

Quality review in pastoral care

The aim of this paper is to support schools in discussing and reviewing the quality of their pastoral practice.

In the context of competing priorities, there is a continuing need to ensure that our practice is of high quality and that school priorities reflect this.

The paper could be used to:

- promote staff discussion and review
- support evaluation through collecting the perspectives of key parties
- stimulate discussion of performance indicators
- aid discussion with governors

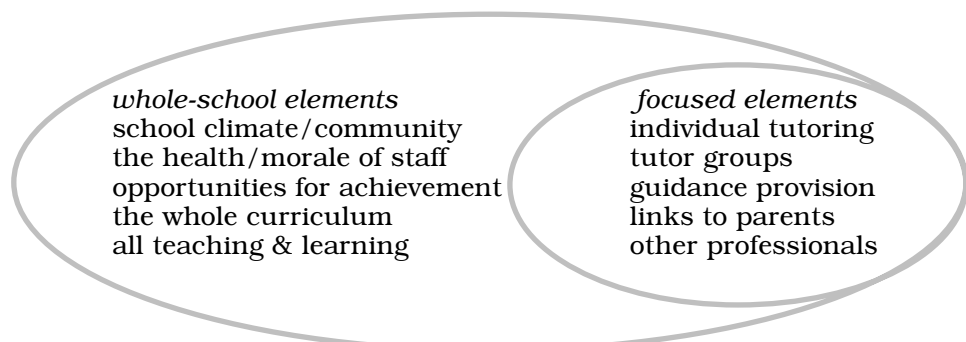
What do we mean by “quality”?

Dictionary definitions do not give a satisfying answer to this question. Quality can feel like a nebulous concept, but nevertheless remains important. Over 20 years ago Robert Pirsig wrote “I think there is such a thing as quality, but as soon as you try to define it something goes haywire. You can’t do it”¹

So why bother with “quality”? Because it’s a suitably *broad* idea to help us consider our practice - it invites us to include our vision of that practice, our hopes and ideals. Thus discussions of quality are more likely to recognise the professional satisfaction which comes from meeting our own view of high quality. Education in the 1990s may have been dominated by a view that all important matters can and should be defined, regulated and assessed: this view is unlikely to illuminate in any adequate manner the key interpersonal quality of teachers’ work and school processes.

And what do we mean by pastoral care?

Studies over decades have shown it is counter-productive to adopt a narrow view, for example by focusing on team leaders or tutors alone. To do so may blind us to other features of the school, which at worst can neutralise high quality tutoring. At best, the wider elements of school are imbued with the same principles and goals, and the tutoring makes a significant contribution to the overall success. This paper will refer to the focused elements as well as the whole-school elements, and the connections between them:



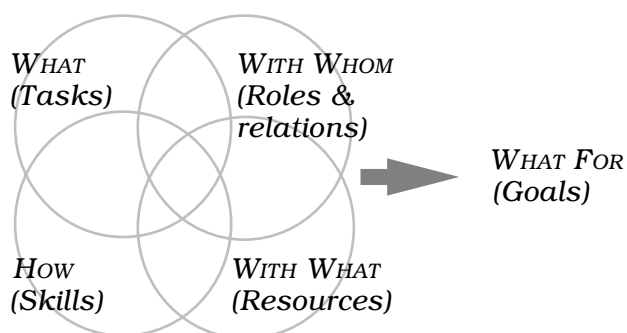
Pastoral Care can make significant contributions to important features of the whole school:

- > the ethos; the sense of community and mutual respect
- > pupils' engagement in the school
- > pupils' contributions to each other and to the school
- > the recognition of a wide range of achievements
- > the extent to which pupils feel effective and empowered as learners
- > the quality of teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil communication
- > the extent of collegiality and coordination amongst staff
- > the attention to morale of all staff
- > the extent to which the pupil voice is heard and responded to

Not only are these the features which make school a viable social institution, helping young people with a complex social present and future, they are also features of schools which show good attainment on public assessments.

Quality and Pastoral Care

Like many educational processes, pastoral care is complex and multi-dimensional. Our analysis will be helped by breaking it down into some manageable headings:



A cohering vision for pastoral work is central: there are many forces which can fragment it, and pressure the work into patterns which it was not designed for - the discipline fixation, watered-down welfare, administrivia. So it can be useful to begin with reviewing goals.

The following activity can be very useful, completed by individuals, teams or the whole staff.

Pastoral Goals of a school

Give your school a rating of 1 to 5 on how effectively it achieves each of the goals below (1 represents low achievement and 5 represents high achievement)

	Rating
(a) provides a point of personal contact with and between pupils	
(b) provides a point of personal contact with and between parents/carers	
(c) monitors pupil progress across the whole curriculum	
(d) offers support and guidance for pupil achievement	
(e) provides colleagues with information to adapt teaching	
(f) promotes a school which meets pupils' needs	
(g) encourages a caring and orderly environment	
(h) engages wider networks as appropriate	
(i) evaluates the effective achievement of these goals	

Exchange your ratings between colleagues, looking for both similarities and differences. Now consider the basis of your judgement. What led you to give a high rating? Are these some of the hallmarks in your view of quality?

