Helping Schools Succeed

A Framework for English Education

Chris Davies and Cheryl Lim
edited by Sam Freedman

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Foreword
by Chris Davies

My introduction to Headship in a London borough was less than auspicious. Four years into a deputy headship and twenty minutes into a French lesson with a class of 12 year olds the Head interrupted the lesson and offered to cover my class so that the borough's chief inspector could discuss with me something I would no doubt find of interest.

Surprise turned to amazement when it transpired that the chief inspector wanted me to consider stepping in as Head teacher in one of the borough's schools where the authority had not been able to recruit a satisfactory candidate through the usual means. My amazement deepened when she replied to my enquiry as to when she might need a response with "Well, I thought if I took a turn around the playground…" The decision was only marginally complicated by the fact that I had never heard of the school, we were within a week of the end of term and the post had to be filled for the start of the next term.

So it was that I started, age 32, as Acting Head of a 500+ First and Middle school in the early 1980s in a demanding part of a London borough. I was confirmed permanent Head on the very first day of term at an interview conducted by the Chief Education Officer. On day two, the National Union of Teachers instructed its members across the country to withdraw goodwill, which meant they were not available for any form of meeting or indeed any other work, apart from lesson preparation and marking, outside of teaching hours. The embargo lasted several months.

Over two headships and eight years as a senior manager in the education department of a local authority, I have seen come (and sometimes go): local authority race equalities units, the national curriculum and its unmanageable assessment and reporting arrangements, the delegation of school budgets, Grant Maintained schools, Ofsted, the publication of test and examination data, fresh start schools, academies, school choice frameworks and much more besides.

Cries for structural reform, became "Standards not Structure" (early Blair) reverting to "Back to Structure after all (Academies and Trusts)" (late Blair) and now look like becoming "Standards!" again. The history of educational system development has been a roller coaster. For all the effort, we are still left with considerable uncertainty over the real level of improvement, both in absolute terms and relative to improvement in competitor countries or in our own independent sector.

Government ministers may talk about the best generation of teachers ever, the best examination results ever and generally just stopping short of reassuring us that "everything is for the best in this best of possible worlds". However, it would appear that those who have the means are not yet buying in to the government's Panglossian vision.

For what we do know is that despite a rise in expenditure on schools by the DCSF (previously DfES) of 123% in real terms over the period 2001 - 2006 the number of pupils enrolled in private schools has increased by 6% over the same period compared to a fall in state school numbers of 2%. This despite independent school fees having risen too, and by twice the rate of inflation.

This is where I am coming from. Yes, there have been improvements and changes for the better, but for too many people these improvements do not match the money and effort expended.

The improvements that have been achieved overall have been relatively modest and are nowhere near the level of change needed to qualify as transformation. What is more, they have been won at great cost to many teachers and, perhaps particularly, head teachers. Although strongly contested by the Government, professional associations claim that there is a growing crisis in the recruitment of head teachers. According to one survey[1] for 2007 vacancy rates reached a new record level for primary schools and readvertisement rates for both primary and secondary schools reached nearly 40% and 30% respectively.

Nor will an elite system do. Too many of our young people leave school without worthwhile qualifications and too many are concentrated in the same schools, which lack the means to tackle the problem. We are no nearer to breaking the historic link between attainment at school and family background. If education ever did offer a way to opportunity for all, it certainly does not now.

Our present Prime Minister said on entering office that "I have learned a lot in the last 10 years. I have learned that top-down, 'pulling the lever solutions' are not always the ones that are going to work best."[2] For me this raises the question "what then are the effective levers? How do they work and who is best placed to pull them?" In short how might we better balance the framework of drivers, incentives, powers, responsibilities and requirements between all the "stakeholders" to improve the inherent effectiveness of our schools?

The Government needs to relinquish lever pulling. But to do that the government needs certainty that those who govern, manage and use our schools can be relied on to act in the best interests of both their children and of all children and young people.

1 Education Data Surveys 2007 - the 22nd annual report, by Professor John Howson

2 Interview with BBC News June 22nd 2007

Executive Summary

Whatever its merits, the English political system is not good at developing coherent and stable systems. Education is just one example. Since 1997 we have had six education ministers in three differently named departments. Numerous public bodies have been created, many of them surviving just a few years. We have seen hundreds of reviews, tens of plans and several 'agendas' – each one creating its own bureaucratic trail.

Many of these reviews, plans and agendas seem to work at cross-purposes. The Standards Unit emphasises results; the Every Child Matters Agenda emphasises well-being. Some curriculum reviews offer more autonomy to schools; others insist that new subjects should be compulsory. There is confusion over whether assessment should be formative, summative or both. Unsurprisingly, this has left most people involved in education bewildered.

This report argues that the English education system needs a clear, coherent, educational vision. There is little internal logic in the way goals and incentives are aligned, far too much central government intervention and far too little trust in teachers as professionals. Drawing on our international comparative research (detailed in companion report, 'Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad'), and interviews with key players in English education, we argue that the solution lies in the development of a 'tight, loose, tight' framework:

- clear vision from the centre (first 'tight');
- autonomy for schools and teachers to achieve that vision as they see fit (the 'loose'); and
- comprehensive accountability mechanisms so that the vision is achieved (second 'tight').

Chapter 1 looks in more detail at the absence of 'vision' in our current education system. Using the National Curriculum as a case study, we illustrate that there is a lack of clarity as to what schools and practitioners ought to be achieving. We argue that central government should focus on the big picture, leaving schools, or groups of schools, to work out the details according to local circumstances.

> " There is little internal logic in the way goals and incentives are aligned, far too much central government intervention and far too little trust in teachers as professionals "

Chapter 2 focuses on the division of power between the centre, local government and schools. We show that when local authorities act as both commissioners and providers this leads to a clear conflict of interest, and we argue that they should focus on the commissioning role. We also examine the ways in which schools can harness the best of both competitive and collaborative practices, through participation in school networks.

Chapter 3 looks at the barriers to developing a professional workforce – the most important prerequisite for a successful system. We review evidence on issues such as retention, recruitment, remuneration and workforce management and development, arguing that there is a need for a new deal for teachers: one that combines better remuneration, higher status and more autonomy with strong expectations of professional accountability.

Chapter 4 scrutinises the main mechanisms by which the government safeguards educational equity – admissions, exclusions and school transport – with the

objective of producing greater consistency in the way these safeguards are monitored and applied. We go on to argue for a system of per-pupil differential funding, which would incentivise schools to take more disadvantaged pupils.

Finally, in **Chapter 5**, we argue that the use of league tables as a driver of accountability is crude and unhelpful. In its place, we propose the introduction of a report card system which uses a broad range of indicators, measures progress over time and reports findings to parents in a clear, unambiguous manner. We also review the role of Ofsted, arguing against the practice of routine inspections in favour of a system of inspections as and when needed.

For ease of reference, an indexed list of proposals is provided at the end of the report.

Introduction

The English education system is built on a web of contradictions. One day a review is announced to 'free the curriculum'; not long after, economic literacy and cookery are mooted as additional compulsory subjects. The admissions code is strengthened to stop schools 'covertly selecting', yet increasing numbers of specialist schools are encouraged to select 10 per cent of their intake on 'aptitude'. A levels are threatened, then saved, then threatened again.

In this report we step back and attempt to view the English school system as a whole. We ask why these contradictions are so prevalent, and how the system could be realigned in order to avoid them in the future.

We began by analysing five education systems that regularly produce better results than the English education system in international assessment comparatives: those of New Zealand, Alberta, Ontario, Hong Kong and Sweden. (Our analyses are available in a companion report, 'Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad'.) In each of these systems, comprehensive programmes of reform have taken place over the past few decades with the aim of developing coherent systems with consistent goals. While each approached the problem differently, and each had flaws, we were able to gather considerable evidence on what works – and, crucially, the importance of an overarching vision that has the support of all key players. We also found that the very best international models combine the goals of excellence and equity – summed up in Ontario's tagline for their reform programme: 'Raising the bar, closing the gap'. This stands in stark contrast to England, where all too often excellence and equity are viewed as opposites.

Next we spoke to a range of key players in English education. These included senior officials at the Department for Children, Schools and Families, former and current government advisors, head teachers, teachers, union leaders, academics and not-for-profit education providers. We asked each of them a series of questions designed to explore their views of the macro structural factors in the school system: funding, accountability, professional autonomy, curriculum, assessment and so on.

At the end of this process, we found that some diagnoses were supported across the political and ideological spectrum, in many cases unanimously:

● First, there is no clear vision for English education. Competing agendas, from an aggressive emphasis on standards, to the social services focus of 'Every Child Matters', has left everyone confused as to the role of schools in society and what they are expected to achieve.

● Secondly, the 'command and control' model, whereby central government micro-manages everything from the curriculum to teacher pay, has gone too far. Head teachers and teachers remain frustrated by their lack of freedom. Non-governmental school providers are keen to develop diverse school 'brands' that will allow for real school choice.

● Thirdly, few are keen to return to the pre-1980s 'secret garden' in which schools were completely unaccountable. Everyone is frustrated, however, by the arbitrary nature of accountability at the moment – demonstrated by the confusion over league tables (what is more important – raw scores or the 'value-added' measure?). Instead it is felt that we should move to a model of reporting that is both easier for parents to understand and incorporates measures other than exam results.

In response to these concerns we developed a 'tight, loose, tight' framework for English education: clear vision from the centre (the first 'tight'); autonomy for schools and teachers to achieve that vision as they see fit (the 'loose'); and strong accountability so that the vision is achieved (the second 'tight'). This framework fits closely with the best practice we observed internationally. In practical terms, control over the macro elements of education would be realigned as follows:

- **Schools** would be given the opportunity to exercise far more autonomy over curriculum, staffing and governance than is currently the case. Rather than 24,000 separate 'independent' schools, though, we would like to see the development of networks of 'branded' schools competing against each other BUT collaborating with other schools in their network. This would allow for diverse curricula and HR models that could be developed in close co-ordination with teachers and head teachers (because networks would be relatively small) but would not force each school to reinvent the wheel. It would be crucial for membership of such a network to be voluntary, so as not to simply replace one form of top-down control with another.

- **Local authorities** would take on a regulatory role that reflected their status as democratically elected representatives of their local area. If they wished to carry on as school providers, they would have to set up arms-length trading companies to compete with non-governmental providers on equal terms. Their primary statutory role would be to commission schools and provide 'safeguards' for local residents. If they were no longer compromised by their status as providers, local authorities would be able to monitor the fairness of admissions properly, as well as

the placement of excluded pupils. They would also be able to focus on provision for the most difficult to teach; currently many of these children are 'lost' in the system or end up in inadequately funded and badly supported Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

- **Central government** would be responsible for setting a core entitlement curriculum that established expectations for schools and pupils. They would also fund schools directly using a pupil premium formula that prioritised the most disadvantaged pupils (and provided an incentive for school networks to focus on schools in difficult areas). Finally they would hold schools, networks and local authorities accountable through an overhaul of performance monitoring. League tables would be replaced with report cards that took into account far more than just exam results and would be easy for parents to understand. To streamline the accountability process, Ofsted would focus only on failing schools and be grounded in the schooling improvement process.

Underpinning this model is the need to develop a high quality workforce. In every system we studied, getting a good teacher into every classroom was seen to be both the most important factor for raising student performance, and the hardest to achieve. This is also true of England, where the development of teachers as informed professionals has been stymied by problems relating to recruitment, retention, remuneration and workforce development and management. In response we propose developing a new deal for teachers which combines increased autonomy, better rewards and higher status with stronger expectations of professional accountability.

The interlocking proposals set out in this report aim to provide a cohesive framework. The model would support schools in achieving excellence by harness-

ing the best of competitive and collaborative practices. It would safeguard equity by emphasising the role of local authorities as defenders of their constituents' right to a quality education. Finally, more autonomous schools would help to professionalise teaching, while creating genuine diversity in the system.

1

First 'Tight': Vision

Education policy in England is not short of polarising debates. We jump from waging war over the academic/vocational divide to curricular battles over knowledge versus skills. We talk about functional basic skills and then, rather schizophrenically, fret that this focus has led to a dumbing down and narrowing of the curriculum. We swing between internal and external accountability; between school autonomy and central regulation; and between standards and structures. We frequently attempt to engage with all of these debates at once.

Given this situation, it is unsurprising that Andy Hargreaves, an international expert on education reform recently commented:

> *England has no inspiring social or educational vision. Unlike Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales, which have clearer identities and are less driven by targets and testing, it has no strong sense of who or what it is. Instead, it regresses to arithmetical achievement gaps or vacuous claims to world-class standards as evasions of any vision.*[3]

We argue that England's lack of a coherent educational vision and narrative of change poses a major setback to our ability to implement and sustain effective education reform. Evidence from our research abroad suggests that sustainable change is more likely to occur when there is internal coherency – a clear logic by which all internal and external levers are aligned.

Consider, for instance, Ontario's experience: the McGuinty administration has successfully distilled their overarching vision of education into concrete end goals, summed up in a single tagline: 'Raising the bar, closing the gap'. The simplicity of this message, and, more importantly, the consistency with which it has been supported by successive initiatives, creates little room for ambiguity (see 'Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad', Chapter 3).[4]

In England, however, initiatives have a tendency to be introduced with little consideration of how they fit into the larger picture, and their impact on overall system coherency. The Every Child Matters (ECM) Agenda was intended to address this deficiency. Yet its slapdash introduction on top of a pre-existing framework of incentives and goals (the 'Standards Agenda') has only muddied the waters.

The state of 'vision' in our current education system

All our interviewees responded negatively when questioned on whether there was sufficient clarity of vision in England as to what schools and practitioners ought to be achieving. They were also unanimous in their conviction that this lack of clarity was a major barrier in the government's attempts to reform the system, although assessments of what exactly had gone wrong varied.

Most acknowledged that the government had succeeded, through their focus

3 A. Hargreaves, 'We need a new age of inspiration', *The Times Education Supplement*, 8 February 2008, pp 20–21.

4 C. Lim and C. Davies, 'Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad' (London: Policy Exchange, 2008).

on performance levels as measured by national tests, in prioritising the goal of raising standards of achievement. For some, however, this focus was ill-conceived. 'I think there's clarity,' a former government advisor noted, 'but whether it's sufficient vision is another matter.' Another interviewee, a prominent government advisor, agreed, arguing that 'it's too narrow a definition of what schools ought to be achieving. And I think it runs the risk of, if you like, turning education into a system where we value only things we can measure, and I think a good education is concerned with more than that. So I don't think we have got a clear vision in totality.'

He went on to argue that the government's fundamental problem was its attempt to solve every social ill with a policy initiative. 'We have a whole series of ad-hoc policies, whether today it's about obesity, tomorrow about something else, and they don't all add up, they don't all cohere to give you a clear picture.' Even those closely linked with the present administration acknowledged that it was 'in danger of looking like a government that runs by initiatives rather than by rolling out a coherent story that's well signposted along the way.'[5]

The breakneck pace with which initiatives have been churned out has made it difficult for schools and practitioners to establish clear priorities over a period of time. A board member of an education provider explained the knock-on effect on schools as follows:

All the pieces may individually be very clear and very good, but cumulatively it just adds up to more than anybody can cope with, so people end up clouded … If you set targets for absolutely everything, for pieces that are early in the cycle and pieces at the end, there is a lack of clarity about whether you are really trying to control inputs or the processes or the outcomes. And when you have controls and targets applying to everything, people can no longer work out what's important to what's actually just really another way of measuring this.

> " We have a whole series of ad-hoc policies, whether today it's about obesity, tomorrow about something else, and they don't all add up, they don't all cohere to give you a clear picture. "

From a policy perspective, it has also made rigorous pilot testing, evaluation and feedback a luxury rather than a necessity. The research director of a major assessment agency argued that many of the teething and technical problems surrounding the introduction of the AS level examinations and, more recently, the Progress Tests, could have been avoided if there had been an adequate period for piloting. A former government advisor expressed similar concerns in his deliberation on the Diploma initiative (more on this in the next section) when he noted: 'It takes five years to be trialled and tested and made to work and I think that the timetable was rushed, frankly.'

Adding fuel to the fire, interviewees noted that the lack of clarity within the system was not simply about an overload of initiatives from central government, but also about a lack of goal alignment at various levels and from various departments. The director of an education consultancy that carries out a lot of school improvement work noted that schools have 'central government requirements, national strategy requirements, they've got local government strategy requirements and so on'. Much of the consultancy's work thus involved helping schools to weed through the raft of, at times, competing guidance, in order to develop a personalised agenda based on their specific needs.

The discussion on competing priorities invariably raised the issue of the Every

Child Matters Agenda. The Agenda has five components, only one of which is directly related to teaching and learning ('enjoying and achieving'). The others are: being healthy; staying safe; making a positive contribution to society and achieving economic well-being. A significant number of interviewees raised concerns that ECM, in requiring schools to address a range of developmental and social issues, had created an overly broad remit which could potentially detract schools from their primary function of teaching and learning:

My greatest fear is that within the structures that have been created, education may well be what I would call third-tier responsibility, third-tier priority. When in fact it ought to be at the top of the – I am not saying 'on its own', but certainly at the top. I mean, there is a risk that it will be given less emphasis.

- Senior government advisor

Schools should provide [young people with] opportunities to be socialised, to exercise, and get a decent lunch and so on. But the most important thing that schools should do is education … and too broad a focus would probably get in the way.

- Member of Parliament

Similar concerns were found in a recent ICM poll of 803 primary and secondary heads. According to the survey, 90 per cent of head teachers agree that schools are having more of a social services role as a result of Every Child Matters. Fifty-six per cent of heads think that this shift in role is 'unacceptable'. More tellingly, even if funding were increased, 45 per cent of heads would still find it unacceptable because 'schools should not have this role'.[6]

It is important to note that no one we spoke to disagreed with the principles of the ECM Agenda. Good schools, they noted, already accomplish all five strands of the Agenda as a matter of course. Yet it would be

a mistake to simply write off these concerns as a form of reactionary backlash. The underlying concern was the uncritical response that initiatives like these invite. After all, it can be difficult to argue with the proposition that 'Every Child Matters' or with the idea of 'Personalised Learning'. The consequence, however, is that these big ideas may not be subjected to the level of scrutiny and challenge from within the profession that they would benefit from.

The discord surrounding the ECM Agenda may stem in part from the fact that even within the teaching profession there is considerable disagreement over what the central vision of education should be. When asked to prioritise a list of educational goals, we noted that there seemed to be two contrasting perspectives. One group saw measurable academic attainment as the key goal, and softer goals such as emotional and social development following naturally as a result of academic success:

I think that individual development is important, but if you set out to achieve that as a goal in itself then you often don't achieve it. I think it's a function of providing a good education where people pass exams and there's an environment around them that allows them to learn.

- Head teacher, academy

The other group reversed the cause-and-effect metaphor, believing that emotional and social development was the necessary prerequisite for the achievement of all other objectives:

In order to improve attainment in those areas which government seems to think are important – core skills, literacy and numeracy and so on – you concentrate on other areas and increase their motivation by concentrating on the broader aspects of their education and get to run on [sic] their back door, if you understand what I'm saying.

- Union representative

6 http://education.guardian.co.uk /1419education/story/ 0,,2236681,00.html

Of particular significance was the fact that this schism fell along primary/secondary lines, with interviewees with backgrounds in secondary education being more likely to prioritise academic attainment. Drawing in multi-agency support, offering extended school days, and so on, were strategic weapons in the war against low standards but not ends in themselves. The language may seem overblown, but these head teachers were passionate and single-minded about performance. As the head of a multi-school trust put it:

> I think that schools need to get [the importance of performance] into their brains, their corporate brains. Achieving that cultural change will require clarity, this very transparent process of clarifying the vision and purpose of schools. If your school is attainment-driven and young people should achieve their potential and there are no barriers to achieving this, if you can get a cultural understanding within your organisation that you're a can-do, innovative, no-barriers to underachievement, that nobody will be tolerated to be slack; if you're struggling you'll be supported, but fundamentally we'll look at your outputs and ensure that you're the right person for the job and support you in doing that job, but we won't compromise on standards. And that's how the cultural shift occurs.

Regardless of how they prioritised their educational goals, all interviewees acknowledged the necessity of ensuring that all students achieved a 'minimum threshold of competence that would allow you to operate as fulfilled individuals'.[7] Disagreement only occurred when discussing where exactly the bar should be set, (as with the tale of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears', the current benchmark of 5 A*–C GCSE grades was either 'too high', 'too low' or 'just right'). It is worth noting that this focus on a minimum standard for all reflects a trend in many OECD countries wherein: i) functional literacy and numeracy skills are seen as increasingly vital for integration into the economy and society; and ii) outcomes, rather than inputs and processes, are the dominant means of evaluating system effectiveness.

The National Curriculum as case study

What hinders our system's ability to set and maintain a coherent educational vision with clear expectations for all?

Undoubtedly, the politicisation of education has played a part. In a recent op-ed piece wryly entitled 'A New Year of Nonstop Government Initiatives', leading commentator Professor Alan Smithers lamented that 'Successive governments seem so driven by a need to make changes that they do not leave themselves time to think them through … some of the education reforms have been necessary and insightful [but] other changes have been counter-productive, seemingly the frenetic meddling of bureaucrats and consultants anxious to prove their worth'.[8] His comments were echoed in an interview with a senior department official who acknowledged: 'The problem with us is that we're the civil service but we also have ministers, and ministers like initiatives and they like to introduce things that will make a big difference.'

Part of the difficulty lies in the government's approach to policy development. During interviews, we found considerable scepticism across the board regarding the value of the government's standard 'one-size fits all' approach to policy development. As it is, the agenda and support systems for schools are the same regardless of school size, age of population served, or local and regional differences in socio-economic and cultural contexts. Given the

7 Interview, former government advisor.

8 http://news.independent.co.uk /education/schools/article 3322328.ece

diverse range of voices within the system, interviewees questioned whether 'one needs to have the same goals necessarily in each area'.[9]

The way in which these dilemmas play out in practice is perhaps best illustrated by the current debate surrounding the National Curriculum, and by extension, the National Curriculum assessment framework. The Education Reform Act of 1988 legislated for the creation of a compulsory national curriculum intended to ensure that all students received a broad and balanced education. Prior to the Act, curriculum design had largely been the responsibility of individual schools and local authorities – a situation that had produced considerable patchiness in delivery and student experience. The promise of an 'entitlement' curriculum was widely appealing and supported across the political spectrum.

Developing a clear consensus on what constituted 'breadth and balance', however, was and remains significantly harder. In its earliest incarnation, the National Curriculum comprised ten subjects, each meticulously outlined to the smallest detail. Later incarnations fared slightly better, featuring less exhaustive lists of required topics in response to practitioner dissatisfaction over the rigidity of the curriculum, not to mention its lack of relevance to certain groups of students. However, periodic additions of 'essential' topics and skill sets to the mandatory curriculum have counteracted efforts to reduce the level of central prescription.

In one sense, the constant clash over what should or should not be required is inevitable. The curriculum is a declaration of our values, our vision of the place of education in a good society and our understanding of what produces a good human being and citizen. While there is strong empirical evidence for the necessity of certain competencies like literacy and numeracy (see box below), the decision to require Subject A instead of Subject B is very much a political one. One interviewee commented: 'Something like the National Curriculum tends to be a compromise at the outset to try and accommodate everybody's point of view and all the influential people's pet things to make them say yes to it. So you usual-

9 Interview, head teacher.

10 P. Tymms and C. Merrell, 'Standards and Quality in English Primary Schools over Time: The national evidence', Primary Review Interim Report (2007).

