

LEADING AND SUPPORTING

CHANGE IN SCHOOLS

DISCUSSION PAPER

Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
Change principles	6
The NCCA and change	7
The change paper	9
PRINCIPLES FOR LEADING AND SUPPORTING CHANGE	10
The process of change	10
Teachers at the site of change	16
The NCCA and policy-related dimensions of change	18
FACILITATING THE PROCESS OF LEADING AND SUPPORTING CHANGE	20
Working principles	20



INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The impetus for this discussion paper on *Leading and Supporting Change in Schools* arose out of a Council discussion in 2008 on the implementation of curriculum change in the education system. During the course of that discussion, there was concern with how curriculum and assessment developments and their implementation play out in the education system and the role that the NCCA plays in relation to leading and supporting educational change in this context.

Particular questions arose about the length of time it took to introduce new and revised curricula in schools, about the scale of resources usually applied to the process and, more generally, with what was perceived as a lack of planning and joined-up thinking on leading and supporting change. Questions were also raised about the current models for the implementation of change in use: how effective have they proven in terms of achieving real and lasting change in teaching, learning, school culture and organisation? How closely have the scale and effects of change been evaluated?

This questioning was further prompted by research findings related to the implementation of the Primary School Curriculum, the ESRI research on the experience of students in post-primary education and the extensive public consultations that took place around the senior cycle developments, all of which have cast some doubt on whether all the change that has taken place has genuinely reshaped the educational experience in our classrooms.

In more recent times, with schools experiencing cuts in the resources available to them as a consequence of economic recession, there is also a sense that some new thinking on change that is highly sensitive to and reflective of the real environment within which schools are working is needed if curriculum and assessment change is to advance in the coming years.

For all these reasons, Council decided to generate a discussion paper that would attempt to take stock of the current situation and set out any emerging possibilities for taking a different approach in the future. It also decided that such a paper would be the subject of consultation in 2009 and would play a key role in the development of its next strategic plan.

At the outset, it's important to note that the paper is referring to change in quite general terms, as the pursuit of general progress, as a process that is ongoing towards the realisation of a vision and goals related to a high quality education for all. This general view of change encompasses planned change arising from national policy initiatives. But nationally planned change is only one dimension of change alongside all the other sources of planned and unplanned change that schools have to take into account in thinking about and dealing with change as part and parcel of what they do.

It is also worth noting that, while the paper is issued for consultation at a time of economic recession, when morale among those working in education and beyond can be somewhat diminished, it is unapologetically imbued with the belief in progress that the NCCA experiences from working with schools and all the partners in education. The view of change here is based in the optimism and belief that schools, notwithstanding the difficulties being faced, will as always contribute directly to the potential of the next generation of learners to face and master the challenges of the future.

Change principles

Rather than, for example, taking as its starting point an exhaustive analysis of past and existing models of implementation, the paper sets out a number of principles that underpin the thinking and work of Council on leading and supporting change in schools. These principles can inform discussion of change within the wider education system but, more directly, they inform and guide the thinking of the NCCA when advice is being generated on the change process and supports that are needed to introduce a particular curriculum or assessment development in schools. Establishing sound working principles in this area is critical and those set out here draw on what has been learnt and experienced from involvement in implementation approaches and models used in recent years.

The principles are also reflective of a number of trends in thinking about leading and supporting change in schools that have emerged in more recent times in the work of the NCCA and others. This includes work that the NCCA has conducted directly with schools and networks of schools. At early childhood level, work with settings has involved research into children's early learning and development experiences, and using this to inform the development of the *Framework for Early Learning*. At primary level, work with schools has focused on the development of advice on and tools for reporting to parents, and on research and review of the Primary School Curriculum.

At post-primary, work with a range of subject teachers and schools has focused on how assessment for learning in one initiative, and key skills in another, can be effectively embedded in daily teaching and learning in classrooms. Some network schools have been directly involved in curriculum development through the generation of transition units. Others have been involved in looking at the development of flexible learning profiles or education programmes in the context of educational disadvantage and beyond.

