

International conference highlights difficulties schools face recruiting and retaining the best staff. **Yojana Sharma** reports

MICHAEL STRADER MARO

# Quality staff are vital, but elusive

Half of developed countries are worried about attracting and keeping high-quality graduates in teaching, particularly high achievers, men, and maths and science graduates, according to a report for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The findings were presented at an OECD conference, Teachers Mater, held in Amsterdam last week.

Teacher quality has become a new focus of international attention. The OECD's 2002 Pisa study, which compared literacy and numeracy levels of pupils in more than 40 countries, showed that in Germany, Greece, the UK, and the Nordic countries two out of three 15-year-olds are in schools where headteachers believe learning is hampered by teacher shortage or inadequacy.

Students of the top 20 per cent of teachers have learning gains four times greater than those of the lowest 20 per cent, a 10-year study of American 12 to 16-year-olds found. Similarly, "having a succession of effective teachers can substantially narrow the average achievement gap between students from low-income and high-income families", says the soon-to-be published study *Teachers matter: Attracting developing and retaining effective teachers*.

While student ability, attitude and background has the largest impact on performance, teacher quality has emerged as the single

most important factor affecting pupil achievement.

Quality is defined by more than teacher qualifications, academic ability and experience. Key factors include enthusiasm, creativity, and the ability to convey ideas.

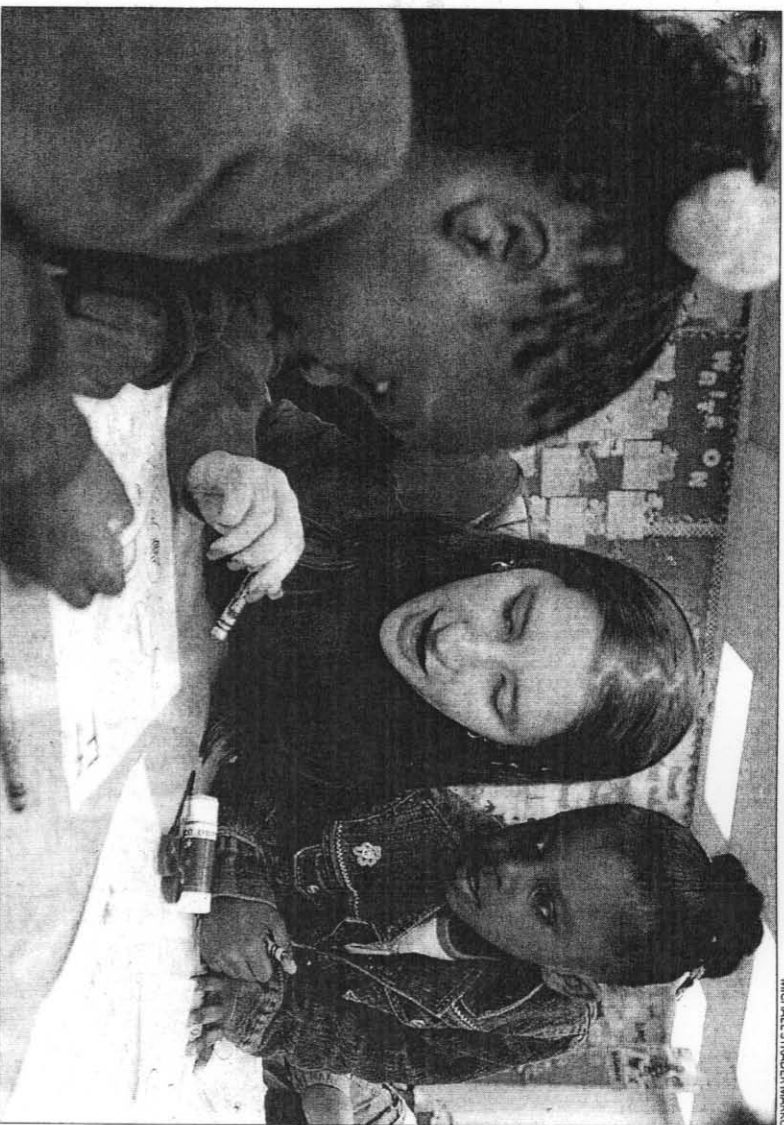
At the same time teachers' jobs have changed. Society now expects schools to deal with children from diverse backgrounds, to be sensitive to culture and gender, to promote tolerance, to respond well to students who are disadvantaged or have learning or behavioural difficulties, to use new technologies and prepare students for lifelong learning.

Teachers also need social and managerial skills. Leadership and organisation is required to build up a partnership between schools and for international co-operation. They must be able to use data and adjust their teaching accordingly. "In the past, there was very little exposure to assessment for teachers," said Phillip McKenzie, the report's co-ordinator.

Studies show effective teachers are intellectually capable, articulate, knowledgeable and able to think, communicate and plan systematically.

Students achieve more with teachers who perform well on tests of literacy and verbal ability.

"The attributes for effective teaching may only become evident once they are working," Mr McKenzie said. "It is difficult to know in advance who will be a good teacher."



Home-grown: Bonnie Stacy, 18, a student at Stranahan high, teaches pupils under a pioneering teacher-training scheme in Florida

## Groomed for teaching at age 14

### UNITED STATES

Bonnie Stacy could never have afforded higher education, nor had she ever considered becoming a teacher. Now she is preparing for both through a scheme that is also providing an innovative solution to a recruitment crisis in Florida's disadvantaged schools.

Concerned that half the teachers in its inner-city schools quit within three years of joining, Broward county school district has gone talent-spotting in its own urban classrooms, singling out pupils to train for the profession from the age of 14.

Students are groomed in teaching techniques and classroom theory, pairing off with teacher mentors, and practising their new-found skills on elementary pupils. After high school, they move on to

community college and university for a four-year, all-expenses-paid teaching degree course with a job guaranteed at the end of it – possibly even back at their own school.

"Universities are not producing enough teachers and the result is that we have a crisis in education," said Broward county school board member Dr Bob Parks, who helped pioneer the Urban Teacher Academy Project. "What better way to confront the teacher shortage than to grow our own?"

At middle school, Bonnie was lucky if her schoolwork earned her C or D grades. Now in her final year at Stranahan high in Fort Lauderdale, which has a graduation rate of just 57 per cent, the 18-year-old is consistently achieving As and Bs.

"Joining UTAP was the best thing that ever happened to me.

It's given me a direction, a passion in life, something to work at and a reason to improve myself," she said.

With more than 260,000 students, Broward is America's fifth-largest school system and needs to recruit 13,000 teachers over the next decade. UTAP is expected to yield 150 a year to work in some of Broward's 101 urban schools.

Because they form an inner-city background, UTAP trainees are considered better equipped to handle the challenges of teaching in poor urban schools and immune to the "culture shock" that is blamed for high turnover among other recruits.

"We want them to be quality teachers in the kind of schools they went to themselves, the harder-to-staff schools, where they can relate to the children and the children

can relate to them," said UTAP co-ordinator Sara Rogers.

The student teachers undergo tuition three times a week, focusing on skills such as how to draw up a lesson plan and how to teach children to read. Once a month, they head to local elementary schools to teach a 30-minute lesson.

Stranahan high student Vanessa Dike, 16, does her teaching practice at North Fork elementary in Broward's poorest postal district in Fort Lauderdale.

"When I first heard about this programme, I thought, 'I don't want to be a teacher'. Now I see what an awesome profession it is," she said. "We can say to pupils, 'I know what it's like for you. I've been there myself. We can make a difference.'"

Jacqui Goddard