11 KPMG Foundation, 'The Long-term Costs of Literacy Difficulties' (2006); available online at: http://www.every childareader.org/pubs/EC Rcosts2006.pdf

12 See, for example, R. Slavin and N. Madden, *Success for All/Roots and Wings: Summary of Research on Achievement Outcomes* (Washington: CRES-PAR, 2003).

13 Ofsted, 'SEN and Disability: Towards inclusive schools' (2004).

Each year, approximately 40,000 students leave primary school with the reading and writing skills of a seven-year-old. This figure has remained largely unchanged over the years, despite the government's £500 million National Literacy Strategy.[10] The government's failure to effectively tackle poor literacy skills is troubling given the wide-ranging ramifications for both the individual and society. According to one review: 'Literacy difficulties are linked to costly special educational needs provision, to truancy, exclusion from school, reduced employment opportunities, increased health risks and a greatly increased risk of involvement with the criminal justice system.' The estimated cost to the public purse was placed at £1.73 billion to £2.05 billion every year.[11]

Crucially, without good literacy skills, students are hard-pressed to access, let alone master, other subjects, including mathematics. Unsurprisingly, research highlights that literacy improvement programmes often generate 'side-effect' improvements in other subjects.[12] Moreover, research demonstrates that early literacy intervention during the primary school years makes a difference, even for children with severe learning difficulties. (It is noteworthy that students with literacy difficulties constitute the largest special educational needs (SEN) group). For instance, in an Ofsted study on SEN, schools with effective literacy strategies were found to make significantly better improvements than those without – in some cases, pupil achievement was more than six times the expected level of attainment.[13]

ly end up from the very outset with stuff in it that shouldn't really be there.'

Ironically enough, the present version of the National Curriculum, in trying to cover all bases, has failed to cover any single dimension adequately. In trying to meet the demands of all interest groups, it has failed to create spaces for local and regional adaptation. One way in which this dilemma could be resolved would be to significantly pare down the curriculum to a small core (with the understanding that what constitutes 'core' curriculum may differ by key stages), with responsibility for ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum being returned to schools and teachers. This would create opportunities for the school to engage with local stakeholders to develop programmes of studies that reflect what the community requires. This was a proposition unanimously supported by our interviewees.

A former government advisor argued: 'I would restrict it to a core competence. I'm actually with Mrs Thatcher on this. I think the key mistake was Baker winning the battle with Mrs Thatcher.' When asked what percentage of the timetable the core curriculum might take, he mused: 'I don't know – probably 25 per cent … I think we've got a broad definition of knowledge and cultural inherited knowledge and experiences that you want kids to have. The successful experience is coupled with knowledge and it could be all expressed in … four sides of A4, maybe double that'. Schools would therefore be encouraged to adapt the broad description to their students' needs.

The advisor's comments match current practice in Sweden, where the national curriculum document is a slim, 18-page booklet outlining the fundamental values of the education system, with goals for schools and teachers. The goals are divided into two categories: goals to be attained, which express the minimum level pupils should achieve upon leaving school; and goals to strive towards, which encourage schools to work towards a culture wherein there is no ceiling on expectations (see 'Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad', Chapter 5).

Similarly, in New Zealand, the national curriculum is described in broad brushstrokes – the details of the syllabus and the pedagogical tools utilised are left to the discretion of the teachers, who were described to us as 'curriculum developers' (see 'Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad', Chapter 2). The potential innovation such a move could generate was best summed up by the head of a multi-school trust in Leeds, who eloquently argued for schools to become more responsive to the needs of the community they served:

Schools should be given sufficient flexibility in their curriculum planning to account for local economic needs while still maintaining a core in the curriculum which allows for social mobility – so we don't want students in mining communities being taught how to be miners, if you know what I mean. What we want is nevertheless some sensitive relationship between an area that might be having an economic boom, like Leeds, the types of industry that are emerging locally. There needs to be some sort of understanding that some skills are going to be needed to be nestled into the local employment base … having said that, though, I'm not talking about a utilitarian approach to education, because we do need these national benchmarks to promote social cohesion and mobility. You need to do both.

Further complicating the debate is the fact that most of the recent National Curriculum reviews are either key-stage specific (e.g. the independent Primary Review)[14] or subject specific (e.g. the

Dearing review on modern foreign languages). While these reviews have certainly produced valuable insights and research, there is an argument for a root-and-branch review of the curriculum, not least the matter of how successive key stages build upon and impact with one another, and how the delivery of the curriculum is supported.

Consider, for instance, the state of the reform of qualifications for 14- to 19-year-olds in England. The first few Specialised Diplomas will be offered from September 2008 and are intended to establish a credible vocational pathway. Since its inception, though, the Diploma programme has struggled to gain credibility. Critics have raised concerns over the awkward middle-track position the Diplomas were straddling, noting that similar vocational qualifications such as the GNVQs had never escaped the shadow of A levels, nor provided students with a quality of training comparable to the apprenticeship route.[15] The evidence thus far has been predominantly negative, prompting the Nuffield Review, an independent review of all aspects of education and training for 14- to 19-year olds, to comment that 'everyone involved in the reform process regards the first 14 lines of the Diploma as problematic.'[16]

We suggest however, that underlying these concerns is a more fundamental question: at what age is a student capable of choosing their own pathway? While we have a 14–19 curriculum, the responsibility for delivery is still generally shared between separate 11–16 and 16–19 institutions. Consequently, the decision as to what pathway to pursue may be delayed to the end of KS4, which some interviewees argued was later than necessary:

The trouble is most of our schools are 11–16, so you've got to move school at 16 and that's really a problem. Most people don't know that half of our schools are 11–16 because if you want

to start them on a vocational route you want to start them at 14, not 16.
- Former government advisor

Part of the reason that people are having such trouble finding a satisfactory shape for 14 to 19 education is the lack of ability to recognise that that's the point at which pathways can and should diverge and that there is nothing wrong with people selecting themselves in to different pathways. And there is no reason at all why they should all be in the same institution at that point.
- Board member, education provider

This is certainly not an argument for separate middle schools. The national and international evidence on these is negative. It does, however, illustrate the interlinked nature of policy, and how a failure to align levers at all levels can negatively impact the delivery of the overall vision. Instead, there may well be a case for creating room for movement for 14-year-old students who feel that their 14–19 education and training needs would be better met by transferring to a different institution. It might also be possible for an employer to take prime responsibility for a young person at 14, such as in the Young Apprenticeship Programmes,[17] with the school retaining some residual monitoring and pastoral support. By extension, this would mean that the transition from lower secondary to upper secondary would become more important, with significant assessment at the end of KS3 rather than KS4.

The confusion surrounding the National Curriculum, its goals and values, not to mention the mechanisms by which it is delivered, is emblematic of the lack of overall clarity within the system. At the same time, given that the curriculum is nothing less than 'a blueprint for what we want children to become',[18] resolving this debate would go a long way towards developing a coherent vision for England.

15 See, for instance, Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training, Issue Paper 1: The New 14–19 Diplomas (November 2007).

16 More recently, the government announced that it would develop Diplomas in science, humanities and the languages. The introduction of these Diplomas, as well as their description as the 'jewel in the crown' of the education system, suggests that the Brown government may be attempting to create what the Blair administration refused to – a unified framework of qualifications as set out in the Tomlinson proposals. (Working Group on 14-19 Reform, '14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform' 2004). It is too early to tell, however, the extent to which the introduction of this new line of Diplomas will make a difference in the academic/vocational divide, particularly since the A level is to be retained until at least 2013 as a discrete qualification. Nuffield Review (2007), p. 7.

17 A Young Apprenticeship programme is targeted at students in KS4 (14–16 years old) who wish to study for their vocational qualifications in a more hands-on manner. Students are based in school and continue to follow the National Curriculum. However, they will spend two days a week (or the equivalent) in college, with a training provider, at work or in a combination of the above. For more information, see http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/14to19/vocationaloffer/Apprenticeships/youngapprenticeships/

18 Mike Newby, Emeritus Professor of Education at Plymouth University. Quote taken from M. Johnson et al., *Subject to Change: New thinking on the curriculum* (London: ATL, 2007), p. 22.

We welcome the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee's call for an inquiry into the National Curriculum[19] and the present testing and assessment framework. As detailed research in these areas was not within the scope of this report, we will not put forward specific proposals on these areas. However, we strongly believe that we should move towards the Swedish model of a core entitlement curriculum, with increased flexibility for teachers and schools.

How might a shared vision be achieved?

Given the diverse range of interest groups in British society today, the question of how common ground is to be found is worth exploring in more detail. And in this case, understanding what not to do may be just as vital as understanding what should be done.

The Harris administration's experience in Ontario offers a particularly instructive lesson in political strategy (see 'Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad', Chapter 3). Their failure to bring all stakeholders on board not only damaged public confidence and teacher morale, but also overshadowed the positive – and necessary – elements of their reform agenda. The same could be said of the rushed introduction, in this country, of the Education Reform Act in 1988 (the consultation period coincided, not by chance, with school summer holidays). These lessons, that the tenor of any given policy can have a powerful impact on how it is received, and that stakeholder engagement is critical to reform success, are worth heeding. This is particularly true if we accept that shared vision is less a precondition of successful change than a product of concerted, honest engagement with all partners.

The challenge of course is in developing an honest rather than superficial engagement with all partners. Recently, the Brown administration established a National Council of Educational Excellence which would 'act as advocates and champions to transform expectations for the education system and advise the Government on strategy and measures to achieve world-class education'.[20] While the NCEE is an advisory body only, it is arguably in a good position to shape the national vision of education in England. Unfortunately, its members are only drawn from universities, schools and businesses. Some of our interviewees were highly critical of the fact that parents, teachers and students were excluded.

It is worth noting that the NCEE bears some resemblance to Hong Kong's Education Commission (EC), the independent advisory body that sets the national education agenda (see 'Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad', Chapter 4). As with the NCEE, the EC is composed of stakeholders and academics. Unlike the NCEE, though, the EC is also responsible for monitoring the progress of government reforms, in effect ensuring that stakeholders have direct influence at both the policy development and policy evaluation stages.

In Hong Kong, the EC has helped reduce the likelihood of having the national education agenda hijacked by any one stakeholder, including political parties. It is too early to predict, however, what impact the NCEE will have on the system in England. Interviewee response ranged widely, from those who thought it was a 'giant step' towards improving stakeholder representation in the policy development process, to those who were argued that 'we are plagued by wildly excessive numbers of quangos; we should be reducing them, not creating more.'

19 The inquiry will consider: the principle of whether there should be a National Curriculum; how the fitness-for-purpose of the National Curriculum might be improved; the management of the National Curriculum and its articulation with other policies and strategies with which schools must work. http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/csf/csfpn040208a.cfm

20 http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2007_0125

For many interviewees, effective collaboration among all stakeholders was less about the development of new bodies than about genuine political will within the government to listen, engage and take their concerns seriously. 'I don't think the mechanism is important,' one union leader argued. 'I mean, you can have those structures but they don't actually operate because no one takes them seriously or they don't produce any goods … Just to give you an example, there is something called the public services forum in which cabinet ministers chair and discuss matters of public service delivery, but I mean it's useless in so far as in that forum the government doesn't really listen.'

> **"** During our focus groups with head teachers, we were intrigued by the fact that a significant minority of respondents raised concerns that 'what is free is not valued' **"**

Instead, the majority of our interviewees viewed the school as the central agent around which a common vision of education was to be developed. When questioned about what could be done to change the culture of education in England, interviewees made references to the need to engage local communities, to strengthen existing home school contracts, and to work with the local media both to generate discussion about the purpose of education and to ensure that the challenges being faced by schools are covered in a less sensationalist (and negative) manner. For these interviewees, 'bring it down to the lowest level of the school!' wasn't just about practicalities, but about ensuring that schools and communities developed mutual ownership of their children's future. As one head teacher summed up:

[Changing the culture of student achievement] is brought about by engaging families in the process of education. In successful schools, families are involved in the planning cycle, the consultation and delivery of a curriculum plan. Parents can actually take part in that and all the local stakeholder groups can be involved, and that's part of the processes of making sure that the offer that you give, outcome driven as it is, actually is a relevant answer.

There already exists a mountain of research on strategies for engaging parents and communities that schools can and should draw on. One particular area that we believe has been under-explored thus far, though, is that of parental contribution. During our focus groups with head teachers, we were intrigued by the fact that a significant minority of respondents raised concerns that 'what is free is not valued'. For these respondents, the fact that compulsory education is free created little incentive for parents to expect and demand high standards of schools, or to see themselves as partners in the education process.

While we firmly believe that per-pupil funding should be provided by the government for reasons of social justice, we note the existence of a number of innovative frameworks which encourage parental contributions for enhancement projects. For instance, the e-learning Foundation works with schools to develop strategies to achieve high levels of home access to ICT for all students, regardless of background.[21] To enable sustainability of funding, parents are encouraged to participate through direct-debit Gift Aid donations over several years. The response from parents has been very encouraging: contributions for all projects currently stands at £1 million each year (compared to the additional £700,000 raised through other public and private channels) and monthly donations

vary from £4 to £28 depending on local circumstances.[22]

This form of parental engagement through modest contributions could certainly be rolled out on a larger scale and used to tackle an unspoken issue within the public sector: the funding discrepancies generated by PTA fund-raising activities. According to data from the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations, the average PTA raises about £4,000 a year. The range, however, is considerable since the spending power of parents and communities varies by location. One secondary school in Middlesex raises almost £50,000 a year from monthly car boot sales alone. Some schools struggle to get a PTA going at all and have no additional source of funding.[23]

These funds are generally used to improve the quality of facilities at a school from computers and ICT rooms, to paying for school trips and restocking libraries. One interviewee reported that the school's PTA fund was used to pay for teacher bonuses (on top of the retention and recruitment grants obtained from the government). Clearly schools in more affluent areas and with students from more affluent families have a significant advantage.

We would like to see action to facilitate charitable giving to schools in a manner which would also enable families in poorer areas to participate. A ratchet mechanism with a multiplier effect should be developed to adjust for differences in socio-economic levels. Thus, a school in the most deprived ward in England (e.g. measured on the basis of the index of multiple deprivation) might have its funds multiplied fivefold, while a school in the least deprived ward in England would not receive any matching funds from the government.

This would create new funding for schools which would be reserved for *enhancement* projects alone (e.g. school visits, capital development). It would also promote engagement and allow parents even in very restricted circumstances the dignity of contributing towards the success of their school. As this funding is not intended to replace per-pupil funding, it should not affect government funding levels.

> **We propose that the government facilitates the setting up of local foundations so that parents can contribute to enhancement projects at their children's school. A ratchet mechanism with a multiplier effect should be developed to ensure that the impact of donating in poor areas is multiplied to level the playing field.**

What might look such a vision look like?

While we recognise the need for a broad national vision, we agree with our interviewees that a detailed, 'one-size fits all' approach will not suit England. We also support their argument that schools, in being the closest point of contact for parents and students, are best placed to negotiate the development of a shared educational vision that is relevant to the community being served.

We suggest, therefore, that an ideal system can be characterised by the analogy of 'tight, loose, tight': clearly delineated objectives, responsibilities and standards; the freedom and autonomy to innovate at the school and classroom level; and comprehensive mechanisms for evaluating school performance and ensuring institutional and professional accountability. Essentially, schools and practitioners will be given as much room to innovate as possible within the constraints of a pared-down, focused national framework.

We propose that the national vision of education refocuses on the primary goal of teaching and learning. While schools should certainly still be expected to attend to other

22 http://www.becta.org.uk/ etseminars/presentations/2005- 10-13/8/slides/slides.ppt

23 http://women.timesonline. co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/f amilies/article2870492.ece

dimensions of individual development, such as those articulated in the Every Child Matters Agenda, the focus should nonetheless be on ensuring that all students achieve the minimum standard in core competencies such as literacy and numeracy. Additionally, every effort should be made to ensure that each distinct stage of education ensures readiness for the next stage.

We propose sweeping away much of the bureaucratic structures within government, local authorities and non-departmental public bodies to concentrate resources into schools and to reduce external initiatives. National and local authorities should concentrate on ensuring clear and consistent information is available to support parental choice, and on commissioning enough good school places for every child and taking action to remove poor quality school places rapidly.

Finally, we believe that a new accountability framework is required. One that is still outcomes-driven, but that is not restricted to a single measure of success, and that is more user-friendly for those who most require the information: parents.

In the matter of designing education systems and overarching structures we have forgotten that wise maxim that sometimes 'less is more'. The rest of the chapters in this report will explore different components of this 'tight, loose, tight' framework in greater detail.

2

Mediating the 'Loose': Governance and Organisation

The past three Labour terms have seen the government and education establishment embroiled in a circuitous debate over standards versus structures. The pendulum has swung from standards (e.g. the primary literacy and numeracy strategies), to structures (e.g. the introduction of academies, trusts and a new role for local authorities), and back again, it seems, to standards, under Brown's new administration. Yet this 'debate' is a non-starter.

It is certainly true that the quality of education is primarily affected by what goes on within the classroom. Nonetheless, structures can facilitate or hinder the development of those underlying fundamentals. Instead of perpetuating a false dichotomy between standards and structures, the question that we should be asking is: 'What are the structures within which attributes of successful schools – strong leadership and school ethos; motivated and talented workforce, etc. – are most likely to be cultivated?'

This chapter takes as its starting point the position that choice and diversity offers England the most promise for a system-wide rise in educational quality. The arguments in support of this position have been made extensively elsewhere (see, for example, Policy Exchange's 'More Good School Places' and 'Choice? What Choice?').[24] A freed-up supply-side combined with genuine per-capita funding and balanced with a strong admissions code and additional finance for pupils from deprived areas is the model now underpinning both Conservative and Liberal Democrat education policy. We shall therefore focus on the division of power and duties between the centre, local government and schools; and on mechanisms for balancing the need for both competition and collaboration.

> " Instead of perpetuating a false dichotomy between standards and structures, the question that we should be asking is: 'What are the structures within which attributes of successful schools – strong leadership and school ethos; motivated and talented workforce, etc. – are most likely to be cultivated?' "

Who's responsible for what?

In England, decision-making powers over areas like staffing, budgeting, instructional content and assessment practices have historically been shared between the school, local authority and national government. However, the past three decades has seen a deliberate shift of power towards the individual school and national government at the expense of the local authority.

The roots of this shift can be traced to James Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1976. Callaghan championed for a core curriculum, closer links between education and industry and rigorous monitoring of national performance – calls that, while not uncommon

24 J. O'Shaughnessy and C. Leslie, 'More Good School Places' (London: Policy Exchange, 2005); E. Sturdy and S. Freedman. 'Choice What Choice? (London: Policy Exchange, 2007)

today, were revolutionary at a time when policy was the province of the education community alone. For the first time, the 'secret garden' of education had been dragged into the public and political spotlight.

Through the early 1980s, the government made tentative forays into developing stronger accountability frameworks. However, the real turning point was the 1988 Education Reform Act – 'the most important piece of education legislation in the second half of the twentieth century'.[25] The Act aimed to create a market within the school system. The central mechanism by which this was to be achieved was 'local management of schools': the devolution of power from local education authorities to each individual school. Beginning with the delegation of up to 85 per cent of funding to each school, the government quickly moved to curb the control LEAs had, introducing new categories of schools (e.g. grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges) which would operate independently of the local authority, and centralising power over key domains of instructional content and assessment practices.

More recently, the Blair government introduced new legislation that re-envisioned the local authority as a 'champion of parents and pupils, commissioning rather than providing education'.[26] The Education and Inspections Act 2006 created a strategic role for local authorities, with duties to promote choice, diversity, high standards and the fulfilment of every child's educational potential. As the commissioner of school places, local authorities will be able to propose expansions to all categories of schools, set the terms for school competition and take all decisions relating to school organisation. Local authorities have also been given new powers to intervene earlier if performance is poor.

At the same time, central government control, particularly over domains of instructional content and assessment practices, remain strong. On one hand, the new secondary curriculum for 11- to 14-year-olds has been slimmed down to give teachers more power and flexibility in personalising education lessons for their students. On the other hand, the government remains committed to national strategies for literacy and numeracy – despite evidence from the Primary Review that these strategies have had a negligible impact on primary literacy (the results for primary numeracy are slightly better). The recent introduction of a detailed pre-primary 'curriculum' has also raised eyebrows.

Central government

Perhaps the least ambiguous and unsurprising finding to emerge from our research is the extent of frustration among stakeholders regarding central government's propensity for intervening whenever and wherever their fancy strikes. 'Whitehall needs to understand that it can't control 24,000 schools from the centre,' one interviewee complained. The charge of 'initiative-itis' and micromanagement is by no means new. Educationists have long argued that the breakneck pace of reforms flowing out of the DCSF and Whitehall have a draining and demoralising impact on schools and teachers, with questionable returns for the system as a whole.

There is little reason to believe that this tendency towards micromanagement will change under the stewardship of Brown's leadership team. 'There seems to be no deficiency in life which the Prime Minister does not consider it to be his duty to address (irrespective of the practicalities involved)' a recent *Times* editorial ran, 'and none where the solution involves anything other than an action plan to be framed by ministers.'[27]

As much as we would wish otherwise, it would be extremely difficult to reverse the politicisation of education. We can, however, curb the extent to which the system is vulnerable to constant influence, by realign-

25 M. Barber, *The Learning Game*, 2nd edn (London: Indigo, 1997), p. 49.

26 Department of Children, Schools and Families, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*, White Paper (2005).

27 http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/leading_article/article3036937.ece

ing existing powers and duties so that all schools and practitioners have the maximum autonomy to innovate and personalise the learning experience for students.

In the previous chapter, we suggested that the national curriculum framework should be pared down and that the responsibility for ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum should be devolved to schools and professionals. In Chapter 4, we will propose the introduction of a national funding formula which will simplify the funding process and reduce the number of separate grants available. The DCSF, for instance, currently disperses up to 35 different school standards grants (in addition to the dedicated school grant), many of which overlap with one another.[28] Additionally, we suggest that the bureaucracy that schools face could be significantly reduced by rationalising the number of organisations involved in education.

The DfES departmental report for 2007 listed 18 non-departmental public bodies[29] (colloquially referred to as quangos) currently involved in education. Most of these NDPBs are defined as 'executive' bodies, which means that they are established in statute, employ their own staff and are allocated their own budget (e.g. the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), the Curriculum and Qualifications Authority, and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)). The list does not include advisory bodies, tribunals or public corporations – a decision that arguably misrepresents the number of agencies in play at any given moment.[30] For instance, the General Teaching Council (GTC) is classed as an 'independent, not-for-profit corporation serving public interest'[31] rather than an NDPB. Unlike other not-for-profit corporations, though, the GTC has statutory power to advise the Secretary of State on all matters of professional practice concerning teaching and learning.