In addition, working directly with schools has contributed to developing processes of consultation, not just in relation to curriculum and assessment development but also into questions of implementation: how schools could and would handle a particular aspect of change if introduced? This work with schools has been informed by international research and thinking on the nature of educational change and the centrality of teachers and schools to that change. In turn, there has been considerable interest among the research community and education policy makers in other countries in the work of the NCCA in this context.

THE NCCA AND CHANGE

The NCCA's core activity can be seen as relating to the four areas of curriculum and assessment development, consultation, support and change. The recent trend of NCCA thinking in each of these areas can be summarised as follows.

Development in curriculum and assessment can be achieved through working both with committees and directly with schools, with the process being informed by research findings and reflections on practice.

Consultation can be viewed as on a continuum from large-scale catch-all consultation to varied, multi-stranded and customised consultation.

Support for teaching, learning, curriculum planning and curriculum development can go beyond guidelines into the realm of online support and ACTION¹.

Advice on implementation and **change** can aspire to a much closer fit between the requirements of national policies and initiatives and the situation and organic needs of schools as centres of learning and change.

¹ ACTION is an NCCA website that supports teachers in the 'how to' of teaching and learning through the use of multimedia.

Perhaps the most concerted and coherent expression of some of this thinking on leading and supporting change is represented by *Project Maths* where schools have been directly involved, from the outset, in curriculum and assessment development, in continuous processes of consultation, in the generation and undertaking of professional support, and in the carrying out of the change simultaneously. In some ways, Project Maths can be viewed as a first attempt to retire the concept of 'implementation of change' and replace it with the idea of 'leading and supporting change in schools'. It also represents the first articulation of a new role for the NCCA in the change process, and new sets of relationships between the Council and schools, and between schools and the change process.

In its most far reaching expression, what may be involved here is a different way of looking at policy making and the encouragement of educational change.

A recent OECD Conference on Schooling for Tomorrow placed a strong emphasis on seeing the involvement of national organisations like the NCCA in policy making as being largely about *puzzling and powering* in the pursuit of change. From this perspective, those involved with system wide change should be less concerned with finding the definitive 'solution' centrally and disseminating it locally for 'implementation'. They should be more inclined to posing the key questions to the system, drawing attention to the complexity of those questions and to the need for multiple, more customised solutions, and then powering those working on the challenges to find solutions. In this context, agencies like the NCCA are viewed more as facilitators, supporters and encouragers of collaboration to address challenges being faced by schools on a daily basis.

A key dimension of puzzling the issues involved and powering those who are able to identify solutions, is how the knowledge generated in the process is managed. In a situation where greater responsibility and resources are devolved to schools, it is essential that knowledge management systems are in place to assist with the process of change and development. This knowledge management involves, for example, clear communication about and provision of information on change. It involves extensive use of evaluation and educational research and the outcomes of these to inform both the puzzling of policy makers and the work of the schools that are being powered. It involves the encouragement of networks, communities of practice, centres of innovation, and different forms of professional development as vehicles for managing and distilling the most important learning taking place among all those involved. Again, Project Maths would come to mind as an initiative where the management of the knowledge being gained from all of those involved is critical to its progress.

Clearly, this view of how change does and should happen involves seeing schools, more than ever, as the key site of change where most of the available resources should be applied and where greater autonomy in decision making related to change should be afforded. While education systems as a whole can tend to be relatively traditional, adaptive and incremental in their approach towards change, schools who are facing the immediate impact of social and economic change on a daily basis often have to be, and can be, highly innovative in this context. Work undertaken by post-primary schools on developing Flexible Learning Profiles and by primary schools on Report Card Templates are good examples of this. Within schools, the greatest importance should be attached to how change is reflected in the quality and practice of teaching and learning and to the forms and sources of leadership across the school that encourage and support change.

The change paper

To date, this paper on *Leading and Supporting Change in Schools* has been an internal NCCA paper developed to support discussion about educational change by Council and thinking about changing curriculum and assessment by executive staff of the NCCA. It may have a wider use as a vehicle for consultation and discussion, especially in the emerging contexts of economic recession and public sector reform when schools are subject to a rapidly changing and challenging environment and when different ways of achieving development and progress in education are likely to be explored. In light of the extent of and nature of the change in the educational landscape at this time, the paper attempts to situate the discussion of change in this context.

