

Governors' Agenda

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SCHOOLS SUPPORT SERVICES LTD

Editorial

Getting more out of less

School budgets, ostensibly, have been protected for one more year, but have they? As the seven years of plenty are now being followed by seven of famine and other services begin to shrink, schools will be required to provide more with what they have which, in the longer term will be much, much less.

Libraries are being closed down, youth clubs are disappearing and social care budgets slashed. Children in larger families have to live in smaller dwellings as housing benefits are capped, an increasing number of parents are out of work and child benefit scrapped in a family where at least one parent earns over £42,375. All this will have a deleterious impact on schools.

Imagine this: unkempt hungry youngsters arriving late to school (if at all) to be educated. Teachers, who have been focusing on promoting learning, have to rely on learning support assistants and mentors to deal with the social side of these children – to help them clear the emotional clutter and scrub the grime away from home experiences so that they become receptive to their spiritual, moral, social, cultural, mental and physical development.

But schools are in the process of cutting back on learning support assistants and mentors because they are discovering that they need these “protected” resources to buy in central services – such as curricular advice, pay roll, and legal, personnel and financial support, which in years gone by were free. Many LSAs have seen their hours being cut in an effort to make school budgets balance.

Will teachers and headteachers be willing to spend extra time and exert increased energy to deal with the baggage their children will bring into schools with a view to promoting good education? The challenge is going to be daunting. It throws up many questions but few if any answers.

The first step to dealing with this new world is to recognise that it exists. The second is to review everything that is done and consider how we can get more from less. The third – in a milieu where the gap between the rich and poor has become a chasm – is to make the wealthy curmudgeons among us recognise that it is in our interest and that of the country’s to loosen purse strings and invest in education and the future.

Altogether, we have to engage in lateral thinking. Everyone in education can well reflect – to use the language of the late American President Kennedy’s – what we can do for our children rather than what our schools can do for us.

Over successive years, school budgets have grown appreciably. We have not noticed because we have grown too used to the good life. Those days are gone.

The threat of austerity and the lean years ahead is a wake-up call. The government is taking steps to redress the disparity in budgets of schools in different parts of the country which have similar intakes – i.e. the same numbers of pupils on free school meals. However, with the parlous financial state of the country, it will mean that the equalisation will be an exercise in dumbing down rather than levelling up. It’s not going to be easy. The one consolation is that all of us are in this together. If we have to get out of the morass we will have to work at solutions collaboratively.

Education Bill 2011

I The Education Bill 2011

The Education Bill 2011 contains 10 parts and 17 Schedules. The 10 Parts are as follows:

- Part 1 – Early Years Provision
- Part 2 – Discipline
- Part 3 – School Workforce
- Part 4 – Qualifications and the Curriculum
- Part 5 – Educational Institutions and other Provisions
- Part 6 – Academies
- Part 7 – Post-16 Education and Training
- Part 8 – Student Finance
- Part 9 – Powers of National Assembly for Wales
- Part 10 - General

II Contents of the Education Bill

Part 1 – Early Years’ Provision

Free early years’ provision will be extended. Regulations will enable children from two years of age from disadvantaged families to be in receipt of early years’ education.

Part 2 – Discipline

This section extends the powers of staff members at schools and FE institutions to search pupils without their consent for items that have been or are likely to be used to commit offences or cause injuries to themselves or others or damage property. They may also search for items banned under the school rules.

Schools will be able to set out in their behaviour policy which articles are prohibited and could be the subject of searches. The power to seize items by force will be extended to weapons, drugs, alcohol, stolen goods and items that may be used to commit offences. Staff may search mobile phones and erase data or files if there are good reasons to do so.

Independent Appeal Panels for permanent exclusions will be replaced by review panels. A review panel will not have the power to reinstate but may

- uphold the decision of the headteacher to exclude a pupil,
- recommend that the governing body reconsider the decision, or
- quash the decision and direct the governing body to reconsider it.

