**Outstanding secondary schools**

The characteristics of outstanding schools can be divided into six categories:

1. **Pupil learning and behaviour, including personalisation of learning, high expectations, individualised support and inclusion**

In outstanding schools, high expectations are placed on students. These schools have a broad range of packages tailored to fit students’ needs and the school context. Key indicators of school effectiveness include staff providing stimuli, challenge and pace in facilitating students’ learning, and students’ voices being listened to and acted upon by the school.

1. **School leadership and vision, including reflection, monitoring and effective governance**

School leadership is inspirational in providing clear vision and direction in outstanding schools. ‘At the heart of all good to outstanding schools is good leadership and the support for, and development of, good and outstanding leaders is crucial to school improvement.’ Outstanding schools know themselves well and evaluate their provision and performance in a robust and inclusive manner.

1. **Teaching, the curriculum and assessment**

A relevant and attractive curriculum reduces behaviour problems, and outstanding schools work to develop curricula which engage and support all their students

**Excellent teachers** should:

• be willing to take a leading role in developing workplace policies and practice and in promoting collective responsibility for their implementation

• research and evaluate innovative practices and draw on research outcomes and other sources of external evidence to inform their own practice and that of colleagues

• have a critical understanding of the most effective teaching, learning and behaviour management strategies, including how to select and use approaches that personalise learning to provide opportunities for all learners to achieve their potential

• know how to improve the effectiveness of assessment practice in the workplace, including how to analyse statistical information to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning across the school

* have an extensive and deep knowledge and understanding of their subjects/curriculum areas and related pedagogy, gained for example through involvement in wider professional networks associated with their subjects/curriculum areas

• have extensive knowledge on matters concerning equality, inclusion and diversity in teaching

• have teaching skills which lead to excellent results and outcomes

• demonstrate excellent and innovative pedagogic practice

• demonstrate excellent ability to assess and evaluate.

In terms of assessment, one of the key indicators of school effectiveness is the setting of challenging targets and the good use of arrangements for assessing and tracking pupils’ progress to raise standards’ The school acknowledges the importance of personalised learning if pupils are to fulfil their potential: ‘the most powerful lever we can pull at the moment to achieve personalised learning is assessment for learning’.

1. **Continuing professional development of teachers**

Outstanding schools take very seriously the induction and continuing professional development of their workforce. In particular, they develop systems for identifying the needs and aspirations of the different parts of the workforce, including effective performance management, appraisal and reflection against professional and occupational standards

1. **Relationships within school and with those outside school, including support services**

Building and retaining links with parents and local communities is integral to raising aspirations and ambitions for children in outstanding schools. Evidence suggests that parental engagement outstrips every other single factor – including social class, ethnicity and disability – in its impact on attainment. In order to improve and sustain improvement over time, schools need to build and nurture the sense of a professional learning community

1. **School culture, ethos and values**

Outstanding schools demonstrate a positive overall ethos and consistently promote community cohesion. Schools which improve continuously invest in the life of the school as a learning community, where members are constantly striving to seek new ways of improving their practice. School improvement is a process of changing a school’s culture. To create sustainable school improvement, there must first be an understanding of the culture that exists in the school; secondly, the right decisions must be taken on strategies for change and development to match the school’s particular context

