UNIT 4 ENHANCING PUPIL LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT

Structure

4.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the constant worries of all head teachers and teachers of formal schooling is 'how to enhance learning and achievement of pupils?' This is particularly vexing in multi-ability classrooms where teaching-learning situations are geared mainly for the 'average pupil' and largely concerned with areas related with academic subjects and intellectual skills. (Developments in spheres of kinesthetics, musical abilities and spatial skills are largely ignored). However determining whether each child's learning and achievements are positively matched with his/her potential is a daunting task.

Each child is a storehouse of multiple abilities and disabilities with varying degrees of potential in each field. The classroom is a congregation of a group of children with mixed abilities coming from diverse cultural backgrounds. No two children are alike and no two children learn in an identical way.

Head teachers are mainly concerned with ensuring that learning and achievements of students are enhanced, pulling up under-achievers and balancing between under-loading and over-loading them. Negative stress and social maladjustment in children need to be tackled and desirable attitudes and self-concepts have to be developed. Challenging and purposeful activities have to be designed for students and all learning has to be stimulating, joyful, fostering creativity and also non-cumbersome resulting in cognitive and balanced personality development.

The head teacher and other persons engaged in the management and overall supervision of schools and the education system of a community have the very important role of formulating the right policies of determining the curriculum, providing the infrastructure, planning activities for the school, supervising the day to day activities within the school and coming up with a comprehensive evaluation programme that encompasses not only the learning outcomes of the individual child but also the performance of the school. Therefore the head teacher has the multiple responsibility of:

i) knowing the students, their needs, abilities, interests, their school related and personal problems and above all being aware of the gaps in their abilities and achievements;

ii) determining the school policies, planning and executing them and collaborating with the teachers to ensure the smooth functioning of the school and optimum achievement of learning and achievement by the pupils.

iii) collaborating with parents of pupils and other community members to create awareness regarding the policies of the school, the potential of the pupils and formulating suitable strategies for enhancing learning and achievement by students. In this unit, you will study about the diversity in achievement in their classroom alongwith contributors to bridging these achievement gaps. The collaboration of school with parents and other community members will also be discussed.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- identify reasons for gap in the potential of the pupils and their achievements, plan and execute changes in the overall school structure and creating a learning environment;

- reflect upon ways in which to work with students and teachers to ensure that learning and achievement of pupils is enhanced;

- collaborate with parents and other community members so that all round progress of the children is taken care of.

4.3 DIVERSITY WITHIN THE CLASSROOM

The head teacher must be on the alert and watch out for students who are doing well in some areas, but not in others. The classroom situation actually offers an interesting medley of a variety of personalities in a state of flux. There may be several children who are working below or above the average level of the rest of the class and these levels vary between different subjects in school.

Activity

- *Do you have students in your school who are high achievers in mathematics but low achievers in language? Write their names. Why do you think they are not doing well in language?*

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4.3.1 Reasons for Diversity in Achievement among Children

The reasons for there being wide disparity among students' achievement in school could be differences in inborn abilities (nature) and acquired traits. Barton (2004) has identified 14 factors that are correlated with school achievement according to accumulated research knowledge, consensus of the research community and available demographic statistics

Of these 6 were in-school factors - 1.1) rigour of curriculum, 1.2) teacher experience and attendance, 1.3) teacher preparation, 1.4) class size, 1.5) technology-assisted instruction and 1.6) school safety.

The 8 conditions outside of school were - 2.1) birth weight, 2.2) lead poisoning, 2.3) hunger and nutrition, 2.4) reading to young children, 2.5) television watching, 2.6) parent availability, 2.7) student mobility and 2.8) parent participation. He also found, on the basis of available statistics, that there were differences in children's experiences with the factors on the basis of race/ethnicity and income.

While it may be difficult for a head teacher, or a teacher as an individual or even the school with a collective effort to bring changes in the factors falling outside the school, it is important to begin by building awareness in the persons concerned.