We believe that there is a need to review the roles and impact of each NDPB within the education sector. With regard to the quality of teaching, for instance, the TDA and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) both conduct research and programmes to support workforce development. This overlapping remit is inefficient, not just in terms of cost to the taxpayers, but in terms of the additional contact points schools have to deal with when seeking appropriate support. Similarly, the Learning and Skills Council has a very wide remit ('planning and funding high quality education and training for everyone in England other than in universities') which closely parallels dimensions of the work of the Quality Improvement Agency ('to help post-16 education and training providers respond to government priorities on 14–19 education and training').[32]

> **We propose a rationalisation of national agencies with overlapping remits so as to reduce the bureaucratic workload upon schools, and the monetary costs incurred by taxpayers. Potential mergers might include: the TDA and NCSL; and the LSC and the QIA. There is little reason as well why many of the functions of the LSC couldn't be merged back into the DCSF and the DIUS (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills).**

Local government – the local authority
Throughout this report, we argue that English schools need to be given more autonomy in order to increase innovation, engagement and overall efficiency. At the same time, we recognise that overly atomised governance structures create their own problems. In New Zealand, for instance, the lack of any middle-level governing bodies is hampering the Government's ability to systematically replicate changes and access economies of scale (see 'Helping

28 See Annex A: http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=9406

29 Officially defined as: 'a body which has a role in the processes of national government, but is not a government department or part of one, and which accordingly operates to a greater or lesser extent at arm's length from Ministers.'

30 For a comparison, see the quango database that has been compiled by the Economic Research Council: http://quangos.ercouncil.org/search/

31 http://www.gtce.org.uk/aboutthegtc/faqs/rolefaq/

32 DfES, Departmental Report 2007, p.156.

Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad', Chapter 2).

The question for England therefore is not whether we should abolish the practice of 'middle management', but whether that function should continue to be played by the local authority. This question gains urgency in light of research from the Curriculum, Evaluation and Management Centre at Durham University, which found that 'LEAs do not differ from one another in educationally important ways' once other school and pupil level factors have been taken into account. The minimal impact of the LEA on student performance is, they argue, unsurprising given that LEAs simply do not have the funds to develop distinctive, long-term initiatives of their own and are thus more alike than dissimilar in their behaviour.[33]

Our research suggests that the new legislation on local authorities (the Education and Inspections Act 2006) has largely been welcomed by stakeholders, although not for the same reasons. Those who view local authorities as the 'stakeholder in education who has been most badly mistreated and ignored for 20 years'[34] have welcomed the new duties and powers. They argue that the Act has reinvigorated local authorities as governing units, and that this strengthening is desirable on the grounds that: i) it is inefficient to 'invent a whole series of other intervening groups and authorities';[35] and ii) that local authorities as democratically elected bodies are accountable to the local community in a way that other federation models are not.

The majority of our interviewees, however, felt that local authorities are inefficient as education providers and welcomed the shift of local authorities to service commissioners. For them, the move away from the local authority as education provider was necessary on the grounds that most, though not all, had failed to adapt to the demands of the choice agenda: 'The conception of the local authority is that we

will have an equitable provision of facility … fundamentally what that means is that there's an attempt to have a 'one-size fits all' approach, which again creates a tension between the choice and diversity agenda.'[36] It was felt that many local authorities are still struggling to come to terms with what it means to be a commissioner rather than a provider and that it is still 'not clear how that's being done yet or what it means for relationships'.[37]

While some of this disarray can be rationalised as teething pains, considerable concern was expressed over the fact that the initiative for divesting the provider role lay with local authorities themselves (e.g. local authorities still maintain control over community and voluntary controlled schools). Interviewees expressed scepticism over the willingness of local authorities to voluntarily downsize and truly act as 'champions of parents and pupils' if they retained a stake in being one of the education providers within any given borough. This conflict of interest was explored in greater detail in Policy Exchange's report 'Choice? What Choice?', particularly as it relates to the academies programmes, and the competition mechanism for new schools.

How are local authorities perceived?
The Audit Commission's Annual School Survey captures schools' perceptions of their council's services for children and young people. The survey results are used as part of each council's annual performance assessment. In general, the 2006 survey found that schools are 'generally content' with the support and services obtained from their council. Of 76 questions, 88 per cent received an average rating of satisfactory or above,[38] with the best areas being child protection and school improvement support, and the worst for services to the most vulnerable children and young people.

Closer examination reveals notable differences in satisfaction levels. First, satisfaction levels are greatly affected by phase of

33 P. Tymms, A. Wiggins, and C. Merrell, 'The Performance of Newcastle Schools: Report 6', CEM Centre, University of Durham (initial analysis in Report 2) (2005).

34 Interview, union official.

35 Ibid.

36 Interviewee, education provider.

37 Interview, former government advisor.

38 There were six possible responses: very good, good, satisfactory, poor, very poor or unable to comment.

education. Nurseries provided the most positive ratings for 76 per cent of questions, as compared to special schools at 14 per cent, primaries at 7 per cent and secondary schools at 3 per cent. In fact, secondary schools gave the most negative responses to 83 per cent of all questions. A comparison of primary and secondary schools alone further sharpens this phase distinction: primary schools were seven times more likely to rate their council positively than secondary schools.

This primary/secondary distinction is supported by other surveys[39] and was echoed during our interviews and focus groups. Interviewees speculated that this divide may be due to the way schools are structured and run. Primary school heads are far more isolated than their secondary counterparts; they lack senior management teams and have to deal with the same amount of legislative process and guidance as a head teacher at a considerably larger secondary school. Furthermore, the range of issues and partners that secondary schools deal with are arguably more complex than primaries, given their larger size and the multiple initiatives that impinge upon them. (It is worth noting that of 245 schools in special measures as of 31 December 2007, approximately 71 per cent were primaries).[40]

Combined, this creates a situation wherein primary schools may be more reliant on local authority support and direction. 'They do like the LA telling them what to do,' a senior department official noted, '[but] the worst thing that I would add is that LAs all over the country have encouraged primary heads to do that, to rely on them, not to challenge, to do as they are told.' This is a powerful allegation. Unfortunately, it was not an isolated comment.

Second, there are notable differences across schools, depending on the type of council they were in (county, inner London, outer London, metropolitan dis-

trict and unitary). Inner London schools were the most positive, giving the best ratings on 57 per cent of questions, while schools maintained by counties reported the lowest ratings on 64 per cent of the survey questions. Although a number of interviewees had singled out smaller local authorities as potentially ineffective at maximising their resources, there does not seem to be a correlation between size and ratings.

> ❝ Primary school heads are far more isolated than their secondary counterparts; they lack senior management teams and have to deal with the same amount of legislative process and guidance as a head teacher at a considerably larger secondary school ❞

What happens to poorly performing local authorities?

Since 2002, the Audit Commission has also conducted Comprehensive Performance Assessments of local authorities, drawing on a range of performance indicators, assessments of corporate capacity, audit and inspection reports, and stakeholder opinions. Local authorities are rated on a four-star basis (two being the minimum acceptable level of performance) and their 'direction of travel': not improving adequately, improving adequately, improving well and improving strongly.

The quality of education services is evaluated as part of a larger raft of services for children and young people. The score for this block is provided by the Annual Performance Review conducted by Ofsted. In 2006, three local authorities failed to reach the minimum requirement expected: Bristol, Stoke-on-Trent and Sandwell.[41] Of the three, Bristol and Sandwell were found to be making adequate improvement; Stoke-on-Trent was not and has since been subject to extensive DCSF intervention.

39 See, for instance, item 2.6 in the National Foundation for Educational Research's annual survey of trends in education for 2006, 'Have schools' concerns changed over time'.

40 http://www.ofsted.gov.uk /portal/site/Internet /menuitem.eace3f09a603 f6d9c3172a8a08c08a0c/?vgnext oid=bc90a9438b4f7110VgnVCM 1000003507640aRCRD

41 CPA – The Harder Test: Scores and analysis of performance in single tier and country councils, 2006.

The process by which intervention is decided upon remains somewhat opaque. According to a representative from the Audit Commission, 'Relationships are in place to ensure that things are caught early'; the published performance scores thus rarely come as a surprise to the government agencies working with the council. Generally, councils that are struggling will be supported through a combination of discussion, planning and monitoring, in collaboration with other local partners. No one agency is tasked with initiating this programme of support, as it is the expectation that this process will develop organically through existing interactions between the council and government officers.[42]

There is no doubt that this fluidity requires a high degree of initiative, trust and cooperation on the part of all parties to function optimally. Other education providers, however, believe that this process is both insufficiently rigorous and unjust:

I think there needs to be a much tougher line on LAs. Academies have to sign up to funding agreements under which the school goes into special measures, and if the academy doesn't improve significantly within 12 months, the DCSF can take the school away, and frankly I don't see why local authorities should be able to carry on controlling a school and having it underperforming for year after year.[43]

It is worth noting that as of August 2007 there were 246 schools in special measures across 95 local authorities. 40 per cent of these schools were located in just 15 local authorities (with one local authority having up to 13 schools). While we recognise

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We support a vision of LAs as commissioners leading to greater fluidity in structures with schools competing (either independently or in networks – described in the section on competition). It is desirable that schools be given the maximum freedom to select the provider that most suits their needs. As things stand however, the LA's strategic role as commissioner gives them an unfair advantage over other providers. We propose that:

1. **All schools become the legal employer of their staff and take ownership of their land (as is already the case for those with foundation status, in trusts or set-up as academies). This would have two effects. First, it would remove the logical inconsistency that sees schools possess de facto control over hiring and firing, and health and safety while authorities retain legal responsibility. Secondly, it would break some of the formal barriers that could stop schools moving to other providers or operating independently.**
2. **Any local authority that wishes to be a school provider should set up an arm's length trading company to bid on contracts so as to operate on an equal footing with non-governmental school providers. Successful companies that emerge from this process could then run schools outside of their original authority.**
3. **All providers, local authority or otherwise, should be subject to clear and transparent regulations regarding school performance. Providers that fail to enable a school within their network to exit special measures or notice to improve within an agreed upon time period should, as with the current regulation for academies, have their school transferred to another provider, upon the agreement of the school and the DCSF.**

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42 We were unable to obtain information from the DCSF as to whether they had additional procedures in place.

43 Interview, education provider

28

that these local authorities may have higher concentrations of socio-economic deprivation, they are clearly struggling.

Competition and collaboration

Our research suggests that systems are the most effective when there are pressures for both competition and collaboration. In Canada, for instance, the presence of at least two public school boards (not to mention private schools) in each district creates a natural impetus for competition between different education providers while providing a natural network for support. Similarly, in Hong Kong, multiple school providers compete in the same geographical area for students, while sharing innovative curriculum and professional development within their network of schools. (See 'Helping Schools Succeed: Learning from Abroad', Chapters 3 and 4, for more information.)

This mix of competition and cooperation – dubbed 'co-opetition' by Harvard and Yale academics Adam Brandenburger and Barry Nalebuff[44] – is a common business strategy for optimising productivity. More recently, however, researchers are drawing attention to the ways in which this practice could be applied in other fields. At the Staffordshire Institute for Education Policy Research, studies on English policy reform have found that competition is more likely to promote short-run efficiency, and cooperation is more likely to promote long-run dissemination of best practice. Researchers argue for schools to 'collaborate … outside their local market, whilst still competing with other local schools'[45] – essentially, the practices adopted by Canada (Alberta more so than Ontario) and Hong Kong.

In England, however, competition and cooperation are typically seen as opposite ends of a spectrum – a paradigm perpetuated by the government. A recent publication from the DCSF's Innovation Unit opened its thought piece with the question: 'What if we collaborated instead of competed?'[46] Indeed, government rhetoric and policy increasingly stresses collaboration between schools and businesses or university partners as the solution for all schooling improvement woes. The new Children's Plan contains an expectation that every secondary school will have specialist, trust or academy status, and every school is to have a business or university partner.

In practice, schools are given considerable leeway in deciding whether these collaborative networks are hard (i.e. resulting in different governing bodies or modes of operations) or soft.[47] This flexibility is deliberate: 'These [collaborations] will work because they've been formed by themselves, and I think that that is essential because you'll only get collaboration if you get trust,' one local councillor explained. 'I think anything that is insisted from the top down is almost doomed to failure.'

While the government should be credited for stepping back from their usual heavy-handed approach, our comparative research suggests that some forms of collaboration may be better than others. In New Zealand, for instance, short-term collaborative frameworks developed in response to specific funding incentives, but rarely lasted once funding stopped. In contrast, models which built on the principle of long-term partnerships (whether with other schools and/or the local community) were more likely to get embedded into the everyday practice of each member school (see the initiative Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara, in 'Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad', Chapter 2).

We find the suggestion that collaboration – whatever its form or costs – is inherently positive problematic:

The main thing is that [collaboration is] extremely time-intensive, and again the tougher the school, the more the sen-

44 A. Brandenburger and B. Nalebuff, Co-Opetition : *A revolution mindset that combines competition and cooperation* (New York: Currency, 1997).

45 N. Adnett and P. Davies, 'Schooling Reforms in England: From quasi-markets to co-opetition', *Journal of Education Policy* 18:4 (2003), pp. 393–406.

46 What If, Next Practice in System Leadership, Innovation Unit; available at: http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/files/pdf/np_systemleadership.pdf

47 The DCSF has four categories of collaboration: hard governance federation, soft governance federation, soft federation and informal, loose collaboration. The first two forms have to be established according to regulations, while the latter two are non-statutory in nature. For information on how each model differs in terms of governance structure and decision-making, see www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/federations

ior people need to be in that school and the less time they can safely spend tootling around outside, having jolly conversations about collaboration … Collaboration is lovely, but it's actually very expensive and the opportunity cost of the time [collaboration] takes up, so I think it's a very fashionable buzzword, but I think it should be used sparingly when there is a real purpose.

- Board member, academy provider

Collaboration is almost a shield against competition sometimes. Collaborate for what purpose? On what? If it's going to raise standards clearly, let's do it. . . but the word 'collaboration' is almost used like 'apple-pie' – it's a good thing, while actually it isn't necessarily.

- Secondary school head teacher

Instead, models of collaboration which require a transformation in the ways schools operate were considered more effective than informal or loose ones. This is primarily owing to the extensive consultations (within the school and with stakeholders) and 'branding' process that schools entering such governance federations have to go through. Interestingly, recent policy announcements suggest that the government is favouring a model which partners high and low performing schools:[48]

- Up to £300,000 funding will be given to a high-performing school when it merges with a less successful school to help deliver improvements – this could apply to both primary and secondary schools.
- A grant of between £120,000 and £300,000 will be given to the stronger school to support its improvement work with its new partner.

We express reservation over the unspoken assumption that a partnership between high and low performing schools is the best

model to follow. Not all leadership teams at high performing schools may be able (despite the additional funds) to balance turning around the performance of their weaker partner, *and* maintaining performance levels at their school. Furthermore, most of the collaborative networks being developed are geographically defined. We know, however, from research on the practice of co-opetition, that the creation of a geographically defined network in a single area reduces competitive pressures, essentially reproducing the monopolies of the LEA era. While this reduction of competitive incentive may be less of an issue in rural areas (where competition, at least within the state sector, is generally weak to begin with), the impact on densely populated areas could be far more wide-ranging.

The way forward may well lie in organisations such as Absolute Return for Kids (ARK) and the United Learning Trust (ULT), which sponsor multiple schools (specifically academies) in more than one location. Both ARK and ULT have developed their own educational vision and ethos; they are also developing their own infrastructure and procedures to address issues like staff remuneration and behaviour policies. While each school has its own management team, the 'branding' produced by each charity's distinct vision and mode of operation indelibly marks each school as belonging to a larger family and enables some comparability of experience across schools. Furthermore, the responsibility for turning around a struggling member school lies with the network provider. While the provider may certainly draw on expertise from more successful schools in their network, the high performing schools themselves will not have to take on additional burdens.

Edison Schools UK (a subsidiary of Edison Inc., a major education services provider in the United States of America) operates in a similar fashion. While its status as a for-profit company precludes it

48 http://findoutmore.dfes.gov.uk/2006/11/trust_schools_u.html

from sponsoring academies or running schools, it is a major provider of school improvement services. The Edison Design for School Improvement is marketed as 'a holistic framework and all-embracing programme for really effective improvement, driven by research-led design and clear outcome measures'. Schools that subscribe to this programme (i.e. become an Edison School Partner) are supported through a structured nine-term improvement plan and have access to Edison's extensive research and development network. So, while it is not a hard federation, schools that subscribe to the Edison Design principles nonetheless experience many of the partnership benefits that schools in the ARK or ULT family obtain.[49]

Given that schools thrive best when there are levers for both competition and collaboration, we propose that:

1. **All schools are encouraged to be a part of a larger support network (preferably non-geographical) which would enable them to access economies of scale and/or collaborate on pedagogical matters such as the development of school curricula. Schools that are prospering as an independent entity would not be required to join a network if they do not wish to do so.**
2. **These networks may be run by the new arm's-length companies set up by local authorities, or not-for-profit providers.**
3. **A one-off grant be provided to any provider which recruits a new school to its existing network. Successful recruitment would be dependent on the quality of the services and resources it offers to its member schools. To encourage the development of non-geographically based networks, a larger grant could be provided if the school in question is in another local authority.**

In the long run, we envisage that these support networks will be funded through subscriptions paid by member schools, who, because local authorities will no longer be taking 10–15 per cent of their budget, will have the money to pay for these services.

49 For more information on these organisations, see http://www.arkonline.org/projects/uk_education1/index.html; http://www.ult.org.uk/; http://www.edisonschools.co.uk/

3

Mediating the 'Loose': A New Deal for Teachers

Teachers matter. We know this intuitively from our experiences: inspirational teachers – when we are fortunate enough to encounter them – are hard to forget. The available evidence on this matter is also uncompromisingly clear: the quality of teaching that students receive is the main driver of student achievement at the school level. Drawing on over 500 meta-analyses, researchers have found that 30 per cent of variance in student performance is attributable to the quality of teaching received – the second-largest source of variance after student ability and prior achievement.[50]

At the classroom level, the impact that teachers have is stark. One large-scale, longitudinal study in Tennessee found that students of comparable abilities and prior achievement would see a divergence in their performance – of up to 50 percentile points within a three-year period – depending on the quality of the teacher they were assigned.[51] Similarly, researchers drawing on a state-wide student database in Texas found that 'having a high quality teacher throughout elementary school can substantially offset or even eliminate the disadvantage of low socio-economic background'.[52]

It therefore came as no surprise that in every system we visited, interviewees repeatedly stressed the importance of, and difficulty in, developing a high-quality teaching workforce. This was also true in England, although interviewees differed significantly in their identification of

where the core trouble spots were and what needed to be done to rectify the situation. Responses ranged from improving the calibre of candidates being recruited and the quality of initial teacher training; to revamping existing mechanisms for motivating, developing and retaining teachers. Still others argued for a review of dismissal processes and the flexibility of the current pay system in order to get the right people on the bus and the wrong people off it.

The breadth of issues raised is beyond the scope of this chapter. We will therefore concentrate on the experience of teachers, rather than the leadership and managerial issues related to head teachers and other senior management team members. The following sections lay out key issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of good teachers, and what a 'new deal' for teachers might look like.

The challenge: developing informed professionals

If the education establishment in the 1970s was a 'secret garden' in which teachers operated with laissez-faire impunity, the current education climate is one of suffocating control and regulation. This transition is both a direct and indirect outcome of the education policies that various governments have put in place. As Figure 3.1[53] illustrates, the earliest reforms under the Thatcher and Major administra-

50 J. Hattie, 'Teachers Make a Difference: What is the research evidence?' Presented at the Australian Council for Educational Research, 2003; available at: https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/docs/pdf/ qt_hattie.pdf

51 W. Sanders and C. Rivers, November 1996. 'Cumulative and Residual Effect of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement' (Tennessee: University of Tennessee Value Added Research and Assessment Center, 1996).

52 S. Rivkin, E. Hanushek and J. Kain, 'Teachers, Schools and Academic Achievement' (2002), University of Texas-Dallas Press, Texas Schools Project.