**In more detail**

* In outstanding schools, leadership is inspirational in providing clear vision and direction. Leaders who take a school from good to outstanding focus on: raising attainment and accelerating progress; improving the quality of teaching and learning; improving the conditions for learning; and developing the school as a professional learning community.
* Outstanding schools place high expectations on all their students. They have a broad range of curricula to engage and support students, personalised to accommodate individual aptitudes and needs.
* Outstanding schools insist on excellence in the quality of classroom teaching, and have systems in place which mean that leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of all the teaching staff. They operate an evidence-based approach to what is happening in classrooms. If staff teach less than very well, arrangements are in place to offer support. At the same time, outstanding schools have a relaxed collegiate culture in which teaching and classroom management ideas are shared unselfishly and problems acknowledged without fear of blame.
* One of the key indicators of school effectiveness, firmly in place in outstanding schools, is the setting of challenging targets and the good use of arrangements for assessing and tracking pupils’ progress. These arrangements are supported by sophisticated information technology to which all relevant staff have access.
* Outstanding schools are highly inclusive, having regard for the educational progress, personal development and well-being of every student.
* Senior leaders make sure that the professional development of all staff, teaching and non-teaching, is relevant, continuous and of high quality. Most of this professional development takes place in school.
* Building and retaining links with parents and local communities is integral to raising aspirations and ambitions for children in outstanding schools. They are also broad in their outlook, for example by having links with schools in other countries. Outstanding schools may well take on a responsibility to support other schools which need to improve.
* A key difference between being a good school and being an outstanding school involves going beyond tight quality controls towards the quality assurance of a self-confident, self-critical community in which learning is interactive and permanent.
* They excel at what they do, not just occasionally but for a high proportion of the time.
* They prove constantly that disadvantage need not be a barrier to achievement; that speaking English as an additional language can support academic success and that schools really can be learning communities.
* They put students first, invest in their staff and nurture their communities.
* They have strong values and high expectations that are applied consistently and never relaxed.
* They fulfil individual potential through providing outstanding teaching, rich opportunities for learning, and encouragement and support for each student.
* They are highly inclusive, having complete regard for the educational progress, personal development and well-being of every student.
* Their achievements do not happen by chance, but by highly reflective, carefully planned and implemented strategies which serve these schools well in meeting the many challenges which obstruct the path to success.
* They operate with a very high degree of internal consistency.
* They are constantly looking for ways to improve further.
* They have outstanding and well-distributed leadership.

**Achieving excellence**

* Having vision, values and high expectations
* Attracting, recruiting, retaining and developing staff
* Establishing disciplined learning and consistent staff behaviour
* Assuring the quality of teaching and learning
* Leading, and building leadership capacity
* Providing a relevant and attractive curriculum
* Assessment, progress-tracking and target-setting
* Inclusion: students as individuals

**Sustaining excellence**

* Continuity of leadership
* Maintaining a strong team culture
* Continually developing teaching and learning
* Developing leaders
* Enriching the curriculum
* Improving literacy
* Building relationships with students, parents and the community
* No student left behind

**Sharing excellence**

* System leadership
* Partnering another school facing difficulties and improving it
* Acting as community leader to broker relationships across other schools
* Developing and leading a successful school improvement partnership
* Working as a change agent or expert leader: National Leaders of Education

**Turning round a failing school**

**Before the change of headteacher, the school:**

■ was comfortable and happy

■ had a strong pastoral system, though this was heavily reliant on personalities of postholders rather than systems

■ had little culture of change and improvement

■ had a questionable work ethic, for example a head of faculty working too hard made staff feel guilty and disapproved of by their line manager

■ set expectations around happy, well-adjusted students, with little discussion of whether they should also achieve higher academic levels

■ had a well-liked headteacher who was very easygoing, genial and supportive, but not challenging, often absent, and who allowed poor staff to remain in post.

**The new headteacher**:

■ faced initial staff resentment; belief that the school was happy and successful and did not need to change

■ gradually changed the culture over a few years; did not do too much too soon

■ retained what was good

■ maintained a relentlessly positive attitude; showed incredible energy

■ was a lateral thinker; prepared to take a gamble

■ had a very ‘can do’ attitude: said ‘yes’ wherever possible

■ was prepared to tackle difficult issues, for example weeding out poor staff

■ trusted and motivated staff

■ was approachable and relaxed

■ made good use of promotion to bring alienated staff onside

■ used the wider senior leadership team to involve more staff as leaders.

**Those aspiring to be outstanding headteachers should develop the following:**

* moral confidence based on deeply held personal beliefs
* significant relationships with a wide network of fellow professionals
* a real understanding of how to learn from experience
* a willingness to learn from students
* clarity and confidence about what works in terms of professional learning
* openness to learning from the example of other school leaders
* confidence in learning how to learn

**Effective school self-evaluation has the following characteristics**:

• robust and comprehensive analysis and interpretation of performance data across all aspects of the school

• appropriate target-setting, tracking and intervention strategies, that at any given point can give an accurate picture of the progress of individual children across all areas of development

• effective systems for collecting and analysing the views of key stakeholders, including children, their families, the range of the children’s workforce and the wider community, together with mechanisms for addressing the outcomes in a school’s improvement or development plan

• clear systems for judging the quality of teaching and its impact on learning, together with focused workforce development strategies to improve the skills and impact of the workforce

• dynamic improvement planning which focuses on the key actions to be taken to address areas for development, is based on a clear link between activity and impact, and is constantly reframed in the light of evidence of impact