



POLICY BRIEFING

SUPPORTING EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

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Schools White Paper

Summary

This briefing summarises the Schools White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All*, published by the DfES on 25 October 2005, and highlights the main implications for local authorities.

The White Paper may be downloaded from the DfES website at:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/schoolswhitepaper>

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The information in this policy briefing applies to England only but the issues raised may be of a wider interest to our subscribers

You are encouraged to circulate this policy briefing to anyone in your authority who may find it useful, including headteachers and school governors.

Introduction

The White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All* is sub-titled *More choice for parents and pupils*. It sets out over 116 pages, the Government's, and in particular the Prime Minister's, vision for 'radical improvement to the schools system by putting parents and the needs of their children at the heart of it, by freeing up schools to innovate and succeed and by bringing in new dynamism and providers. This will ensure that every school delivers an excellent education, that every child achieves to their potential and that the system as a whole is increasingly driven by parents and by choice' (in the words of the e-mail from the DfES to local authority Chief Executives).

Much of the media speculation focused not only on the emphasis on 'parent power' but also on the anticipated demise of the local education authority role – represented in one major broadsheet as 'councils will be stripped of their responsibility for schools'. In fact, local authorities will acquire a number of significant new duties and powers in relation to schools. But, in the words of Tony Blair, 'the role of the LEA will change fundamentally'.

In his speech (<http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page8363.asp>), Tony Blair described the substantial improvements since he came to power, but acknowledged criticism that headline figures concealed shortcomings in important areas of achievement: "If the critics should accept the improvement, we must accept the challenge. We must do better. We must do better to tackle the pockets of deep educational disadvantage; do better in lifting schools from average to good; do better in enabling more good schools to become genuine centres of excellence, giving as good an education in the state sector as anyone can buy in the private school system."

That is clearly his ambition – and the White Paper seeks to set out how this will be brought about; it includes two forewords: four pages from the Prime Minister and one from the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Ruth Kelly.

The White Paper

The document combines a description of recent change with proposals for the future. There are nine chapters, plus an annex on the resource and legislative implications (and an Executive Summary). The main points from each chapter – particularly those relating to local authorities – are as follows.

1. The challenge to reform

Significant improvements in the number of primary school pupils attaining Level 4 in English and maths have been echoed in the rising numbers of secondary pupils achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs. The number of failing schools is less than half the figure in 1998. Ofsted reports 75% of leadership and management is good or better, compared with 56% in 1997. 'Our goal is no less than to transform our schools system by turning it from one focused on the success of institutions into one which is shaped and driven by the success, needs and aspirations of parents and pupils.'

A number of ambitions are described, including raising standards for all – especially amongst the least advantaged; helping parents engage with the education of their children; dealing with schools which are coasting, rather than striving for excellence; overcoming the negative effects of poor behaviour; and breaking the link between poverty and low aspiration 'once and for all'. The Government believes that 'this requires schools to have the freedom to tailor the way they manage themselves, and the teaching and support they offer, to the needs and talents of individual pupils and their parents. Working within the principles of fair funding and fair admissions, schools will benefit from new energy in the system through a more diverse set of providers that allows parents to choose the school that suits their child.'

Specialist schools (which will be virtually every secondary school within two years) and Academies are cited as successful models, with characteristics shared by others – many of which, it is claimed, 'would like to go further: this means opening up the system as a whole to the opportunities presented by such innovation and dynamism'.

'A system designed around the needs of children will require us to deliver the radical vision we have set out for integrated services for children, families and young people [*in Every Child Matters*] ...It needs the local authority which has important insight into local knowledge – to play a role analogous to the one it now plays in early years provision: commissioning and championing the needs of parents and pupils, pushing for improvement rather than interfering in the day to day running of good schools which are empowered with light-touch inspection.'

There should be catch-up classes for children who have fallen behind, stretch for those with special talents, access at other schools or colleges for those

wishing to pursue specialist courses and a flexible and engaging curriculum with the ability to take exams when pupils are ready rather than at fixed ages.

2. A School System Shaped by Parents

'We are determined to transform our school system into one that responds better to the needs and aspirations of parents...And the nation needs to ensure that areas of underperformance which undermine our efforts to improve social mobility are tackled vigorously.'