53 Developed by Sir Michael Barber.

32

Figure 3.1: The development of the English teaching workforce

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                        Knowledge
                          Poor
                            |
   1985-1995                |         1975-1985
  ┌─────────────┐           |        ┌─────────────┐
  │ Uninformed  │  ◄─────────────────│ Uninformed  │
  │ Prescription│           |        │Professionalism│
  └─────────────┘           |        └─────────────┘
                            │
  Central       ───────────┼──────────────  Professional
  Control                  ▼                 Autonomy
   1995-Present             |         The Way Forward
  ┌─────────────┐           |        ┌─────────────┐
  │  Informed   │───────────────────►│  Informed   │
  │ Prescription│           |        │Professionalism│
  └─────────────┘           |        └─────────────┘
                            |
                        Knowledge
                          Rich
```
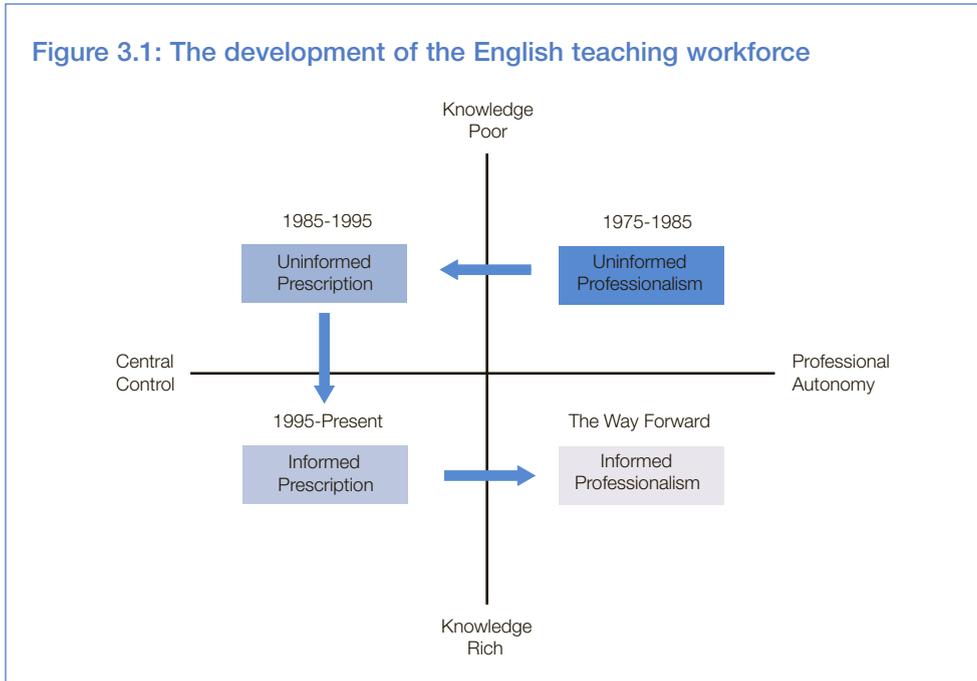
tions were intended to provide all children with a comparable educational experience. Reforms such as the introduction of the National Curriculum moved the locus of power over what happened within classrooms from the teacher to the government.

While a step forward in terms of accountability, policy-making during those early years was hampered by a lack of research and evidence into what really worked. As educational research became increasingly sophisticated, however, teaching began to be promoted by the government as a science, rather than as an art. The national literacy and numeracy strategies are the best illustrations of this wave of reform: top-down initiatives intended to enforce 'proper' teaching pedagogies within each school.

Practitioners and researchers argue, however, that the years of central prescription have had a detrimental impact on the teaching workforce. An incomplete list of concerns would include: the stifling of innovation and creativity; the erosion of public trust in teachers; and the decline in the status of the teaching profession as a whole. A report commissioned by the

DCSF found that teachers' perceptions of their own status declined rapidly between 1967, when they rated it 4.3 out of 5, and 2006, when they rated it 2.2. As for public perception: in a comparison of 12 other professions, teaching was generally perceived as a middle-ranking profession, most comparable to social work, rather than to law, medicine or business.[54]

Indeed, a graduate teacher on the Teach First scheme commented during an interview: 'Initially I felt a bit embarrassed at the idea of saying I was a maths teacher. Many of my friends are investment bankers or work in similar high-flying professions. There is a little bit of a stigma about teaching; people think you do it because you do not know what else to do, or you want the holidays.' A senior union leader pressed this point in his acknowledgment that 'I think there's an issue of teaching being seen to be the poor relations of the professions within England.'

The status of teaching as a profession has in turn been linked to issues of recruitment and retention. Through the 1990s, the government struggled to recruit sufficient teachers into the workforce, with par-

54 DfES, 'The Status of Teachers and the Teaching Profession in England: Views from inside and outside the profession', Final report of the Teacher Status Project, 2006.

Figure 3.2: Registered and 'in service' teachers by age group 2006/7
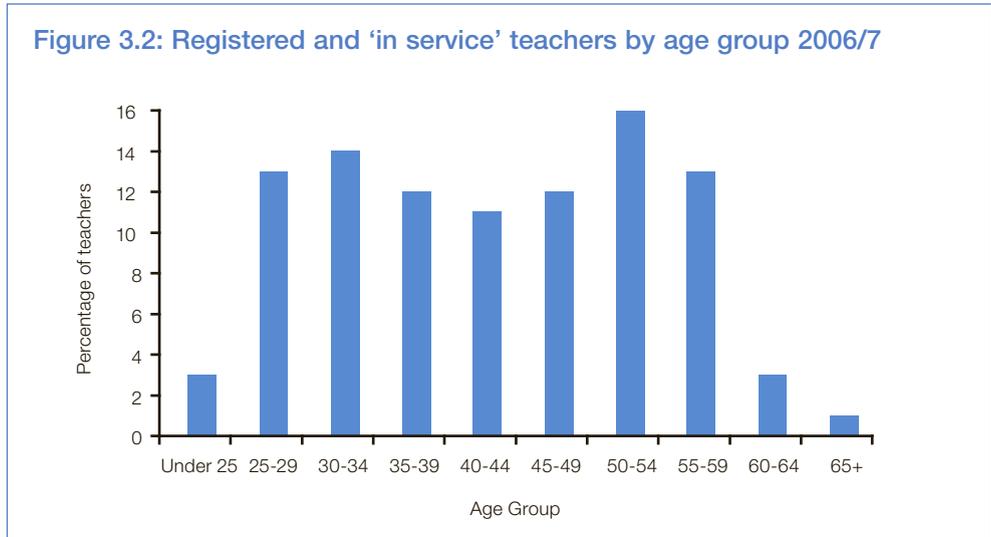
ticular difficulty in subjects like maths, science and ICT. While there has been some improvement, recruitment to teacher training at the secondary level is still below target for nine out of twelve secondary subjects.[55] The profession also appears to be struggling with 'wastage' – teachers who resign and leave the profession. DfES data shows that in 2003–4, 9.2 per cent of the workforce left the profession, with only a quarter of these leaving due to retirement.[56]

Teachers believe that the best way to improve their status would be to allow them to exercise more professional judgement. Yet the government has been loath to relinquish control. This tension between professional autonomy on the one hand, and performance accountability on the other, is encapsulated in Barber's conception of the 'informed professional' – teachers who are given a free rein to exercise their professional judgement in recognition of demonstrated knowledge and skill.

Recruitment: the who and how

As Figure 3.2 illustrates, approximately 35 per cent of the current workforce is over the age of 50; given this demographic profile, the rate of loss (of teachers to the profession) will rise significantly over the next 15 years.[57] While this certainly has knock-on effects on the quality of teachers entering middle and senior management positions, there are real concerns over the ability of the government to recruit sufficient candidates of calibre to compensate for this ageing workforce.

The government agency charged with raising the quality and quantity of teacher trainees is the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). In addition to launching an aggressive and highly sophisticated advertising campaign, the TDA has promoted a range of diverse routes into teaching to support different target groups. Thus, the Teach First programme (modelled after Teach for America) is aimed at high-performing graduates interested in teaching for a limited period of time before moving on to another career; whilst FastTrack is intended for those who desire to progress quickly into leadership and management roles. As of 2006, there were 32 different ways to enter the teaching profession in England.[58]

The TDA's strategies appear to have made some progress in widening the background of entrants to the profession. Graduate career surveys have found that teaching is now the most popular career choice among final-year graduates and those considering a career change; 'second career' teachers now make up one-third of each batch of teacher trainees.[59]

55 D. Burghes, B. Moon, J. O'Leary, A. Smithers and C. Woodhead, *Teaching Matters: The recruitment, employment and retention of teachers* (London: POLITEIA, 2007), p. 21.

56 Ibid., p. 27.

57 GTC. Profile of the teaching profession: Annual digest of statistics 2006-07: http://www.gtce.org.uk/shared/contentlibs/gtc/141488/201080/teach_profile_stats_2007.pdf

58 M. Barber and M. Mourshead, How the Worlds Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top (London: McKinsey and Company, 2007), p.20.

59 Teacher Development Agency, press release, 11 August 2005.

The current level of teacher vacancies is at the lowest level since 1999, although there is reason to believe that the recent reduction in training grants (e.g. for non-priority subjects) and the introduction of tuition fees for all undergraduates may lower recruitment rates.[60] The very latest figures from February 2008 suggest that these fears are being realised: teaching applications are down 9 per cent since 2007.[61]

Even if the quantity of teachers is maintained, there are concerns over quality. The head teacher of an inner-city London academy expounded: 'It's no good for me to hear the government saying we've got x amount of teachers applying, it's more than last year – it's the calibre . . . Are we recruiting the right calibre of teachers … especially for schools like this?' Similarly, a head teacher told us: 'I know we're told that there aren't shortages of teachers, but when you advertise for teachers and you see the quality of applicants that come in through the post, it feels like there is.'

This reported difficulty in recruiting good quality teachers may be linked to the school's circumstances. Existing evidence suggests that recruitment and retention is often harder in schools serving disadvantaged communities. Research commissioned by the DCSF found that teacher turnover is significantly higher in schools with low attainment, a high eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) and a high proportion of non-statemented special-needs children. Furthermore, teachers in difficult schools are over 50 per cent more likely to move to another school than teachers in 'good' schools.[62]

There is reason to believe, though, that more could be done to raise the quality of candidates being inducted into teacher-training schemes. In 2005/2006, 21 per cent of trainee teachers were non-graduates, and of these, 32 per cent had no A levels. Of the first-year postgraduate trainees with a UK degree, 58 per cent held a 2:1 or first. The TDA notes that this is an improvement from seven years ago, when only 51 per cent of the same group had a 2:1 or first.[63] (Note that no separate information is currently collected centrally on the level of education attained by 'second career' teachers.)

In contrast, a recent study by Barber and Mourshed (2007) found that top-performing systems recruit their teachers from the top third of each graduate cohort: the top 5 per cent in South Korea, the top 10 per cent in Finland and the top 30 per cent in Singapore and Hong Kong. This selectivity, coupled with the provision of a good starting salary (discussed later in the chapter), helps to raise the status of the profession, thereby attracting even more high-calibre applicants.

An illustration of this virtuous cycle can be seen in England's experience with Teach First, a programme specifically targeted at high-flying graduates. The entry requirements are high: a minimum 2:1 degree, 300 UCAS points and evidence of leadership skills and initiative. Successful applicants are placed at challenging secondary schools for two years and work towards Qualified Teacher Status on-site. Teach First teachers have been successfully branded as an elite cadre, and competition for places is stiff. In 2006, it was listed number 14 in the *Times'* list of top graduate employees.[64]

> We recognise that the TDA has made advancements in improving the rates and quality of teacher recruitment. However, we believe that the system would benefit from making a training route based on Teach First into the default option for new graduate teachers, and further encouraging the entry of 'second career' teachers. In forthcoming research on teacher recruitment and training, to be published this autumn, we will look at how the model could be adapted to achieve this.

60 The introduction of the training grant in 2000, coupled with a slight rise in the starting wages of teacher salaries, resulted in a 30 per cent rise in applications.

61 John Howson, 'Monthly Commentary', *EDS Surveys* 8:1 (February 2008).

62 A. Smithers and P. Robinson, 'Teacher Turnover, Wastage and Movements between Schools', DfES, Research Report 640, 2005.

63 Training and Development Agency, press notice, 18 July 2007.

64 http://www.top100 graduateemploy-ers.com/top100.html

The quality of initial teacher training

Interviewees generally agreed that the quality of initial teacher training was inadequate in preparing trainees for teaching, which in turn contributed to the high rates of attrition among NQTs. One interviewee argued: 'Poorly prepared aspirant teachers are coming into the profession and they're exiting almost immediately: within two, three, four years they're gone!'

There was less consensus on where exactly the perceived weakness in existing teacher-training schemes lay. Some felt that the one-year PGCE programme would function better if it was extended for another year or two, while others took that proposal a step further by drawing comparisons to the training expected of other professions: 'At the moment the PGCE course lasts two and a half terms, whereas if one wants to become a doctor, an engineer or any other profession, one is talking about an initial degree followed by professional training lasting at least two or three years.' Note that in Finnish practice, all teachers are expected to have at least a Master's degree.

Others argued that it was less about the length of training and more about how teachers were trained: 'I think all teacher training should eventually take place in the schools … the PGCE is OK, but a lot of it is theoretical, there's not enough practical experience.' One union leader pressed the point, by arguing that current training is unlikely to support the development of teachers as informed professionals: 'The current training reflects the highly centralised system that we have got. When I say they can teach a quality lesson, they could teach a strategies lesson, a conventional lesson …[however] teachers need to be equipped to make their own professional decisions about what techniques to use.'

As things stand, there is comparatively little research on the relative efficacy of each of the 32 possible routes into teaching in England. Initial evidence suggests, however, that work-based employment routes – the most significant of which are the Graduate Teacher Programme and the Overseas Trained Teacher Programme – may have an edge. Evidence provided by the DCSF to the Education and Skills Committee found that 90 per cent of teachers training through employment-based routes gain qualified teacher status, which is considerably higher than other routes.

Drop-out rates are also lower. Data from the TDA (then the Teacher Training Agency) found that: 'We could lose about 5% off GTP, about 11% off postgraduate and it will be higher, about 20–23% of undergraduates off the longer courses.'[65] This may not be indicative of the quality of support and training in each programme, but could reflect the degree of certainty held by trainees before entering the programme: 'second career' teacher trainees, in making an active choice to switch careers, may be less likely to change their mind than an undergraduate who may have been less aware of the alternative options available.

Even within a particular training route, there can be considerable variation in the quality of training provided. In one comparison of the performance profiles of university PGCE programmes, researchers found variations of up to 300 points (scored on the basis of entry qualifications, quality as judged by Ofsted inspections and the proportion of trainees known to be entering teaching) between the highest- and lowest-ranking institutions.[66]

> **Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is considerable variability in the efficacy of various training routes. Our research to be published later in the year will propose a rationalisation around the routes that work best.**

65 House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 'Secondary Education: Teacher retention and recruitment', Fifth Report of Session 2003–2004, Volume 2, Q372.

66 A. Smithers and P. Robinson, 'Teacher Training Profiles 2007', Center for Education and Employment Research, University of Buckingham (2008).

Incentives: remuneration

Pay levels

The Database of Teachers Records shows that the average salary of full-time qualified secondary teachers has risen by approximately 50 per cent from £22,200 in 1995 to £33,720 in 2005, with a comparable rate of change for primary teachers. Once adjusted for inflation, this increase is approximately 18 per cent.[67] Given these changes, the majority of our interviewees expressed satisfaction with current pay levels. 'I think we are past the point of getting any real marginal return for throwing more money at teachers,' one education provider noted. The one exception was the NUT, which argued that salary rises have not adequately taken into account changes in inflation, and that the purchasing power of a teacher's salary has fallen.

Research conducted by Barber and Mourshed (2007) suggests, however, that in countries where salaries are already very high (e.g. Switzerland), further increases in salary had little impact on the number or quality of applicants to teaching. Indeed, salary is rarely stated as one of the more important impetuses for entering teaching (although ensuring that starting salaries are comparable to those of other graduate jobs does widen the pool of potential applicants). The report concludes that systems should pay 'good (not great)' starting salaries – a finding that corresponds with the results of our research.

The challenge is determining what constitutes a 'good' starting salary. Evidence indicates that new graduates are entering the workforce with larger debts; a recent survey found that the average student graduates with £14,779 of debt, a 5 per cent increase from 2005 figures. Coupled with higher costs of living (most notoriously sky-rocketing house prices), new graduates arguably require more money in the earlier part of their life to support aspirations for family life.

Frontloading the remuneration scheme is one possible solution. The restructuring costs could be borne by reducing incremental progression: in the average OECD country, the difference between the average starting salary and the maximum teacher salary is 70 per cent. This contrasts with 46 per cent in England and just 18 per cent in Finland. Barber and Mourshed (2007) notes that such restructuring has succeeded in other countries because salary progression is less important in the decision to become a teacher than starting salary, and teacher retention is not strongly correlated to salary progression.[68] The scheme could also be frontloaded by reducing pensions, which would also address the way the present system incentivises teachers towards the latter part of their careers to hang in, even when it is not in their best interests to do so.

We suggest that the remuneration scheme be frontloaded to enable higher starting salaries, financed through reducing incremental progression, and by reducing pensions. We will explore this proposal in greater detail in our forthcoming report on teachers.

Performance-related pay

Far more contentious is the government's performance management system (introduced in 2000), which links performance with pay through a combination of individual goal-setting and personnel appraisals.

Some interviewees reported that the existing system has no teeth as the expectation is that anyone who applies for threshold pay will receive it. One head teacher said: 'When I was in ——, we had fifteen secondary schools and the only school that didn't put everybody through was my own school, and they took me to a tribunal and

67 Database of Teachers Records. Inflation adjustment (to 2006/2007 prices) calculated using the HM Treasury GDP deflator.

68 Barber and Mourshed (2007) p.21

Under the system, teachers start on a 'Main Pay Scale'. Progression on the scale could be described as based on length of service: each September, teachers on the MPS move to the next scale point subject to satisfactory performance. Teachers who have reached the top of the MPS are required to pass a 'threshold assessment' – based on teachers' professional development and the progress of their pupils – before they can enter the Upper Pay Scale.

Once on the UPS, progression is based on recommendations of head teachers to the governing body. Beyond that, there are specialised pay spines for head teachers and other school leaders, and for Advanced Skills Teachers (for teachers who wish to maintain their focus on classroom practice rather than leadership or management posts). More recently, the government introduced an 'Excellent Teacher' position. Unlike the ASTs, ETs are on a set salary.

then they lost, but the amount of time that took from my working life was huge.' Success rates at both the threshold assessment and upper pay scale progression have indeed been very high: at over 90 per cent between 2000 and 2004.

In response to this allegation, a union representative pointed out that there are only 26 teachers in England who have been appointed to the position of Excellent Teacher, arguing that this disproves the notion that pay rises within the teaching sector are automatic. (The number of teachers on the Advanced Teacher Scale is also comparatively low – 4,000 out of 500,000 teachers.)[69] The legislation was there, he noted; there was simply strong resistance within the community to overly differentiated salaries: 'I think some of these things aren't used because they go against the culture of our schools. That this idea of rewarding individually teachers for something that was a collective activity is something that teachers don't feel comfortable with.'

It is worth noting that similar points have been made about the take-up rates of the five retention and recruitment allowances payable at the discretion of employers. Data from the School Teachers' Review Body indicates that 95.9 per cent of teachers do not receive any type of recruitment and retention allowance. Evidence provided by teacher unions and the National Employers' Organisation for School Teachers to the Education and Skills Committee indicate

that there is strong resistance, even hostility, within the teaching community to the use of such allowances over fears that they might prove divisive.

Complicating the issue is the fact that evidence of the impact of performance-related pay schemes on student outcomes and teacher behaviour is mixed.[70] One England-based study found that schools could be roughly divided into two categories: reformers and fire-fighters. The former uses performance management as a means of improving how schools are run and correspondingly achieve positive gains in goal-setting and pupil attainments. The majority of schools, however, appear to use performance management as a form-filling exercise to get teachers long-overdue pay increases. While this study's research did find suggestions of an increase in 'reformer' schools as the scheme matured, the lack of further research since then leaves us with little concrete data on how effectively the scheme is currently working.[71]

Flexibility of pay
Given the paucity of conclusive evidence, a centralised overhaul of performance-related pay seems unwarranted. Instead, our research suggests that a more sensible way forward may be to give individual schools far more control and flexibility over their payrolls in order to pay teachers whatever the local market requires.

At present, the only type of maintained school that is exempt from following

69 http://www.dfes.gov.uk/ rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000743 /Addition_D_DOU.xls

70 See, for instance, O. Harvey-Beavis, 'Performance-Based Rewards for Teachers: A literature review' (Paris: OECD, 2003); A. Strath, 'Teacher Policy Reforms in Sweden: The case of individualised pay', International Institute for Education Planning (Paris: UNESCO, 2004); Community Training and Assistance Center, 'Catalyst for Change: Pay for Performance in Denver', Final Report (2004).

71 D. Marsden and R. Belfield, 'Pay for Performance Where Output is Hard to Measure: 'The case of performance pay for school teachers' (London: LSE Research Online, 2006); available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk /archive/00000850.

national guidelines on pay are the academies. In a House of Common debate, Jim Knight justified this decision by arguing that: 'Academies need to respond innovatively to the huge challenges they face. The ability to negotiate their own pay and conditions to meet the particular needs of the academy, its staff and students is part of the increased flexibility they need to meet these challenges.'[72] He did not, however, provide a reason why other schools in challenging circumstances, or indeed all schools, were not afforded this flexibility to meet the challenges of their community.

So far, most academies have used the parameters of the national pay system as a base, topped up with a range of incentives and conditions. These include the power to award staff bursaries for innovative teaching practices, bonuses linked to pupil performance, and financial support for teachers pursuing a Master's degree. Head teachers and sponsors of academies have fiercely defended their flexibility over teacher pay and rewards, particularly in light of the demands academy staff work under. Daniel Moynihan, the chief executive of the Harris Federation of South London Schools, noted, for instance, that their use of bonuses 'recognises the fact that the working year and working weeks are slightly longer'.[73]

Moynihan's comments could just as easily apply to a non-academy. By 2010, all schools are to offer core extended services, including: 'before and after school clubs (not necessarily on the school site); activities beyond the school day such as sports, arts, music clubs, study support and volunteering; parenting support; referral to health and social services; and opening up facilities to the community such as sports grounds and space for adult learning'.[74]

Given that schools have different requirements, it makes sense for each school to have far more control over salary. National pay agreements should provide guidance to schools on minimum starting levels of pay, rather than restricting school

flexibility to pay whatever necessary to improve performance and retain the best teachers. Indeed, in all likelihood, they are probably much better placed to make such decisions. As a former government advisor noted: 'it's a problem for any performance pay if central government in Whitehall is trying to deal with the pay of any individual teacher, particularly in a devolved school. It should be left up to the school.'

National pay agreements should offer guidance on minimum pay, limiting automatic progression to four increments. After that, schools and networks should develop their own pay structures based on the situation in their local market. Coupled with our proposal for a per-pupil national funding formula (see Chapter 4), this should enable schools to create whatever performance incentives they believe necessary. Providers running a number of schools will be in an especially good position to develop models of pay that can be rolled out across their network.

Incentive: continuing
professional development

Numerous teacher surveys have found that job satisfaction is closely linked with the quality of professional development a teacher receives. Teachers who have opportunities for professional development are less likely to want to leave the workforce. As several interviewees noted:

I think the big challenge is keeping people, and that's a question about them being trusted, about them being valued, but above all about them being developed.[75]

The majority of teachers know that when they join the profession they know it's not going to be the highest paid job that there

72 Jim Knight, Hansard, Column 1378W, 6 July 2006.

73 D. Turner, 'Academies Push Pay Boundaries', FT.com, 28 November 2007.

74 http://www.governornet .co.uk/publishArticle.cfm?topicA reaId=28&contentId=303&page Start=21&sortOrder=c.title

75 Interview, government advisor.

is in civil services and government or in public service. But that can be offset by strong professional development and being valued, I think.[76]

Correspondingly, teacher contracts now provide for five no-contact days for continuing professional development (CPD), and all schools are expected to evaluate the quality of CPD provided to teachers in their annual self-evaluation. The TDA, in collaboration with other partner organisations has also identified national CPD priorities.[77]

The good news is that this increased focus on the importance of CPD appears to be making some inroads. The annual GTC surveys have found that each year there is a statistically significant increase in the proportion of teachers who feel that their professional development needs are being met partly, or in full. However, there is still a significant minority that feel that their needs are not being met at all.

Additionally, interviewees were strongly in agreement that the quality of continuing professional development (sometimes referred to as in-service training) remains 'a mess'. A former government advisor noted: 'If you look at the amount of money that we've invested in the recruitment and initial training of teachers, just pick that one, it's huge, it's disproportionately the most amount we spend if we talk about professional development. We hardly spend anything on in-service training and yet all the stats show that it's been grossly inefficient.'

Others expressed concern that current contractual provisions for professional development do not adequately guarantee time and space for individual growth. 'The trouble with the five no-contact days,' a former head teacher noted, 'is that they've been built into the school calendar and are eaten up by administrative and organisational bits. Sure, there might be time set aside for staff development, but that's whole staff rather than individual.' Evidence provided to the Education and Skills Committee also sug-

gests that funding for CPD is disproportionately focused on NQTs, with few opportunities or programmes developed with mature teachers in mind.

Our research suggests that there is strong support for giving every teacher an entitlement in terms of time or money to extend their own professional development. For some interviewees, this might include the opportunity to take sabbaticals in non-educational fields in order to encourage them to 'step outside their comfort zone'. The argument here is that the existing vision of what constitutes CPD is still far too narrow, and that teachers could benefit from experiences outside the educational establishment.

> **We propose that an individual CPD budget, based on a money entitlement for service worked, be offered to teachers. Teachers would take responsibility for identifying and planning the type of development opportunity that would most meet their needs.**

Managing underperforming or ineffective teachers

Evidence suggests that a system which strongly supports teachers through continuous professional development would reduce the rates of demotivated, underperforming teachers.[78] Nonetheless, we recognise that such teachers may still remain, and mechanisms need to be developed to manage the situation lest it begin to impact the performance of other teachers. As one head teacher put it: 'You've got to motivate, reward and retain the best. You won't actually do that if those teachers don't see you dealing with underperformance and become demotivated themselves.'

The experience of one interviewee, a Teach First graduate, offers a vivid picture of what might happen when poor performance is ineffectively dealt with:

76 Interview, education provider.

77 For 2007–10, those priorities are pedagogy (i.e. behaviour management, subject knowledge, supporting curriculum change), personalisation (i.e. equality and diversity, special educational needs) and people (i.e. working with other professionals, school leadership).

78 See, for example, the work that has come out of the Variations in Teachers' Work, Lives and their Effect on Pupils (VITAE). Project website: www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/centres/crtsd/vitae

I think I am very lucky in the school I am in. We have a strong senior management team and an excellent head. Talking to others, it's obviously not like that in every school. Our staff is really professional compared to other ones I hear about, although it's not perfect. We have, for example, one teacher – I don't know how she got employed – who just has no control at all. I was blissfully unaware of how bad things were until I had to move to an adjoining classroom. Her classes and tutor groups run wild, and even with my relatively short experience I can see that she just has not got what it takes to be effective.