The first section of the paper sets out a number of principles which are foundational to leading and supporting change in education. They are tentative, provisional and are presented for further discussion and teasing out. The second section of the paper, which is equally tentative and exploratory, addresses the key question of how, bearing these principles in mind, strategies related to the process of leading and supporting change in schools can best be facilitated by the education system. In other words, it looks at what is involved in creating the conditions where the kind of change already suggested can actually happen. In this way, the second section begins to explore the processes, roles and relationships across the education system that are needed to achieve deep and continuing change in schools and, given the source of this paper, the part that the NCCA can and should play in this.



PRINCIPLES FOR LEADING AND SUPPORTING CHANGE

Principles for leading and supporting change

Some principles that should be taken into account in planning for change, in policy making aimed at accomplishing change, and in the process of carrying out change are outlined below. The principles are generalised, they overlap, they are not exhaustive. They seem to form comfortably into three categories: those that have to do with the process of realising change; those related to teachers as essential agents of change; and, finally, those concerning the broader systemic and policy-related dimensions of change.

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

Achieve clarity on the intention and outcome of change

Clarity of intention is a key success factor in effecting change. The rationale for the change, the principles associated with the change and the intention of the change must be clearly articulated, shared and understood by all involved. The process of achieving clarity and a sense of shared purpose takes time for the individuals involved in the change. What's more, the clarity of intention has to be pursued both at the outset and as it evolves through review of the change process. Because change is an iterative process, the meaning of the change needs to be regularly revisited and clarified or rearticulated as the process of change continues.

It is one thing to be clear on the idea and intention of change. But that clarity also needs to be effectively communicated to all and by all involved. Sometimes clear intentions can become obscured or can be misread or interpreted in different ways when the quality, means and media of communication are poor. Even when the communication is of a high quality, intentions can be misinterpreted because of previous poor experience of change. What is said and what is heard may not always be the same.

The intention must be clarified and understood at the range of levels and in the areas which it is expected to influence. What change is expected in terms of teaching and learning? Is it intended that certain aspects of the school as a learning environment or as a learning organisation will change? How is the experience of education for the learner and for the learning professional expected to change? What contribution, if any, is the change expected to make in the wider context of people's lives and societal change?

So, clarity of intention and continual review of those intentions is critical for those involved in the change, and for all aspects of the change including planning, resourcing and evaluating the change. It's also important to recognise that the intentions associated with change are often likely to be ideologically and politically contested.

Change happens all the time

The great illusion that hampers centralised implementation of educational change is the idea that change is controllable, that you can ring-fence change, that change is amenable to an input-output model. The opposite seems to be the case. Educational change comes in many forms and is already happening, all the time. Students' lives, the lives of teachers, not to mention schools as organisations are being changed by globalisation, technology, changing societal institutions, and the prevailing economic and political climates. At the level of the many daily learning interactions taking place in every school, change is an ever-present factor. Change is part of the rhythm and life of the classroom and school. When a specific change intention is introduced to teachers and schools it joins the ongoing flow of change, is affected by it and influences it. It is added to what has been absorbed from previous change initiatives and interventions and to their leftovers. In other words, it becomes part of an already existing change archaeology that shapes schools and those who work and learn in them.

This appreciation of change as already happening, complex, fluid, built on previous rounds of change is one that should inform any planning or strategising in the area of educational change; the closer our understanding of the kinds of changes that are taking place with students, teachers and schools, the greater the prospect for success in accomplishing specific intended change. Knowing that specific curriculum and assessment change joins a wider pool of ongoing change should mean that good judgement is exercised in the amount and scale of specific, intended change proposed.