The requirement to give parents 24 hours' notice of their child's detention will be repealed. There will also be a duty for every school to enter into behaviour and attendance partnerships with other schools in the area.

Part 3 – School Workforce

The General Teaching Council for England (GTCE), the Training and Development Agency (TDA) and the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) will be abolished. The functions of the GTCE and the TDA will be taken over by the Department for Education (DfE).

Clause 13 imposes restrictions on reporting allegations against teachers (including peripatetic and support teachers) made by or on behalf of pupils registered at the school. It covers allegations where no charge has been made. The restrictions cease to apply once there are court proceedings in respect of an offence.

Part 4 – Qualifications and the Curriculum

There are a number of disparate provisions in this section.

- (1) The Secretary of State may direct schools to participate in international surveys.
- (2) Ofqual will be able to compare qualifications that it regulates to international qualifications.
- (3) The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) will be abolished. Its functions will be taken over by the Department for Education.
- (4) Schools in England will be required to seek independent careers advice for pupils in year 9 to 11.
- (5) The Diploma entitlement for students in Key Stage 4 and students from the age of 16 to 18 will be scrapped.

Part 5 – Educational Institutions

- (1) School governing bodies will no longer be required to
 - i. cooperate with the LA to promote well-being;
 - ii. publish the school profile; and
 - iii. have a School Improvement Partner

- (2) In regard to school admissions
 - i. local admission forums will be abolished;
 - ii. the Schools Adjudicator will still make decisions on objections to admission arrangements but will not be able to specify changes to admission arrangements; and
 - iii. Local Authorities will no longer have to submit annual reports to the adjudicator.
- (3) Local Authorities must seek proposals for the establishment of Academies if they consider there is a need for new schools in their areas. An LA can only publish proposals for a community or foundation school if no Academy proposals have either been made or approved.
- (4) There will be changes to the constitution of governing bodies. It will no longer be a requirement to have Local Authority or (for non-VA schools) community governors. The requirement for staff governors will be restricted to the Headteacher. Other categories of governors may be prescribed by regulations.
- (5) Outstanding schools will be exempt from inspections.
- (6) The inspection reports on schools will be restricted to four discrete areas which are as follows.
 - i. The achievement and standards of pupils
 - ii. The quality of teaching and learning
 - iii. The quality of leadership and management
 - iv. The behaviour and safety of pupils
- (7) The power of the Secretary of State to close a school that is in special measures will be extended to those with serious weaknesses.
- (8) The right of parents and members of the public to complain to the Ombudsman will be withdrawn and revert back to Secretary of State under Sections 496-497 of the Education Act 1996. LAs will also no longer have the right to consider curricular complaints under 409 of the Education Act 1996.
- (9) Schools will be able to charge for Early Years' education in excess of that provided under the Childcare Act 2006 which will bring them into line with private providers.
- (10) Pupil Referral Units will not be called "short-stay schools" but continue to be called PRUs.

Part 6 - Academies

- (1) Academies will no longer be required to have specialisms.
- (2) There will be three types of Academies
 - i. Academy schools
 - ii. 16-19 Academies
 - iii. Alternative provision academies, i.e. Academies providing for sick or excluded children
- (3) Clause 53 will require headteachers and governors to consult with the trustees where voluntary aided or voluntary controlled schools wish to convert to Academies. All schools will be required to consult with appropriate stakeholders where they propose to become Academies.
- (4) Where an Academy wishes to expand by extending the age range or increasing the Planned Admissions Number, it will be required to consult with appropriate stakeholders.
- (5) The remit of the schools adjudicator will be extended to Academies where there are objections to their admissions arrangements.

Part 7 – Post-16: Education and Training

- (1) The Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA) will be abolished and its functions transferred to the Secretary of State.
- (2) This section reaffirms that the statutory participation age (in education and/or training) will be raised to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015, whilst removing the requirement to commence enforcement procedures on young people, parents and employers in relation to this.

