
E d u c a t i o n

No.307

ISSN: 1741-9867

Friday 4 April 2008

Children's Plan launched by DCSF and LAs

The Government has announced the next steps in the implementation of the Children's Plan, with packages investing in play, youth facilities and children's workforce. At a conference organised by the DCSF with the Association of Directors of Children's Services, Children and Schools Secretary Ed Balls announced spending of £73 million in training, recruitment and professional development of social workers. He also announced £305 million to help achieve the target of having a graduate Early Years professional in every full day care setting by 2015, and £7.5 million for the play workforce.

Ministers announced plans for a new expert group, which will bring together champions from different parts of the workforce: unions, representative organisations and people who provide frontline services. The group will work with the Government to develop a long-term strategy to support and develop people who work with children and help provide a high quality of personalised and integrated services.

Under the £235 million of spending laid out in the Children's Plan, the Government plans to invest in an extra 3,500 play areas and will give 30 local authorities £2 million each to build new adventure playgrounds. Launching the consultation document, *Fair Play: A consultation on the play strategy*, Children's Secretary Ed Balls and Culture Secretary Andy Burnham also vowed to help tackle bullying and crime in play areas and other public spaces, improve road safety and work with town planners and developers to create more child friendly public spaces, ending the 'no ball games' culture.

Close relationship

The close relationship between the Government and the ADCS was reflected in the comments of Maggie Atkinson, direct of children's services in Gateshead and the new president of ADCS. She said that the conference was "an example of partnership in practice at the most senior level, working to ensure that schools are at the heart of the new integrated children's services". Local authorities are aware that the leaders of some of the teacher unions feel that the move from education to children's services departments has made local authorities less effective in supporting schools. The amount of time invested in this conference by ministers and senior civil servants would suggest that the Government is determined to back the local authorities in what has been for many a difficult adjustment to make.

The Schools Secretary, Ed Balls, spent half the day at the conference, talking to DCSs after his brief speech, which was followed by an hour of questions facilitated by John Coughlan, DCS Hampshire and the outgoing joint president of ADCS, and John Schultz, chief executive of Stockport council.

Four of the five ministers at the DCSF were present, with Jim Knight there on film. Health junior minister Ann Keen made an appearance. The three main directors general of the DCSF, Ralph Tabberer (Schools), Tom Jeffries (Children) and Lesley Longstone (Youth) were also there. Most DCSs from across England attended, as did about 30 local authority chief executives and a range of representatives from the voluntary sector and the teacher unions. A team of about 20 media studies students from Croydon's schools were there to work the ITC equipment. John Freeman, outgoing joint president of ADCS, summed up the mood when he said the day had been a practical demonstration of the partnership promised in the Children Plan.

John Chowcat, Aspect general secretary, said: "Graduate Early Years Professionals in Aspect will welcome the additional resources as will our members who manage and provide high professional services across the children's services and education improvement sector."

Teachers vote to strike, inspectors may do the same

Members of the National Union of Teachers have voted in favour of a strike over pay. The one-day strike, which is to take place on 24 April, follows a postal vote of three-to-one in favour, with 48,217 for and 15,884 against. The NUT wants the 2.45% pay rise for 2008 lifted at least above inflation. General secretary Steve Sinnott said: "I call on the Government to think again and ensure that salaries at least keep pay in line with inflation and that there is a recognition of the continuing workload pressures on teachers. The consequences of real term pay cuts are familiar to us. They were a feature of the 'boom and bust' years before 1997. In that period schools suffered from recruitment and retention problems – there were teacher shortages and morale was low. The NUT wants no return to those bad old days."

Other teacher associations, in particular the Association of School and College Leaders which represents heads and other senior management team members, were less than supportive. John Dunford, general secretary of ASCL, criticised the move saying that the pay offer was a reasonable one in the circumstances. Ironically, the one group most likely to support the NUT are Ofsted inspectors who are also balloting for industrial action over pay.