In fact we have to organise around her, giving her the least academic groups who have no chance of achieving anything that will affect our statistics – and we are under huge pressure to improve these. She has been in the school for several years and yet nobody has been able to deal with her extreme lack of effectiveness. I know people have tried to support her, but it never translates into any real improvement in the classroom. Maybe having all the bottom sets will provoke her resignation!

The compliance with underperformance that her story illustrates, not to mention the calm acceptance of the practice of the worst teacher being given the classes that are hardest to teach, is troubling.

The difficulty facing researchers here is the sheer absence of data. No information is collected centrally on the number of teachers who are dismissed each year through competency procedures or who have taken severance payments. Anecdotal evidence is rather mixed. Some of our interviewees argued that the accountability frameworks and the 'performance culture in schools' has changed expectations of what will or will not be tolerated. They

argued that, compared to the situation in the 1980s, and even the 1990s, the situation has vastly improved.

> ❝ As one head teacher put it: 'You've got to motivate, reward and retain the best. You won't actually do that if those teachers don't see you dealing with underperformance and become demotivated themselves' ❞

Others argued, however, that there is still far too much tolerance of underperformance. One interviewee, a head teacher often contracted by the DCSF to assist struggling schools, noted:

I know some schools where they've got year after year of teachers underperforming and they continually allow them to stay within the same area of underperformance for years … It's like saying to a surgeon: 'You're not very good at heart bypass because you keep cutting the wrong artery, but keep trying because eventually you're going to get it right.' How many casualties are we going to have before we actually say: 'Maybe you shouldn't do heart surgery?'

This toleration of underperformance was in part attributed to a general cultural disapproval of aggressive performance management (as previously discussed). Concern was expressed, however, over the length of the competency procedure. Under current legislation, underperforming teachers must first be supported through an informal period of review. The school, with the agreement of the teacher, will set a period of time during which the teacher is expected to meet clearly outlined improvement goals. The teacher is also entitled to receive appropriate support from the school towards meeting those

goals. Only if the teacher fails to make progress by the end of the informal review process will a formal hearing be held wherein another action plan for improvement is laid out and a final written warning provided. If there is still no progress, the teacher will be brought to a dismissal committee. While there is no official data on the average length of time consumed by this dismissal process, anecdotal evidence suggests that a period of up to a year is not unusual. One local councillor dryly noted: 'It's hard enough getting rid of school keepers, let alone staff!'

Among those who felt that the existing framework was failing in some form or another, there was disagreement over who (or what) was at fault – from those who were dissatisfied with what they perceived to be overly strong unionism:

I think the complication is the strength of the teaching unions, so if you take a teacher on you have to be very strong-willed because you will encounter the full force of the trade unions and they can make life very difficult for you. So I think dealing with ineffective and demotivated teachers depends on the quality of the head and how much they want to do it, but also is harder in the areas that need it most because they tend to be [the] most unionised.

To the intransigence of the local authority:

Because the LA are involved in [the competency procedures], and because they have a natural resistance to the sharper edge that the private sector might have, I think we have far too much compliance with underperformance.

To the head teachers:

There are teachers who get into the system and they are basically not cut out for the job. Performance management should sort that out. And to the extent that doesn't happen, that's a failure of the school managers, heads and possible local authorities in not encouraging and supporting the process.

While we recognise the need to ensure that the competency procedure an underperforming teacher receives is fair, procedures that drag on for months can be extremely demoralising, not just for the teacher in question but for the students being taught by said teacher. We propose that a much shorter capability procedure should be agreed upon once the informal stage of the process has been exhausted.

Interestingly enough, there was strong interest among head teachers for a system to 'buy out' long-stay teachers who are not entirely incompetent but have burned out and are still too young to take early retirement. One popular possibility was a dedicated fund that school governors could draw on to cover the costs of a severance package. The use of a dedicated fund was seen as particularly key since, as one head teacher told us: 'The leadership incentive grant was supposed to do that, but it never did of course. It just went into the general budget.'

We propose that a fund be set up by the government specifically for the purpose of moving out teachers who have yet to reach early retirement age but have ceased to be effective in the classroom. Governing bodies may borrow the cost of a severance payment from the fund (e.g. £40,000), which is then paid back within an agreed time period through savings gained from hiring a younger teacher, who would in all likelihood be on a lower salary point.

4

Mediating the 'Loose': Safeguards

Any system, however carefully designed, will always be open to manipulation. The English education system as it currently stands seems particularly prone to gaming techniques – a situation, some might argue, that is largely of our own making. Given the lack of good school places, parents with the means will certainly do their utmost to secure their child's desired school. And given the high-stakes nature of the test-based accountability system, is it any surprise that some schools cherry-pick their student population?

We anticipate that the model of autonomous, non-geographical school networks discussed in previous chapters will go some way towards addressing these challenges: by harnessing the best of competitive and collaborative practices; speeding up the spread of good practice; and giving schools and teachers the autonomy to act as and when necessary. We acknowledge, though, that competition can lead to greater segregation if adequate safeguards and counter-incentives are not put in place.

This chapter therefore re-examines the areas – admissions, exclusions and school transport – which will require careful monitoring on the part of local authorities should a more competitive, flexible model be made to work without harming equity. Crucially, it proposes a new mechanism for funding schools so as to incentivise schools to avoid 'cream-skimming' students from wealthy areas.

Admissions

As we argued in our publication 'Choice? What Choice?',[79] the present admissions system is more accurately described as one of parental preference rather than parental choice. The lack of good school places means that popular schools are heavily oversubscribed and a significant portion of families are disappointed. In 31 out of 150 local education authorities, more than 20 per cent of families fail to obtain a place at their first choice school.[80] Unsurprisingly, the admissions process is widely viewed (and experienced) as highly stressful.

Concern over the admissions process is also driven by research findings that peer effects (based on the composition of the school's student body) have a significant impact on individual performance. Evidence from the PISA studies suggest that 'students attending schools in which the average socio-economic background is high tend to perform better than when they are enrolled in a school with a below-average socio-economic intake.'[81] This is true, regardless of the student's individual socio-economic status. Similarly, studying at a school with a high proportion of high-achieving pupils (which is itself correlated with socio-economic background) has a positive impact on individual attainment.[82] The PISA studies also suggest that countries with schools that are less segregated by socio-economic background have higher overall performance and are more equitable.

In England, however, researchers have found that segregation in schools is significantly higher in terms of social class, income and ability than can be explained

79 Sturdy and Freedman (2007)

80 'Myths behind School Admissions Claims Exposed', *Daily Telegraph*, 10 March 2007.

81 'Learning from Tomorrow's World – First results from PISA 2003', (Paris: OECD, 2004), p. 189.

82 See, for instance, E. Hanushek, J. Kain, J. Markman and S. Rivkin, 'Does Peer Ability Affect Student Achievement?' *Journal of Applied Econometrics* 18 (2003), pp. 527–44.

by residential segregation, particularly in densely populated areas where there are more schools available. For instance, on average, voluntary aided schools take a lower proportion of students on free school meals (FSM) and students with special educational needs (SEN) than would be expected given the composition of the community. Where that has occurred, other schools in the area have, invariably, taken more pupils on FSM and SEN than would be expected.[83] Given the fact that school performance is very closely related to the demographic composition and prior achievement of its student body, schools with a disproportionately high number of students on FSM or SEN (in relation to the community the school is in) are undoubtedly at a disadvantage. Research also suggests that the degree of segregation in England has been exacerbated by 'gaming' strategies on the part of schools and parents.

In response to these concerns over fair access, the government finally launched a new School Admissions Code (in force since 28 February 2007). Schools are now required 'to act in accordance with' the Code rather than simply 'have regard to its guidance', as was formerly the case. Additionally, every local authority, admission authority and governing body in England has a statutory duty to ensure that admissions policies and practices promote a system wherein 'all parents feel that they have the same opportunities to apply for the schools they want for their child.'[84] This includes developing In-Year Fair Access Protocols to cater for students who need a place outside of the regular school admissions round; and increasing provision of advice and support for low-income families through the use of Choice Advisors.

By and large, the Code has been welcomed by practitioners and stakeholders as 'a huge step forward in stopping schools from picking children and enabling chil-dren and families to pick schools'.[85] As one head teacher noted: 'The new system that's just come in this year is much easier, it's just ticking the box. The subjectivity has gone out of the window.' Interviewees also applauded the strengthening of the regulatory aspect of the Code, in particular the duties placed upon local authorities and admissions forums to evaluate the fairness of admissions policies. 'Admissions shouldn't be left to individual schools,' another head teacher approvingly remarked. 'It's really important that someone is sitting outside of the school and ensuring fair play.'

It is worth noting that several interviewees cautioned against treating the Code as a panacea to larger problems of segregation and schooling inequality. We acknowledge the validity of their point and recognise that there is a need to balance considerations of family disruption and uncertainty alongside the drive to reduce instances of unjust gaming practices. Nonetheless, we agree that the Code is a positive step forward in promoting more consistency and transparency within the system. We suggest, however, that there still remain a number of areas where further consideration is required.

Selection by ability vs. selection by aptitude [86]

Under current guidelines, it is unlawful for non-grammar schools to introduce selection by ability during either the general admissions or oversubscription phase. However, schools which have had a system of partial selection by ability since the beginning of the 1997/1998 school year are allowed to maintain this practice as long as the selection guidelines and the proportion of students selected remain the same. No justification is provided for this special dispensation.

The DCSF estimates that there are some 40 schools which fall into this category, representing 1.25 per cent of all secondary

83 See evidence provided to the Children, Schools and Families Committee on 30 January 2008.

84 School Admissions Code 2007, paragraph 1.3.

85 Interview, senior department official

86 This section will not discuss in any detail the issue of grammar schools, as there is not sufficient room in this report to do the debate justice.

schools.[87] Coupled with the 164 grammar schools, 6.15 per cent of all secondary schools are selective by ability, albeit to varying degrees. Additionally, secondary schools with specialisms in physical education, the performing arts, the visual arts and languages[88] may select up to 10 per cent of their students based on demonstrated 'aptitude'.[89] Academies may also select up to 10 per cent of their students by aptitude, regardless of what subject area they specialise in.

Existing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of aptitude tests, particularly their ability to predict future achievement, is, however, extremely thin. Despite the fact that research suggests that tests of aptitude are only useful insofar as they accurately predict later achievement, the Department has neither undertaken nor commissioned research on this issue.[90] More crucially, there is little evidence to suggest that aptitude can be assessed independently of any reference to ability. Given this paucity of data, it was unsurprising that the Education and Skills Committee, in their report on School Admissions, recommended that a school's ability to admit students based on their performance on aptitude tests be withdrawn.[91]

To date, the government has favoured a combination of two arguments to defend their stance on selection by ability. The first is that it 'enhances educational opportunity at a local level by enabling young people with particular gifts and talents to have direct access to high quality specialist provision where oversubscription criteria

might otherwise have ruled them out'.[92] This is a purely rhetorical argument, as no research has been produced to support this statement. The second is that only a small proportion of schools actually use selection by aptitude (since it is limited to particular subjects for specialist schools), and that of the schools that select, some do so under the special dispensation afforded to schools that selected by ability/aptitude during the 1997/1998 school year. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) reports that in total, only 6 per cent of their schools select by aptitude.

Even so, as the Education and Skills Committee noted: 'All forms of selection at one set of schools have, as a matter of arithmetic, consequences for other schools.'[93] Further, this practice is undoubtedly going to increase alongside the push to expand the number of academies and specialist schools. In both declaring new forms of selection as 'unlawful' and maintaining (indeed, expanding) selection in 'special circumstances', the government's policy on selection still appears, as chided by the Committee three years ago: 'ad hoc and without principle'.[94]

The government's one concession to the state of existing evidence was to acknowledge that 'where necessary' the 'incidental effect' of ability testing can be screened out by ensuring that students selected by aptitude are spread across the whole ability range.[95] Nonetheless, there remains no requirement within the current guidelines for schools that practise selection by aptitude to include such mechanisms.

87 Email correspondence with the DCSF.

88 Schools with a specialism in design technology and ICT will no longer be allowed to select by aptitude from 2008. However, schools that already select in those subjects may continue to do so.

89 Aptitude here is defined as 'a particular capacity to learn or develop skills in that subject'. School Admissions Code 2007, paragraph 2.75.

90 M. Coffey and C. Wetton, 'Aptitude Tests and Technology: An investigation of aptitude and its relationship with GCSE scores', Department for Education and Employment (1996).

91 House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 'Secondary Education: School Admissions', Fourth Report of Session 2003–2004, Volume 1 (2004), p. 63.

92 'The Government's Response to the Education and Skills Committee's Report on Secondary Education: School Admissions', November 2004, p. 19.

93 House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 'Secondary Education: School Admissions', Fourth Report of Session 2003–2004, Volume 1 (2004), p. 4.

94 Ibid., p. 4.

95 'The Government's Response to the Education and Skills Committee's Report on Secondary Education: School Admissions', November 2004, p. 19.

Given the government's objective of creating an admissions system that is more transparent, straightforward and fair, we find it irregular that practices that are not grounded in empirical evidence remain in use. We propose that:

1. The 'special dispensation' for schools that had partial selection mechanisms (either by aptitude or ability) during the 1997/1998 school year be eliminated.
2. The practice of selection by aptitude at all state-funded schools, including academies be stopped.

Oversubscription criteria

Under current guidelines, any school that has free places available is required to accept all applicants unless, as in the case of grammar schools and sixth-form colleges, the applicants fail to meet the entry academic requirements. Schools which are oversubscribed, however, are required to follow a predetermined oversubscription process set by the admissions authority (i.e. the local authority or school governing body).

The current Code is not intended to provide an exhaustive list for what does or does not constitute good practice, although paragraph 2.13 does include up to 13 common practices that have been ruled unlawful. Additionally, all schools are required to give priority to children in care, and to children with special educational needs.[96] Apart from that, schools may choose from a variety of mechanisms such as: presence of siblings in the school; distance between home and school, and ease of access by public transport; catchment areas; banding; and random allocation (lotteries). The DCSF does not currently collect information on admission authorities' oversubscription criteria – an oversight that needs to be remedied.

A recent study[97] found that oversubscription criteria often combine several elements and weighting structures. Among the most significant criteria for all schools were siblings, catchment areas and proximity (the latter was generally used if the other criteria had failed to differentiate). Interestingly, only 15 per cent of schools use faith-related criteria (e.g. church attendance), but for these schools it is a high priority. Under the current Code, the use of faith-related criteria has been maintained on the grounds of ethos. Given that voluntary aided faith schools receive most of their funding from the state, however, it is arguable that they should be obliged to take children of any family which wants (for instance) a church

school education and are prepared for their child to participate fully in the religious life of the school.

> In both declaring new forms of selection as 'unlawful' and maintaining (indeed, expanding) selection in 'special circumstances', the government's policy on selection still appears, as chided by the Committee three years ago: 'ad hoc and without principle'

The use of faith-based criteria is not the only mechanism to have raised concerns over gaming. There is evidence that some oversubscription mechanisms are fairer than others. For instance, in a recent literature review, CfBT found that admitting students by catchment areas in 'densely populated urban areas where there tends to be greater segregation and zoning of housing … can reinforce postcode characteristics, and these in turn may limit the power of education to offer pupils options and give opportunities for social mobility.'[98] On the flip side, random allocation by lottery and fair banding (the selection of an intake so that the spread of student ability is representative of a larger population) have been advocated as fairer means of achieving a balanced intake, albeit with certain caveats.

For instance, random allocation is only fair when the sample size is large enough to be representative of the local population. Similarly, fair banding can be achieved in a number of ways, since the wider population may be the applicants to a particular school, or the range of ability in a given area (local authority or national). Professor Anne West has argued, however, that banding should not be done on the basis of applicants to a particular school as those that apply to a given school may not be representative of the area.[99] Researchers have found, for example, that in 2003, in

96 Under the Education Act 1996, schools are required to admit a child with a statement of special educational needs regardless of whether they have places.

97 J. Coldron et al., 'Secondary School Admissions', Sheffield Hallam University and National Centre for Social Research, Research Report DCSF-RR020 (2008).

98 CfBT, 'Review of International Literature on Admissions' (2007).

99 House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 'Secondary Education: School Admissions', Fourth Report of Session 2003–2004, Volume 1 (2004), paragraph 190, Q59.

the three local authorities in London where area-wide banding was still practised (Hackney, Greenwich and Lewisham), segregation was at half the level expected when compared to local authorities of a similar size and composition.[100] Consequently, some, such as the IPPR, have advocated for a system of area-wide banding that applies to all schools, not just those that are over-subscribed.

Yet the decision as to which mechanism to use is not always made on existing evidence alone. Political viability is also essential. For instance, the use of lotteries may also drive children out of the state sector, which would be a perverse effect. In Brighton, the proposed introduction of a lottery was extremely politically unpopular and this has put off other local authorities who were considering similar proposals. It may be the case that a shift to a pupil premium funding system, discussed later in this chapter, would help solve the segregation problem without recourse to politically unpopular action. Schools with large numbers of disadvantaged pupils would become richer as additional funds would be attached to these pupils. This may lead them to become more popular among wealthier families – balancing segregation over time.

> **Given that some oversubscription mechanisms may be better able to achieve equitable intakes than others, we propose that:**
>
> 1. **The Department begins collecting information on admission authorities' oversubscription criteria and the impact of each mechanism upon the composition of a school's student body. Mechanisms which are found to achieve more equitable intakes should be promoted.**

> 2. **The issue of faith-based criteria as an oversubscription mechanism be reviewed. We suggest that all voluntary aided faith schools set aside a percentage of places to students of other faiths and no faith (the exact percentage to be determined during the review). Some voluntary aided faith schools already do an exemplary job on this matter, and it would be worth studying their experiences in greater detail to determine how such a practice might be rolled out on a larger scale.**

Monitoring

There is evidence that schools which are their own admission authorities, particularly voluntary aided schools, are more likely to covertly select than community schools whose admissions policy is set and run by the local authority.[101] The new Code, with its tighter requirements and greater specificity, should go some way towards addressing this issue. Yet the success of the Code will be dependent on our ability to monitor and enforce its use.

There is reason to believe, however, that the current mechanisms for monitoring compliance could be strengthened. At present, Admissions Forums (set up by local authorities as a platform for local stakeholders to discuss and monitor the effectiveness of admissions procedures) have the ability to publish an annual report detailing the extent to which admission arrangements are operating in a fair manner, serve the interests of vulnerable children, have met parental preferences, and affect social segregation. These reports are to be drawn upon by the Schools Commissioner in his two yearly national review of fair access.

The problem, however, is that while Admissions Forums are encouraged to pro-

100 S. Gorard, C. Tough and J. Fitz, Schools, *Markets and Choice Policies* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003), cited in S. Tough and R. Brooks, *School Admissions: Fair choice for parents and pupils* (London: IPPR, 2007).

101 See, for instance, Coldron et al. (2008).

duce these reports, they are not required to do so. The choice of having the reports reviewed by the Schools Commissioner rather than the Office of the Schools Adjudicator also seems rather odd, given that the latter is responsible for determining objections to school admissions. There may well be a case for strengthening the role of the Office of the Schools Adjudicator, by allowing it to take proactive action based on the annual reports, rather than waiting to have cases referred to it.

> **Given the need to ensure compliance with the Code, we propose that:**
>
> 1. **The power of Admissions Forums to publish an annual report be made a duty. The report should also be made public to enable parents to assess the extent to which admissions arrangements in their area are operating in a fair manner.**
> 2. **The role of the Office of the Schools Adjudicator be reviewed to determine whether it should be given stronger powers over the process of monitoring and enforcing compliance with the Code.**

Permanent exclusions[102]

If school admission is one of the processes by which schools employ covert and overt tactics to select their intake, then exclusions, some argue, is its counterpart. The allegation here is that schools, under pressure to perform in academic league tables, have an incentive to exclude hard-to-teach pupils. These pupils in turn either get 'lost' in the system, or concentrated in particular schools, with negative consequences for teaching and learning. A

board member of a major education quango noted:

Typically what happens is a good school excludes their problem children and they all end up in these bad schools, and I don't think that any school, however good, can cope with more than a dozen children in a year group. If you've got more than 25 or 30, you just can't cope.

Indeed, the overall standard of discipline and behaviour in schools, the daily grind of low-level classroom disruption, has come under increasing fire from practitioners, parents and the general public. As ever, the media remain quick to pick on new forms of disciplinary problems like cyber-bullying and happy-slapping. In response, 'tough' new policies have been announced by both main parties. Earlier this year, Labour introduced a new policy that would allow teachers to discipline students misbehaving outside the school compound. The Conservative Party's recent Green Paper 'Raising the Bar, Closing the Gap' promised to restore authority to practitioners and set clear boundaries and sanctions.

Who should have the final say in the exclusion process?

One of the more controversial proposals put forth in the Conservative Party's Green Paper is the right of head teachers to exclude students, without recourse to an independent appeals panel; although students would still be able to lodge an appeal with the school's governing body. (Currently, students can lodge an appeal first to the school's governing body, and then to the Schools Adjudicators' Panel.) The Conservatives argue that the process of permanently excluding a pupil is fraught with difficulty – that it is expensive, time-consuming and stressful – and further compounded by the fact that 'one in four appeals is won by the appellant and half of these children return to their

102 Henceforth, the use of the term 'exclusions' should be understood to refer specifically to permanent exclusions. We recognise that fixed-term exclusions can be a powerful tool in the school's behavioural policy, and support the school's right to use this mechanism as necessary.

original school'. Consequently, 'potentially disruptive students know heads are increasingly reluctant to use the sanction of permanent exclusion and so feel freer to cause trouble.'

We recognise that achieving good discipline is central to turning around the performance of struggling schools, and it is important to ensure that discipline policies remain credible in the eyes of pupils. However, removing the right of appeal to an independent panel is a sledgehammer response to a minor problem. While one in four appeals was decided in favour of the parent, only 12 per cent of all permanent exclusions had appeals lodged against them. In 2005/2006, that meant that only 240 of 9,170 cases were won by the appellant, and of that number only 130 students – 1.4 per cent of all permanent exclusions – were reinstated in their old school.[103] No data is collected on the number of exclusions that are overturned by the school's governing body.

It is unfortunate that some of these successful appellants included pupils who had been excluded for serious offences; nonetheless these are rare exceptions rather than the rule. Furthermore, there is no evidence to support the Paper's insinuation that 'heads are increasingly reluctant to use the sanction of permanent exclusion' because of the likelihood of having their exclusions overturned. Indeed, as the next section shall lay out in more detail, it is just as likely that the decrease in permanent exclusions (and rise in fixed-term exclusions) may be due to concern over the poor quality of alternatives to mainstream education.

While some of the head teachers we interviewed acknowledged that they would not appreciate having their judgements overturned, they defended the right of appeal to an independent body on the grounds of natural justice:

I wouldn't be happy if my judgement was overturned, but that should be the

system because every decision that public bodies make should be subject to appeal at some stage and I think that exclusions should be part of that.[104]

I'm sure I wouldn't want to have my decision overturned either. But the fact is, people make mistakes. There must be in a public service where you're proposing to take away a fundamental right, and it's enshrined in human rights the right to education, that when you're dealing with something so fundamental there must be process of appeal against that.[105]

