

Building Schools for the Future: the 3 Rs **Tim Byles, Chief Executive, Partnerships for Schools**

BETT 2008

Thank you for coming along today to find out more about the Building Schools for the Future programme in England. The great thing about BETT is that it gives us all the opportunity to hear in detail from the experts – be they the educationalists whose work underpins transformational programmes such as BSF; the cutting-edge technology companies with their latest ideas for making learning interactive and inspiring; or my own colleagues from Partnerships for Schools talking about the challenges and solutions to delivering the BSF programme, a programme which will truly change the face of education in this country forever.

What I am going to do in today's session is focus on the basics, the **3 Rs** of BSF, if you like:

- Firstly, the **reason** for this unprecedented programme, the biggest strategic capital investment in education we have ever seen, and the most ambitious project to transform education since Queen Victoria was on the throne.
- Secondly, the **recognition** that BSF can and will make a difference to the life chances of millions of young people, with studies already starting to show the green shoots of success in early projects.
- And thirdly, the **roll-out** of BSF, our plans for 2008 and the coming years.

The reason

So why BSF and why now? Since the concept of universal free schooling was recognised, every generation's political figures, so it seems, has identified education as being central to the health, wealth and general well-being of society. Throughout time leaders have, quite rightly, placed education at the heart of the political agenda, and Tony Blair spoke for them all when he cited 'education, education, education' as being top priorities for the country.

Since becoming Prime Minister, Gordon Brown has clearly signalled his commitment to education, naming it his 'passion' and, more generally, the importance of the total well-being of all young people no matter what their background. He personally opened the first brand new BSF school in Bristol last September, and he has on a number of occasions spoken about the doors that education opened for him.

It is a vision he has long championed, where every young person is given the opportunity to identify and develop their own talent and potential; where every young person has something which they can give to the good of the community.

And his personal commitment to the BSF programme is crystal clear. So it is in this environment – with the weight of government firmly behind a raft of reforms which will see major changes to how and where we educate the next generation, not only to be better workers, but better citizens – that BSF is operating.

Back in 1997, capital investment in schools in 1997 was under £700m – by contrast annual capital investment will rise to £8.2 billion in 2011 – a seven-fold real terms increase.

The **reason** why this investment is so vital at this point in time becomes clear when you consider that only around 14% of our school buildings have been built since 1976. That means millions of pupils are being taught in school buildings from the 1950s, 60s or early 70s – some even older. These buildings were expected to have a design life of around 35 years at most. But young people today are still receiving their secondary education in buildings where their parents, maybe even grandparents, were taught.

Teaching and learning — and the world – has moved on since those days. When I was at school the thought of having IT lessons, let alone using computers in every lesson, seemed like the stuff of science fiction. Now most of us here today will have been ‘liberated’ from our offices by the BlackBerry and Wi-Fi which allows us to work any time, any place, anywhere (although I hope there’s not too much BlackBerry activity during this session). In the same way today’s young people want to learn in different ways and at different times.

While it comes as no surprise to anyone with teenagers, scientific research has recently suggested that the circadian rhythms of teens are different from the rest of us, making it biologically difficult for them to be at their best in the morning. According to neuroscience then, the typical morose and sulky ‘Kevin the teenager’ is someone who deserves our understanding, sympathy and help more than an early morning alarm call.

A recent snapshot of the gadget-life of youngsters showed that 77% of 11 to 16 year olds are online every day – 93% of them saying they use the computer to help with their homework.

The fact is that the schools in which most young people in England are being taught were built for a very different kind of education in a very different world.

We no longer expect, or want, our children to sit at one desk within the same four walls. As you will have seen here at BETT, we champion interaction and discussion; we encourage a variety of ways to learn from individual tasks to large group working; and we aspire to the broad and innovative use of IT - not only in the tried and tested core subjects, but in sport and fitness, art and music.

So our schools estate – which is drastically in need of updating – will over the lifetime of this programme be brought into the 21st century. Being able to

ensure that we can provide safe, welcoming and stimulating centres of learning for decades to come is therefore one of the main **reasons** for this programme.