School inspectors could strike in protest at what they claim are longer hours and unfair pay. At least 1,000 inspectors and other workers at Ofsted will receive a postal ballot for industrial action, after pay talks broke down when Ofsted "imposed" a below-inflation pay for three years on inspectors. Unison and the Public and Commercial Services Union said the inspectorate had proposed a two per cent rise between 1 August 2007 and this year, and a one per cent rise for the two years after that. This, they said, amounted to inspectors "being pushed to breaking point" by working harder for less money. Helga Pile, Unison's national officer for Ofsted, said: "Our members are crucial to ensuring that every infant at nursery or teenager in care is properly looked after and educated. To work effectively this system needs to be properly funded. It's high time the government and Ofsted finally realised this."

Govt. initiative invites children to come over to Myplace

Young people in England are to be provided with safe and exciting places to spend their leisure time, thanks to a new government initiative. Launched by Beverley Hughes, the minister for children, young people and families, the Lottery-funded Myplace scheme will see £190 million invested over the next three years in ambitious projects driven by the active participation of young people. It is hoped these projects will provide places where all young people can engage in a wide range of positive activities such as sport, dance and music. Research commissioned on behalf of the DCSF recently found that 60% of 13 to 16-year-olds spent the hours of 4pm to 6pm getting bored, with 80% regularly spending this after-school period in front of the television. But 67% stated however that they'd like to take part in more after-school activities.

DIUS scheme encourages universities to boost fund raising

Universities are being encouraged to boost their fundraising efforts and stimulate further investment in higher education through the Government's Voluntary Giving initiative. Under the scheme, universities and colleges working to secure cash donations and extra financial support from individuals and private investors could win a share of a £200 million match-funding scheme.

Following a consultation with the higher education sector, the scheme will operate on a three-tier basis designed to allow institutions to set their own fundraising aspirations. The top tier will be funded on a 3:1 private to public funding ratio, the second 2:1 and the third on a 1:1 basis. This would mean, for example, that a university in the second tier that raises £4 million would receive an extra £2 million from the Government.

Govt. announces creation of new qualifications watchdog

A new agency for developing curriculum, assessment and qualifications is to be created, under plans announced by the Government. Children's secretary Ed Balls revealed that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) will be reformed as the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA), subject to parliamentary approval. He also announced the appointment of Kathleen Tattersall OBE as the first Chair of the regulator of qualifications and examinations (Ofqual). The new independent watchdog will act as the independent guardian of standards across the qualifications, tests and exam system in England. Ms Tattersall is the chair of the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors.

Tuition fee hike could put poorest teenagers off university

The poorest teenagers could be put off going to university if the Government agrees to another hike in tuition fees, the Higher Education Policy Institute has said. Its latest report expresses concern that, when the Government commissions a review of funding and support in 2009, the current subsidy for poorer students will not be continued. Some universities want the £3,000 fees limit to rise to up to £8,000, but HEPI says that increasing fees by up to £4,000 would hit the poorest hardest. The National Union of Students wants to see a more open review that goes beyond the simple question of what level the fee cap should be set at.

Government launches latest consultation on 14-19 reforms

Hundreds of popular BTEC and City and Guilds courses are to be axed as part of the Government's plans to streamline qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds. Launching a consultation on proposals for achieving the education framework set out in the 14 to 19 Education and Skills White Paper, the Government has laid out four qualifications bands. These are diplomas, GCSEs and A-Levels, apprenticeships, and a "foundation learning tier" of core subjects, such as English and maths, which would be taken by all pupils. The foundation learning tier will consist of courses currently being designed by the QCA for pupils who were not ready for diplomas, GCSEs or apprenticeships. The proposals would also include a new body, the Joint Advisory Committee on Qualification Approval.

14-19 reforms will see Blair's baccalaureate pledge dropped

Ministers have admitted that the Government will drop Tony Blair's pledge for every student to be able to do an international baccalaureate, under its recently announced 14 to 19 reforms. After announcing its intention to introduce four tiers of qualifications, the Government conceded that the baccalaureate could be withdrawn completely following a review of the exams system in 2013. Despite this, a spokesman for the International Baccalaureate Organisation insisted that the demand for the qualification would continue to grow with or without government funding. The reforms were widely seen as promoting the importance of the diploma and hastening the demise of the A-Level as the gold-standard qualification.

Ministers launch crackdown on admissions code criminals

Ministers have launched a crackdown on covert selection in schools, after it was revealed that as many as one in three schools could be breaking admissions laws. Children's secretary Ed Balls published a breakdown of admissions criteria in three areas in England, which showed that 96 out of 570 schools had broken the code. One north London school had asked parents to commit to paying £895 a term when they applied, and another had demanded £650. The Government is seeking an amendment to the latest Education Bill that will give more powers to the schools adjudicator. It wants local authorities to submit annual reports to the adjudicator, who would then enforce the code if schools were still breaking it.