However it is imperative that the in-school factors be rectified and modified suitably. The conscientious teacher could take care of her own attendance and preparation and use technology assisted multi-media approach in her class. The head teacher could with assistance from the teachers work at the rigours of the curriculum, make it more flexible and student friendly without letting standards fall; determine a class size which is conducive to greater student learning and achievement and ensure safety and security for the child at least within the school premises.

Dependent upon the headteacher's point of view, she may believe that achievements gaps are inevitable, narrowing, widening or are being correctly or incorrectly addressed and measured, closing achievement gaps demands action on multiple fronts.

Activity

- *Do you think some of the students in your school could achieve more in some of the subjects? Why are they not doing so?*

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4.3.2 Helping Under Achievers

While a head teacher can do precious little to increase the inherent intelligence, creativity, other abilities or change the socio-cultural background of the child, yet she can with active support of the teachers and management support, design and create a classroom situation which ensures that diamonds are not dimmed while pebbles are given opportunity to shine. Above all she must see that the children learn to think for themselves and become lifelong learners. This is easier said than done and a head teacher as well as a teacher have to face a number of situations, some of them new, each day, which have to be handled immediately. One such common occurrence could be the following:

Activity

- *Class-situation diagnosis*

A head teacher during her supervision comes across a class in which a teacher finds a child looking out of the window and another surreptitiously reading an adventure tale while her class is going on.

A) How could she rectify the situation? Indicate how you have been tackling similar situations?

i)	By punishing the erring children.	Yes	No
ii)	By scolding/shouting at the entire class	Yes	No
iii)	By leaving the class in a huff and not returning till the erring children apologize	Yes	No
iv)	By calling in the head mistress or sending the children to her	Yes	No
v)	By writing a complaining note to her parents	Yes	No
vi)	By talking to them separately and finding out their points of view	Yes	No
vii)	By working upon her method and bringing suitable changes in them	Yes	No

viii)	By closely examining all the children's previous recorded achievements and administering tests to determine their cognitive abilities	Yes	No

B) What do you think the possible reasons for the two children behaving the way they do in class?

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Discussion

Clearly the first five alternatives listed in A) above are not desirable though they may be more often and widely used. In a mixed ability classroom alternative vii) above is difficult to determine as no one method could be tailor made to fit all. Alternative viii) is a good starting point that will help the teacher to diagnose and reflect and think of possibilities for question B).

The answers to this section could range from the child being too advanced cognitively to have patience to follow the teacher's slow pace to the child being a slow learner, cognitively impaired, not being interested in the topic being taught in class, learning style of child not matching the teacher's method of teaching or there could be some other reason such as the emotional state of the child at that time.

According to Bloom (1971), affective entry characteristics namely, the interests and attitudes in terms of the child's linking, enthusiasm, positive view about the school and subject, preferences and desires are of crucial importance in learning and achievement because they help to determine the extent to which a learner will put forth the necessary efforts. The research indicates that children who are extremes on school achievement, there is a relation between positive and negative attitudes and indications of adequacy or inadequacy in school achievement. While indications of success in school are likely to result in positive attitudes towards it other variables may enter in to determine whether the school and school learning is viewed as positive and favourable.

Some feasible ways that the headteacher could adopt

Finding a way out in situations mentioned above could be clustering or segregation of children on the basis of results of intelligence (more on this later*) and achievement tests (point viii above, in box).

Activity

● *Is it desirable to have a separate section for the higher achievers?*

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Having separate 'ability sections' or 'gifted section' has proved to have its own set of problems wherever this has been tried. An enriched environment for one student may not be enriched for another. Children in such groupings are known to have developed feelings of superiority and complacence, while those in other groups feel inferior and nurture much resentment. Besides since there cannot be such segregations in other sections of society, it is unfair and undemocratic to build such situations in the school.

Other possible solutions for attracting attention of children and ensuring enhanced learning could be enrichment of curriculum, co-operative peer learning, collective learning events, mentoring, multi-age education, activity based learning, enhancing learning beyond the classroom, opportunity to innovate for enhanced learning, etc.

For designing the best possible match for the child so that the achievement gap is minimized, the other factors that are important are given in the following sections.