All primary and secondary schools will be encouraged to become self governing and to acquire a Trust, *ie.* not-for-profit, charitable organisations able, if they wish, to appoint a majority of the governors (though required in that case to establish a Parents' Council (see Chapter 5). The governing body of an existing primary or secondary school will be able to create its own trust or link its school with an existing Trust. (More work is felt necessary on the situation for special schools.)

Acquiring a Trust would require consultation with parents to ensure support followed by publication of formal proposals; a separate statutory process would be required before schools acquiring a faith-based Trust could become faith schools. The local authority could refer the governing body's decision to the Schools Adjudicator where the decision failed to take proper account of the views of the majority of parents or if there were serious concerns about the impact on school standards.

Existing legislation requiring all new or replacement secondary schools to be subject to competition for providers will be extended to primary schools, and all new or replacement schools will be Foundation, Trust, voluntary aided or – where appropriate – Academies. So there will be no new community schools.

Trust schools, like Foundation schools, will employ their own staff, control their own assets and set their own admission arrangements (subject to the Admissions Code of Practice). Trusts will be able to apply to the Secretary of State for flexibilities, which might include additional curriculum flexibilities and freedoms over pay and conditions for staff. If granted, these would apply across all schools supported by the Trust. In effect, this would create the possibility of school 'brands' – a term used by the Prime Minister in his speech.

A new **Office of the Schools Commissioner** will be established to act as a national champion for the development of Trust schools. The Schools Commissioner will also 'support and secure the significant changes in the way local authorities commission schools for their communities', linking authorities to Trusts, identifying opportunities for successful Trusts to form partnerships with more schools and supporting independent schools wishing to join the maintained sector. The Commissioner will also be able to challenge local authorities that fail to exercise their new duties adequately, including in relation to school expansion and sixth form provision (see below). The Commissioner will advise the Secretary of State on local authority plans for major capital investment, challenge authorities to work together to maximise choice, diversity and fair access, and liaise with authorities to identify potential Academy projects. The Commissioner will also monitor key local indicators of parental satisfaction and rising school standards, and publish an Annual Report.

'Trust schools will be, in effect, independent state schools, but will remain part of the local government family of schools.' They will be funded as other local schools, subject to the Code of Practice on admissions and to all of the accountability mechanisms that apply to other state schools. If judged by Ofsted to be inadequate, the local authority will have the same range of intervention powers as for other schools, including (in the case of severe failure) a proposal for closure and competition for a new school – in which case the assets would revert to the local authority (except where originally provided by the Trust).

Trusts would be charities regulated by the Charity Commission, and would be under a duty to promote community cohesion and good race relations. Consideration is being given to whether further safeguards are necessary to prevent the entry of inappropriate Trusts.

The role of Academies is emphasised, again, with the possibility of independent schools joining the state sector being eligible for Academy status.

Parents would be able to ask for a new primary or secondary school to improve standards of local education, to meet a lack of faith provision, to tackle entrenched inequalities or to promote innovative teaching methods. Local authorities will be under a duty to be responsive to parental interests, deciding whether a proposal to establish new school should be taken forward or whether the demands can be better met in other ways. Parents will have the right of appeal to the Schools Adjudicator if their proposals are rejected. Capital funding

would normally be provided through existing programmes, with the expectation that, to reduce costs, authorities would consider whether a new school could be housed on an existing site, possibly shared with an existing school or using temporary buildings in the short term. A dedicated capital fund will be established to support strong and innovative proposals from parents, with the expectation that authorities would normally provide a site for successful proposals.

Local authorities will be expected to move quickly to close any schools that are failing to attract sufficient pupils in the event of **surplus capacity** arising from the creation of new schools or expansion of popular schools, and to consider whether capital assets released could be used 'to inject new dynamism into the system'. (Falling rolls – not a feature of the White Paper – are also likely to lead to surplus capacity in many areas in coming years.)

It will be made easier (though how is not explained) for **independent schools** to join the maintained sector. They would not be allowed to charge fees, and would have to meet the normal requirements of the maintained sector.

It will be easier for secondary schools to open sixth forms, with a presumption that such proposals from high performing specialist schools would be approved. New provision, including competitions for new 16-19 provision, will be expected to demonstrate how it would contribute to the delivery of 14-19 reforms.