It takes time to achieve deep change

A common default setting in relation to change in education is the expectation that once a specific change is introduced and supported in some way, it will happen. But achieving real change, educational change that is deep and lasting, takes time. This is because most real change involves changing the way teaching and learning happens or changing the culture of schools as places of learning and organisations – changing the way things are done! Realising this kind of profound change involves professionals grappling with fundamental beliefs, dispositions and habits and altering practice on the basis of experience. There is probably inadequate appreciation of the time involved in this process, of the dynamics of change involved, and of the conditions needed to support this kind of deep change. This is, in some measure, reflective of a policy making and management environment where the setting of short-term, easily measurable targets rather than longer-term transformative processes is the norm.

It takes investment to achieve deep change

Access to appropriate levels of resources and funding is also a key to achieving deep and lasting change. Resources play an important role in nudging and incentivising people towards engaging with change. But they're also more intrinsic to processes of change than that. Investment in people, in the learning environment, in aspects of schools as learning organisations is fundamental to establishing a momentum for change. In the context discussed earlier of puzzling and powering and managing knowledge well, the resources needed for those involved to think, reflect, negotiate their way, plan, try out, review, and share ideas and experiences cannot be viewed as anything other than essential provisions.

Change involves leadership

It is no accident that the title of this discussion paper includes the idea of leadership. The word 'education' is rooted in the idea of 'leading out' and inevitably educational change involves leadership. Reports of pilot projects and implementation initiatives published during the past twenty years in Ireland commonly conclude that change happens most effectively when it is supported by those in positions of leadership, such as school principals, and when leadership is in evidence at every level of the project or initiative. Distributed leadership, where the leadership in a given aspect of change comes from multiple sources and where the change comes about through the relational activity that follows, has particular potential for schools. Leadership in making meaning out of and developing ideas for change, in building effective personal and institutional relationships for change, in encouraging innovative and creative thinking and action, in establishing effective services for change, in motivating the next person or network to be involved in change, is critical to achieving deep and lasting change.

Strategies for change must be agile

This principle is closely related to others associated with the process of change. If the intention of change needs to be continually clarified and shared, if a specific change strategy is to take account of other changes that are happening all the time, if deep change can only happen over a medium-long timescale and is continually evolving through support, then it follows that any strategy for change must be agile, quick-footed, and responsive. It also needs to be agile because of the multiplicity of change agents and contexts for change, and because in the realm of educational change one size seldom fits all. Agility of this kind requires sensitivity to the dynamics of change at the level of the professional and the school, a strong evidence base to facilitate decision making, creative and imaginative thinking, and a shared understanding of the process of change.

The agility of strategies related to change is also critical because schools as sites of change are so different from one to the next. While there are clearly commonalities that some schools share, and a need to ensure quality across the system, the adage that no two places are the same applies particularly well to schools. In tangible terms, schools can differ radically in type, in size, in resources and the scale of funding, in the communities served, in their physical structure and environment. In cultural terms, schools differ in their state of readiness for change, their ethos, the nature and quality of leadership, their history of involvement in change among many other factors. It follows that the potential uniqueness of the situation of each school must be reflected in the agility of strategies for change with which the school has to engage.

Think in terms of evolving and supporting more than changing

This principle involves refocusing the question of the time it takes to carry out educational change. Perhaps it is more appropriate to the process and complexities involved to think in terms of teachers as professionals and schools as places of learning being continuously supported in the process of change and evolving in their engagement with key elements of educational change. This may well be a better description of the way things are anyhow, even if from a policy implementation perspective they are imagined to be otherwise. And when we think in terms of evolution more than change we probably shouldn't see the evolution involved as smooth or even at every point. Change more often than not involves jumps and starts, leaps forward, steps backwards, shifts of direction and many other forms of movement. But overall, in an Irish context, changes in teaching and learning practice, changes in the culture and organisation of schools, and changes to schools as institutions are usually characterised more by evolution, adaptation and incremental growth towards a particular kind of change than by 'big bang' large-scale adoption of it.