But BSF is about much more than just bricks and mortar or simply replacing old with new. If that were the case, my job would be a much easier one.

Instead this unprecedented programme is finding a new solution, a 21st century solution, to providing 3,500 new or remodelled secondary schools for England's 3.3 million students; so that the teaching profession has a workplace which encourages them to be the most inspirational teachers they can be; and so that schools reclaim their place at the centre of every community, a vibrant and cherished facility used well beyond the school day.

BSF therefore recognises that the schools we build now - the schools of the future - will be used in different ways and by different groups. We are literally having to re-define the word 'school'. Indeed some BSF projects are already doing this. For example in Knowsley, which will no longer have 'schools' – but instead seven new and innovative Learning Centres, the name itself already demonstrating that these buildings and their resources will be available to all.

Local authorities are thinking more than ever about getting maximum use – and value for taxpayers' money – from new facilities. The co-location of other services, which I'll talk about more a little later, is just one way of ensuring that our new centres of learning are used 365 days a year, not just the 180-or so days of the school year.

Central to the success of the BSF programme is the concept of educational transformation. But what does that actually mean? Instead of asking, as we once did, 'what do we want this school to look like?' BSF provokes us to ask – and find answers to - a whole new set of questions. Questions like:

- What sort of skills and behaviours do we want young people to emerge with as they enter adulthood?
- How can every pupil benefit from individual learning plans, and where is the best place for them to study?
- How can we weave ICT into all areas of the curriculum?
- What flexibility needs to be in-built to ensure that the space works at all times and for all users?

It's never too soon for local authorities to start the dialogue with schools, students and the local community as they embark on the BSF process. And not to ask the question: what do you want your school to look like, but rather how do you want people in your area to learn now and for decades to come?

This is important if what is delivered – and what lives on for future generations – are schools that are really owned by the community; delivering what they need and embodying their aspirations.

We recognise that BSF projects are large infrastructure endeavours that require strong links across a range of Government policies. That's why PfS has brought together a number of other key partners in the educational sector, particularly NCSL, QCA, TDA, Becta and the Innovations Unit, to work together to align educational policy within BSF local authorities.

Through this we anticipate being able to join together the energy and effort on curriculum and workforce reform, school leadership and ICT development along with BSF capital funding so that in the local context a real, transformational, step-change, is brought about. We call this our 'innovation zone' work and we are currently trialling it in two local authorities, Knowsley and Sheffield, with a view to developing it further over the next 12 months.

We are finally emerging from the shadows of earlier PFI school schemes which lacked the framework we now have in place to make sure the right school gets built in the right place. Before a local authority even receives a penny of taxpayers' money through BSF, we need to be convinced that the right size school is being built in the right location, and with the right design and features to support the school's vision for education and specialisation.

To do this we have created a new breed of public private partnership, the Local Education Partnership – or LEP – which is already proving to be an extremely efficient and flexible procurement vehicle. I mentioned the co-location of other services earlier, and we are finding that the LEP is proving to be the key that can unlock wider regeneration opportunities in local areas.

The long-term exclusive relationship between private partner and the public sector – usually for 10 years – has additional commercial incentives stitched into the fabric of this innovative PPP model. The LEP is sufficiently flexible to procure wider local services beyond BSF schools. We are already seeing the possibility of BSF being the lever for community cohesion, building schools at the intersection of faith communities for use by all members of these communities; for social housing; for community-use leisure facilities. We are seeing co-located community policing, health services, adult education facilities. The possibilities are varied and open to exploration and innovation by local authorities.

Recognition

While it's still early days for the programme, we are beginning to see what this new educational environment feels like and receive **recognition** for the benefits stemming from new facilities and new approaches.

Good design is crucial in raising aspiration, behaviour and possibly even attainment in pupils. Good design, thoughtful design, is therefore at the heart of BSF. Every brick and pane of glass, every internal and external space, every piece of furniture, the installation and integration of ICT, all of this has been carefully thought about and is there for a reason.