4.4   CONTRIBUTORS TO BRIDGING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

The role of the teacher

The teacher is the key role player in the classroom. She has to recognize the potential of the child and should have the competence and flexibility to select a level and appropriate method of teaching/learning for the child.

Often the teacher, the administrators make the mistake of emphasizing only learning and achievement in academic subjects ignoring completely the other abilities that a child may have, the nurturing and encouraging of which may have the spill-over effect of transfer of learning of the child from one area to another, instill confidence and satisfaction in the child and encourage her to learn academic subjects better.

'If in a classroom, atmosphere is more for cooperation and self learning, children start developing confidence in their strength and rectify their weaknesses. In fact, open discussion, even in regular curricular subjects help students extensively to review their own positive traits. In fact no student should be humiliated or caricatured in the school/class and this should be the essence of any good teaching-learning situation' (Maitra, 2000, pp 106)

Activity

● *Manju, a pupil of grade VI was continuously falling behind the other children in almost all subjects. The headteacher, while reviewing achievements of the class, found this puzzling as earlier, her work was satisfactory. On making discrete enquiries, he found that the class teacher was openly making fun of her because she stammered. As a result, Manju's stammering became worse and she lagged academically.*

● *What do you think the headteacher should do?*

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The child's potentials

Often a child's potential is judged from scores of intelligence tests (mentioned earlier*) and academic achievement tests. Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences provides an alternative view to the traditional one of IQ, wherein he describes human cognitive competence is better as a set of abilities, talents, or mental skills that are called *intelligences.* A human may be gifted in any or more of these areas, which are: 1) linguistic intelligence with components of syntax, semantics, pragmatics, written and oral language; 2) logical-mathematical intelligence with components of deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning and computation; 3) spatial intelligence with components of ability to represent and manipulate spatial configurations and interrelationship of parts; 4) bodily-kinesthetic intelligence with component of ability to use all or part of one's body; 5) musical intelligence with component of pitch discrimination, ability to hear themes in music, sensitivity to rhythm, texture and timbre, production of music through performance or composition; 6) interpersonal intelligence with component of ability to understand and act productively on others' actions and motivations; and 7) intrapersonal intelligence having component of understanding of self.

Having an understanding of this multidimensional approach to intelligence will enable teachers and administrators to appreciate the need for fostering growth of the child in areas in which he/she has potential; modify curriculum accordingly and enhance achievement of the child in those areas. This will go a long way in ensuring a better and fuller human development of the individual child as well as society.

Activity

● *Write 5 ways in which two high achievers in your school are different from each other.*

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The headteacher must also have a fairly good knowledge of any disabilities that a learner may have. These may range from some physical impairment like visual, auditory or orthopedic disability to those that are not so obvious like malnutrition, dyslexia, attention deficit syndrome etc. In cases where she finds learners in her class being specially enabled, she may in consultation with the school administration, parents and specialists from the areas concerned chalk out a suitable teaching-learning strategy for such children.

Activity

● *Are there any students in your school who have learning disabilities? Write the nature of the disabilities of these students.*

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Method of teaching-learning

There may be a number of methods of teaching-learning that may be used by a teacher and there is no single effective method. A number of methods may be used, which may be inter-changed; one at a time or a different method for a different child/group of children may be used.

Activity

● *Which methods of teaching are being used in your school?*

For younger children ....

For older children ....

The headteacher must see that developmentally appropriate learning tasks are being selected and used with special needs of individual children in sight. The methods employed for younger children need to be different from those used for older children. Younger children respond better to concrete activity based style of teaching learning rather than to abstraction and use of standard lectures and self-reading and writing methods.

For such groups the methods that may be used could be learning through play, games and story telling. Children respond well to all these methods as they capture their interest and provide activity and some measure of excitement. It is possible to devise games related to all subjects, which may be teacher directed as well as self, or small group oriented. Use of multimedia and the internet and simulation are other possibilities. Enhancing learning through amateur theatre is another alternative that has not been fully explored.

Younger children tire out soon with any one method and so there is a need for changing the method frequently.