Realising change involves light and heat

The motivation to change can come from a range of sources and from differing interpretations of those sources among teachers and others involved. Some are encouraged to change when they 'see the light'. Something in the proposed change encourages the person to revisit what they believe, what they are disposed towards, what they do, and to change personally and professionally on the basis of the light that has been thrown on what they do. In other cases, 'heat' can be effective. The person and professional responds to an imperative that they view as unavoidable or as unavoidably important, such as a change in policy, provision or legislation. Or, the specific change proposed meets an urgent need or an emerging challenge that is being felt by the teacher or the school at the time. In other words, the motivation to engage with change can come about by means of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

Strategies for change must be designed or participation

Teachers and schools need to be seen as more than mere tools in other people's purposes. A weakness in centralised strategising about the implementation of change is that it doesn't involve those who will be at the forefront of carrying out that change enough. As the gatekeepers of policy change in their classrooms and schools, teachers and school management should be closely involved in the policy development process. Strategies for change need to open up more and be genuinely participative, so that all involved at the level of the school in very particular contexts can engage in meaningful conversation and reflection with one another and the wider school community about what works in teaching and learning, about how improvements can be made, about how change can be brought about. Truly participative change strategies involve policy decisions being made by those who will realise them.

Change should be characterised by quality

In every walk of life professionals respond to the idea of quality. In this sense, the quality of thinking on education, on change in general and on specific aspects of the intended change is a critical factor in realising change. The quality of the theory underpinning development, the quality of research supporting it, the quality of documentation thinking it through and articulating it, the quality of the process of conversation and consultation through which shared understanding is reached, and the quality of the resources supporting it will be directly associated with the change itself. The worth and potential of the change will be judged on that basis by teachers and schools.

TEACHERS AT THE SITE OF CHANGE

Teachers as key agents of change

Everyone who works in education is familiar with the rhetoric that teachers are key agents of change. It's a familiar phrase, it's a self-evident truth. Yet there is only some evidence that implementation processes in their design and practice are founded on this truth. Existing models of in-career professional development often place teachers at the receiving end of policy changes generated at national level. Teachers have often been the object of implementation products rather than the subject of processes of educational change. The perception of teachers on the ground is that the change agenda is often set elsewhere, with the interests of teachers as professionals well down the list of prime considerations. Realising deep educational change can only happen through teachers and school management and their interactions and relationships with the learner. This kind of change has to see teachers, truly, as the key agents of change.

Teachers experience conflicting expectations and fragmentation

Increasingly, teachers experience a range of conflicting expectations of them as professionals in their working lives. The views and expectations of education authorities, of school management, of colleagues, of parents and of students on what is valuable and important in teaching and learning can differ radically and these differences can be further reflected between schools, between stages of education, between communities and socio-economic groups, between different interests in society. The perception and measure of a 'good' teacher, the acknowledgement and recognition of accomplishment and achievement in teaching varies across different audiences and ranges from the most educationally idealistic at one end of the spectrum to the most utilitarian at the other. What is valued in teachers in the early stages of primary education can be far removed from what is valued in the run-up to the Leaving Certificate examination.

In the implementation of change, teachers experience a significant degree of fragmentation. Teachers and schools frequently have a sense of contending with multiple and sometimes competing innovations and initiatives simultaneously. They have concerns about a lack of joined-up thinking in the area of professional support. It can be difficult to access and engage with educational change when what is essential about that change, how it can cohere with their work as professionals, is elusive.

Teachers, with some difficulty, have to chart their course as professionals amid these changing conditions, these shifting expectations, this fragmentation. The response of teachers to the idea of educational change can, at the very least, be heavily influenced by conflicting expectations and fragmentation.

Change is personal and professional

For teachers, change is both personal and professional. Realising lasting changes in teaching and learning can involve changing deeply held beliefs about life and the world, and long established dispositions in relation to particular aspects of learning, education and society. It can also involve changing familiar, habitual practices that have stood the test of time. In this sense, accomplishing significant change is not just a professional matter, no more than, in most cases, it was a professional matter to decide to teach in the first place. There is strong research evidence that decisions to join the teaching profession are very often based in the most noble intentions – to contribute to the lives of children and young people, to ‘make a difference’ through the transformative power of education. These may be drivers that motivate the profession but they are intensely personal ones too. Sensitivity to the essential connection between the personal and the professional in the lives of teachers is a key to the success of initiatives in the area of educational change. Professional support for teachers in the process of change should attend both to professional needs and those aspects of personal development that can have a spin-off professionally.