Part 8 – Student Finance

The section on Student Finance applies to the university tuition fees cap of £9,000 annually for courses on a pro rata basis for part-time studies and increases the cap on the interest rates that can be charged on new student loans.

Parts 9 and 10 – Powers of the National Assembly of Wales and General

This part covers regulations, interpretations, extent and commencement, among other things.

III Commentary

There are a number of aspects of the Education Bill which will be warmly received by the great and the good.

- (1) The extension of pre-school education for two-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds, for instance, is very welcome and has been applauded by the Children’s Commissioner, Dr Maggie Atkinson.
- (2) The Bill seeks to strengthen the hands of teachers in promoting good discipline. Michael Gove, the Secretary of State, has commissioned another review on professional standards where he has specifically stressed that one of the key qualities he will require of teachers is an ability to crack down on bad behaviour. In the overwhelming number of instances, schools are oases of calm for young people living in (otherwise) chaotic milieus. However, a number end up behaving unacceptably for many reasons, two of which stand out for me.
 - (a) To protect themselves from gangs in the areas in which they come, they cart dangerous weapons and/or drugs and bring them into school.
 - (b) Some are turned off by the irrelevant education and/or poor teaching within their schools. They feel part of the “out crowd” and resent not being able to achieve anything worthwhile.

These factors, among others, cause youngsters to become disruptive and socially dysfunctional, giving headaches to schools and bringing turmoil to teachers’ professional lives.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that bullying continues to flourish in schools while reporting bullying has gone underground. The new future queen (at the time of writing known simply as Kate Middleton) when only 13-years-old in 1995 spent two miserable, tear-streaked terms as a day-girl in the elite, independent (boarding) Marlborough College Downe House in Wiltshire. Rumours have rumbled on for years that she was severely bullied. Unsurprisingly, therefore, guests to her wedding with Prince William were asked to donate money to charities and named Beatbullying, the country’s leading anti-bullying organisation. Since Kate’s school days, bullying has morphed with the growth of the internet.

The measures within the Bill may well bring about more order out of disorder. They have, however, to be used judiciously and not slavishly and in conjunction with good teaching and learning, if schools – which, in the main, are well-ordered – are to strengthen and improve.

Sanctions available must be deployed with care. It is questionable whether it is ethically acceptable for the legislation to allow no-notice detentions, which is in the Bill. Sir Alan Steer, the former behaviour Tsar during the Labour government, has been highly critical. He

observed to the TES: “All it needs is (for) one child (without the parents having received the 24-hour notice) to have an accident or be molested on their (sic) way home from school and then the school will be facing a difficult situation.”

However, others like Sir Michael Wilshaw, principal of the much-acclaimed Mossbourne Community Academy in Hackney, one of the most deprived councils in the country, aver that postponing administering detention by 24 hours causes the sanction to lose its edge and is much less effective than detaining pupils on the day of their misdemeanours. Sir Michael stated that his school often gives no-notice detentions otherwise the “really badly behaved ...just don’t turn up to school. Plus, it makes parents take responsibility for their children’s behaviour.”

The White Paper, which preceded the Education Bill, signalled that it will be the responsibility of a school permanently excluding a pupil to find and fund alternative education. If this is introduced through amending regulations, the changes will discourage schools from taking the ultimate sanction. Joan McVittie, Headteacher of Woodside School in Tottenham and Vice President of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said that this measure would be a “nightmare” because schools’ finances could become chaotic. Also, the excluding school could still be responsible for the examination results of the pupil excluded for the purposes of league tables.

- (3) The new measures to protect teachers’ identities from allegations of abuse against children – at least until such time as they are charged – could not have come sooner and is salutary. This policy appears to be in response to an Association for Teachers’ and Lecturers’ (ATL) survey in 2009 which revealed that 25% of school staff members have had false allegations made against them by pupils and one in six has had an allegation made by a member of the pupil’s family. A number of pupils, resentful of having to be disciplined, make slanderous allegations against teachers who try to maintain order. After all, the best form of defence is attack. Overnight, many a teacher discovers that her/his career is ruined.