More crucially, interviewees expressed concern that removing the right of appeal to an independent panel runs the risk of increasing instances of 'gaming' within the system. One head teacher demanded: 'What about the unreasonable schools? I know schools where it's very much "let's get rid of these children because we're looking at our results" whereas in my authority we only exclude as a last, last result. And that's fine if everyone plays the game, except some people are really selfish in just thinking of themselves so that won't work.'

Evidence does suggest that schools with complete autonomy over the exclusion process are more likely to exclude hard-to-teach pupils. As it is, DCSF statistics reveal that pupils with statements of SEN are over three times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than the rest of the school population.[106] Black Caribbean pupils are also 2.6 times more likely to be excluded than their white peers, even after SEN and FSM are taken into account. Further, 'excluded Black pupils are less likely to fit the typical profile of excluded White pupils (such as having longer and more numerous previous exclusions, poor attendance records, criminal records or being looked after children)'.[107]

103 National Statistics, 'Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools and Exclusion Appeals in England, 2005/2006'; released 26 June 2007.

104 Interview, secondary school head teacher.

105 Interview, primary school head teacher.

106 National Statistics, 'Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from Schools and Exclusion Appeals in England, 2005/2006'; released 26 June 2007.

107 Ofsted, Race equality in education: *Good practice in schools and local education authorities*, HMI Report 2398 (2005); cited in DfES, 'Exclusion of Black Pupils: Priority Review' (2006).

We support the continued rights of head teachers to permanently exclude a student, and students to appeal to an independent panel. We believe that such a system provides the necessary checks and balances to minimise the occurrence of unjust exclusions. The existing legislation can nonetheless be tightened to ensure that:

1. Any student who has been permanently excluded should not be reinstated, lest the authority of the head teacher and school governors be undermined.
2. If the exclusion is found to be unjust by the Schools' Adjudicators Panel, it should not go on the student's record. Schools which have been found to have unjustly excluded a student on more than one occasion must undertake a comprehensive review of their discipline and behaviour policy, with the understanding that further infractions may result in disciplinary action.

What happens after a student is excluded?
Our research suggests that a central concern for head teachers is what happens to children that are excluded. At present, interviewees report that local authorities favour having the children reintegrated into mainstream education as soon as possible. 'Unfortunately, at the end of the day it all comes down to the financial implications,' a local councillor reported. 'So long as there is a tight financial settlement the bureaucracy are going to want to put those youngsters back into another secondary school, because obviously that is the cheapest way to educate those youngsters.' Educating a student at a PRU costs £17,000 a year – approximately three times as much as the average per-pupil cost at a maintained school.

From September 2007, all secondary schools (including special schools, pupil referral units, academies and city technology colleges) are expected to work in partnership to improve behaviour and attendance. With regard to exclusions, schools are to agree upon In-Year Fair Access Protocols to ensure that every school accepts an equal share of pupils with prior permanent exclusions or with a history of challenging behaviour. This includes consideration of funding arrangements (i.e. whether or not money is transferred from one school to another, and how much is transferred) and admission numbers (e.g. whether to set aside school spaces for potential in-year transfers). Note that under the fair access protocols, schools have a right to refuse acceptance to a student who has been permanently excluded twice.

Schools are also being encouraged to use managed moves as an alternative to exclusion. The DCSF describes this as 'a move to another school to enable the pupil to have a fresh start in a new school'.[108] This move requires the agreement of the governors of both schools concerned, the local authority and the parent/s of the child in question. At present, however, the DCSF does not collect statistics on how widespread the practice of managed moves is, and how many students have been affected.

The Fair Access Protocols are a positive step in the right direction. Yet their impact may be curtailed by the tight cap on admission numbers. Under the present system, schools that have spare places cannot turn away applicants to their school. However, the schools that are the most likely to have places left over after the general admissions round are those that are already struggling or working in challenging circumstances. For instance, the head teacher of a school with a high mobility rate noted that her school received a higher proportion of students from

108 DCSF. 2007. 'Improving Behaviour and Attendance: guidance on exclusion from schools and pupil referral units'

the local Fair Access panel simply owing to the fact that she had free spaces: 'I worry that placements are being made without taking into account our existing needs and pressures and lack of resources.'

Ironically enough, the schools that can least afford an unbalanced intake may well be the ones who are the most likely to do so. The knock-on effect, as these head teachers lament, is dire:

> *You have the space, so you end up with a totally unbalanced intake which undermines your resources, undermines the education of your other children, demoralises your staff and leads to resignations.*

> *One of the MPs in my area who would meet with the heads on a regular basis … one success we had was when he brought in special legislation to prevent [assigning students on the basis of free spaces alone] simply because this one school in my borough was getting all the difficult kids just to fill it up and it was going down and down and down.*

Similarly, a number of head teachers from highly effective schools (defined here as schools that are performing above the odds) expressed concern that their schools ran the risk of 'becoming victims of [their] own success'. Owing to the fact that they had gained a reputation for working with hard-to-teach students, they were being pressed to take more and more on, without consideration of the impact such an intake would have on their ability to sustain their achievements.

Furthermore, while there are certainly numerous examples of good practice being developed, interviewees noted that the lack of compulsion in the system means that discrepancies do occur. One head teacher told us: 'We have a system in the authority where we agree to swap kids around, but there are two schools in the authority who are not a part of it; these are schools at the top of the league table. They select their kids at Year 7 and then will not take anyone who is permanently excluded from another school. I keep asking the LA, why won't you enforce it? But they won't. They don't want to rock the boat.'[109] One local councillor argued, however, that it was not an unwillingness to enforce that was the problem but the fact that 'we have no powers to insist that other schools take [expelled students] on.'

While we recognise that schools should be given the flexibility to negotiate agreements that take into consideration local circumstances, we believe that certain principles should be made non-negotiable:

1. **All schools must participate in their local fair-access and managed-moves scheme; and the local authority should be given a statutory duty to enforce it.**
2. **To ensure that every school accepts an equal share of permanently excluded pupils, schools should be required either to set aside an agreed-upon number of places each year to accommodate in-year transfers, or to admit children beyond their published admissions number. This decision should be made during consultations with the Admissions Forum.**
3. **The school making the exclusion should be required to transfer the Age-Weighted Pupil Unit attached to the new institution providing the pupil with education. The amount of money transferred to the new institution should be prorated. If, however, the school is found to have unjustly excluded a student, the entire AWPU allowance should be transferred.**

109 Note that a similar concern was raised about the willingness of some local authorities to challenge the admissions policies of some of their more successful (but covertly selective) schools.

Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)

Fair-access and managed-move schemes may not benefit all pupils. In such instances, alternative provision is generally provided by PRUs, short-stay centres for pupils who, whether because of behavioural, health, social or emotional difficulties, cannot be educated at maintained or special schools. They are established and run by local authorities, although each PRU has a management committee that is akin to a school's governing body. Currently, there are 425 PRUs catering to approximately 15,000 students in England.[110] The quality of provision across these PRUs is very patchy: the latest *Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector* found that while 52 per cent are good or outstanding, 14 per cent, or every one in eight units, are inadequate.[111]

Evidence and anecdotal reports suggest that PRUs struggle with numerous challenges, most notably inadequate accommodation, staffing and local authority support. The recent Ofsted report found, for instance, that at a significant proportion of PRUs, lack of space and facilities has limited the curriculum which can be taught on-site. Fulfilling their commitment to a broad and balanced curriculum, not to mention the requirement of 25 lesson hours per week, requires creative wrangling on the part of a PRU – and not all of them are able to do so.[112]

Staffing problems are also affecting the quality of teaching on offer. The pupil–teacher ratio has failed to improve commensurately with the national ratio, and there has been a five-fold increase in the number of untrained support staff.[113] The latter should be of particular concern given research suggesting that students with emotional and behavioural problems thrive best in an environment where they are not just supported by teachers, but by trained social workers and counsellors.

Compounding these problems are issues of governance. Unlike head teachers, the 'Teachers in Charge' of PRUs have significantly less autonomy: budgets and staffing remain the responsibility of the local authority. Despite this degree of control, there is reason to believe that not all local authorities have effectively integrated PRUs in their strategic framework for the borough. Ofsted has found, for instance, that guidance on issues such as referring students to a PRU, or developing a reintegration plan for students, varies significantly in quality. Not all local authorities have a system for assessing, recording and tracking pupils' progress as they move from mainstream provision to the PRU and back again, or even internal mechanisms for evaluating PRU performance.

Perhaps the most significant challenge facing PRUs, however, is the fact that it is increasingly used as a long-term alternative to mainstream provision. Part of the blame can be traced to inadequate reintegration procedures on the part of the local authority (e.g. the specification of a time limit for the placement). Part of the resistance comes from students themselves, who may be hesitant to return to an environment where they had felt alienated. Consequently, many pupils stay on for years. Students who are not reintegrated by the end of KS3 inevitably spend the rest of their education within a PRU. This lack of student movement means that many PRUs are full and unable to offer places to in-year excluded students and/or full-time provision.[114]

Tackling the roots of student disengagement is certainly part of the answer. The new studio schools that are being developed by the Young Foundation offer one possible alternative to mainstream education provision. While not specifically targeted at at-risk youth, the studio schools do aim to address the challenge of disengagement through a '14–19' curriculum which integrates learning, entrepreneurship and work. What makes the studio school concept unique is that they are to function as commercially viable businesses:

110 http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/ portal/site/Internet/me nuitem.1c8478149b4a6342502b 011069f034a0/?event=searchBy ProviderType&maxResultPerPag e=10&currentPage=1&sortOrder =3&providerCategoryID=262144

111 Ofsted, *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector 2006–2007* (London: The Stationery Office, 2007), p. 25.

112 Ofsted, *Establishing Successful Practice in Pupil ReferralUunits and Local Authorities* (London: The Stationery Office, 2007).

113 http://education.guardian. co.uk/egweekly/story/0,,218108 1,00.html

114 Ofsted. 2007. Establishing successful practice in pupil referral units and local authorities. London: The Stationery Office, p. 15

The idea of a studio school hangs on the central feature of a series of operating businesses run by the students themselves. As small schools closely linked to particular industries, participant numbers would be capped at 300 14–19-year-olds per school. The schools will look and feel like a cluster of businesses, and the young people will be as much workers as students. The staff would comprise a mix of teachers and non-teachers with business expertise. In addition to working in and running the businesses, the students will participate in enterprise projects either consulting to local businesses or starting up their own ventures.[115]

Similarly, other charities and non-profits are stepping forward to offer more choices for those dissatisfied with mainstream provision. From the London Boxing Academy in Tottenham (whose curriculum integrates boxing and physical activity) to the Lighthouse Group, a national charity with its own alternative education schools, this diversification of provision is to be welcomed and encouraged.

In the short term, we believe that there are small changes which would have an immediate impact on performance:

1. **PRUs should have the option of taking over the management of their budgets and staffing.**
2. **Additional funding should be provided to address issues of staffing and infrastructure development. PRUs with inadequate accommodation should be given priority when planning redevelopment (e.g. through the Building Schools for the Future initiative).**

3. **We recognise that the process of developing alternative programmes of teaching and learning can be time-consuming and costly. To lower the costs of such activity and encourage greater diversification, we propose that a one-off grant be offered to providers or charities developing such programmes. As with the AISI model in Alberta (see 'Helping Schools Succeed: Learning from Abroad', Chapter 3), the organisation in question must establish and follow a rigorous evaluation process in order to assess the effectiveness of said programme. The results of each pilot would be made public (e.g. through a national database) to develop our knowledge base of what does or does not work.**

In the long term, we anticipate that our proposals regarding school autonomy, supply-side reform and 'pupil premium' funding will further encourage the development of alternative programmes.

School transport

In England, children between the ages of five and sixteen are automatically entitled to free school transport if they attend the nearest suitable school and the school is further away than the statutory walking distance.[116] The extension of the choice framework has meant, however, that more and more parents are looking beyond their neighbourhood school for education provision. Yet for many low-income families, the lack of affordable home-to-school transport (either through the public transportation system, as in Hong Kong, or a dedicated school bus service, as in

115 http://launchpad.young
foundation.org/node/120

116 Defined as two miles for pupils up to the age of eight, and three miles for pupils aged eight to sixteen.

Edmonton, Alberta)[117] can be a significant barrier.

Correspondingly, the Education and Schools Inspection Bill 2006 included a guarantee of free home-to-school transport (to maintained schools and academies only) for children from low-income families.[118] Specifically:

a) for children of primary age, transport will only be provided to the nearest suitable school, but for those in low-income families aged eight to eleven, local authorities **must** ensure that free transport is provided for children living more than two miles from the school.

b) for children of secondary age, local authorities **must** ensure that those from low-income families have free transport to any one of the three nearest suitable schools, where the distance travelled is between two and six miles. Local authorities **must** also ensure that transport is provided to the nearest school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief where this is between two and fifteen miles away.

However, this provision remains limited for secondary school students who may well have to travel more than six miles to any 'one of the three nearest suitable schools'. This may be particularly true for students living in less urbanised areas, and for those keen to enrol at a school with a particular specialism (bearing in mind the fact that there are eleven different types of specialist schools available). Researchers have found that in the densest area, London, there are on average 17 secondary schools within a ten-minute drive of themselves. This falls to seven in non-London urban areas, and just over one in rural areas.[119] What is considered a reasonable distance and journey length may thus differ considerably from one geographical area to another, and should be reflected in national policy.

In 2005, the Sutton Trust, Policy Exchange and the Social Market Foundation argued for the introduction of a national yellow bus scheme in 'No More School Run'. Drawing on evidence from the United States of America and pilot trials in England, the report illustrated that the benefits of such a system – ranging from reduced atmospheric pollution and time savings for parents, to reductions in truancy and crime among students – would far outweigh the costs.

More recently, our interviews suggest that there is support for a more concerted transport system. A senior official of an education provider that uses a yellow bus scheme noted that the system was 'absolutely invaluable because a lot of those youngsters could not have come to the school without the yellow bus. It's also helped to create the ethos, because almost as soon as you get on to the bus, you're a part of the school community … it just raises that profile of "school's happening now, you need to be a part of it" and so on, so I think it may well have an impact if it were done more universally because it has a sense of purpose about it as well.'

Research conducted in England also suggests that there is support for the introduction of a yellow bus scheme. In a study of local authorities which have piloted such schemes, researchers found broad support among parents, students and schools. The attribute of the scheme which was most appreciated on the grounds of safety and convenience was the practice of picking up and dropping off students close to their home and school.[120]

In July 2007, transport company First Group established the Yellow School Bus Commission under the Chairmanship of David Blunkett. The Commission is consulting on the potential for expanding the yellow school bus scheme and was set up in response to research indicating that parents are seeking a viable alternative for the school run and that 86 per cent of parents

117 See 'Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad', Chapters 4 and 3.

118 Defined here as those whose children are eligible for free school meals or who are in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit

119 S. Burgess, B. McConnell, C. Propper and D. Wilson, 'Sorting and Choice in English Secondary Schools', The University of Bristol, CMPO Working Paper Series No. 04/111.

120 S. Davies Gleeve, 'Evaluation of *First* Yellow Bus Pilot Schemes' (London: Department for Transport, 2003).

would be willing to send their children to school on a dedicated school bus.[121] As part of this process, researchers at the University of Aberdeen have been commissioned to conduct the most comprehensive review to date of existing schemes in local authorities across England and Wales.[122]

> **While some of the circumstances surrounding the publication of 'No More School Run' have changed, we believe that the central tenets of a national yellow bus system that is both free to low-income families and accessible to those who are willing to pay for it are still sound. We thus welcome the establishment of the Yellow School Bus Commission and anticipate the forthcoming release of their research report.**

Funding

In 2005, Policy Exchange advocated in 'More Good School Places' the introduction of a financial incentive for schools to take on hard-to-teach pupils: pupils with special educational needs, low prior attainment, disciplinary problems and so on.[123] This idea of an 'advantage premium' was adopted by the recent Conservative Party's Public Services Improvement Policy Group report and has since been endorsed by the shadow education team. A similar proposal, dubbed the 'pupil premium' and developed by the CentreForum think tank, was also unveiled at the Liberal Democrats 2007 Conference.

This increased support for a system of differentiated funding at the national level is undoubtedly a reflection of grassroots demand. At present, a portion of the money allocated to schools is based on the school's 'additional educational needs' (AEN), which is in turn determined using proxy measures such as free school meals, ethnicity, post codes and national test data. However, this funding is not ring-fenced at the level of the local authority, a designation that creates inefficiencies and dilutes the final sum given to schools.[124]

Given this status quo, it is perhaps unsurprising that our interviewees were unanimous in their agreement that a reform of the existing funding system would be necessary if our system is to meet its commitment of providing every child with fair and equal access to a good education:

> *I think it's a very logical approach that if schools are facing multiple disadvantages in terms of their socio-economic circumstances, then I think it is logical to resource those schools to meet those challenges. That's done in a very piece-meal manner at the moment through various department policy initiatives. It's not done in a strategic way.*
>
> - Board member, stakeholder organisation

> *A great deal of money, I think, has been put into supporting disadvantaged pupils in a range of ways [but] it could be easier for funding to follow the student – that's maybe one mechanism for ensuring that all young people have access to excellence. I mean, obviously there is an issue about creating organisational instability, but there are probably ways in which that can be managed.*
>
> - Board member, education provider

There was slightly less agreement on how money should be allocated and who exactly constituted a 'disadvantaged' pupil. Some interviewees advocated a system of 'funding according to prior attainment', while others believed that there was a need to increase the funding attached to pupils with a history of disciplinary problems: 'You're probably

121 http://www.firstgroup.com /newsdetail.php?id=000068

122 For more information, contact Professor John Nelson, Professor of Transport Studies.

123 O'Shaugnessy and Leslie (2005)

124 See, for example, A. West, 'Redistribution and Financing Schools in England under Labour', *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership* (forthcoming).

going to need some kind of voucher system to pay schools £5,000 more just to take on these children.'

It is clear that there is growing consensus across the political spectrum that the way in which schools are funded needs to be overhauled. The key issue now is hammering out how such a policy would work in practice.

Policy Exchange is currently working on a national funding formula based on the principle of per-pupil differentiated funding. The research is anticipated to be published by the end of 2008.

5

Second 'Tight': Accountability

The past few decades of education reform have seen the transformation of the accountability framework from one based on regulatory compliance and professional norms alone to one driven by results. This unrelenting emphasis has has led to widespread acceptance of the need for educators to be accountable to the public for student learning. Controversy continues to rage, however, over the means by which such accountability is achieved, with critics arguing that existing measures are clumsy, overbearing and counterproductive. In one of the more eloquent critiques of the system, noted philosopher Onora O'Neil argued:[125]

> *If [the revolution in accountability] is working, we might expect to see indications that public trust is reviving. But we don't. In the very years in which the accountability revolution has made striking advances, in which increased demands for control and performance, scrutiny and audit have been imposed, and in which the performance of professionals and institutions has been more and more controlled, we find in fact growing reports of mistrust.*

In this chapter we will explore the two major mechanisms for public accountability within the present framework: achievement and performance tables, and Ofsted. We argue that the existing measures are not fit for purpose, principally because they fail the litmus test of any public accountability

system: they are not sufficiently user-friendly for those who need it most– the parents. The existing measures have also created perverse incentives which have skewed the way schools and teachers respond to the practice of teaching and learning.

Getting the accountability framework right will be particularly important in the model of increased autonomy that we have proposed, if we are to avoid the problems of patchy delivery that plagued England in the 1960s and 1970s. More importantly, if schools and teachers are to act confidently upon their expanded freedoms, they will need clear guidelines on how their performance will be judged, and the assurance that any evaluation will be consistent with the system's overarching goals.

College achievement and performance tables

League tables, or as they are officially termed, 'College achievement and performance tables', were first introduced in 1992 by the Conservative administration under John Major. While schools had been publishing their results since the 1980s, there had been no official compilation of results before then. Initially restricted to secondary school examination results, this publishing policy was quickly expanded to include the reporting of all key-stage test results. These tables were intended to end the 'secret

125 *A Question of Trust*, Reith Lectures, 2002; available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/ lectures.shtml

garden' of education and to enable parents to make comparisons across schools (a necessary component of the government's choice strategy).

To this day, the use (and misuse) of league tables remains highly controversial. Some of the critiques of the system have an ideological element, asserting that the publication of performance statistics in a ranked order creates a hierarchy of winners and losers that pits schools against each other.[126] Others argue that the specific performance statistics in use are not accurate measures of school effectiveness, making it very difficult (if not impossible) to help parents distinguish between effective and ineffective schools. The use of 5 A*–C GCSE grades, for instance, is frequently criticised on the grounds that unadjusted 'raw scores' reflect the prior attainment and family background of the student rather than the quality of teaching provided by the school.[127]

The most serious critique of the existing league-table system is based on Goodhart's Law of Economics. This states that 'when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure' owing to distortion within the system as attention is focused towards what is measured. What is unmeasured gets neglected. Goodhart's Law becomes even more acute when one or two performance indicators are used in isolation to construct simple league tables.[128] (It is also worth noting that when the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT) first published their recommendations on a national curriculum assessment framework for England, they explicitly cautioned against the reporting of test scores alone, without any contextual information being provided about the school composition and environment.)

In England, the government's dependence on national assessment scores as an accountability mechanism has created

perverse incentives for schools who seek to do well in the league tables in order to avoid the stigma of failure and the very real threat of closure. In addition to cream-skimming practices, researchers found that some schools have responded to the pressure of league tables by adopting 'educational triage' – strategies wherein resources are 'rationed' to borderline C/D students (those who are most likely to improve the school's overall 'score') at the expense of the development of 'safe' and 'hopeless' students. Schools also report a higher degree of test coaching, and a narrowing of the curriculum to focus on areas that are tested by the SATs and GCSEs.[129]

In response to these critiques, Wales and Scotland decided to stop publishing league tables altogether. England, on the other hand, opted to create more sophisticated (and complex) indicators; hence the introduction of the value-added measure in 2002 and the contextual value-added measure in 2006. The former took into account prior student attainment and was a more accurate measure of school effectiveness than the raw-score performance statistic. CVA was a further refinement of the value-added measure concept, adjusting student achievement scores to take into account a wide range of individual factors that affect pupil performance.[130] However, neither the CVA nor raw-score league tables address the dilemmas raised by Goodhart's Law, as school performance continues to be based on a very narrow measure of educational excellence: academic performance in national assessments.

Proponents of the concept of CVA (many of whom are practitioners) argue that it is a fairer means of assessing school performance. A recent working paper by the Centre for Market and Public Organisation found, for instance, that CVA does provide a more accurate measure of school performance, although the

126 To be fair, it is the newspapers that publish the statistics in rank-order format, and that often leave out important qualifying information such as confidence intervals. However, the government has not required the broadsheets to follow publishing guidelines. Both the Conservative and New Labour administrations have also encouraged parents to use the performance tables as measures of school quality when selecting schools.