Oversubscribed schools will be encouraged to take up existing incentives to expand, and smaller scale expansion will also be encouraged (except where this would contravene the infant class size pledge). Where expansion is not a realistic option, joint ventures and mergers with other schools will be encouraged, possibly through formal federations under a single governing body.

By 2007 all secondary schools will be expected to form or join partnerships to improve the management of bad behaviour and persistent truancy, and to have admissions protocols for 'hard to place' pupils (see Chapter 7).

To tackle **school failure**, a duty will be placed on local authorities to consider the full range of their powers immediately on receipt of an adverse Ofsted report, and the 'outdated Code of Practice on local authority and school relations' will be scrapped 'to enable more decisive intervention', taking account of the introduction of the new School Improvement Partners. Possible

actions include: the immediate change of head teacher and/or members of the school management team; suspension of the delegated budget; appointment of additional governors; replacement of the governing body with an Interim Executive Board; appointment of a partner school; or immediate closure and competition for a new provider.

For schools in special measures, which do not show real progress within a year, the presumption will be that the school will be closed, with a replacement or an Academy opened on the site. If a school issued with an Improvement Notice fails to demonstrate significant improvement within a year, it will be placed in Special Measures. Particular mention is made of the disproportionate number of schools for children with behavioural, emotional and social disorders, which are failing. Local authorities will be given a new power to require a school, which is failing or at risk of failure to join a federation or other collaborative arrangement. The process by which local authorities can issue warning notices to schools where there are real concerns about performance or management will be made quicker and simpler, and extended to coasting schools as well as those with outright poor standards.

When a school is judged by Ofsted to be inadequate, local authorities will be under a new duty to ensure effective communication with parents, possibly appointing a Parents' Champion to help parents understand the nature of the problems and the options available to address them.

3. Choice and Access for All

The White Paper claims that the argument that there is no demand for choice ignores reality. 'We want to ensure that choice is more widely available to all and is not restricted to those who can pay for it.'

Proposals include better information for parents, with significantly more detail about schools available from the existing national website enabling a simple postcode search of schools in an area (www.parentscentre.gov.uk). Local authorities will be expected to improve the independent information they provide, and to provide parents with advice on how to compare secondary schools. This might combine public sessions with targeted one-to-one sessions for parents in need of more support. £12 million will be provided to enable every local authority to have a network of '**choice advisers**' in place by 2008.

The issue of **school transport** is illustrated by a chart showing that a greater proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals travel less than two miles to school, whilst a greater proportion not eligible for free school meals travel three miles or more. Legislation will be introduced to entitle those eligible for free school meals or in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit to free transport to any of the three suitable secondary schools closest to their home, where these schools are between two and six miles from their home. It is also hoped that greater access to subsidised school transport will reduce car use for the 'school run'. Pilot schemes will be established with local authorities to test the impact of an extended transport offer for all pupils and to explore the links between better transport and fair admissions – these may include charges for better off families. Authorities will be expected to consider all home-to-school and other transport as part of their new duty to support choice, diversity and fair access; this might include safe walking routes and the use of 'yellow buses', and should include consideration of journeys arising from extended provision and a broader range of 14-19 options.

'Our new system will be underpinned by **fair admissions** in order to extend choice and open access for more parents.' Specialist schools will be able to offer some places to pupils living beyond their traditional catchment area, and schools will be encouraged to work together 'to help make such choices meaningful for parents'. Selection of up to 10% of pupils by aptitude in a specialism will continue but 'there will be no return to the 11-plus'. (Selection by ability at 11 receives a number of unfavourable comments, but there are no proposals to end it.) Foundation, voluntary aided and Trust schools will be 'free to use the approach to fair admissions that they think will best suit their local circumstances, as long as it is compatible with the Admissions Code.' It will be easier to introduce banding arrangements, where appropriate, based on the local or national ability range to achieve an all-ability intake. All proposals for new schools will need to include proposed admissions arrangements, showing how these will promote community and social integration and choice. Local authorities will be able to specify the community to be served by a new school and will have the power to modify proposed admission arrangements to bring them into line with the Code of Practice. All popular and successful schools which expand will have to prove to the local authority that their admissions arrangements are in line with the Code (one requirement of which is that arrangements work to the benefit of all local children and families – see TEN briefing 53/05 on the recent draft Code).