However, the plans don’t go far enough. A teacher, accused by a pupil, has her/his anonymity protected until a charge is brought in the courts. If the teacher is found guiltless, she/he is still exposed. Is this just? Besides, teachers who are the subject of malicious, groundless accusations, nevertheless, have their police records tarnished. In one case of which I am aware, the career of a deputy headteacher of a school has been blighted because the CRB has records of the accusation (though the case was not taken to court) which will follow him around whenever he applies for the post of headteacher.

- (4) The news that a number of quangos (quasi-judicial non-governmental organizations) are to be axed has received a mixed reception. Teachers have welcomed the abolition of the GTCE from 31 March 2012. In the course of its existence, it appears to have achieved very little. Only a handful of teachers have ever been banned from the profession, though its key function is to deal with teachers behaving unacceptably or operating seriously below the standards expected – competency-wise.

The government argues that axing quangos will save the nation money. I am not so sure that the government is right. A number of these bodies do sterling work. When they are no more, the DfE will have to make arrangements to take on their responsibilities. For instance, civil

servants will now have to organise teacher training in place of the TDA, the curriculum to carry out the work of the QCDA and take responsibility for education and training for the post-16 when the YPLA becomes history. Civil servants are up to their eyebrows in work promoting several government initiatives such as Academies and Free Schools. Their number is bound to swell to cope with the extra volume that will stem from scrapping the quangos. The cost of additional staff will nullify the savings made by axing the quangos. In fact, the changes could add to government expenditure.

Additionally, these changes, will transfer more power to the Secretary of State. This flies in the face of the Prime Minister's aspirations of creating the Big Society.

To centralize powers further, the Secretary of State will take back control from the Ombudsman of dealing with parental complaints. He will also have new powers to close schools that are subjects of serious weaknesses in addition to doing so for those in special measures.

Local authorities will see their small wings clipped. While they have responsibility for ensuring that there are sufficient schools to educate the children in their areas, they will be unable to establish new ones (where there are shortages) without having first to invite the world and his dog to establish Academies and Free Schools. This may lead to delays and cause youngsters out of school to languish without learning opportunities.

It is tragic that the School Support Staff Negotiating Body will die of infant mortality. Teachers have the School Teachers Review Body to protect their salaries and promote their welfare. School support staff members, who are poorly paid, will have no such body to champion their cause. The SSSNB would have had a key role in working towards remedying this. Not so now.

- (5) At national level, working groups, which include headteachers and teachers, are beavering away reviewing the curriculum to give schools greater scope to be creative. The working parties have been formed as part of a whole-scale review of the National Curriculum, the first since the late 1980s. Dearing, Tomlinson and Rose carried out piecemeal work. The launch of this belt-and-braces exercise is good news.

However, the Secretary of State, Michael Gove, operates quizzically. On the one hand, he wants a slimmed down National Curriculum (NC). He is also encouraging good and outstanding schools to become academies and giving them the freedom to opt out of the NC. On the other hand, he has established the English Baccalaureate comprising English, Mathematics, two Sciences, a Modern Language, History or Geography and by so doing making it patently clear what he wants schools to teach.

Gove keeps exhorting us to do what those at the top of the international league tables do. But Singapore, Hong Kong and Finland – countries at the top of the tables - have moved away from an emphasis on facts and knowledge. Rather, they combine knowledge, skills and personal qualities as the three key areas of learning. Gove, meanwhile, wants a return to a study of the kings and queens of England and dates of the non-fruit variety.

Mick Waters, professor of education at Wolverhampton University and president of the Curriculum Foundation, wrote in the TES: "As a profession, we owe it to children to offer

them learning that will give them the knowledge and skills and to manage their own lives, leave them with a desire to look back years later and reflect that it was worth it. For the nation's next generation, the world really is their oyster. We have to help them learn how to open it." I would add that we also have a duty to help them develop the personal quality of accepting failure so that they can strive even harder when that oyster resists opening.