As children grow physically and cognitively their needs change and the earlier classroom methods have to be changed appropriately. They now respond better to oral instructions and written material. Some may prefer merely to listen and record important information for later study while others will prefer visual input to accompany oral lectures and discussions. Still others prefer learning through a more kinesthetic approach. A multi-modality approach helps all students in learning and achieving better.

Students at all developmental stages can work on projects either individually or in groups. Projects put students in control of their learning, and provide opportunity to engage in activities closer to real-life work environments and enhance learning beyond the classroom.

Providing an individual mentor to either an individual or a small group of learners either from the school or from outside are other possibilities that ensure individual differences and needs are taken care of.

Mixed age grouping, cross-age tutoring, and flexible scheduling are other instructional strategies suited for older children and beneficial for gifted and special needs children.

Differentiated learning may also be provided by diagnosing the difference in readiness, interests and learning style of all students in a class, using a variety of performance indicators.

Some other methods that are being explored and researched are sleep-learning and hypnosis.

Activity

● *Discuss with experts, other headteachers and teachers the various methods of teaching that could be adopted in your school, keeping the feasibility of each method in view.*

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Motivation

All educators know that a motivated learner learns and achieves much more than an indifferent learner. In many situations, teachers need to provide incentives and rewards for learning. While for smaller children extrinsic motivation may be helpful, older learners either soon tire of extrinsic motivation and give up or are filled with feelings of doubt, resentment and even are prone to use of unfair means to achieve.

For the older learners intrinsic motivation has better long-term benefits for learning and achievement.

Pupils must have a sense of belonging to the school and have positive feelings of security and happiness. Punishments and negative comments like 'why can you not understand what others can'; 'you are too slow in learning'; 'you are sloppy and stupid' are de-motivating. Every child should see mistakes as opportunities to learn. The teacher as well as the headteacher must be patient and supportive; never punishing, criticizing or embarrassing the young learners.

The classroom should not be a place where sexual stereotypes are encouraged or nurtured. The headteacher should emphasize that both boys and girls may be achievers in all subjects and there are no boundaries such as mathematics and science is for boys and languages and art is for girls.

The school should be a place where the curiosity, creativity and problem solving ability of the pupils are enhanced and pupils continue to learn from within to outside the classroom and school.

Interventions by the headteacher

The role of the headteacher is multi-faceted. Her/his foremost responsibility is to ensure a school environment conducive to enhanced academic and all round learning of pupils. He has to work at multiple levels of ensuring efficiency in the teachers in the school; ensuring optimum learning of the pupils and last, but perhaps the most important, negotiating with parents and the community at large to ensure the maximum all round development of the pupils in their lives beyond the walls of the school. It is important to keep in view at all times that the full potential of the child must be explored and developed and it is not enough to stress only achievement in academic subjects (Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences). Above all the headteacher, the teachers, parents and other community members must work as a team to ensure attaining achievement of the pupils.

The headteacher also has the responsibility of changing the over-all structure of the school and creating a learning environment. For example she/he should ensure that there are enough good books in the school library and all children have access to them. If necessary classroom libraries may be created with the help of books donated by faculty members the alumni and the community.

Similarly other equipment and paraphernalia needed for better learning, like computers and software, models, maps and charts, adequate furniture may be acquired as and when funds permit.

The headteacher and teachers as a team

Activity

● *Do you think there are disgruntled teachers in your school? Write the names of those teachers who you think are not happy with their jobs or are nursing resentments. Against each name write the possible causes.*

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Some of the school related causes of resentment amongst teachers could range from being over burdened with work load; not getting promotions and other facilities that the teacher may feel is rightfully hers/his; rivalries and jealousies amongst the staff members; dealing with very large classes; not being able to practice methods and techniques that she/he perceives to be correct but are against the overall school policy; infrastructure related problems; not having support and co-operation of parents and wards of pupils, and many more. While it is possible for a sensitive and caring teacher to resolve many of these problems on her own, the timely and insightful intervention of the headteacher may prove to be much more effective.

Activity

● *Suggest some ways by which you think you could solve some of these problems.*

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A sensitive, understanding and resourceful headteacher on her/his own can resolve many of these commonly experienced problems. A simple word of encouragement by the headteacher is a great moral booster for all members of the school community and conducive for all round growth of all members, i.e. of pupils, teachers and the school. Whenever the teachers ask for learning support, the headteacher should be always willing to pitch in.