4. Personalised learning

'Personalisation is the key to tackling the persistent achievement gaps between different social and ethnic groups.' The main proposals include:

- Intensive small-group literacy and numeracy for those falling behind
- Extra stretch for the gifted and talented
- Extra support and tuition beyond the school day
- £335 million by 2007-08 earmarked within the Dedicated Schools Grant to support schools with this work – targeted towards local authorities with the largest number of underachieving and deprived children, and through their local funding formulae to the most challenging schools
- a further £60 million in each of 2006-07 and 2007-08 for schools with the highest numbers of pupils who have fallen behind to ensure their workforce has the necessary skills
- School Improvement Partners (SIPs) and Ofsted challenging all schools to demonstrate that they are providing the catch-up support needed, with the most support for children facing the greatest disadvantage
- A growth in the number of specialist schools with an SEN specialism, or special schools with a subject specialism, with 50 more designated by 2008 and an evaluation by then comparing the respective strengths of the two models to inform developments beyond 2008
- Expanding and improving programmes for gifted and talented pupils in Key Stage 3, including sport support for the most gifted young athletes
- Up to £1 million a year to match-fund business and philanthropic contributions to the 'Go for Gold' scheme for gifted and talented pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Extension of support to secondary schools for bilingual learners; expand programmes to target underachievement of young black people; focus on improving the attainment of Muslim pupils; introduce a targeted programme to address the severe underperformance of Gypsy and Traveller communities (see note of new TEN publication on final page of this briefing); and ensure spread of best practice in meeting the needs of underachieving white working class boys.

5. Parents Driving Improvement

Primary and secondary schools will be required to give information on pupils' progress to parents at least three times a year, with the opportunity for face-to-face discussion with teachers. There will be a national campaign to develop

further and to share schools' experience of the benefits of parental engagement. Materials will be provided for parents to use at home to support their children's learning. Guidance on home-school agreements will be updated and relaunched.

Ofsted will be given a new statutory power to investigate parents' concerns about a school and, where justified, to require a school to call a meeting with parents to discuss their complaints. Ofsted will then determine what action should be taken, which could include an immediate inspection. If serious failure is found, this could trigger the local authority action described in Chapter 2, including a change in the school management.

Ofsted inspections will include the quality of schools' engagement with parents, and a new statutory duty will be placed on governing bodies to have regard to the views of parents. **Parent Councils** will be encouraged, offering a relatively informal mechanism for engagement, and they will be required in Trust schools where the Trust appoints the majority of the governing body (which reduces the number of elected parent governors). Statutory guidance will address this issue.

School Councils UK, a charity, is to establish a network of school councils; guidance to secondary schools will be updated to give stronger encouragement for school councils to be engaged in decision making.

The remit of Children's Information Services will be extended from their focus on early years to provide information for parents of children up to age 19. Additional funding will be provided to enable schools to offer information sessions for parents when their children start at primary or secondary school.

6. Supporting Children and Parents

By 2008 half of primary schools and a third of secondary schools are expected to provide access to extended services, with all schools doing so by 2010 (see TEN briefing 34/05).

Schools are reminded that, although they are not 'statutory partners' in Trust arrangements under the Children Act, they have a statutory duty to ensure that their functions are carried out with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children; that this will mean working with other children's services and the new Local Safeguarding Children Boards, and playing their part in multi-

agency work to protect them – and that they will need to ensure that staff have the awareness and training they need to do this.

The DfES is consulting through the review of Pupil Registration Regulations on new measures to tighten up requirements on schools to inform the local authority of children leaving their school rolls, and by December 2005 all authorities are expected to have in place systematic arrangements for identifying **children missing from education** so that suitable provision can be made for them.

The DfES is to work with a sample of local authorities and others on a pathfinder project to develop tools to identify and assess the small number of children who might benefit from **boarding provision** to meet complex needs.

SIPs will be expected to hold schools to account for how well they support **Looked After Children** and for promoting their educational outcomes (for which authorities, but not schools, are under a statutory duty). There will be consultation early in 2006 on further proposals to improve outcomes for this group.

By 2010 every Primary Care Trust (PCT) should be resourced to have at least one full-time year-round qualified **school nurse** working with each cluster or group of primary schools and the related secondary school. A practical guide for headteachers, *Looking for a School Nurse?* will be issued in November 2005.

