

European School Heads Association ESHA

VISION PAPER: THE QUALITY OF SCHOOLS

ESHA is stressing that quality in education means above all trust: we need trust on schools - students, teachers, school heads. Without trust there is no respect and education needs mutual respect. Learning, respect, self-responsibility and sound self-esteem are **as** relevant key factors in the education **as** accountability, achievement, testing, ranking and inspection. Quality means equity, too: equal opportunities of education, irrespective of domicile, sex, economic situation or mother tongue. Quality and equity are not conflicting principles of education system.

PISA surveys of 2000 and 2003 have indicated that in order to achieve good learning results there is a need to give teachers a more central role in decision-making on a number of general issues bearing influence on school activities. Education is attributable to teachers' high professional competence and strong ethical commitment to their work. There is an obvious challenge to open up the classroom for increased cooperation with colleagues, parents, and other experts working with children and youth. Highly qualified expertise as well as broad and recognized factual authority when it comes to school-related decision-making provide a good basis for teacher's professional development as well as for the school's enhanced organizational competence and interaction with the surrounding community.

ESHA's understanding is that quality of Education is always a balance between the two trends - school effectiveness and school improvement. We have to ask like Stoll and Wikeley: "How do we know that what we are doing makes a difference to pupils?" Only by accepting this point of view we can ensure that each pupil achieves the highest standards possible. This enhances all aspects of pupil achievement and development.

While speaking about school effectiveness we should be interested in what goes on *in the classroom* between the teacher and the students (e.g. teacher's feedback to student, assessment aligned with goals, teacher-pupil-pupil interrelationships, pupil's involvement, teacher professionalism and reflectivity, active learning and developing metacognitive skills). Pupils really are subjects and starting points for teaching and learning processes .

ESHA's understanding is that school leadership is playing a remarkable role in enhancing quality of learning. The impact of school leadership on student achievement is powerful but indirect. That's why the conditions and policies under which school leaders can exercise this role most effectively must be taken into special consideration. Furthermore, school leadership must always offer an attractive career for potential candidates and for those on this job. Attractiveness of the leadership profession and of the teaching profession are a fundamental element in keeping education standards high.

Jorma Lempinen
General Secretary of ESHA