While being sensitive to the teacher's point of view is important the headteacher must also get feedback about the efficiency, sincerity and devotedness of the teachers from pupils and teachers. For these oral and friendly discussions may be helpful, but more than that, confidential questionnaires (to students and parents), surprise visits to classrooms and all round vigilance are helpful. Wherever teachers are found to be slack or wanting, they could be suitably counseled. Keeping a friendly but alert and watchful eye on all activities in the school is an indicator of good management.

Activity

● *Take the case of Headteacher X who had a cheerful demeanor at all times and would put in a word of encouragement or praise for the pupils and teachers very frequently. Do you think such an attitude is conducive for better achievement and learning by pupils? Discuss.*

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For finding a feasible and working solution to some of the other problems the headteacher may have to seek the co-operation and collaboration of the parents and other persons from the community at large. Cordial relationship among faculty members and the headteacher and being on the alert for signs of distress and tension among individual teachers on the part of the headteacher and a willingness on her/his part to resolve such problems is certainly a step in the right direction. While personal reasons for stress in a teacher cannot be resolved by the headteacher alone help may be enlisted from professional counselors. Arranging for stress relieving workshops, faculty recreation like games, picnics and other such measures for ensuring happiness and contentment in the faculty fosters confidence and satisfaction amongst them. However the headteacher may face constraints such as arranging for adequate finances, space and time. Seeking co-operation of parents and other community members who are resourceful and/or have the expertise for holding workshops, recreational activities etc. is likely to provide a happy solution to fostering the overall well being of the teachers.

4.5   THE HEAD TEACHER, PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS A TEAM

Collaborating with the parents and community

While chalking out a program for enhancing learning of pupils, the headteacher and teachers must reflect upon and think of ways and means of intervening into the 8 out of school factors listed by Barton (4.3.1). Though it may be too late to take corrective right measures for some of these factors such as low birth weight and health related damages might have already taken place but it is never too late to take some effective measures regarding television viewing, having access to books other than school textbooks, reading to the child and providing for her/his overall well being.

Activity

● *In which ways could you as headteacher enlist the support and co-operation of parents of pupils for ensuring optimum achievement of pupils?*

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For ensuring the best all round development of the pupils, the headteacher must ensure that she/he is able to put across to teachers, students and parents that she/he is genuinely interested in doing so. For this a suitable school slogan or logo may be adopted and displayed prominently. The teachers, students and parents must have a feeling of trust and fearlessness in approaching the headteacher for resolving their problems and doubts.

Opportunities for learning and developing all factors of multiple intelligence of a person should exist in an ideal school. Identifying the multiple abilities and interests of each child and providing for learning opportunities and encouraging achievement in these fields is desirable. Excellent sports facilities, music (vocal and instrumental) classes, art classes should be arranged for. Help and co-operation of parents and community members should be sought for identifying and arranging for teachers who could take such classes, maybe on a voluntary basis. The headteacher should hold discussions with teachers and parents to emphasize the need for providing such opportunities both within and outside the school and for appreciating and encouraging learning and achievement in pupils in multiple fields. This is not only in keeping with Gardiner's theory of multiple intelligences but also a step in the right direction for the overall cognitive and personality development of the child.

Willing to introduce innovations

The headteacher should be aware of innovations in teaching-learning taking place at other places and practices found successful elsewhere may be adopted as far as they are feasible and possible. Journals and research reports recommend many changes in classroom practices, which have moved away from collective teaching and now emphasizes individual learning. So have there been drastic changes in the purposes and methods of assessment and examinations. These should be discussed with teachers and experts and incorporated in the school.

Suggested activities to which community members could contribute

1. Experts from the community could be identified for disseminating information by means of lectures, holding workshops for teachers and parents on topics such as– 'multi-abilities of the child', 'various aspects of development of the child', 'learning styles of children' 'children's literature and importance of reading to the young child', 'importance of play', 'peer influences', 'television viewing learning opportunities versus harmful effects', 'importance of family harmony and support' etc.