7. School Discipline

The Practitioners' Group on School Behaviour and Discipline, chaired by Sir Alan Steer, reported on 21 October; its recommendations underlie many of the proposals in this chapter.

Legislation will give headteachers the new powers to search pupils for knives and other weapons. A clear and unambiguous legal right for teachers to discipline pupils will be introduced, backed by the expectation that every school will have a clear set of rules and sanctions (a recommendation of the Elton committee in 1989, but never implemented). Parenting contracts will be usable earlier, and the use of parenting orders extended. A new regime will be introduced for pupils suspended from school, with parents expected to be responsible for excluded pupils for the first five days (supervised doing schoolwork at home or, for example, at a relative's house); headteachers will be

expected to use their delegated and devolved funding collectively to develop provision (on and off-site) for suspensions longer than five days, and to ensure that all exclusions are properly recorded. Local authorities, currently required to provide full time education for permanently excluded pupils from the sixteenth day following exclusion will be required to do so from the sixth day.

The Steer Group has recommended retention of **exclusion appeals panels**, but has proposed reforms which are to be implemented: panels will have to accept the judgements of headteachers and governors where it is clear that the pupil has committed the offence; headteachers and governors on panels should be from the same phase of education as the excluding school; and training for clerks and chairs will be made mandatory.

By September 2007 every secondary school is expected to be part of a partnership to improve behaviour and reduce truancy, and to make arrangements for **'hard to place' pupils** which ensure that no school takes an unreasonable share of children with challenging behaviour, including those excluded from other schools.

The DfES will explore with partners the possibility of introducing a National Behaviour Charter, as recommended by the Group, to clarify the rights and responsibilities of pupils, parents and staff in promoting good behaviour in schools. Consideration will also be given to another recommendation, for all schools to develop the function of a Pupil and Parent Support Worker to follow up cases of misbehaviour. The Anti-Bullying Charter for Action will be re-issued every two years, to sustain momentum, and further guidance will be issued on tackling bullying. Further investigation will be undertaken into improving provision for early identification of and meeting the needs of the small group of pupils with severe or complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD).

8. The School Workforce and School Leadership

A reform of teachers' professional standards will set out what can be expected of teachers throughout their careers, including the need for up-to-date knowledge of subject specialisms as part of a commitment to effective professional development. Performance management will be made more effective. From September 2006 the value of incentives for new maths and science trainees will be increased. The Teach First scheme, to attract the best

graduates to the most disadvantaged areas, will be extended from London to five more cities.

The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) will be designated as the modernisation agency for the school workforce, building on the recent work of the former Teacher Training Agency and the National Remodelling Team and continuing to work closely with unions, local authorities and other employers. (See TEN briefing 36/05.)

The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) will focus on developing the leaders of the most complex and challenging schools, and will encourage schools to make more effective succession planning arrangements. The College will be asked to identify, with a range of partners, a new group of national leaders of education, drawn from those succeeding in the most challenging leadership roles; these headteachers will work with the College to influence the direction and targeting of leadership provision across the school system, and will be able to advise Ministers on the future direction of education policy.

An enhanced role is envisaged for governing bodies as schools acquire greater autonomy, and although Ministers clearly intend to encourage the creation of Trusts, with the ability to appoint the majority of governors, it will be for existing governing bodies to decide whether or not to pursue this option, which would require a formal consultation process. They will also continue to be able to choose their own optimum size – with encouragement for the smallest effective model as being ‘the way to create energetic and focused governing bodies’. For Trust schools where the Trust appoints a majority of the governors, the school could have a governing body of 11 members. DfES is collaborating with the NCSL to develop a mentoring programme to support chairs of governors, and there will be an increased expectation that new governors will undertake induction training, and the DfES will continue to work with local authorities to promote and accredit training programmes.

9. A New Role for Local Authorities

‘The best local authorities are strategic leaders of their communities... They work with neighbourhoods and local communities to help them articulate their needs, and ensure that the pattern of local services matches up to their vision and aspirations. They act as commissioners of services and the champions of

users... We will support local authorities in playing a new commissioning role in relation to a new school system, at the heart of their local communities, and responsive to the needs of parents and pupils. They will support new schools and new provision where this is a real demand or where existing provision is poor. This is a very different role from acting as a direct provider of school places. We recognise that in many ways it is more challenging. But it also offers the scope to ensure that communities receive the education they deserve and aspire to.'