- (6) Gove will be taking more powers into his hand by either directly closing down schools given notices to improve (in addition to having the power to do so with failing schools) or requiring local authorities to close them. Academies and Free Schools will replace them. In January 2011, he appointed Dr Elizabeth Sidwell Schools Commissioner for England to speed up the creation of more Academies and Free School. Dr Sidwell, Chief Executive of the Haberdashers' Aske's Federation, a group of three academies in London, turned Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College in South East London, into a city technology college, making it one of the most popular schools in the country with 12 applications for every place available.
- (7) The government is determined to ease the bureaucratic strain on schools. However, it is in danger of throwing the baby out with the bath-water. That schools will no longer have to update their profiles on the DfE web is welcome. But is it correct to dispense with School Improvement Partners, who (as their predecessors - External Advisers - did) have been doing excellent work in helping and supporting governors through the performance management process of headteachers. Governors operate in a voluntary capacity and require professional input into a task like this. Will there be anything replacing the SIPs? The government's response appears to be a deafening silence.
- (8) The proposed legislation related to school admissions – such as the abolition of the Schools Forum, the clipping of the School Adjudicator's wings and the dispensing of the annual report of local authorities to her/him – is likely to reduce accountability and create unfairness in the admissions process, something that the last government sought to avoid at all costs. The cynic within me seems to think that this measure will enable Academies and Free Schools to operate in a less restrictive milieu. The TES reported that the government is considering changes to the Schools Admission Code of Practice to allow children of the founders of Free Schools to be given preferential treatment for admissions similar to children in care. We eagerly await the new Code of Practice for Admissions.

In the News



I **Devolved Capital Funding for Schools likely to be axed**

Sebastian James, Group Operations Director at Dixons Retail plc, published his panel's review on capital spending on 8 April 2011. The review was launched by Michael Gove, Education Secretary, in July 2010, the purpose of which was to ensure that future capital investment would provide good value for money and "strongly support the Government's ambitions to reduce the deficit, raise standards, tackle disadvantage, addressing building conditions and meet the requirement for school places resulting from an increase in the birth rate".

One of the key recommendations emerging from the review is that school governing bodies, who have control of small sums of capital funds known as the Devolved Formula Capital Grants, be required to hand them over to their umbrella bodies such as local authorities (for community schools) and the Young People's Learning Agency (for Academies).

The recommendation was that "the Department (i.e. the DfE) should avoid multiple funding streams for investment that can and should be planned locally, and instead apportion the available capital as a single, flexible budget for each local area, with a mandate to include ministerial priorities in determining allocations."

It would be up to each area to have a short, local investment plan which would be in accord with the government's priorities.

Earlier this year, the DfE slashed the capital grant by 80% leaving a £500 million black hole in schools' budgets.

Unsurprisingly, the ASCL and NAHT received this news with astonishment and horror. They claim that while the government has averred that the Buildings Schools for the Future was bureaucratic and caused a £8 billion wastage, the James's review, if implemented, would be recreating even more bureaucracy by requiring schools to go cap-in-hand to their local authorities every time their roofs leaked.

The Review of Educational Capital by Sebastian James can be read at <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/c/capital%20review.pdf>

II Government plans new formula for funding schools to secure equity

On 13 April 2011, the government launched the first of a two-stage consultation to create a fairer funding of schools system in England. It will embark on the second stage after taking account of the views of schools, parents, teachers, local authorities and unions about the current system and whether the putative proposals are steps in the right direction.

