Ofsted-let's bolt the door](#). *Times Educational Supplement*, 4 December 2009, page 44.

Teachers in England are highly critical of Ofsted. There's never-ending criticism of the way in which inspections are done. The criticism is about **how** inspections are done but not as to **why** there is a need to inspect schools. Quality-based organisations accept that evaluations help ensure that standards are being met.

In future years Ofsted will be interacting far more with South African schools, district offices and education department head offices. If Ofsted does its task well and avoids certain pitfalls of the British approach, our education system can be improved on enormously.

Recommendations for the South African version of Ofsted are:

1 Avoid the word 'Inspector'

In the history of our country, the word 'inspector' evokes unpleasant memories. Think of Bantu Education and the role of inspectors. The inspectors were meant to ensure compliance to regulations that ensured segregated schools and unequal educational opportunities. The word 'inspector' can evoke extremely negative perceptions.

In quality management theory and practice, there's been much progress beyond mere inspection. Yes, there's still the need to ensure compliance to basic requirements. There's a need to ensure that quality is evident and of a high standard.

Yet the assessor or evaluator shouldn't be restricted to narrow prescriptions contained in manuals. Weak evaluation is characterised by an assessor being obsessed with rigid compliance. Excellent quality can be achieved when people are allowed to use their own initiative. Quality organisations go far beyond compliance; they continually go beyond the mere inspection level. They encourage creativity and initiative to bring about new and higher heights of excellence.

2 Be academically and professionally competent

Every member of an Ofsted team should have the academic grasp to be of meaningful help. The assessor should have a track record of outstanding professional achievement. If they're giving advice, they should speak from a position of personal experience in that particular learning area or subject. If someone is advising the principal, that person should have once themselves sat in the 'hot seat'.

In the judiciary, a judge is appointed on the basis of both an excellent academic and professional track record. Selection is a rigorous process. In a similar way, an Ofsted member is also a judge. That person is judging colleagues' capacity and ability to provide excellent education. An Ofsted appointment should be made only at the end result of a tough sifting process.

3 Be emotionally intelligent

Teachers and school principals in Britain have been traumatised by Ofsted. There have been mental and physical health breakdowns as well as early retirements. Tragically, there have been suicides.

Any form of evaluation has an element of stress. That's a reality. People can become emotionally fragile. Even the most dedicated and hard-working educator can have self-doubts about their abilities. Ofsted members need to be emotionally intelligent in their interactions. Be empathic, be kind and be sensitive. Read a person's body language accurately. Know when to speak and when to remain silent.

4 Analyse data and documentation sensibly, not obsessively

Data provides much important information about a school and the district education department office. Scrutinise and analyse. An example is the attendance statistics of both the learners and the staff. The statistics will reveal trends and possible areas for improvement. Similarly, there is the need to scrutinise the results of standardised tests and matric results.

An outstanding school is not determined by the volume of its data and documentation. It should have sufficient written guidelines and policies to ensure that everyone knows how the school is meant to function. There's enough detail but not in mind-numbing quantities.

5 Remember: 'What cannot be counted often counts the most!'

Anthea Cereseto, Headmistress of Parktown Girls' High School in Johannesburg, repeated a famous epigram at their 2009 Prize Giving ceremony. She reminded the audience of an Albert Einstein epigram in which he commented that sometimes the things that really count cannot be counted.

It's relatively easy to assess, for example, the level of achievement of Maths in a school by looking at the exam papers and assessing the students' results. A quality school is, however, very much more than a set of good test results. Values such as caring, cheerfulness, honesty, kindness, perseverance and ubuntu are critical to such a school. Ofsted needs to be aware of these and other qualities when doing an assessment.

6 Be a critical friend

There's no place for a 'bully boy' or 'bully girl' relationship between an Ofsted evaluator and a staff member. The relationship should be one of being a 'critical friend'.

Friends are positively disposed towards each other. They want their friends to achieve. Friends are not afraid to give positive criticism.

When an Ofsted assessor gives advice it should reflect an understanding of what it's really like in the every-day work situation.

7 Praise and motivate

Ofsted visits are excellent opportunities to say, "Thank you". Staff members need to be praised for their achievements. Remember to praise verbally in public. Don't forget to include the positive comments in the written reports submitted after the visit.

Acknowledge achievements but also motivate. Motivate staff to continue with their personal and professional goals. Inspire them to strive for never-ending levels of further improvement.

8 Encourage initiative and innovation

Initiative and innovation need to be encouraged. A spirit of adventure should permeate the entire education system. Sadly, education is often viewed by outsiders as a conservative profession.

Traditionally, adherence and conformity have been highly praised in the inspection system. We need to congratulate those who go beyond the mundane and the ordinary. Not every new idea will be an instant success; most will need to be 'tweaked' or some even discarded. What does it matter?! Doesn't true education develop creativity, individuality and the breaking down of uncritical, blind obedience?

9 Keep professional findings within the profession

In British schools, Ofsted reports are in the public domain. There are league tables of examination results. The British media savages poor-performing schools. At present there's a growing groundswell amongst schools to boycott standardised tests. Schools resent the 'Naming and shaming' process of publicly identifying schools that don't achieve specified standards.

A powerful argument against identifying such schools is that there are usually a number of factors that explain the poor results. These results are not due to professional incompetence. A single illustration would be a school in an area of high HIV/Aids, orphan families, poverty and unemployment. Low scholastic achievements cannot always be put at the door of the teacher and school.