Local authorities structures and ways of working are already changing to take account of their lead role in trust arrangements under the Children Act 2004; similarly, the 10 Year Child Care Strategy, the *Youth Matters* Green Paper and the 14-19 reforms all reflect this commissioner role. It is now proposed to extend this role to the school system. To reinforce the increasing integration of services, and the links to the local authority's wider community leadership role, it is planned to remove the term 'local education authority' from the statute book and to refer from now on to 'local authorities' in government publications and new legislation.

Local authorities will be placed under a new statutory duty to promote choice, diversity and fair access, to underpin this role as commissioner and champion of pupils and parents.

'Local authorities will need to plan how many schools their area needs, where and how big they need to be, what kinds of schools will serve the area best, and who the schools should serve. Local authorities will draw on their analysis of parental demand and their consultation with local partners to draw up a strategic plan for the pattern of schools in their area, as part of their Children and Young People's Plan' (due by April 2006).

The present duty to hold a competition for providers where a new secondary school is required will be extended to cover primary schools as well. If no suitable promoter can be found, authorities may publish their own proposals for a Foundation school, but no more community schools will be established.

School Organisation Committees (SOCs) are to be abolished; their powers to decide whether proposals for new schools and for major changes are accepted will be transferred to the local authority.

Authorities will be expected to use the increasing range of information and pupil level data available to them, including from the new School Improvement Partners (SIPs) employed by them and more frequent inspections, to take early and decisive action where quality of provision in schools is unacceptable. They will be expected to challenge schools which may be letting down particular groups (for example, looked after children) and those that are 'coasting'; the statutory basis for 'warning notices' will be changed to make it easier and quicker for authorities to take such action. They will also be expected to take more radical action in the case of school failure identified by Ofsted, and on shorter time-scales (with significant improvement to be apparent within a year to avoid moving to the next stage – see Chapter 2).

The expectation that authorities consult schools on their Children's and Young People's Plan, and that schools have regard to the Plan (for example, when creating their own school development plan) are to be put onto a statutory footing.

There will be continuing consultation with local government about whether they have the tools they need to play the roles described in the White Paper of supporting parents, securing high standards in schools and joining up local services, and on what, if any, further powers may be necessary.

TEN comment

This is emphatically a political White Paper, published in half-term week, and in part more about the headlines it generated than the substance of the change it will bring about; indeed, in much of the country (*ie.* England) many of its proposals relating to choice will be quite irrelevant. It was trailed to an unusual extent over the fortnight leading up to its publication, even for an era dominated by 'spin' and press manipulation, culminating in a speech by the Prime Minister the preceding day to parents in Downing Street (presumably because there were no schools open). Inevitably, therefore, the document contained few major surprises. However, since the consistently negative media line on local authorities was obviously fuelled by briefing from the usual anonymous 'sources', the very different story in the White Paper itself was pleasantly unexpected.

The document seeks to project quite a concoction – of achievements so far; a vision of a more market oriented system in which schools (headteachers and governing bodies) have greater autonomy and responsibility; parents have greater power; pupils have greater access to the personalised learning they need; disadvantaged and vulnerable groups will be better supported and provided for; all taking place within a broader system of coherent public services for children, young people and their families (many of them located in and around schools) in which local authorities are the central players – leading on the commissioning of services, and holding to account a broadening range of providers.

But there are very real tensions in this vision, and it ignores the extent to which some of the central opportunities described are already available, but have attracted little interest. The prominence given to schools acquiring a Trust and parents being able to start their own schools – both of which are possible now – suggests a somewhat inaccurate view of the present system and thus an unrealistic vision of how it is likely to change; indeed, given that the subsequent legislation will be largely permissive rather than prescriptive, it is quite possible that not a lot will change at all. There is little to justify the hyperbolic language associated with the proposals.