EDUCATION JOURNAL

For professionals in children's services and learning at every stage

As the Government announces the abolition of the LSC, the current issue of *Education Journal*, No.109, includes a number of articles on the latest developments in 14 to 19 provision.

- Ian Nash reports that cuts in further education mean that the Government is penalising the “nearly poor” due to lack of entitlement to welfare benefits or support with college fees. He observes the dual standards adopted between FE and HE. While there is a distinction between adult “education” and adult “skills” in further education, with money overwhelmingly spent on so-called economically relevant courses, there is not such distinction or constraint on academic freedom when cash is handed over for higher education.
 - Personalised learning and e-assessment. Jon Williamson and Marian Sainsbury of NFER write about the launch of *i-nfer plan*, which helps a teacher to determine the level a pupil has reached within a particular area of the curriculum.
 - Chris Markham of Portsmouth University writes about his research on unlocking hidden feelings in school children who have speech and language difficulties.
- Muriel Green of the further education body the Quality Improvement Agency writes about the progress that has been made in the organisation's Skills for Life Improvement Programme and QIA's imminent merger with the Centre for Excellence in Leadership.

In the same issue areas of change in primary and early years provision are explored.

- Mike Baker reports on the numerous school reforms taking place in 2008, focusing on the recently announced review of the primary curriculum and the continuation of the *Making Good Progress* pilot. There is also the introduction of diplomas, the phased start of the key stage 3 curriculum changes, major reforms to A-levels and the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Diane Hofkins is also interested in the Early Years Foundation Stage, believing that its principles could be extended through the infant years. She reports on the Government's announcement that former chief primary HMI Sir Jim Rose will be heading a review of the 5 to 11 curriculum.

Education Journal is published by the Education Publishing Company Ltd.,
Devonia House, 4 Union Terrace, Crediton, Devon, EX17 3DY. Tel: 01363 774455.

Careers advice ‘often patchy and outdated’, claims inquiry

Careers advice for young people and adults is in need of serious improvement, according to research. The findings from a six month inquiry by the Skills Commission into information, advice and guidance (IAG) services in England reveal a system of careers advice that is patchy and often outdated. The publication of its report coincides with an overhaul in funding of careers advice that will see local authorities becoming responsible for the provision of advice and guidance for young people. The report recommends re-evaluating IAG services; making sure that people have better access to improved websites and forums where they can find information about training routes; and making it a statutory duty that learning providers deliver careers education to young people up to the age of eighteen.

OCR launches site to help teachers through GCSE changes

The Oxford Cambridge and RSA exam board has announced the launch of www.GCSEchanges.com, a resource designed to provide knowledge and support for teachers involved in the GCSE change process. As part of the 14 to 19 reforms, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has revised subject criteria for GCSEs. OCR has therefore launched www.GCSEchanges.com as an information portal and regular guide for teachers and those making specification decisions for their school or college. Highlights of the website include an explanation of the changes being made and the implications for teaching; draft specifications of all GCSE subjects available to download; and email alerts on the latest 14 to 19 information.

New chairman appointed for languages diplomas

Dr Terry Lamb has been appointed chairman of the development partnership for the new Languages diploma. Dr Lamb is senior lecturer in education at the University of Sheffield. He is a leading EU expert on intercultural education. He previously spent 16 years teaching languages in secondary schools. A former president of the Association for Language Learning, he was a member of the government’s National Languages Steering Group. He is a governor of CILT, the National Centre for Languages.

Dr Lamb said: “I am delighted to be taking up this key role in the development of the Diploma in Languages. The new Diploma represents a unique opportunity to raise the profile of language learning in schools and colleges, and to encourage more young people to take up and continue the study of languages. Language learning and cultural awareness are absolutely vital for success in our increasingly globalized lives, and the new Diploma will encourage young people to develop high-quality language skills and intercultural awareness, taught in innovative and exciting ways, which they can then apply in real-life contexts.