2. Organizing talks, film shows and workshops on academic subjects as well as topics of general interest.

3. Arranging for visits by faculty and students to places of historical interest, museums, and picnic spots for educational and recreational purposes.

4. Offering guidance and counselling services for students, teachers and even parents.

5. Contributing to the infrastructure and other facilities, such as provision for multi-media instruction in the school.

Ms. Jacobs, the headteacher of a school requested all the students of her school, especially those passing out, to donate old books, which they children no longer wanted. She also made similar requests to other members of the community at large. Soon she had a good collection of books. These, with the help of teachers, she got graded and distributed to the respective classes. All classes now had a ready and easily accessible reference library, which children were free to use whenever they wanted. This had the desired effect and many children became avid readers and learners of diverse subjects and topics.

4.6 EVALUATING THE PROGRESS OF THE CHILD

While assessing the progress and development of the individual child, it is important to evaluate the progress made by the child relative to her/his own earlier achievement, rather than making in-group comparisons. Remarks are more encouraging than the mere mention of marks and mention of achievements in all fields rather than only those of academic subjects are important. It may be a good idea to provide a complete progress portfolio to the child instead of a mark sheet with numbers and ranks as indicators of success or failure. Moreover since evaluating an individual child as a comparison to the other group members without taking into account her/his own limitations in abilities in learning may play havoc with the psyche of the child, it may be a good idea to try attaining the following:

Matching the method of learning and evaluation with the abilities of the child

If the perfect match between the learner's ability and readiness and appropriate curriculum and learning method can be made then enhanced learning and closure of achievement gap can be ensured.

- While choosing an appropriate method for teaching and learning, as well as evaluation, the following should be kept in view:
- Level of the learner, which may vary from subject to subject; topic to topic and time to time;
- Aptitude for particular hands of learning. Carroll (1963) is of the view that aptitude is the amount of time required by the learner to attain mastery of a learning task. Research (Bloom, 1971) indicates that aptitudes for particular learning tasks are not completely stable, and that they be modified by appropriate environmental conditions at home and school learning experiences.
- Attention span of the learner which may vary according to the age of the learner, the type of learning task, physical state of the learner etc.;
- Rate of learning of the learner and learning style of the learner in terms of being concrete versus abstract; sequential versus random; preference for visual versus listening only
- Motivation level of learners
- Cultural background of the learner.
- Emotional state of the learner

The over all objective of education which is to equip the learner for lifelong learning; integration of intellectual, social and emotional aspects of learners and ultimately human development.

A word of caution

When evaluating pupils, the headteacher must bear in mind that sensitivity to the child's feelings and emotions during the process of evaluating her/him is imperative. Our society has increasingly become achievement oriented. Fierce competition and

the need to excel drive all - the parent, teacher, administrator, policy-maker and the society at large. While some children thrive as they are able to fulfill parental teacher and their own expectation there are countless others who crumble to varying degrees under the stress and may suffer from various ailments which may range from school and examination related anxiety to going into mental depression to having nervous breakdowns They become victims of situations that are socially created. While some by their own efforts and some with the help, sometimes timely and sometimes delayed, of parents, teachers and counsellors are able to emerge intact there are many others who continue to languish in mental torture and depreciation.

A human approach to learning and achievement with an understanding that an individual should achieve and attain according to his/her intrinsic potential and not according to standards being set by others in the group will ensure greater human development and lesser human wastage. Stress should be laid on *joyful learning* by children using experimentation, exploration and observation of natural phenomena.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

The headteacher must be aware of the multi-abilities that a child may have and strive for the all round development of all or at least most of these abilities and not just for the academic subjects. There is diversity in all respects in the classroom. There may be under-achievers and over burdened children in the school. A proper match between potential and curriculum load is desirable. The headteacher must collaborate with the students, teachers and parents and community members to close the achievement gap and enhance learning. The headteacher must provide for the requisite infrastructure and facilities that are conducive for better learning and achievement. Supervision by the headteacher of all activities in the school and counseling of persons slack in their work is conducive to enhanced learning and achievement.

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