It has been suggested that Trust schools are simply the grant-maintained model reinstated; they are not. What attracted most schools to become GM was the unfairly advantageous funding, now gone; the chance to escape closure or re-organisation plans, now gone; and control of their admissions arrangements, now subject to a Code of Practice and an Adjudicator – much of whose work has involved sorting out and ending arrangements introduced by former GM schools which breach the Code. Flexibility over staff pay and conditions is something schools are reluctant to dabble with, and if the Government thinks flexibility over the National Curriculum is educationally beneficial, it should extend it to all successful schools, not hold it back as an inducement to persuade schools into an otherwise unattractive change. That is indefensible.

Improving the information and support to parents, and increasing the influence they can exert, is to be welcomed (though predictably hasn't been warmly so by headteacher organisations). However, the obvious danger is that, even with the additional support on offer, it will be the more confident and articulate who take greatest advantage, which can often be to the detriment of other groups.

Also welcome is any move to enable pupils' needs to be met more flexibly by collaboration between institutions rather than competition between them simply to attract the largest number of potentially successful pupils – but the constant refusal to dismantle aspects of the market system which almost nobody but English national politicians believes are a benefit illustrates the mixed messages (or disagreements) surrounding policy.

Perhaps the most significant example is the prospects for the most disadvantaged. On the one hand, they will be given greater access to popular schools with a major extension of free travel and the support of 'choice advisors'; on the other, they will face increased competition from middle class parents well able to afford fares on the newly introduced bus routes – and what are the admission arrangements that will increase their access to even more heavily oversubscribed schools? Banding is one such mechanism, though not appropriate everywhere, but what will be the incentive to encourage (let alone require) schools in predominantly middle class areas to introduce mechanisms that will favour the distant and disadvantaged? The role of the Admissions Forum will be crucial, and there will surely need to be a requirement on schools to accept and implement the advice of the Forum.

In the meantime, authorities will be expected to act strategically to keep surplus capacity down to affordable levels by 'taking out' the weakest and least popular schools – many of which, in urban areas, will be amongst those serving predominantly poor communities (so the more generous transport provision may become a necessity for some children to attend any school). And falling rolls – barely mentioned in the White Paper, despite a drop of around 10% in the next ten years – will add significantly to the pressures on the system, and increase the difficulties faced in disadvantaged areas. It will be essential that authorities' duty to promote fair access takes priority over their duty to promote diversity and choice.

Amongst other specific tensions which will require some careful attention are those between encouragement of more faith schools and concerns over social cohesion and between encouragement of new school 6th-forms and securing coherent and viable 14-19 provision.

Along with a change in their role, local authorities are set to acquire a number of new duties and powers, many of which will strengthen their influence over schools. To repeat: 'local authorities will need to plan how many schools their

area needs, where and how big they need to need to be, what kinds of schools will serve the area best, and who the schools should serve. Local authorities will draw on their analysis of parental demand and their consultation with local partners to draw up a strategic plan for the pattern of schools in their area, as part of their Children and Young People's Plan. However, the same issues of resources and capacity will face local authorities as face schools, but the White Paper only addresses the latter. (Amongst the proposals for expanding schools' leadership capacity is a clear suggestion that in future a cadre of headteachers will have a formal role advising Ministers on policy.) Indeed, authorities are under pressure to meet 'Gershon' savings targets whilst carrying through the enormous change programme associated with *Every Child Matters* – and the gratuitous undermining of local government's role which plainly accompanied media briefing on the White Paper shows an irresponsible disregard for the capacity problems, which exist.

The White Paper offers a number of opportunities for local authorities, and it will be important that they are seized and acted upon with confidence. It is equally important that authorities are given the powers and levers necessary to implement in full their new role and responsibilities, and the legislation that will follow will be essential to achieving that.

Ministers have signalled an intention to open up many previously 'exclusive' schools to a wider range of families and to engage them more fully in the system as a whole, and to put significant new pressure on many schools to improve their performance on behalf of all pupils. That is a welcome – many would say essential – concomitant to the successful implementation of the 'children' agenda (which has been dogged by the lack of coherence with the 'standards' agenda). It will be the legislation, and the subsequent actions of Ministers, which determine the extent to which they are serious about reversing the trend towards social polarisation in favour of social mobility. Local government will need to hold the Government, and Ofsted, to account if they do not act robustly to support authorities in their role as champions of children and their communities.

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Gypsy and Traveller pupils

TEN has recently published a 16-page pamphlet, *Educating Gypsy and Traveller pupils*. Full details, and a downloadable pdf, are available from our website: www.ten.info