127 See, for example, S. Gorard, and E. Smith, 'What is 'Underachievement' at School?', *School Leadership and Management* 24: 2 (2004), pp. 205–25.

128 L. Elton, 'Goodhart's Law and Performance Indicators in Higher Education', presented at the Conference on Evidence-Based Policies and Indicator Systens, 9–11 July 2003.

129 See, for example, D. Gillborn and D. Youdell, *Rationing Education: Policy, practice, reform and equity* (Buckinghamshire: Open University Press, 2000); and D. Wilson, B. Croxson and A. Atkinson, 'What Gets Measured Gets Done: Headteachers' responses to the English secondary school performance management system', *Policy Studies* 27:2 (2006), pp. 153–71.

130 Specifically, the measure takes into account prior attainment, gender, ethnicity, age in year, SEN status, free school meals status, first language, whether or not the pupil has been in care, social mobility, and the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).

practice of ranking schools (based on CVA) is spurious since approximately half of English secondary schools are indistinguishable from the national average.[131] Others within the educational and political establishment have resisted the use of CVA tables on the grounds that it justifies underachievement in the most disadvantaged communities, 'strips the aspiration out of education' and 'gives schools no incentive to help children get past the disadvantages they may begin with'.[132]

> 66 As a school's standing can change significantly depending on which league table is used, it is unsurprising that organisations working with parents report confusion 99

To appease both camps, the government currently publishes league tables detailing five good GCSE grades (i.e. A*–C); five good GCSE grades including English and Maths; five good GCSE grades including English, Maths and Science; and CVA performance. As a school's standing can change significantly depending on which league table is used, it is unsurprising that organisations working with parents report confusion:

In terms of how a school is performing, then I think parents are interested from a consumer point of view in how a school compares with other schools. And they are interested in league tables, but the problem with league tables is that they don't offer parents the information that they want. They are very complex. Government attempts to make them more accurate has produced more complexity.

- Board member, stakeholder organisation

Crucially, our research suggests that this confusion is particularly acute among parents who lack the resources and cultural capital to make use of this information – the very group who were intended to be served by the publishing of league tables. A senior government advisor even expressed the fear that 'the system of accountability has widened that divide, not narrowed it' and that these parents are 'victims of the system'.

Adding to the public's confusion is the manner in which the raw and CVA scores are reported in the broadsheets. None of the major broadsheets (e.g. *The Times*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian* and *Independent*) publishes information on confidence intervals in their performance tables. Yet such information is vital to take into account means based on relatively small sample sizes (particularly true for primary schools).[133] Part of the problem also stems from the competing CVA models used within the education establishment. For instance, the SSAT (Specialist Schools and Academies Trust) have been championing David Jesson's CVA model on the grounds that 'If you're going to be using a value-added approach, it's got to be so simple and clear that schools can calculate their own value-added.'

We disagree with the argument that an accountability measure only has value if the average school or layperson can replicate its calculation. Nonetheless, in our conversations with practitioners and stakeholder representatives, we were struck by the contrasting ways in which interviewees interpreted CVA data. This does suggest that even among educational experts there is a struggle to apply the information in a constructive manner. We also note that publishing raw scores alongside CVA undermines the government's efforts to reduce perverse incentives within the system. Researchers have found that head teachers expect that raw scores will still be the 'headline' figure, and remain focused on that indicator.[134]

131 D. Wilson and A. Piebalga, 'Accurate Performance Measure But Meaningless Ranking Exercise? An analysis of the English school league tables' CMPO, University of Bristol (2007).

132 Interview, education provider.

133 See, for example, D. Jesson, 'The Use and Misuse of CVA' in *Research Intelligence*, Volume 100. (London: British Educational Research Association, 2007).

134 Wilson et al. (2006).

Given the continued weakness of the existing system, we propose that the publishing of league tables be abolished. We propose instead that an alternative form of reporting, which takes into account broader measures beyond examination results, and that measures progress over time rather than as a snapshot, be introduced.

What might an alternate system of reporting look like?

In our companion report, we looked at the reporting and accountability frameworks of five different education systems. We were particularly struck by the principles behind the frameworks in Alberta (see page 62) and Ontario, notably: i)

their emphasis on progress over time rather than performance in any single year; and ii) the use of performance indicators beyond academic results in national assessment tests.

The practice of measuring performance over time enables the identification of trends: whether or not the school is improving, declining or coasting. Doing so not only enables the government to develop targeted interventions, such as in Ontario, to support the particular needs of each category of schools, but it also emphasises the objective of constant improvement. Schools are expected to compete not only with other schools but with their own personal best. Furthermore, measuring performance over time reduces the chances of a school's report being skewed by one-off changes such as a particularly hard-to-teach cohort, or temporary disruptions in the supply of teachers.[135]

New York City's Accountability Framework

Schools are graded from A to F, and the grades are based on three areas, each with a different weighting, and a fourth 'bonus' component:

School Environment (15% of final grade): evaluates attendance, safety, academic expectations, engagement with parents and students, and communication. Information derived from parent, student and teacher surveys

Student Performance (30% of final grade): evaluates student skill levels in English and Maths based on the NY State test in elementary and middle school. At the high school level, it measures diplomas and graduation rates

Student Progress (55% of final grade): measures average student improvement in English and Maths from the previous year to this year

Closing the Achievement Gap (additional credit): gives schools extra credit for exemplary gains among high-need students such as special education students, and students in the lowest third city-wide

The evaluation of each measure depends on how the school does relative to the range of performance of all schools in the city (one-third of final score), and to peer schools (two-thirds of final score). Schools that get As and Bs are eligible for monetary rewards, and may be chosen to serve as demonstration sites for their peers. Schools with low grades face intervention, including leadership change or closure.

135 This is particularly true for primary schools. Owing to their small size, their performance in the current league tables can be significantly affected by changes in the cohort (since frequently the league tables measure the performance of a single class).

In September 2004, Alberta Education introduced a new accountability framework for assessing the progress of schools and school boards in achieving their educational goals.[136]

The Pillar tracks progress over 16 different measures, of which only four are directly related to achievement in national assessment tests:

- **Safe and caring schools**: percentage of teacher, parent and student agreement that students are safe at school, are learning the importance of caring for others, are learning respect for other and are treated fairly at school
- **Annual drop-out rates**
- **Annual high-school completion rates**
- **Programme of studies**: percentage of teachers, parents and students satisfied with the opportunity for students to receive a broad programme of studies, including fine arts, career, technology, and health and physical education
- **Overall quality of education:** percentage of teachers, parents and students satisfied with the overall quality of basic education
- **Percentage of students achieving an acceptable standard in the Provincial Achievement Tests:** for schools with students in kindergarten up to Grade 9
- **Percentage of students achieving an excellent standard in the Provincial Achievement Tests:** for schools with students in kindergarten up to Grade 9
- **Percentage of students achieving an acceptable standard in the Diploma Exams:** for schools with students from Grades 10 to 12
- **Percentage of students achieving an excellent standard in the Diploma Exams:** for schools with students from Grades 10 to 12
- **Percentage of students eligible for the Rutherford scholarship:** a monetary award for excellent academic achievement at the high-school level
- **Percentage of students participating in the Diploma Examinations**
- **Annual high school to post-secondary transition rate**
- **Work Preparation:** percentage of teachers and parents who agree that students are taught the attitudes and behaviours that will make them successful at work when they finish school.
- **Citizenship:** percentage of teachers, parents and students who are satisfied that students model the characteristics of active citizenship
- **Parental Involvement:** percentage of teachers and parents satisfied with parental involvement in decisions about their child's education
- **School Improvement:** percentage of teachers and parents indicating that their school and schools in their jurisdiction have improved or stayed the same in the last three years

Each measure within the Pillar is evaluated on three bases: against the fixed provincial standard (the achievement measure); against the jurisdiction's prior three-year average result for each measure (the improvement measure); and an overall evaluation which combines the first two. Results are then colour coded on three different scales to highlight performance according to percentile; changes in performance and whether or not the jurisdiction's performance is on target or a cause for concern.

For more information on Alberta's Accountability Pillar, and other supporting policies, see 'Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad', Chapter 3.

136 The year 2007 is the first year that schools and boards were evaluated on all 16 measures. Previously, there was not enough data on measures such as preparation for work and citizenship to produce the three-year jurisdiction average needed for the improvement evaluation.

In terms of the set of indicators used to assess school performance, the education establishment seems to be particularly susceptible to the McNamara Fallacy:[137] we value what we can measure, and disregard that which we can't. Alberta has attempted to avoid this by using parent, teacher and student surveys to assess elements such as the degree to which the education provided prepares students for work and citizenship, and whether or not schools are teaching students respect for others. The framework's heavy reliance on surveys does present methodological limitations, as evidence suggests that opinions do not always correlate with actual behaviour. Nonetheless, Alberta's attempt to grapple with these 'softer', less tangible outcomes does succeed in affirming the government's and profession's commitment to a broad vision of education.

Recent developments in New York City's Public Schools, specifically the introduction of an annual report card, also offer good reporting principles. These Progress Reports (see page 61) measure student year-to-year progress; compare the school to 'peer' schools (i.e. schools with comparable student compositions and prior attainment) and the range of all schools in the city; and provide 'extra credit' to schools that improve the performance of children with the greatest needs.

We recognise that the relative newness of the New York Progress Reports should be cause for caution, as it will doubtless take some time to gauge the full impact of this system upon schools and teachers. Nonetheless, from an English perspective, the Progress Reports are fascinating in the way they incorporate both raw and value-added data, with a stronger weighting placed on the latter. Moreover, additional weight is placed on student progress for the lowest third of the student cohort city-wide – arguably the hardest cohort to move. In doing so, it gives teeth to the state's commitment to closing attainment gaps between students. Similarly, while the report card does compare school performance against the city average, more weight is given to how a school does in relation to peer schools with comparable student intakes.

> " The practice of measuring performance over time enables the identification of trends. Doing so not only enables the government to develop targeted interventions but also emphasises the objective of constant improvement. "

As in England, however, considerable concern has been raised (and rightly so) over the fact that 85 per cent of the grade depends on standardised test scores. This year's Progress Reports have already produced some upsets in the system, with some schools with outstanding reputations getting grades as low as F. This change may certainly reflect the Report's weighting of student progress and school performance relative to peer schools. However, there is also probably some truth to the argument that schools with excellent pastoral care or curricular innovation (beyond English and Maths) are being short-changed.

We recognise that the practice of measurement can incur costs, from the resources invested in developing new software, to the staff time spent on data collection. As it is, however, many of the indicators that we have suggested are already collected in some form or another (e.g. through the school self-evaluation forms and the Pupil Level Annual School Census database). In that sense, we would not be developing a system from scratch but building upon and bringing together existing networks of information. Given the weaknesses of the present league-table system, we believe that a new framework is an investment worth making.

137 'The first step is to measure what can easily be measured. This is OK as far as it goes. The second step is to disregard that which can't easily be measured or give it an arbitrary quantitative value. This is artificial and misleading. The third step is to presume that which can't be measured easily really isn't important. This is blindness. The fourth step is to say that what can't be easily measured really does not exist. This is suicide.' Taken from C. Handy. *The empty raincoat: Making sense of the future.* (New York: Random House Business Books, 1995).

Building on our previous research in Alberta and Ontario, as well as developments in New York City, we propose that a new accountability and reporting system, such as a report card, be developed. This report card is to be developed in consultation with stakeholders and should include the following principles:

1. It should use a broad range of indicators to assess school quality. We suggest that the potential set of indicators might include:
    i)   average student progress between key stages. If the New York system of giving extra credit for the improvement of the weakest cohort is found to be effective, it would be worth considering a similar weighting mechanism in England
    ii) student performance in baseline literacy and numeracy assessments (for secondary schools)
    iii) parental, Teacher and Student Satisfaction Surveys on the:
        a) overall quality of education
        b) range of programme of studies on offer (for secondary schools)
        c) extent to which students are being prepared for success in working life
        d) extent to which students are enabled to be active citizens
        e) extent to which schools provide students with a safe and healthy environment
        f) extent to which schools engage parents and students in decisions regarding each child's education.
    iv) teacher turnover rates (although a baseline would first need to be established, as no turnover at all could be unhealthy for the school)
    v)   student absences (unadjusted for authorised absences)
    vi) annual drop-out rates at 16 (for secondary schools).
2. School performance should be measured over time (e.g. three years, as in Alberta and Ontario) to enable the identification of trends, as well as to encourage schools to constantly raise the bar on their own performance.
3. School performance should be compared to schools with similar student intakes and prior attainment. If comparison to the national average is included, a weighting system such as that employed in New York's accountability system should be considered.
4. The results from the set of indicators should be summed up and reported in a clear, unambiguous manner (e.g. A–F grade, or a traffic-light system).

138 In September 2001, the Care Standards Act 2000 transferred responsibility for regulating day care from local authorities to Ofsted.

139 Under the Education and Inspection Act 2006, the new Ofsted is a merger of four previously separate inspectorates: the Adult Learning Inspectorate, the Commission for Social Care Inspection, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration and the previous Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education).

Quality monitoring mechanisms

Since its inception in 1992 as the Office for Standards in Education, Ofsted's original remit as a school inspection agency has been steadily expanded to include the regulation of day care (in 2001)[138] and, more recently, all childcare, children's social care and provision for learners of all ages (April 2007).[139] This expansion is aimed at ensuring more comprehensive and strategic reviews of education and care across England.

In 2004, Ofsted and the DfES set out their vision for a new relationship between the government and schools. This new relationship was intended to

deliver 'an intelligent accountability framework, a simplified school improvement process and improved data and information systems'.[140] As part of this reform, Ofsted introduced a light touch (i.e. Section 5) inspection framework. The main elements of its new framework include: smaller inspection teams; shorter inspection periods and cycles; increased emphasis on schools' self-evaluation forms to inform inspection; shorter notice of inspection; and 'shorter, sharper' reports. Elements of the ECM Agenda have been incorporated into the evaluation criteria, and schools are assigned one of four grades: outstanding, good, satisfactory and inadequate.

These changes were designed to reduce the burden of lengthy, labour-intensive inspections on schools and teachers. However, it is improbable that financial considerations played no role at all, since the pared-down model was developed against a backdrop of budget contractions. In 2003–4, the combined budget of the four inspectorates making up the new Ofsted was £266 million. Targets set by the Treasury require a reduction in cost to £186 million by 2008–2009, and Ofsted's cost – despite the cutbacks – remains an issue of contention within the education establishment.

Whatever the rationale, Ofsted introduced further measures to reduce the intensity and frequency of inspections for schools. Mid 2007, they introduced a reduced tariff inspections (RTI) framework wherein 30 per cent of schools are allowed to undergo a reduced inspection conducted in one day and by one inspector. Schools are selected based on performance data, the results of the school's self-evaluation form and their grade in a prior Ofsted inspection. More recently, Ofsted announced that it is considering introducing no-notice inspections, although no further details have been provided.

In April 2007, NFER (the National Foundation for Education Research) released the first independent evaluation of the new Section 5 inspection process. The results suggest that the majority of schools are satisfied with the new inspection framework. Similarly, a recent policy paper by the Association of School and College Leaders found that there is a high degree of satisfaction among head teachers, although 'there is a significant minority of ASCL members who either have complained to Ofsted or feel dissatisfied but do not put in a formal complaint.'[141]

Our research suggests, however, that the new inspection model is weakened by its over-reliance on pre-obtained data. A prominent head teacher told us: 'They look at previous inspections that say good, so they go in knowing that it's either going to be good [or] outstanding, and they spend half a day looking at statistics, and they make the circles fit.' Another interviewee, an executive head teacher, pressed this point: 'Now you get two days and you get two people and they basically look at the data of the school and then judge the school on that, and what happens is, what they see in the school doesn't really matter.' This concern – that data is sometimes used as a substitute for inspectors' judgements – was also flagged in both the ASCL and NFER studies.

Interestingly enough, in the NFER study, schools identified the main benefit of the new inspection framework as providing external confirmation of schools' own self-evaluation, rather than as having identified new improvement areas.[142] Indeed, Ofsted argues that the consistency in the grades awarded by schools themselves and inspectors confirms the validity of the new inspection process. Yet this is circular logic: given that school inspectors rely heavily on schools' self-evaluation forms to provide the evidence and focus of their inspections, it is unsurprising that there is a high degree of correlation.

140 DfES, Ofsted, 'A New Relationship with Schools' (2004); available at: http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/assets/3666.pdf, p. 1.

141 ASCL, 'Next Steps: The future of inspection of schools and colleges' (December 2007); available at: http://www.ascl.org.uk/mainwebsite/resources/document/pp45%20inspection%20of%20schools%20and%20colleges.pdf

142 T, McCrone, P. Rudd, S. Blenkinsop and P. Wade. "Impact of Section 5 Inspections: maintained schools in England". (Slough: NFER: 2007).

Additional concerns were raised over the loss of focus on classroom teaching within the new inspection framework. While previously, all full-time teachers were observed by inspectors, the short two-day nature of the new framework means that a much smaller number of lessons (and even parts of lessons) are observed. As one policy-maker explained:

The problem now is that you've got a reduced inspection framework where people go into school for two days, they see fractions of lessons. I don't think that gives you a good basis, and if you've only seen a fraction of a lesson, it's much harder for you to judge that lesson [as] unsatisfactory; it's easier to say it's satisfactory.

> ❝ While previously, all full-time teachers were observed by inspectors, the short two-day nature of the new framework means that a much smaller number of lessons (and even parts of lessons) are observed. ❞

Given that teaching quality is the most significant school-level factor in student learning, it seems strange that an inspection intended to assess education quality devotes so little attention to what goes on in the classroom.

The reduced tariff inspections came under particular fire from respondents. Despite the smaller inspection period and workforce, the indicators and process remains the same, suggesting that inspectors will either be cramming in the same amount of work in less time, or skimming through parts of the inspection. Neither was seen as an acceptable option. ASCL reports that where RTI occurred, the exercise was too short for 'inspectors to form secure judgments on the basis of their own observations in the school' and did not

give schools 'a fair chance to demonstrate the quality of its work'.

What role should Ofsted play?
Our research suggests that there is a need to rethink what purpose school inspections play in the larger accountability framework. Undoubtedly, school inspections can – as our research in New Zealand demonstrated – provide a powerful wake-up call to complacent schools. This has certainly been true in England, where Ofsted has been a pivotal player in the accountability movement. While we can debate the extent to which its influence on schools has been positive, there is no denying that what Ofsted inspects, schools scurry to do.

As the above section illustrated, however, the light-touch model functions more as an audit given its reliance on pre-obtained data rather than on real-time observations of what goes on within schools and classrooms. Even as a quality monitoring mechanism, however, concerns over the inspection process render the final product somewhat suspect, particularly for weak schools that by their very definition require far more input and support than is currently provided.

Furthermore, interviewees expressed concern over the relationship between Ofsted and the process of school improvement. Recent statements produced by Ofsted and the Chief Inspector of Schools, Christine Gilbert, emphasise that Ofsted's role is to provide external scrutiny rather than support and challenge, the latter being seen as the role of the school improvement partner (SIP).[143] Hired by the local authority, SIPs are intended to serve as the main (though not only) avenue for communication between the local authority and school on schooling improvement issues.

The first SIP pilots were rolled out in 2004, and roll-out for secondary schools was completed in 2007, with all primary schools being covered by the end of 2008.

143 See, for example, the oral evidence provided to the Education and Skills Committee on 13 December 2006, Questions 20–24.

An initial review of the pilot sites was not released to the public, although the first independent evaluation of the SIP programme is expected to be published in 2008. Anecdotal evidence gleaned over the course of our research suggests, however, that the quality of SIPs (and thus the experience of schools) varies widely.

Ofsted asserts that this division between the inspection process and support post-inspection is necessary to distance inspection from judging what it might have had a hand in contributing to. Our interviews with practitioners and stakeholder representatives suggest, however, that significant concern remains over this split. This was true even among those who were broadly positive about the direction of the new framework. An executive member of a stakeholder organisation argued:

Ordinary inspection teams, when they walk into a school and say very harsh and critical things about the way that school is presenting itself at that moment in time and yet offer no solutions … I'm not sure many companies would pay for that. Yet schools are forced to pay for it and it is a hugely expensive process which takes money out of the overall education budget and doesn't offer enough value to schools and governing bodies at the moment.

Crucially, interviewees agreed that the 'best' inspectors are those that still provide the support-and-challenge function central to school improvement: 'The best inspectors already do that, don't they? They open a dialogue with you.'[144]

We believe that many of the elements currently reviewed in the light-touch model can be assessed in a less time-consuming and costly manner through the annual report cards proposed earlier. The new report cards would also cover a broader range of indicators, thereby addressing the fundamental weakness of the existing accountability system – its reliance on narrow measures of success. It would therefore be possible to abolish the practice of routine school inspections as the English system's baseline quality monitoring mechanism.

In its place, school inspections should only be carried out: i) on schools that perform poorly in the annual report cards; and ii) in response to parental complaints, as per the current practice. These inspections should focus on classroom teaching, and be grounded in the school improvement process. Such a shift may result in an increased inspection period and/or require the hiring of more experienced school inspectors who can provide credible school improvement advice. We believe, however, that the value gained from this focused form of inspection is worth the cost, and would be covered by the savings gained from cancelling the regular cycle of school inspections.

Additionally, we propose that a random sample of schools is inspected each year, with the specific purpose of estimating the overall quality of teaching in schools. At present, Ofsted estimates that 94 per cent of teaching in secondary schools is satisfactory or better; with an even higher figure (97 per cent) for primaries. This figure is calculated on the sample of each year's inspections. Our respondents, however, were largely in consensus that this figure was an inflation owing to the 'gaming' that goes on whenever inspectors visit.

To avoid this, we propose that these inspections be carried out without prior notification, and should not carry any ramifications for the schools sampled. The latter criterion is particularly important, as it reduces the likelihood of 'gaming' and stress among schools and teachers. By extension, we believe that this practice of random sampling would produce a more accurate picture of the quality of teaching in the country.

144 Interview, head teacher

> **Given that a system of annual report cards would serve as a basic quality monitoring mechanism, we propose that**
>
> 1. **The practice of inspecting all schools on a regular cycle is abolished. Instead, schools should only be inspected on a needs basis: identified through poor performance in the annual report cards or parental complaints. The number of days and inspectors allocated to these inspections should be decided upon by Ofsted, depending on the perceived severity of the problem.**
> 2. **School inspections should be rooted firmly in the school improvement process, and inspectors should be trained and selected with this purpose in mind. While the responsibility for school improvement should still lie with the head teacher and governing body, the support-and-challenge function currently played by SIPs should be reintegrated into Ofsted.**
> 3. **Random samples of schools should be inspected each year with the specific purpose of assessing the average quality of teaching in schools. These inspections should carry no ramification for schools or teachers in order to reduce stress and gaming.**

Consequences: support and pressure