No one can dispute that the current system is unfair. The funding of schools with similar numbers of pupils on free school meals in different parts of the country can vary by as much as £1,800 per pupil at secondary level and £1,300 at primary. In one local authority, where 43% of pupils were on FSM, the school received £3,367 per pupil and in another LA where only 10% of pupils were eligible for FSMs, the allocation was £4,032 per pupil. In Peterborough, the number of children who speak English as another language has risen by 60% but the funding of schools has remained unchanged.

The principles of the proposed, new system are as follows.

- (i) School budgets should be fair, with schools in similar circumstances and intakes receiving similar allocations.
- (ii) The system should be transparent with any additional funding being used to support deprived pupils, beginning with the Pupil Premium.
- (iii) The formula should be clear and easy for parents, schools and the public to understand.
- (iv) The formula should be similar for all kinds of schools – community, foundation, voluntary-aided, (the 629) Academies and the handful of Free Schools.

There are three overriding questions that those consulted are being invited to answer.

- (a) Do you agree with the case for reforming the system?
- (b) Do you agree with the aim of ensuring that all deprived pupils get the same level of funding no matter where they live?
- (c) What is the right balance between simplicity and complexity?

The consultation on the first stage will close on 25 May 2011 and the second round will begin shortly after. More detail can be found at

<http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/pressnotices/a0076656/fair-funding-for-all-schools>

III Schools Financial Value Standards

On 15 November 2010, the Secretary of State, Michael Gove, decided to abolish the Financial Management of Standards in School. He then launched a consultation on 10 March 2011 (which will end of 30 April 2011) to seek the views of governors, headteachers and other stake holders on the proposed Schools Financial Value Standards (SFVS). While the tedium of having to complete an enormous sheaf of papers to demonstrate that financial standards are being met have been scrapped, schools will still be expected to comply with the requirements of the financial directors of their local authorities to prove that they secure good value for money and that there is probity in the system. Details of the consultation and how one can respond can be found at

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/a0075378/schools-financial-value-standard-sfvs-consultation>

IV Key Stage 2 Standard Assessment Tests (SATs)

Lord Paul Bew, Chair of the national working party reviewing SATs, published his interim report. The Working Party, which has three headteachers – two primary and one junior – and a former primary headteacher, among others, will publish its final report in June 2011 and present it to both, the government and the National Curriculum Working Party.

Its terms of reference are as follows.

- (i) How best to ensure schools are properly accountable to pupils, parents and the taxpayer for the achievement and progress of every child on the basis of objective and accurate assessments.
- (ii) How best to ensure that parents have good-quality information on the progress of their children and the success of schools.
- (iii) How to avoid, as far as possible, the risk of perverse incentives, over-rehearsal and reduced focus on productive learning.
- (iv) How to ensure performance information is used and interpreted appropriately within the accountability system by other agencies, increasing transparency and preserving accountability to parents, pupils and taxpayers, while avoiding the risk of crude and narrow judgements being made.

Lord Bew's work is being informed by that of the Expert Group on Assessment set up by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families. It identified four key purposes for the assessment system – encompassing both, formative and summative.

- (i) Optimise the effectiveness of pupils' learning and teachers' teaching.
- (ii) Hold individual schools accountable for their performance.
- (iii) Provide parents with information about their children's progress.
- (iv) Provide reliable information about national standards over time.

In HMCI's 2009 annual report, Christine Gilbert observed: "...in some schools, over-emphasising preparation for the national tests in English, maths and science, especially in year 6, reduces the time available for activities that can most interest and challenge pupils: speaking and listening in English, using and applying maths and science investigations. Pupils' attainment can then become narrowly based."

The Cambridge Primary Review Team comments chimed in with HMCI's sentiments. "As children move through the primary phase, their statutory entitlement to a broad and balanced education is increasingly but needlessly compromised by a 'standards' agenda which combines high stakes testing and the national strategies' exclusive focus on literacy and numeracy...The most conspicuous casualties are the arts, the humanities and those kinds of learning in all subjects which require time for talking, problem-solving and the extended exploration of ideas."

