

## Introduction

*Performance will be to the twentieth and 21st centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, namely, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge.*

McKenzie, (2001)

The context in which England's policy on teaching is established has changed significantly over the last six decades. From the 1940s until the mid-1970s, teachers enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and trust in knowing what was best for pupils. From then until the 1980s the concept of accountability was introduced, under which management procedures replaced voluntary codes of professionalism. Local Management of Schools (LMS) was introduced, resulting in a shift of control from Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to individual schools. Subsequently, the government has introduced national league tables; national testing of pupils; publication of examination results; external inspections; and performance management. One of the collective effects of these initiatives has been to place the performance of teachers under the spotlight.

For the best part of twenty years, teachers in schools in England have experienced reform on an unprecedented scale. In central government's drive to raise standards in schools, it has implemented policies that have created pressures on teachers not only to improve their performance but also to sustain high levels of performance. The large majority of teachers have accommodated this reform with characteristic good humour – at times, tinged with healthy scepticism but also with a determination to make things work for the benefit of the pupils they teach. Others, it has to be said, have found it more difficult to cope with the array of initiatives and have, for a number of reasons, under-performed.

Under-performance among teachers presents an enormous challenge for leaders and managers in education at all levels, despite improvements in staff selection and training and the existence of national standards for teachers. Teacher under-performance is not new of course – many teachers, like many workers in other fields, under-perform at some time, and in some contexts. Each of the writers of this book very quickly recounted the influence of under-performing teachers on their own learning as pupils. We were also honest enough to confess that there had been times in our own teaching careers (not many!) when – for all sorts of reasons – we had also under-performed.

## DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE TEACHER PERFORMANCE

So why has our awareness of teachers' under-performance risen in recent years. There are a number of reasons, many of which stem from a growing demand from central government for teachers to be made more accountable for what goes on in their teaching areas. Two prominent, government-initiated, initiatives that have increased this level of accountability have been Ofsted inspections and performance management. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) suggest that:

*If you open up classrooms to find excellence, you also risk exposing bad practice and incompetence. While this risk is real, the actual scale of the incompetence problem is smaller than the fears to which it gives rise.*

Nor is the question of teacher quality just an issue for the United Kingdom – all countries are seeking to improve their schools. An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report entitled *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* (OECD, 2005) focuses on policies that contribute to attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers in schools. The report draws on the results of a major OECD study of teacher policy conducted over the 2002–04 period in collaboration with 25 countries around the world.

*As the most significant and costly resource in schools, teachers are central to school improvement efforts. Improving the efficiency and equity of schooling depends, in large measure, on ensuring that competent people want to work as teachers, that their teaching is of high quality, and that all students have access to high quality teaching.*

(OECD, 2005)

Teachers who under-perform not only fail to achieve expected results, but their behaviour may also have a deleterious effect on the work of others. They consume much of school leaders' time and occupy posts that would be better filled by better performing teachers. Their ineffective performance may also damage the school's reputation – often raising fierce reaction from parents. The continued emphasis by Ofsted on raising standards of teaching and learning puts pressure on individual teachers, and those managing them, to ensure that any weaknesses in classroom performance are remedied.

### **Why has this book been written?**

This book has been written in the belief that it will help teachers, and those managing their performance, to develop further strategies and improve current ones in order to correct weaknesses in their practice. This is intended to be essentially a practical book for busy senior and middle managers in primary, middle and secondary schools who are required to manage and, wherever possible, reverse the

under-performance of those with whom they work. It is intended that much of the material found in the book will also help under-performing staff to reflect upon and improve their performance.

It is crucial to point out that this book is not about teachers whose performance has deteriorated so significantly that, despite quality support, capability procedures are called for. Its emphasis is on those teachers who are, in general, capable but have significant weaknesses in a number of critical aspects of their work – *‘they fall below a threshold of satisfactory performance on a number of criteria: they are not just unsatisfactory in one small aspect of the job’* (Fidler and Atton, 1999).

### The structure of the book

In Chapter 1 we look at some fundamental questions associated with the under-performance of teachers and present a series of issues that need serious consideration. The chapter describes the consequences for schools of teacher under-performance and attempts to clarify what we mean by under-performance within the context of what we know about teacher effectiveness.

In Chapter 2 the authors draw upon their experience to look more closely at the nature of ineffective or poor performance in teachers. It highlights the use of supporting benchmarks to help draw distinctions between performance that can be restored and that which inevitably leads to capability procedures and possible dismissal.

Chapter 3 focuses on the practical support strategies that line-managers can put in place to improve and restore teachers’ professional practice. Teachers who are under-performing will need a programme of structured support, individually tailored to take account of the balance between individual, immediate and wider context issues which have given rise to the poor performance.

The aim of Chapter 4 is to examine the role of self-reflection in improving teacher effectiveness, to prompt and extend self-reflection for teachers who are already self-reflective, and to provide assistance to line-managers who need to encourage self-reflection in teachers being supported to become more effective.

Chapter 5 focuses on the potential of performance reviews to reverse the trend of under-performance amongst some teachers through their emphasis on planning priorities, forming objectives and individual improvement plans, and on appropriate support and challenge. We advocate coaching as an essential skill for team leaders in supporting under-performing teachers. It describes the challenge for team leaders in confronting unacceptable practice and identifies strategies for giving constructive criticism. It emphasises the need for early intervention and for team leaders to be aware of equality issues in their own judgements and behaviour. The importance of giving high quality feedback is highlighted in order to effect change and enable the recipient to retain a sense of self-worth and self-fulfilment.

In Chapter 6 we suggest a whole-school approach to maintaining and developing teacher performance further through the use of a Professional Development Group.

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The importance of sound recruitment and selection procedures in making the right appointments is covered in Chapter 7. It provides a comprehensive strategy for preparing for a selection process with substantial guidance on securing the best candidates to fill vacancies.

We use Chapter 8 as a resource made up of authentic case study materials that readers might use to consolidate their learning and plan appropriate action to help restore the performance of teachers. The materials are also provided to support in-school training events on the issues surrounding supporting under-performing teachers.