Professional findings should stay within the profession. Raw exam scores don't give the real picture. Even when the school is at fault, little is achieved through public humiliation. It's not only the staff morale that is negatively impacted. It's the children and the families too. Tackle the issues that need to be addressed; keep people's self-respect intact.

The public is definitely entitled to know the overall quality levels within schools and education departments. Therefore it is reasonable for Angie Motshega, Minister of Basic Education, to inform the South African nation of the 2009 matric pass rate. Likewise, it is acceptable for the provincial MECs for Education to publicly identify and praise top achieving schools. These schools can spur others to excel.

The principle is: Praise in public, criticise in conclave.

"Acknowledge achievements but also motivate"

10 Act decisively on poor quality

Ofsted evaluations will be meaningless if there is no follow-through when poor quality has been identified. Decisive, prompt action needs to be taken to help schools with poor physical and teaching resources. Unsatisfactory teachers need to be compelled to up their performance or go. Ofsted needs to have the 'clout' to move quickly from assessment to meaningful action.

Under-performing schools could be placed in a South African version of a "Special measures" programme. This programme would allow Ofsted to immediately put improvement plans in place. The school would have frequent evaluations. Once a school has attained a certain level of quality, it would be taken out of special measures.

11 Be a learner

Every school has something to teach every member of an Ofsted team ... if their eyes and ears are open! Assessors are at schools not only to evaluate; they're also there to identify best practice. Be open to new and better ways of doing things. When the assessor moves on to another school, share the learning experience.

12 Be a considerate visitor

When Ofsted visits a school, they need to remember that they are visitors. In some ways the school has been inconvenienced: a room has to be found for the Ofsted team, additional catering and car park parking are needed. No matter how welcome you are made to feel, remember that the school has been inconvenienced. Be courteous and grateful.

13 Focus on the people, not the paperwork!

A quality school is a happy place. The children like an enjoyable, exciting and stimulating learning environment. Their parents appreciate the caring and sound education provided. The entire staff – administrative, maintenance and professional – like being in a place where their varied efforts are valued.

Ofsted members should aim to get the 'feel' or 'vibe' of the school. Don't be obsessed with the paperwork. Chat to the children in the classroom and playground, observe the interactions, enjoy a joke (and tell one or two yourself!), watch a sports match or a cultural activity in the hall. Focus on the people and you'll be able to assess astutely and wisely.



Some excellent material for nothing ...

SAQI is privileged to have an association with the Human Values Foundation (HVF) in the United Kingdom. This award-winning charity is famous for its Values Education programme for primary and secondary schools. Their programmes are used across the world. Ofsted in Britain has praised the HVF for the excellent positive effects of their programmes in schools.

If you would like to download two free Lesson Plans, go to www.HumanValuesFoundation.com. The primary school example is on the theme: Love-loyalty and friendship. Go to the Education in Human Values (EHV) section and click on 'sample lesson'. To view the high school example, go to the Social and Emotional Education (SEE) section and click on 'sample lesson'. The high school example is titled 'Keeping our cool' with Non-Violence as its core value.

... and some excellent material at massive savings

As a very special gesture to South African schools, the HVF allows its material to be bought at cost via SAQI. Schools pay only for the reproduction costs and the posting. Two examples of the cost savings are:

• **Education in human values (EHV) – a course for 5 to 12 year olds**

The material consists of a teacher's manual and two volumes containing 44 lesson plans. The lesson plans cover the core values of: Truth, Love, Peace, Right Conduct and Non-Violence. Each core value deals with related values. So, for example, Truth has related values such as: honesty, integrity (trust), truthfulness and self-analysis.

To order the course directly from HVF: £114.07 (Rand equivalent: ± R1330). Order directly from SAQI: R430

• **Social and emotional education (SEE) – a course for 12 to 14+ year olds**

The material consists of a teacher's manual and two volumes containing 34 lesson modules.

To order the course directly from HVF: £ 124.07 (Rand equivalent: ± R 1490). Order directly from SAQI: R450

The modules help students to develop...

- A healthy and safe lifestyle
- Good relationships and a caring attitude
- Confidence and responsibility

Examples of learning module themes are:

I have the power to choose
I welcome success
Keeping our cool
Co-existence
Happiness

Visit the SAQI website (www.saqi.co.za) to see other material that is available. For detailed information about the various Human Values Foundation programmes, visit their www.HumanValuesFoundation.com site.



"Over the past 15 years, I have seen a gradual evolution in the area of training. First it was: 'Training? No-one does any training.' Then we progressed to: 'What if I train my staff and they leave?' To which the only response is: 'What if you don't train them and they stay?'"

Debra Templar in *AussieHost News*



A beautiful backdrop for a Quality in Education workshop ...

Bloemendal Conference Centre, Durbanville. Delegates of the Atlantis Principals' Forum really enjoyed the spectacular setting of the venue. From their panoramic vantage point, they could see the carpets of wine farms below. In the distance was Table Mountain with Cape Town and the harbour at its feet.

SAQI does Quality in Education presentations and workshops in all nine provinces. The focus is on leadership and management issues. Teachers, senior management teams and education officials attend them. Programmes are adapted to the specific requirements of the group. Poor schools are sponsored. For more details, please contact Vanessa du Toit at SAQI on 012-349-5006 (vanessa@saqi.co.za). Otherwise, contact Richard Hayward on 011-888-3262 (rpdhayward@yahoo.com)

Free downloads of back numbers of *Quality Education News* are available at www.MySchool.co.za or www.saqi.co.za