THE NCCA AND POLICY-RELATED DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE

Appreciating the centrality of teachers and schools to the change process

Appreciating this centrality involves ensuring that learners, teachers, schools and their communities are the genuine starting points for thinking about change. It involves giving schools greater autonomy in setting the agenda for change at the local level. It means involving those most closely associated with trying to achieve change in planning for how that change is to be accomplished and what it will take to accomplish it, as well as involving them in the process of change. It also involves developing deeper sensitivity towards and closer understanding of the dynamics of change for the learner, for the teacher as a professional and for the school as an organisation.

In recent years, direct engagement with schools has enabled the NCCA to access the perspectives of teachers and schools on many dimensions of curriculum and assessment change. These are critical inputs and insights not only in the context of curriculum development but also in how to generate an effective model for leading and supporting change. The initiatives have valued teacher inquiry and insights by recognising teachers as generators of real knowledge about what works in teaching and learning and, as such, have brought teachers and their schools into the field of policy development and change in the area of curriculum and assessment. Appreciating the centrality of teachers to leading and supporting change involves continued work on initiatives directly with schools and placing a particular emphasis within that work on researching and consulting on leading and supporting change.

Shared purpose among the other agents of change

While teachers and schools have been identified as the key agents of change, they are not the sole agents of change. Any change can be viewed as stretching across a wide variety of agents, actors, situations and contexts and as it stretches the meaning and the nature of that change can be altered. Teachers and schools often perceive the implementation of change to be fragmented in nature and underline the importance of joining up the thinking on leading and supporting change. Systems thinking also highlights the connections between subsystems that are part of a change process, particularly where the systems in question, such as education systems, are characterised by complex relationships between the various agents of change.

It follows that leading and supporting change also involves building links and relationships, common understandings and shared intentions: in short, a shared sense of purpose between all the stakeholders and change agents involved. Accomplishing deep change requires that a concerted sense of purpose and approach is achieved across the range of change agents in the current field of implementation of educational change in Ireland including support services and structures, Education Centres, the Teaching Council, the SEC, the relevant sections of the DES and the NCCA, among others.

**FACILITATING
THE PROCESS
OF LEADING
AND SUPPORTING
CHANGE**

Facilitating the process of leading and supporting change

The key question posed by the identification of the principles just discussed is how, keeping these principles in mind, strategies related to the process of leading and supporting change in schools can best be facilitated by all involved? Drawing on some of the material in the final two principles discussed, this section of the paper begins to explore the processes, roles and relationships across the education system that are needed to facilitate deep and continuing change in schools.

Again, the approach taken has been to identify certain principles for consideration. However, while the principles outlined in the previous section might be described as fundamental to or informing the process of leading and supporting change, those outlined in this section are probably best described as working principles, or even conditions that are conducive to achieving deep and continuing change in schools.

WORKING PRINCIPLES

Focus of change

The primary focus in leading and supporting change in schools and in introducing educational change and reform must be on teaching and learning, teachers and schools, and leadership in schools. These are the essential aspects of, and change agents in, educational change, through which and through whom the most significant impact can be made. It involves seeing schools as centres of innovation and learning and powering them through investment, support and knowledge management to realise that role. Policy priorities and change strategies in education should be orientated in this context.

However, the point should always be reinforced that when we talk about change we're not talking about change for change's sake. Given the principles outlined in this paper what will be involved is balancing continuity with change – finding ways of progressing without overwhelming those involved. Rather than going from new initiative to new initiative, foundations for working with change are laid and built on over time. Those foundations are likely to be based on creating a culture of learning in schools where learning is valued for all involved. In this way change is about integrating new useful insights and strategies without losing what is good in what is already done. In other words, a natural, continuous approach is taken as opposed to each change seeming to overturn all previous learning.