The appointment was welcomed by GoSkills, the Sector Skills Council for Passenger Transport. Its chief executive, Peter Huntington, said: “This languages qualification is going to open up new exciting prospects for our young people and is a really valuable opportunity for appropriate employers in the passenger transport industries, as well as in other sectors, to put languages at the forefront of their skills agenda.”

Skills shortages continue to pose problems

Over half (53%) of organisations say their learning and development work has not yet been influenced by the government’s post-Leitch skills agenda, according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development’s annual learning and development survey. Only 13% have signed the Employer Skills Pledge, despite the majority of organisations reporting that they will require a broader range of skills in two years and 44% reporting that they will also require a higher level of skills. However, there is some positive news for the government looking forward: nearly half of employers report that they are considering or would consider signing up to the Employer Skills Pledge or the “Train to Gain” initiative.

Brian Stevens, Director of FEdS Consultancy Ltd and Signposter Ltd.

We are at a significant moment in the huge cultural change that is underway in the relationship between employers, the Government and Education. We have a cultural divide in this country that we have been puzzling over for the last century and a half – certainly since shortly after the Great Exhibition of 1851, at which Britain celebrated its world leadership in innovating, designing and manufacturing. Yet only just over a decade later, at the Paris Exhibition of 1867, this country failed to win any awards – prompting Sir Lyon Playfair to write to the RSA about the lack “of good industrial education” compared to France, Belgium, Switzerland, Prussia and Austria.

The RSA celebrated its 250th anniversary only three years ago. Yet we tend to forget that the RSA is in fact The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce and that the Victoria and Albert Museum was established to show the necessary and effective links between thinking, designing and making. How did this divide between thinker and doer develop, that is so shot through our cultural attitudes? It is quite foreign to any other country.

The 3 Rs as we know them today resulted from a speech in 1795 by Sir William Curtis, then MP for the City of London (and its Lord Mayor) who was publicly mocked for his inability to spell, carried in those days much more significance. For they formed a triangle of reading and writing, arithmetic and reckoning (the ability to calculate accurately and to judge) and wrighting and wroughting (that is, the ability to make – as in wheelwright, shipwright, cartwright and the fashioning of metal).

Even now, high on the wall above the Chairman’s position in the Courtroom of the Bank of England, is a wind dial linked to a wind vane on the roof. By noting the direction and force of the wind, the Court could judge when the next ship would dock in the Pool of London and so fix interest rates. To this day too you will find a wooden plaque in the primary school of St Mary Clyst, just south of Exeter, dated 1705, which sets out the triangle there as Reading /Writing, Arithmetic/ Reckoning and Navigation.

Sir Lyon’s outburst led to a series of Royal Commissions, typified by a *Punch* cartoon, published in the latter part of the 19th century entitled “The schoolmaster of the future – and the sooner we get him the better”. The British workman with his bag of tools over his back confronts the schoolmaster, inevitably wearing a gown and sitting behind a raised desk on a dais with a timid, shy schoolboy in front of him, saying “bother your ‘ologies and ‘ometries, let *me* teach him something useful”. Yet steadily, since the mid-19th century, we have developed a culture that divides thinker from craftsman, academic from vocational and trade from learning. We are the only country in the world that has Chartered Institutes. The Victorian universities would not contemplate that learning could be associated with trade.

For the last two to three decades in particular - since Jim Callaghan’s Great Debate of 1976 and Industry Year in 1986 - a huge range of activity has taken place to try to redress the balance. Yet our cultural oil tanker is only partly into its turn. This is about social equality as well as employment; we cannot afford, socially or economically, to leave potential untapped. FEdS want to respond to this continued challenge – from the point of view of business. There has not yet been developed a mechanism to sustain serious debate on these issues with Government and Education. We have nearly always been reactive.

That old triangle hit a balance we have not re-defined in practice. The Tomlinson Review recommendations went close to it. The new diplomas have been fenced off from it by not only maintaining the A-levels and GCSEs but by even re-modelling the A-levels to coincide with the launch of the diplomas.

The Signposter Programme is built entirely with the spirit of the original three Rs in mind, and also with the spirit of Christine Gilbert’s personalising of learning as a key driver. (See the link below.)

- A fuller version of this opinion piece can be found in *Education Journal* No.108.