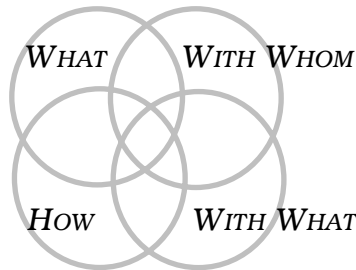
Pastoral care functions at a number of levels: individual pupils, groups of pupils, and the whole-school level. Clarifying these three facets can be useful in itself and can lead to ensuring that the appropriate practice is in place for each and all of them.

1. Pastoral Casework

A focus on individual pupils, their development, patterns of learning and achievement.

Monitoring, guidance and action on matters which affect learning and development

Skilled individual tutoring: reviewing, action planning, and support to progress



Tutor is key point of contact, with effective communication to other staff, parents ...

Time, space, communication channels, information and its analysis

When Pastoral Casework is of good quality

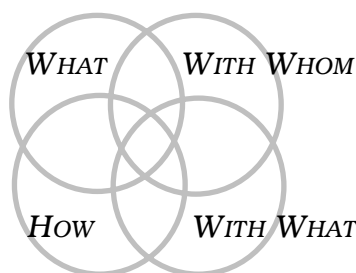
- ✓ pupils feel competent and empowered in handling work demands
- ✓ pupils know where personal concerns can be addressed and feel confident in approaching those sources
- ✓ teaching staff feel they have relevant knowledge of pupils they teach and know where to channel information
- ✓ parents have regular chances for discussing overall progress
- ✓ tutors feel engaged and supported in this aspect of their job: it is a source of professional satisfaction

2. Pastoral Dimension of the Curriculum

A focus on pupils and the personal-social skills they need: at school, for learning, out of school, in later life.

Aspects of developing self: bodily, sexual, social, vocational, moral/political; self as a learner, self in the organisation

Methods which promote active, collaborative, responsive approaches to learning, a variety of styles, developing learner responsibility.



Tutorial groupwork, specialist courses, specific subjects and all lessons are coordinated in a whole-school framework.

Time for team planning and review; teaching materials of good quality; human resources including those outside the school; opportunities for observation and exchange of practice

When the Pastoral Dimension of the Curriculum is of good quality

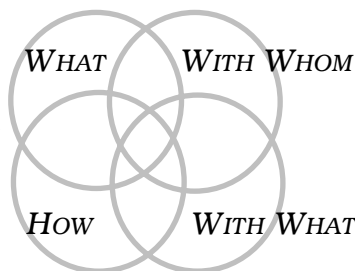
- ✓ pupils can reflect on their overall profile of learning
- ✓ transition and choice are well handled
- ✓ social relations and interpersonal issues are positive
- ✓ pupils' needs are heard and used in negotiating the curriculum
- ✓ pupils' voice is engaged in the teaching and learning methods
- ✓ teachers have a high focus on the process of classroom learning
- ✓ teachers can identify their contribution to a whole curriculum
- ✓ regular evaluation elicits teacher and pupil perspectives

3. Pastoral Management

A focus on the school, its curriculum, relations to parents, and its effectiveness in reaching its pastoral goals.

Disseminating the vision, and coordinating the elements. Ensuring the development of practice and vision. Evaluating goal achievement

Team-building, delegation, monitoring and review, development planning, appraisal and training



Roles are clear and understood, teams are composed effectively and there is appropriate linkage between them

Time for teams; information on individuals, groups, and curriculum; accommodation and support (secretarial, advisory, training); effective communication channels.

When Pastoral Management is of good quality

- ✓ there is trust and mutual respect between members
- ✓ there is positive involvement in change
- ✓ team meetings are professionally satisfying
- ✓ there is little “split” talk such as “pastoral/academic” “sides”
- ✓ whole-school issues are well mediated through the year team
- ✓ staff feel adequately prepared for their tasks

How do we know when we’re achieving the quality we seek?

Teachers rarely get credit for their full range of achievements: many important accomplishments do not reach the public domain. Steps towards correcting this can have positive impact on school climate and professional satisfaction.

A range of occasions can be used to highlight our own view of quality, thereby helping staff decide what it means, when it is achieved, when it is foregone. These occasions create the basis for moving forward.

Staff might agree what are the signs of high quality pastoral work: such performance indicators are not the same as outcomes. The preceding sections offer some candidates. These would not be used to impose further control (the sign of low-trust governance) but to increase communication and celebration.

How do we improve quality?

The analysis in this paper may provide a framework for identifying areas of improvement. Staff could agree the areas where development is needed in:

Overall Goals: are they clarified -> agreed -> articulated -> communicated?

Focused elements: which need attention?

	<i>Tasks</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Roles & relations</i>	<i>Resources</i>
<i>Casework</i>				
<i>Curriculum</i>				
<i>Management</i>				

This contributes to ongoing strategic planning of appropriate interventions: agreeing/reviewing tasks; training for skills; clarifying effective roles and relations; obtaining and networking resources.

Such improvement is likely to feel supportive and extending if it also relates to that final goal: regular evaluation of how we reach our goals.

Chris Watkins, 1997

¹ Pirsig R M (1976), *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Corgi Books.