Many of our existing schools provide ample opportunities for bullies and anti-

social behaviour with their gloomy corridors and out-of-the-way toilet blocks. BSF is designing out these black spots. Our aspiration is for more of our schools to embody the best design elements of schools like the Bristol Brunel Academy.

Its wide, bright, light-filled corridors run the full length of the building and provide vantage points for passive staff supervision.

Teachers there tell us that students rarely run along this corridor, it's a relatively quiet and calm space, and as a result the tensions and fights which often break-out in these spaces has been reduced dramatically.

But you don't just have to take my word for the positive effects BSF is already having. Young people and staff have already **recognised** the benefits, after just a few weeks in their brand new BSF school.

Public **recognition** that teachers and pupils are enthusiastic about BSF came last month with the publication of the first independent evaluation report into the BSF, conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

In it those questioned were upbeat about the impact new schools will have on transforming education, leading to improved teaching and learning, and the potential for better behaviour and performance.

The report includes the sobering fact that only 11 per cent of students said they felt inspired by their current learning environment – that means around nine out of 10 children are spending the vast majority of their waking hours in a building from which they can't wait to escape.

And it's a similar story for teachers. They said that in many cases classrooms are not fit-for-purpose; that schools have been badly remodelled over the years; classrooms are damp and smelly and they personally spend too long dealing with problems caused by poor lighting, inadequate heating, and noise levels rather than doing what they want to do, and what they're paid to do, that is teach young people.

You can see here just some of the findings from this first independent evaluation:

- Only 20% of headteachers think that current school buildings raise pupils' aspirations.
- 87% of headteachers said BSF will promote/accommodate a wide range of learning styles.
- 84% of headteachers said BSF will improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school.
- 56% of headteachers think their current building doesn't create a sense of ownership by community

- 44% of headteachers think parents not proud of the current school

Looking specifically at ICT, the evaluation tells us that existing investment and infrastructure is already contributing positively to the educational experience in most schools. But staff are clearly excited by the opportunities it affords for greater personalised learning, more engaging lessons, and the possibility for far-reaching changes in teaching styles, as well as the potential for improved pupil monitoring and enhanced communication between schools and home – such as the ‘real-time’ reporting we heard about this week.

So finally, to the third of my 3 Rs, the **roll-out** of the programme to date and what the coming year has in store for BSF.

- There will be 3,500 new or remodelled schools over the lifetime of the programme.
- First brand new BSF school – Bristol Brunel Academy – opened by the Prime Minister in September 2007.
- A further 11 will open by spring, around 30 due to open this calendar year.
- Looking forward to the opening of our first brand new SEN school in Lambeth this spring.
- Back in November 2006, just one scheme had reached financial close. That figure has now reached 15, worth over £2.5 billion. Four projects – including our first joint authority project – closed in December alone
- More than 70 local authorities now engaged in BSF, with 15 authorities in Wave 6 joining from this month.
- Every local authority in England will be engaged in the programme by 2015.

As stewards of the programme as a whole, PfS is always looking for new ways to ensure that we deliver this ambitious project in as efficient, cost-effective and timely manner as possible.

With this focus on self-improvement in mind, over the past year, we have made a number of adjustments to the pre-procurement phase of the process to ensure that more authorities are ready to hit the ground running when they formally enter the BSF programme.

As a result of earlier engagement by local authorities, we have seen the pre-procurement phase reduced by around 6 months. In 2008 our attention will turn to procurement.

With that in mind, we are due next month to share the feedback from some very interesting stakeholder workshops held at the end of last year, looking at three specific aspects of the procurement process: design, ICT and the LEP, and how we can increase the pace of the programme, keep costs to a minimum and, overall, ensure that we make the very most of this opportunity to transform education in the 21st century.

I said at the outset, that BSF is much more than just a large scale building programme. I do not want our legacy to be measured in bricks and mortar, but by our success in providing inspiring learning environments for citizens of the 21st century; by our success in raising aspirations and improving the life chances of young people and communities across the country.

Thank you.