

Let them teach themselves

Adviser's radical plan for personalised learning

By William Stewart

CHILDREN SHOULD teach each other, decide for themselves what time to come into school, and work with teachers almost as equals, says a government adviser who would like to see a new style of learning.

Charles Leadbeater's recommendations sound radical but are based on what already happens in some British state schools.

The management guru, who helped to originate the policy of personalised education when advising ministers, believes schools should abandon the standard school day and work shift patterns.

"Children should be able to opt to learn early – 7.30am to 1pm – or late – 1pm to 6.30pm – so they are better able to make learning part of their lifestyle rather than something

imposed upon them," he writes in his report for the Innovation Unit, an independent body which unearths and promotes new ideas and initiatives in education.

Mr Leadbeater was inspired by Bridgemary Community Sports College in Gosport, Hampshire, where 50 Year 10s attend between 7.30am and 1pm. Cheryl Heron, the headteacher, expects that about a quarter of the school will eventually work the early shift because it suits pupils' and teachers' lifestyles.

But changes should not stop there, according to Mr Leadbeater. He has been inspired by the policy operating in Fife in Scotland, where pupils in 125 primaries tutor each other in English and maths. Now he is calling for England to "become the first country in the world to make peer-to-peer learning



Bridgemary Community College in Gosport is piloting mornings only for some Year 10s.

Photograph: Neil Turner

central to its education system".

Giving pupils the responsibility would engender greater respect for teachers and "massively expand the resources available to the school", says his report. "If just 1 per cent of the current school population were to become pupil-tutors, that would be 70,000 children."

Mr Leadbeater also wants the relationship between teachers and pupils to alter so that it becomes

"less hierarchical" and they become "partners in learning". He points to Eastfeast, "a collaboration of 16 schools in East Anglia that use a mix of gardening, art and food to create open, shared learning". There, adults and children work together on allotments, which helps them co-operate more openly than in class, and in the process learn maths, science, geography and art. "The main goal of school innova-

tion and reform should not be to install new technology, build new classrooms, devise new patterns to the school day, nor even create new curricula," the report argues. Instead, it should be about giving pupils "the right relationships" that will motivate them to learn.

● 'What's Next? 21 Ideas for 21st century Learning' can be found at www.innovation-unit.co.uk