The UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) website reveals that more than 100 million children, the majority girls, never get a chance to see the inside of a classroom. Furthermore, for many children the poor quality of education provided, resulting from irrelevant and obsolete curricula, overcrowded classrooms and untrained teachers, leads to high dropout and incompletion rates.

A UNESCO fact sheet says simply: ‘793 million adults worldwide – 1 out of 4 people – cannot read these words’. Of these adults, 64 per cent are women.

A report on the Unicef (United Nations Children’s Fund) website reveals that children of mothers with secondary education or higher are twice as likely to survive beyond age five as children of mothers who have no education.

According to recent analysis reported by Unicef, half the reduction in child mortality over the past 40 years can be directly attributed to better education for women. Unicef also reports that not only educated women are more likely to send their children to school, but they are also better able to protect their children from malnutrition, HIV infection, trafficking, and sexual exploitation.

It is estimated that 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills – equivalent to a 12 per cent drop in the number of people living on less than US$1.25 a day.

The Year Book also reports that The Salvation Army is responsible for the education of 599,350 pupils. This is significantly more pupils that are in primary and secondary education in countries such as Uruguay or Moldova. The number is higher than the entire population of Albuquerque, the most populous city of the state of New Mexico, USA!

The third volume of The History of The Salvation Army (dealing with the years from 1883 to 1953) records that ‘Salvation Army schools exist in connection with corps (local stations) in various parts of the world’, with special mention given to Newfoundland, Canada. It continues: ‘The proper education of all young people housed in the Army’s institutions is provided for either by attendance at outside schools, or by teaching within their walls.’

Commissioner John Swinfen, writing in the Historical Dictionary of The Salvation Army, reports that early Salvation Army ministry in Africa included ‘elementary programmes of health, hygiene, sewing, numeracy and literacy’ which, together with singing, ‘formed a foundation on which primary schooling was built’. The commissioner goes on to say: ‘By the 1920s school programmes were becoming formalised in several countries. Mountain View School in South Africa began in 1919. The Howard Institute in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) opened in 1923 with boarding accommodation.’

From very early on, teaching was at the forefront of the thinking of Salvation Army Founders William and Catherine Booth. In December 1859 – almost six years before The Salvation Army began – Catherine published a booklet called Female Teaching.
The Salvation Army is well known for many things, including uniforms, brass bands, homeless shelters and rehabilitation centres. What is less well known is that The Salvation Army is responsible for an astonishing 2,769 schools. More than 18,500 teachers provide an education to 594,229 pupils ranging in age from three to 18, in kindergartens and through primary, junior, secondary and vocational training.

Most students will spend four or five years in a Salvation Army school and a significant number will either board or lodge in a Salvation Army-run hostel. In these instances the Salvation Army school will be their home during term time and everyone looking after the young people will be in a strong position to enhance their spiritual development and shape their attitudes.

This is an incredible mission opportunity, providing a significant period of time to build quality relationships. Equally, however, there is a great responsibility to ensure that each child is given every opportunity to become the best they can be.

The United Nations’ second Millennium Development Goal states that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, should be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. This is a laudable goal which will improve the lives of many – but it can put primary schools under pressure where resources do not keep up with expectations. A number of Salvation Army schools have seen significant increases in their admissions without receiving any extra funding.

Each Salvation Army territory and command has a different approach to education and a different relationship with the government, local community and with donors. These relationships are generally determined by funding options, either coming from the state or through private sources. Local laws on school governance will also dictate the role The Salvation Army plays in teacher appointments and application of the curriculum.

The outworking of The Salvation Army’s International Vision – One Army, One Mission, One Message – promotes an emphasis on reaching and involving youth and children. However the provision of a structure where education is intended to take place is not in itself sufficient. Quality education needs to be central to ‘reaching and involving’ youth.
and children otherwise the potential impact gained from having a school is lost.

In recent years it became clear that a framework was needed to support and direct Salvation Army schools around the world as they strive for excellence.

With this in mind, an International Schools Strategy was developed – through consultation with Salvation Army territories, educationalists from around the world and representatives of communities where The Salvation Army provides schooling – setting out key principles and focus areas for Salvation Army schools.

The vision statement focuses on what all Salvation Army schools should try to achieve: ‘Salvation Army schools seek to develop compassionate people of integrity and character with the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding to achieve their full God-given potential. This will be achieved by developing quality, holistic, faith-based, family-focused education prioritising vulnerable and marginalised children.’

Nine guiding principles put Salvation Army schools at the heart of the community they serve and place importance on social, emotional, cognitive, physical and spiritual development. There is an emphasis on providing a safe and secure environment supported by corps (churches) keeping Christian values at the heart.