Document round-up

The Department of Children, Schools and Families published *Foundation Stage Profile Results in England: 2006-07* on 27 March 2008. This statistical first release contains national and local authority level results for the foundation stage profile assessments for 2007. This statistical first release contains national and local authority level results for the foundation stage profile assessments for 2007. Ref: SFR32/2007. Download free from www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000752/index.shtml

The DCSF also published *Level Two and Three Attainment by Young People in England Measured Using Matched Administrative Data: Attainment by age 19 in 2007* on 1 April 2008. This statistical first release includes statistics on the attainment of young people aged 19 in 2007, showing the proportion of young people qualified to at least levels two and three by age and by cohort. Ref: SFR04/2008. Download free from www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000774/index.shtml

The DCSF also published *Primary and Secondary School Admissions and Appeals: A guide for parents* on 2 April 2008. This guide will help parents through the school admissions process and clear up any confusion about how it works. It also covers the appeals process. <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk>

The DCSF also published *Promoting Achievement, Valuing Success: A strategy for 14-19 qualifications* on 31 March 2008. This Green Paper seeks views on proposals for how the Government should move to achieve the vision set out in the 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper. Ref: Cm7354. ISBN: 9780101735421. £13.90. Visit www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations Deadline: 23/06/08.

The DCSF and the DCMS jointly published *Fair Play: A consultation on the play strategy* on 3 April 2008. This consultation document sets out how Government departments propose to work together and with partners to create more opportunities for children to play, building on the framework and investment laid out in the Children's Plan. ISBN: 9781847751393. Visit <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations>.

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills published *Participation Rates in Higher Education: Academic years 1999-2000 to 2006-07 (provisional)* on 27 March 2008. This statistical first release updates an earlier release on the HE initial participation rate of English-domiciled students. Ref: SFR02/2008. Download free from www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000780/index.shtml

The Higher Education Policy Institute published *Funding Higher Fees: Some implications of a rise in the fee cap* on 3 April 2008. This report considers some of the implications of any rise in the maximum fee payable by full-time UK and EU undergraduates at English institutions without a commensurate increase in commitment of public expenditure by the Westminster Government. Download the report free from www.hepi.ac.uk/downloads/35Implicationsofariseintheeecap.pdf

The Skills Commission has published *Inspiration and Aspiration: Realising our potential in the 21st century* on 2 April 2008. This report contains the findings from a six month inquiry by the Skills Commission into information, advice and guidance (IAG) services in England. Download free from www.policyconnect.org.uk/docs/content/sc_iag_inquiry_final_report-1.pdf

Research round-up

Seven research journals came into our office this week. *Active Learning in Higher Education* (Sage, Vol.9 No.1), *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (Routledge, Vol.29 No.2), *The Curriculum Journal* (Routledge, Vol.19 No.1), *The Round Table* (Routledge, Issue 394), *Educational Action Research* (Routledge, Vol.16 No.1), *History of Education* (Routledge, Vol.37 No.2) and *Journal of Education for Teaching* (Routledge, Vol.34 No.1).

Media Watch

On Sunday, the *Observer* reported that a government initiative to regenerate children's play and exercise areas had been undermined by the revelation that last year the Education Secretary and his predecessor had personally agreed the sale of 19 school playing fields. Despite government promises made over the past decade that playing fields would be carefully protected, at least 187 fields had disappeared and hundreds of other pieces of school land had also been sold after being classed as too small to be playing fields. A further 53 playing fields across England, owned by both schools and local communities, were also believed to be under threat.

On Monday, *The Scotsman* reported that an initiative by Glasgow City Council would mean that every school-leaver in Glasgow who qualified for a modern apprenticeship would be offered one next year. The move would also mean that those who lacked the necessary qualifications would be offered help in getting the literacy, numeracy and social skills that they needed to qualify.

The Scotsman also reported that the Free Church of Scotland had called for the introduction of faith schools based on hardline Presbyterian principles. The editor of the Free Church of Scotland's official magazine, the Reverend David Robertson, said that it was time to return to delivering education on religious lines.