Connecting to politics and policy

Bringing about this focus on leading and supporting change and seeing schools as the key sites for change involves engagement with political processes and a clear basis in policy. Policy and political initiatives should set the vision and goals and some of the challenges related to the change involved. Change can involve a variety of innovations as long as they're connected to policy-based vision and goals. A clear policy perspective gives those involved a clear sense of direction and empowers and motivates them to achieve change in that direction. It also helps to co-ordinate actions from a wide variety of people and organisations. A clear sense of direction also guides decisions about what *not* to do and about what to do first.

Clear policy frameworks and thinking provide the best basis for the introduction of particular strategies for change and areas of change, and for enhancing the role of schools in this context. For example, unambiguous policy statements in specific areas such as those of continuing professional development of teachers, languages in education, ICT in education and more general areas such as equality in education would provide a sound basis for leading and supporting change in schools.

Generating debate on education

Serious public debate about education and about education in relation to broader political and social issues can contribute in very significant ways to creating the conditions for leading and supporting change in schools. An increased level of debate among those involved in education, and with others not involved directly in education, will contribute to greater levels of awareness and discussion of change in schools. It is an essential aspect of communicating about and puzzling about change and an essential dimension of knowledge management in relation to change.

Nature of strategies

Strategies for leading and supporting change in schools must be characterised by foresight and innovation, a strong sense of direction and coherence, detailed planning, the identification of key milestones to be agreed, reached and attained, and decisions based in evidence and evaluation. Strategies generated around these elements are most likely to gain the support of schools for change.

Strategies must also be focused on the management of resistance to change, both at the system level and at the level of the school. In the context of supporting change in schools, resistance can be seen as a natural part of the change process and indeed as a sign of potential progress. People faced with change are generally interested in whether they are equipped to handle the change, whether the change is meaningful for them and whether they are motivated to engage with it. Strategies to manage resistance involve facilitating the movement of individuals and groups through stages such as denial, resistance, adaptation, acceptance and commitment. This can be achieved through a focus on enabling people to have the tools and skills required to make the change and through building in short-term wins for those involved through the change process.

Investing in change

Strategies for change that are rooted in policy priorities, that attract public and political support, and that are well planned and developed, must attract appropriate levels of resources. Investment in educational change on a realistic scale contributes significantly to leading and supporting change in schools. Investing in change also involves looking closely at the role that incentivisation can play in encouraging educational change.

Those elements of change that are viewed as priorities either in a national context or by individual schools can be greatly encouraged through incentivisation. The costs involved may not always be great, but the motivation to change will be sustained, and the aspects of change involved will be advanced and can be publicised as such, which adds further momentum to the process of change involved.

Collaborating on change

Developing and working on strategies to lead and support change in schools will involve increased levels of liaison and collaboration between those agencies and organisations, such as the NCCA, that contribute to the generation of education policy, develop the instruments and plans for the implementation of change, and are increasingly involved in working on developments in collaboration with schools.

The collaboration should be based in the idea of agencies involved in policy making and support playing an essential role in puzzling the key issues and areas of change being engaged with by schools and supporting them through effective direct engagement and knowledge management.

Evolving change scenarios

Strategies associated with particular areas or aspects of change should be finely tuned to the dynamics of how change is transacted in teaching and learning and in the life of schools. The principle of 'one size doesn't fit all' should be fully appreciated in this context. A series of change scenarios need to be developed in collaboration with the education partners and schools which set out and exemplify a continuum of possibilities for change.

The continuum of scenarios might be based on the levels of resources and different stages of readiness or preparedness schools are at in leading and supporting change. Alternatively, the continuum of scenarios could be based on the scale of change involved and consider, for example, the difference between introducing changed teaching and learning in a subject such as mathematics, changes to a generic curriculum area such as wellbeing, or changes at a more extensive level such as programmes of study in senior cycle.

The scenarios could prove to be useful tools for schools in making decisions about what to undertake and how best to do that, and for policy-makers in planning how best to resource and support schools in the change process.

Background references

While the discussion paper does not draw or quote directly from specific sources, its' contents have been influenced by readings in the area of educational change such as those listed below.

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