The strategy’s six focus areas are:

• Providing quality education which leads to high achievement for all;
• Relationships and partnerships;
• Improving infrastructure and maximising resources;
• Developing a plan for sustainability;
• Continually improving the quality of teaching staff and management systems;
• Developing minimum standards and guidelines on child safety and protection.

All schools should work hard to provide the best education possible, but many Salvation Army schools have to fight against the background of harsh economic realities.

They are often found in areas where there are minority groups who have to work hard to fight discrimination and economic disadvantage; or in neglected and isolated urban areas that suffer from social, economic and spiritual poverty. Some examples of Salvation Army education are found in isolated rural communities where the Church provides health and education to people who are otherwise ignored by the state.

The Salvation Army’s calling to ‘serve suffering humanity’ takes it to these areas. It is in the fabric of the Army’s being, but it does not make for an easy existence, especially in the field of education where resources are limited and more often than not financial advantage goes hand in hand with quality.

To provide excellence in these areas means drawing on other strengths.

Teachers in the United Kingdom are often called on to demonstrate ‘added value’. The aim is to show through the exam system, and teacher assessment, that a child has achieved above what was previously assessed as his or her...
Howard writes:

My wife, Julie, and I taught at a Salvation Army-run school in Wenchi, Ghana, in the late 1990s, so it was interesting to return there in 2013 as the International Schools Coordinator.

The rural areas look very similar to when we were there, though the road is now mostly tarred and there is electricity in the town and at the school. The school itself looked much the same – some extra buildings and a lot more students, with 1,000 boarders.

I went straight to a Board of Governors meeting and the alumni representative was Priscilla, one of our former students, speaking eloquently and confidently. (Julie must have taught her!) It was so encouraging to see her in that setting now.

As I walked round the school, cooks, drivers, the carpenter, electrician and other ancillary staff came to hug me. I talked at length with former teaching colleagues and then went to speak at a school assembly. It was incredible to see 1,000 students in the hall, and to hear them sing. There are few comparable sounds, and it was incredibly emotional to feel a part of the journey that the school has been on and is continuing with these students.

Education providers in Ghana face a massive challenge with the advent of free compulsory basic education. Clearly education for all is a priority, but if it is not funded properly then the education received can be ineffective and negative. New policies which seem sensible have been put in place but a lack of sufficient investment is creating class sizes of 70-plus, with classes being taught outside when it is not raining, insufficient desks, insufficient textbooks and overwhelmed teaching and support staff.

Another interesting consequence of free education is that expectations are now for the government or the Church to provide everything a child may need. If a parent teacher association tries to raise funds then there is sometimes an attitude that parents need not be involved, whereas previously – when parents had to pay to send their children to school – education may have been more highly valued, and parents more willingly mobilised.

These, however, are relatively minor quibbles compared to the fact that the poorest of the poor now have access to education, and that is a definite success of the FCUBE (free compulsory universal basic education) policy put in place by the Ghanaian Government in the light of the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals. Mind you, the long-term success of FCUBE will only be ensured by investment and local involvement. Local ownership is key to the success of any programme.

Another significant challenge is growing an economy without leaving the poor and public servants behind. I am constantly amazed at the prices in Accra, which now has skyscrapers and flashy four-wheel drive cars, but where teachers struggle to make their pay last through the whole month.

My job is a privilege. I see so much excellent work and spend time with so many dedicated people. The vision is huge, but my task – in promoting the implementation of the International Schools Strategy – is to turn that vision into achievable objectives.
academic potential and that the teaching they received has enabled them to excel. In well-resourced schools with supportive parents this is relatively straightforward.

This, however, is not the environment in which The Salvation Army generally chooses to work. We therefore have to draw on other strengths and resources to add ‘value’ – often through the provision of a safe, welcoming environment where young people are given the means to thrive and the tools to improve the circumstances of both themselves and their families.

In all things the priority of The Salvation Army with its One Mission and One Message is to build deeper relationships with the Church, with the community and with God. Salvation Army schools offer a space for these relationships to develop and grow. In this way effective schools have the potential to glorify God and Salvation Army schools – using the International Schools Strategy as a starting point – should always have this in sight.

Commissioner John Swinfen, whose Salvation Army officership included leadership appointments in the UK, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, the Republic of Congo and at International Headquarters, carried out a review of Salvation Army schools in India in 2000. His conclusion is as true now as it was then: ‘Ineffective schools do not glorify God. Effective schools can, and Salvation Army schools should.’

The International Schools Strategy can be found online at www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/schools

Howard Dalziel is International Schools Coordinator at The Salvation Army’s International Headquarters in London, United Kingdom