On Tuesday, the *Guardian* reported on the Government's plans to streamline qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds. It said that ministers wanted to remove qualifications that were failing to equip students for a job or university, but they had admitted that the majority of stand-alone BTECs and City and Guilds qualifications were likely to be phased out in 2012, while their most successful modules would be absorbed into the new diplomas. The qualifications expected to go were the A-Level equivalent for train conductors, the City and Guilds for parking attendants, the certificate in bartending and serving fast food, the BTEC in body massage, the GCSE equivalent in nail art, and the ABC certificate in cake decoration. They would be replaced with diplomas in hair and beauty studies, retail, engineering, languages, IT, media, construction, manufacturing and product design, hospitality, science and seven others.

On Wednesday most of the dailies reported that members of the NUT had voted to strike. The *Mirror* reported that council workers including refuse collectors and librarians had also threatened to walk out in protest at below-inflation pay strikes. The NUT argued that they wanted to stop cuts in the real pay of teachers as there were recruitment problems and low morale. Three-quarters of members voting had backed a one-day strike on 24 April. The *Sun* leader claimed that teachers had prospered under Labour, with better pay, conditions and help from classroom assistants. It also claimed the "catastrophic walkout had virtually no genuine support", as education was "being hijacked by fewer than one-in-three leftie NUT members". The *Daily Mail* reported that up to 20,000 would go on strike and added that the move would fuel fears of a return to 1980s-style teacher union militancy. The *Mail* also pointed out that the NASUWT had backed a work-to-rule next year unless excessive workloads were reduced. The second biggest teachers union also said that it would back snap strikes over pupil indiscipline and academies. It said that millions of students in FE colleges also faced disruption on 24 April after the lecturers union UCU balloted members for a strike over pay alongside the NUT.

The *Guardian* reported that the NUT general secretary, Steve Sinnott, had said that the strike was a last resort after he had tried to explain the union's case to ministers and the chancellor. Margaret Morrissey, spokesman for the NCPTA, said that the move would cause teachers to lose considerable parental support, and John Dunford, general secretary of ASCL, said that he was disappointed that the NUT had voted for a strike over a pay award that represented a good deal for teachers in the present climate. The *Guardian* also reported that the chairman of Neost, which represented the local education authorities, had urged the NUT to "pause for thought before embarking on action that could affect many schools across the country". A spokeswoman for the DCSF said that the Government had simply acted on the recommendations made by the independent school teachers review body. The *Daily Telegraph*, which ran the NUT strike story on its front page, said that the union was at odds with the views of other teaching unions by insisting that the 2.45

per cent pay rise on offer constituted a “real-terms pay cut”. The *Telegraph* leader claimed that Steve Sinnott was attempting to threaten a Labour government that was perceived to be weak, with a return to the militancy that public sector unions had once used to such effect in national power struggles. *The Times* reported that the NUT had said that it would talk to the Government until the last minute, potentially allowing an eleventh-hour resolution. But officials at the DCSF had said that there would be no concessions or compromise. Steve Sinnott was reported to have said that no further action had been planned after the one day strike, and he had denied that the move would alienate parents. The *Independent* reported that, although the NUT had called for an extra ten per cent at Easter, union leaders were starting with a pay increase equal to the level of inflation. *The Independent* added that although the NASUWT had said that its members had shown “no widespread appetite” for industrial action on pay, the feeling over teachers workload was “very different”. Mick Brookes, the general secretary of the NAHT, said that although his members believed that a pay deal below the rate of inflation “wasn’t helpful for recruitment”, they preferred to seize on the pay review body’s pledge to look at the deal again next year if inflation had risen.

The BBC 2 programme *Newsnight* ran a piece on Wednesday about Brain Gym, an American programme that claims that by a number of exercises it is possible to release electro-magnetic energy, change the flow of blood to the brain and increase the learning capacity of children. Jeremy Paxman interviewed Paul Dennison, the man behind the scheme, in California, while others on the programme dismissed the science behind the scheme as completely bogus. There are more than 70 Brain Gym instructors in Britain, while the programme claimed that “thousands” of schools here used the programme.

Education

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Editorial team: Demitri Coryton and Arabella Hargreaves.

© 2008 Education Publishing Worldwide Ltd.
Distributed by the Education Publishing Company Ltd
ISSN: 1741-9867

THE
EDUCATION PUBLISHING
COMPANY LIMITED

Devonia House, 4 Union Terrace, Crediton, Devon EX17 3DY.
Tel: 01363 774455. Fax: 01363 776592.
Email: education@educationpublishing.com. Web: www.educationpublishing.com

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