

IPH Report from Ian Knight

“What was the role of leadership in driving the teaching and learning to provide a high quality experience for all learners?”

Formally and sincerely I wish to thank all the Principals, staff and students of the establishments I have had the opportunity to visit.

Universally I was greeted with courtesy and enthusiasm. Staff have spoken freely regarding their roles and associated challenges. Pupils have readily engaged in dialogue.

My observations were based upon visits to the following schools:

1. Mahamaya Girls College, Kandy
2. Nannapurawa School, Monaragala District
3. Medagama School, Monaragala District

Key school features – generic

- Overarching positive ethos of importance of education – for the individual and for the nation
- Pupils focussed upon their learning
- Motivated to attend, to be punctual
- Importance of retaining and promoting traditional culture
- Respect for authority and the system inbuilt within culture of country, not just the school
- Pupils’ pride in their uniform
- Conduct and behaviour of pupils universally good, reflective of system through which they progress
- Curriculum traditional, exam driven (terminal assessment)
- Limited examples of demonstrable VAK differentiation to learning styles
- Much didactic based teaching, in part reflecting limitations of pupil movement in crowded classes

- Significantly larger class sizes than would be the norm or tolerated in the UK – but good results achieved in city school
- By British standards quality of building stock and level of resourcing were poor, but any comparison must be contextualised
- Significant differences in level of resourcing between urban and rural schools
- Extracurricular provision, particularly in urban schools, was good especially sport related
- Significant opportunities for privately funded additional or boosted classes in urban areas
- Higher education opportunities very much limited in remoter rural areas due to accessibility and cost
- Specialist provision for pupils with learning difficulties was limited

Role and Impact of Principal

- Very much a figurehead, regarded with deference, particularly in urban school
- Evidence would suggest Principal, through necessity and particularly in larger schools, has more of a managerial or chief executive role as opposed to a leader of learning
- In schools with thousands of students, the Principal acknowledged that they were divorced from the day to day teaching and learning due to the simple logistics of running such a large organisation
- Management structures seemed to suggest that Assistant Principals and Subject Principals were far more intimately involved in the standards agenda
- Issue of Principals having no control over staff centrally allocated to their schools undoubtedly has an impact upon ability to raise standards. This is a particular concern in remoter areas where staff may be sent, possibly against their will
- Evidence from the urban school indicated little or no formalised networking or CPD for Principals organised by the state or government. Likely to be an even greater issue in more remote areas
- I believe in the case of the urban school, there was no form of Board of Governors. Additional strategic responsibility on shoulders of Principal and senior staff

- In larger, high profile urban schools, there is considerable cache and prestige in having a child on roll. Parental support in terms of resourcing, security etc, will, by inference, put additional pressure on the Principal
- My understanding is that Principals can be paid on one of three scales – according to experience, size of school and its profile. I would suggest, for career development, many of the best Principals would seek positions in the high profile, better resourced city schools
- At classroom level, class teachers were conscious of their individual accountability for standards and achievement

Impact on my own practice

- Reflect on levels of achievement and positive ethos in environment not on a par with minimum expectations in the UK
- Mechanism to create such an ordered environment, particularly in large schools
- Consideration of through school model in possible future restructuring via BSF programme
- Levels of active and effective student participation and engagement in the smooth running of the school
- Role of prefects and class leaders in reducing organisational burden on staff and, in so doing, creating pupils with far more confidence and positive outlook than would be the norm in UK establishments