For an accountability framework to have teeth, there needs to be a proportionate system of rewards and sanctions for performance. Current legislation enables local authorities to intervene where there is evidence of unacceptably low absolute standards or if a school is found to be performing less well than expected given the circumstances it operates in. In both circumstances, schools are required to prepare improvement plans (that take action immediately), and are subject to interim Ofsted inspections.

Schools in special measures, however, undergo more interim inspections and are more likely to experience a change in leadership. 'Few head teachers survive their school going into special measures,' an education consultant noted. 'It is one of the few instances where practitioners are personally accountable for what happens in schools.' The DCSF does not currently collect data on the percentage of head teachers that are moved on, although they acknowledge that anecdotal evidence suggests that this does occur with some frequency.

In contrast, there is very little in the way of rewards for schools that are high performing and high attaining. (Although one might argue that simply being left alone is reward beyond measure in today's top-down, prescriptive climate.) The School Achievement Award Scheme (SAAS) was a short-lived scheme (running from 2001 to 2003) which rewarded schools that showed significant improvement or performed above expectations. It differed from other performance-pay related measures in that it recognised the contribution of both teaching and non-teaching staff in school improvement. Successful schools were awarded a lump sum to be distributed as pay bonuses to the staff. Who exactly received the bonus, and the amount of this bonus, was at the discretion of the school's governing body. In practice, most schools chose to distribute the money to all staff, with rewards staggered in amount from head teachers down to support staff.

It was purportedly cancelled due to a lack of evidence that it had a positive impact on teaching, learning and school improvement. Some argue, however, that it was the controversial performance-related nature of the scheme that led to its prema-

ture death. A review of the single research study commissioned on SAAS reveals a far more promising picture than that described by the government.[145]

Specifically, the study found that satisfaction was directly related to the perceived fairness of the scheme and the success of the money distribution process, with only one in ten staff expressing dissatisfaction with the scheme and process. The majority felt that the distribution process had been fair and had not caused any divisiveness in their schools. Indeed, three-quarters of those interviewed (heads and teachers) believed that the SAAS had a positive impact on the school's profile/status, team spirit/staff relationships and personal job satisfaction. A further 40 per cent of heads and teachers agreed that the SAAS provided an extra incentive to improving pupil progress within the school. It seems that offering schools a carrot can be just as powerful as taking the stick to them.

> **We suggest that there is a need to recognise those schools that are performing above expectation. We thus support the reintroduction of a scheme along the lines of the SAAS to reward high-performing schools, as identified through the annual report cards.**

Reporting student performance to parents

So far, this chapter has focused on institutional accountability – the mechanisms by which the school's performance as a whole is reported to parents, the public and the government. For a parent, however, the most immediate concern will naturally (and rightly) be how their child is performing, in both absolute and relative terms. As the case study from New Zealand illustrated (see 'Helping Schools Succeed: Learning from Abroad', Chapter 2), pro-

viding user-friendly information about student performance, in both absolute and relative terms, is crucial in engaging parents in tackling problems of underachievement.

At present, schools are required to provide parents with a written report of their child's progress at least once each school year. If the student has sat for a National Curriculum test, their results are to be reported by level; the school is under no obligation by law to disclose the marks achieved. The report must also include comparative information about the National Curriculum levels of attainment of pupils of the same age, in the school and nationally.[146] Additional information may be provided at the discretion of the head teacher. It also goes without saying that some schools, and teachers, do establish regular parent-teacher meetings, which provide families with ongoing and more detailed feedback.

> " The majority of interviewees believed that the use of curriculum levels as a means of describing student progress can be difficult for many parents to grasp "

Despite these mechanisms, a significant majority of our interviewees still felt that the quality of reporting to parents could be improved. For some, their dissatisfaction lay in the type of information being reported:

What you don't want is to just be told how your child is doing. What you need to be told is what's going to be done to help your child fix the problem. If you are parents and you get told that your child is below average but you don't get told what to do, that's not very helpful. Creating a dialogue between the parents and the schools … that's the key. I think our schools are really bad at this actually … I mean, some schools do well at it but most don't

145 J. Stevens, C. Simm and H. Shaw, 'Evaluation of the School Achievement Award Scheme', MORI Social Research Institute, Research Report No 427 (2003).

146 See http://www.qca.org.uk/eara/default.asp for more information on assessment and reporting arrangements.

give it enough time. You need written reports too, and those aren't good enough.

Former government advisor

For others, though, the problem lay in the complexity of the curriculum level frame-work used in assessment. Currently, England uses eight 'level descriptions' to measure student progress in each subject (or rather in every attainment target[147] in each subject).[148] Given that one level is fairly broad, sub-levels (a, b and c) have been

147 Defined as 'the knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils of different abilities and maturities are expected to have by the end of each key stage'; http://www.nc.uk.net/nc_resourc es/html/ ks1and2.shtml

148 Students with special educational needs, who are working below Level 1 of the National Curriculum, use a separate 'P level' scale.

149 D. Wiliam, 'Level best? Levels of attainment in national curriculum assessment' (2001), ATL, p. 5; available at: http://www.atl.org.uk/atl_en/reso urces/publications/research/level _best.asp

150 See, for example, the work of American psychologist Carol Dweck.

151 D. Wiliam, 'Value Added Attacks: Technical Issues in Reporting National Curriculum Assessments', *British Educational Research Journal* 18: 4 (1992), pp. 329–41, p. 330.

152 The four main options considered by the Dearing committee were: a retention of the ten-level scale for all foundation subjects; modifying the scale to minimise its imperfections; abandoning and replacing the ten-level scale with KS grading scales; and using a modified ten-level scale for some subjects (where there is a progressive build-up of knowledge and skills) and KS grading scales for others (R. Dearing, 'National Curriculum Assessment: Final Report', Paragraph 7.12 (1994)).

153 Note that according to the TGAT level framework (see paragraph 104 of the final report), this should technically be Level 1.5 at the end of KS1, Level 3.5 at the end of KS2, and Level 5 at the end of KS3.

The National Curriculum assessment framework in use today has remained largely unchanged in form since it was first developed by the Task Group on Assessment and Testing in 1987. In a historical overview of TGAT's work, Professor Dylan Wiliam noted that the final framework was 'the result of a clear priority to provide a system that allowed students to experience progression, in order to promote a view of attainment as incremental rather than fixed, and to focus on progress rather than absolute levels of achievement'.[149] Research had shown that students either see ability as fixed or incremental; those who saw ability as incremental were more likely to engage in tasks (however challenging) in order to improve their ability. Those who saw ability as fixed were likely to 'opt out' if they believed their chances of succeeding at a task were low, preferring to appear lazy rather than dumb.[150]

TGAT thus decided against the use of independent reporting scales at the end of each key stage (e.g. five levels of attainment for each key stage, graded A–E) since it was recognised that a child may get the same grade (e.g. B) at each key stage even though they were making absolute gains. It was feared that such an outcome might reinforce a belief in ability as fixed and demotivate students. Instead, TGAT decided upon on a ten-point scale (see Figure 5.1)

Having 10, rather than 5 or 20 levels, represents a compromise … if there are too few, then students do not change levels during a key stage, and thus the whole scheme is de-motivating … With 20 levels, most students would be able to achieve one level a year but distinguishing levels in any meaningful way would be very difficult, especially in process oriented subjects.[151]

In 1994, the Dearing Review of the National Curriculum Assessment recommended that the ten-point scale be rationalised to an eight-point scale, and that 'level descriptions' be used to measure student progress for each subject. The Review chose not to propose a significant overhaul of the system on the grounds that there was a lack of clearly superior alternatives.[152]

Table 5.1: Expected attainment of students by key stages

Range of levels within which the great majority of pupils are expected to work		Expected attainment for the majority of pupils at the end of the key stage[153]	
KS1	1–3	KS1	2
KS2	2–5	KS2	4
KS3	3–7	KS3	5/6

Figure 5.1: The original ten-point scale proposed by TGAT
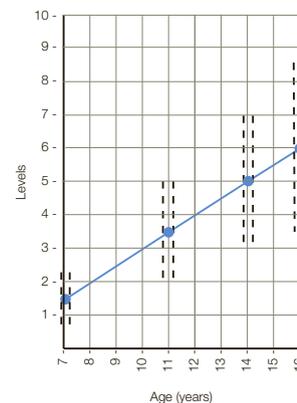
developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to provide more gradated information on progress. (See box for om page 70 more background on the development of the curriculum levels.)

However, the majority of interviewees believed that the use of levels as a means of describing student progress can be difficult for many parents to grasp. One local councillor responded: 'No, I'm sure they don't [understand] … the trouble is, what is an acceptable level for their child to be performing at? And the difference between having a Level four and Level five in a national assessment test is difficult to understand.' Another interviewee, the director of an education provider, pressed the point: 'It's a messy system, and this thing of having a level for every two years and sub-levels and the confusion between content knowledge and the ability to analyse and work with material, trying to cram those into a single scale . . . it has done some good things, but there are all sorts of problems with using the National Curriculum levels as the basis for measurement.'

Some will doubtlessly argue that the degree of parental confusion can be addressed by providing better explanations to parents by teachers and schools on how progress is assessed, what the benchmarks are for each curriculum level, and so on. We certainly agree that better relationships between parents and teachers would create opportunities for dialogue that engage parents as partners in the learning process. Nevertheless, our research suggests that this difficulty in understanding may also be linked to structural problems with the National Curriculum assessment framework.

Recent years have seen serious concerns raised about the validity and reliability of the existing national assessment framework, not to mention the negative impact the test-based accountability system has created.[154] These concerns have led to an inquiry by the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee into testing and assessment.
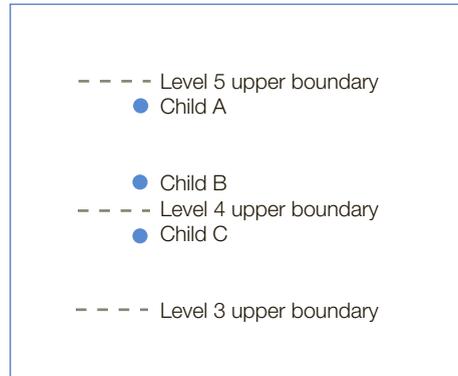
With regard to the use of the curriculum levels, researchers have noted that the practice of dividing scores by levels create serious problems because of the breadth of each level and the impact of measurement errors. Consider the following illustration:

Both Child A and B are classed as Level 5, although in absolute terms, Child B and C are closer in performance. When levels are overlaid upon test scores, the cut-off score chosen to demarcate one level from another can significantly affect the percentage of students achieving particular levels. One estimate, by Professor Dylan Wiliam, suggests that up to 30 per cent of students at key stage 2 and 40 per cent of students at key stage 3 may be awarded a level higher or lower than they should have owing to measurement errors.

Assessment specialists from Cambridge Assessment further note: 'If Child C progresses to the position of Child B over a period of learning, they have increased by one level. However, if Child B progresses to the same position as Child C, they have progressed further than Child A over the same time, but they do not move up a level. Introducing sub-levels has helped in some ways (4A, 4B, etc.) but the essential problem remains.'[155]

Adding to the difficulty in understanding student progress is the fact that cross-key-stage comparability is not possible within the current system. One study on the comparability of pupils' writing across key stages found that levels were not equivalent for a

154 See http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmchilsch.htm#memo and http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmeduski/memo/test&ass/contents.htm

155 Memorandum on testing and assessment, submitted to the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee in June 2007: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmeduski/memo/test&ass/ucm4402annexb.htm

156 S. Green, A. Pollitt, M. Johnson and P. Sutton, 'Comparability Study of Pupils' Writing from Different Key Stages', University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference University of Edinburgh, 11–13 September 2003.

157 Interestingly enough, Wiliam further argues that this system was not deliberately conceived but a result of minor (and major) missteps during the implementation phase of the National Curriculum. See Wiliam (2001).

range of reasons, including differences in test focus, programmes of study and changes in standards.[156] This lack of alignment, Professor Wiliam, argues, is inevitable as the current assessment system is based on each subject's programme of study rather than on the attainment targets or level descriptions.[157] Since each key stage's programmes of study are significantly different, it is not possible to compare results or determine progression based on levels. It is thus not possible – as is frequently done – to assume that having x number of students achieving Level 4 at the end of KS2 would automatically lead to at least x number of students achieving Level 5/6 at the end of KS3.

Given these discrepancies, we believe that the time is ripe for a review of the cur-riculum levels, which includes a considera-tion of how the assessment framework can be made more accessible to parents and students. Is there a case, for instance, for realigning the levels so that each year cor-relates to one level? How might we address the issue of cross-key-stage comparability and translate that information into a form that is sufficiently user-friendly for the average layperson?

The Children, Schools and Families Select Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into assessment and testing, and is about to launch an inquiry into the National Curriculum. We look forward to receiving the results of these inquiries and hope that some of the issues that we have raised will be addressed.

Conclusion

Our visits to schools abroad suggested, and our research in England confirmed, that the English school system lacks a clear vision built on consistent principles. We found that heads and teachers feel harried by a government that does not trust them; school providers are frustrated by their inability to create diverse 'brands' in an overly centralised system; and everyone is confused by the contradictions inherent in league-table performance management.

Our response is based on our observations of successful international systems (explored in our companion volume, 'Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from Abroad') and conversations with key players in English education. We have tried to design a framework that promotes both equity and excellence – goals that have too often been seen as opposites in the past. Our model aims to:

- support excellence by increasing competition while encouraging collaboration through school operating networks
- increase autonomy for teachers, leading to better rewards and higher status in return for a more professional attitude towards remuneration and tenure
- promote diversity in provision while safeguarding equity through a funding formula that would see additional money attached to students from disadvantaged areas.

We propose that the levers of education be aligned as follows:

Nationally the government, through its agencies, would set out a core entitlement curriculum and the regulatory framework covering exclusions and admissions. The government would also be responsible for addressing overarching issues of retention, recruitment, and workforce management which presently restricts the availability of good teachers – the most important prerequisite for successful reform. The details of curriculum, staffing and governance should however be left to schools.

The government would assist the development of *school operating networks*. These would be non-commercial trusts which offer real expertise to schools in developing distinct curricula, implementing IT, offering a range of services such as HR and replicating good practice effectively. Such school operators would bring a brand to their networks, helping to establish consistency and potentially offering a level of assurance to parents in choosing a school. Parents would reap the benefits of competition between networks while teachers would benefit from collaboration across networks. Schools and networks would be incentivised to work with disadvantaged communities through a *national* funding formula that was weighted for socio-economic deprivation and that was distributed *directly* to schools.

League tables would be replaced with report cards that parents can understand and that give information not only on exam results but also on other aspects of schools. Ofsted inspection would focus on schools where this data gives rise to concern and would leave the rest alone. Ofsted would also extend its research responsibility to gather information through anonymous low-stakes visits to classrooms.

Locally authorities would focus on strategic commissioning for the local community, not on running schools. Their perspective would be that of the user, not that of the provider. Should an authority wish to be a provider either of schools or of services to schools, then it must set up a not-for-

profit company to trade without advantage in fair competition with other providers.

Authorities would be judged by the extent to which they are successful in ensuring the provision of world-class schools for all. In particular, authorities should exercise imagination in stimulating the supply of settings for children whose behaviour and emotional issues render them impossible to educate in mainstream schools.

Authorities would also be responsible for regulating admissions and for ensuring provision for excluded pupils. This would often mean a negotiated fresh start, or it may mean a non-school setting, where more innovative and specialised approaches are possible.

The authority would also oversee the provision of education for pupils with a statement of special needs. Where this is best provided for in special schools, the authority should commission them from providers.

Governments and authorities would work together to promote the development of school network operators, building on the work pioneered by established and emergent operators such as King Edward VI Foundations, Specialist Schools Network, United Learning Trust, the Harris Federation, ARK Education, and the Mercers' Association of Schools.

Schools should be given ownership of their land and responsibility for their employees. They should be encouraged to join a network operated by a licensed provider, who will offer risk transfer, services and an identifiable brand. While state funding would be required to develop and scale up this new market, in the medium to long term school operators would stay in business by the quality of their offer to schools who would buy into the network. Some schools will wish to remain completely independent, and as long as they offer a good service they should be able to do so.

Schools would have as few constraints as necessary, and these would relate to core curriculum, admissions and exclusions protocols, and the publication of information.

As a consequence of this kind of rationalisation, we believe that there would be considerable scope to downsize the number and range of many educational bodies and in time release a greater proportion of money to flow through to delegated school budgets (and away from quangos and standards funds). It is essential to ensure that the greatest proportion of funding possible gets through to improving classroom provision.

The current system constrains schools and professionals across the board. Our model would offer the freedom to develop diverse, creative and excellent schools. But it would also keep the necessary safeguards and incentives in place to reduce segregation and keep schools accountable to parents and taxpayers. Most of all, it is coherent, and coherence is something the current system is conspicuously lacking. Coherence can only come when government takes a step back, focuses on the vision and stops micromanaging schools through endless initiatives.

Indexed list of proposals

On national governance, we propose that:

1. The government moves towards the Swedish model of a core entitlement curriculum, giving increased flexibility for teachers and schools. (pp. 15-19)
2. National agencies with overlapping remits be rationalised. Potential mergers might include: the Training and Development Agency for Schools and the National College for School Leadership; and the Learning and Skills Council and the Quality Improvement Agency. (pp. 24-25)
3. A national funding formula based on the principle of per-pupil differentiated funding be used. (pp. 56-57)

On local governance, we propose that:

4. Any local authority that wishes to be a school provider should set up an arm's length trading company to bid on contracts so as to operate on an equal footing with non-governmental school providers. (pp. 25-28)
5. All providers, local authority or otherwise, be subject to the same regulations regarding school performance. Providers that fail to enable a school within their control to exit special measures or notice to improve within an agreed upon time period should, as with the current regulation for academies, have their school transferred to another provider, upon the agreement of the school and DCSF. (pp. 25-28)

On schools and school networks, we propose that:

6. All schools become the legal employer of their staff and take ownership of their land (as is already the case for those with foundation status, in trusts or set-up as academies). (pp. 25-28)
7. All schools be encouraged to join a larger support network (preferably non-geographical) which would enable them to access economies of scale and/or collaborate on pedagogical matters such as the development of school curricula. (pp. 29-31)
   - These networks may be run by the new arms length companies set up by local authorities, or not-for-profit providers.
   - Schools that are prospering as an independent entity would not be required to join a network if they do not wish to do so.
   - A one-off grant would be provided to any provider which recruits a new school to its existing network. To encourage the development of non-geographically based networks, a larger grant could be provided if the school in question is in another local authority.

8. The government facilitates the setting up of local foundations so that parents can contribute to enhancement projects at their children's school. (pp. 19-21)
   - A ratchet mechanism with a multiplier effect would be used to ensure that the impact of donating in poor areas is multiplied to level the playing field

On teachers, we propose that:

9. A training route based on Teach First be made the default option for new graduate teachers and further encouraging the entry of 'second career' teachers. (pp. 34-35)
10. The various training routes be rationalised around those that work best. (p. 36)

11. The remuneration scheme be front-loaded to enable higher starting salaries, financed through reducing incremental progression and by reducing pension. (p. 37)

12. National pay agreements offer guidance on minimum pay, limiting automatic progression to four increments. After that schools and networks should develop their own pay structures based on the situation in their local market. (pp. 37-39)

13. An individual budget for continuing professional development based on a money entitlement for service worked be offered to teachers. (pp. 39-40)

14. A much shorter capability procedure be agreed upon once the informal stage of the process has been exhausted. (pp. 40-43)

15. The government sets up a severance fund. Governing bodies may borrow the cost of a severance payment from the fund which would then be paid back within an agreed time period. (pp. 40-43)

On quality monitoring and reporting, we propose that:

16. A new accountability framework which supports the following principles be developed: (pp. 58-64)
    - It should use a broad range of indicators to assess school quality.
    - School performance should be measured over time
    - School performance should be compared to schools with similar student intakes and prior attainment.
    - The results should be reported in a clear, unambiguous manner (e.g. A-F, traffic light system)

17. The practice of inspecting all schools on a regular cycle be abolished. Instead, schools should only be inspected on a needs basis: either identified through poor performance in the annual report cards, or by parental complaints. (pp. 64-68)
    - The support and challenge function currently played by School Improvement Partners should be reintegrated into Ofsted.

18. The average quality of teaching in schools be assessed through the inspection of random samples of schools. These inspections should carry no ramification for schools or teachers in order to reduce stress and gaming. (pp. 64-68)

19. An initiative along the lines of the School Achievement Award Scheme be reintroduced to reward high performing schools. (pp. 68-69)

On admissions, we propose that:

20. The 'special dispensation' for schools that had partial selection mechanisms (either by aptitude or ability) during the 1997/1998 school year be eliminated. (pp. 44-46)

21. The practice of selection by aptitude at all state-funded schools including academies be stopped. (pp. 44-46)

22. The Department begins collecting information on admission authorities' oversubscription criteria and the impact of each mechanism upon the composition of a school's student body. Mechanisms which are found to achieve more equitable intakes should be promoted. (pp. 47-48)

23. All voluntary aided faith schools set aside a percentage of places to students of other faiths and no faith (the exact percentage should be determined during a national review). (pp. 47-48)

24. The Admissions Forums' power to publish an annual report be made a duty. The report should also be made public to parents. (pp 48-49)

25. The role of the Office of the Schools Adjudicator be reviewed to determine whether it should be given stronger powers over the process of monitoring

and enforcing compliance with the Code. (pp 48-49)

On permanent exclusions and pupil referral units (PRUs), we propose that:

26. Any student who has been permanently excluded should not be reinstated, lest the authority of the head teacher and school governors is undermined. (pp. 49-51)
    - If the exclusion is found to be unjust by the Schools' Adjudicator Panel, it should not go on the student's record
    - Schools which have unjustly excluded a student should undertake a comprehensive review of their discipline and behaviour policy, with the understanding that further infractions may result in disciplinary action
27. All schools participate in their local fair-access and managed moves scheme; and the local authority should be given a statutory duty to enforce it. (pp. 51-52)
    - To accommodate in-year transfers, every school should be required to set aside an agreed upon number of places each year; or to admit children beyond their published admissions number.
28. Any school excluding a pupil be required to transfer the prorated Age-

Weighted Pupil Unit to the new institution providing the pupil with education. (pp. 51-52)
    - If, however, the school is found to have unjustly excluded a student, the entire AWPU allowance should be transferred.
29. As with schools, PRUs should have the option of taking over the management of their budgets and staffing. (pp. 53-54)
30. Additional funding is provided to address immediate shortfalls in staffing and infrastructure development. PRUs with inadequate accommodation should be given priority when planning redevelopment (e.g. through the Building Schools for the Future initiative). (pp. 53-54)
31. Providers and charities be encouraged to develop alternatives to mainstream education through the provision of a one-off grant. (pp. 53-54)
    - To qualify for the grant, the organisation in question must establish and follow a rigorous evaluation process in order to assess the effectiveness of said programme.

On school transport, we propose that:

32. The viability of a national yellow bus system that is both free to low-income families and accessible to those who are willing to pay for it, be explored. (pp. 54-56)

The past few decades of education reform have been tumultuous. Since 1997 alone, we have had six education ministers in three differently named departments. Numerous public bodies have been created, many of them surviving just a few years. We have seen hundreds of reviews, tens of plans and several 'agendas' – each one creating its own bureaucratic trail.

We argue that England's struggles stem from the absence of a clear, coherent, educational vision. There is little internal logic in the way goals and incentives are aligned; far too much central government intervention; and far too little trust in teachers as professionals. Drawing on research from abroad and in England, we argue that the solution lies in the development of a 'tight, loose, tight' framework: clear vision from the centre; the freedom for schools and teachers to achieve the vision as they see fit; and comprehensive accountability mechanisms to ensure the vision is achieved.

This framework would support schools in achieving excellence by harnessing the best of competitive and collaborative practices. It would safeguard equity by emphasising the role of local authorities as defenders of their constituents' right to a quality education. Finally, more autonomous schools would help to professionalise teaching, while creating genuine diversity in the system.

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