There appears to be catholic agreement that schools must be held accountable but that the current system of SATs and league-tables are not fit for purpose. However, none of us is any clearer yet about what should replace it. Bew's working group has a mountain to climb. Meanwhile, his interim report can be read at

<https://media.education.gov.uk/MediaFiles/8/6/8/%7B868C26F0-986E-43AF-A6E7-424BF2C72592%7DKS2Review%20Final%20040411%20progress%20report.pdf>

Research

What do we know about school governors?

I Numbers and Composition

There are between 300,000 and 350,000 school governors in England. About 11% of the positions on governing bodies are currently vacant. Some groups, such as black and minority community members, the disabled, young people, lone parents, those with low incomes, the unemployed and the business community are under-represented (Ellis 2003). Governing bodies are over-represented by women, those from professional backgrounds, those who identified themselves as white and older people. Also, many governors serve in schools in localities to which they do not belong.

Ellis examined the barriers faced by under-represented groups and identified the following.

- (i) Potential volunteers felt that the school governor role would take up more time than they were willing to commit.
- (ii) Those on low incomes – the unemployed, lone parents and disabled people – were constrained because of the cost of taking part and the lack of reimbursement for expenses.
- (iii) Some were of the view that the lack of publicity surrounding school governance was a major deterrent, which, in some instances, contributed to the continued stereotypical images of

governing bodies being dominated by white, middle class and middle aged members of the community.

- (iv) A number lacked confidence and self-esteem. They were also alienated from the education system which prevented them from taking part in it.
- (v) Several felt that the attitude of existing governors was a barrier to involvement in that they were perceived as making judgements about the ineligibility of individuals to take on the role.
- (vi) Existing governors were of the opinion that the under-represented groups lacked knowledge and awareness of governance and did not exploit opportunities to remedy this.
- (vii) Those who were disabled stated that the configuration of the school buildings and the lack of transport acted as barriers.

According to Dean et al (2007), who carried out research in three disadvantaged areas in England, that governing bodies were not representative of their communities was not viewed as problematic by most governors, who did not see themselves as representing particular constituencies. However, Price WaterhouseCoopers (PwC) did not agree (2007). Its report stated that several respondents to a questionnaire highlighted the importance of governing bodies being representative of their communities.

The researchers discovered that a typical governing body is composed of a core group of committed and long-serving members and a less-active periphery. The core, apparently, is even less likely than the whole governing body to reflect the local community.

II How well are school governors doing?

Ofsted judged that the majority of school governors carry out their functions satisfactorily if not better.

In her 2009/10 annual report, Christine Gilbert, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (HMCI), said that 65% of maintained schools were good or outstanding. However, governance was "one of the weaker aspects of leadership inspected - being good or outstanding in 56% of schools". This appears to be a bit harsh, given that school governors operate in a voluntary capacity.

Chris James et al from Bath University confirmed that most governing bodies "are operating effectively but that the school governing body was:

- (i) over-complicated – the task of governing was highly complex;
- (ii) over-loaded – school governors were responsible for too much;
- (iii) overlooked – school governing does not receive sufficient attention and recognition."

The third point, however, evaporates when Ofsted inspectors arrive with unrealistic expectations of what governance can achieve if the professional members (i.e. the headteacher and staff members) of the governing body engage in what James et al calls the "principal-agency model" by blocking out the lay members from playing their part in moving the schools forward.

Researchers discovered that many governors find it difficult to challenge their headteachers and prefer to work collaboratively with them. This begs the question: “What if the headteacher is not doing what she/he should for school improvement.” Collaboration, in such circumstances, has a circumscribed function and it becomes necessary for governors to become more hard-nosed.

In my experience, governors demur to their local authorities for guidance, who then tip-toe around employment legislation, because it is a minefield. The outcome of this is that it becomes virtually impossible for governors – no matter how hard they work – to attain a grade in leadership with Ofsted that is higher than that awarded for the headteacher’s leadership.

Researchers surveyed headteachers who perceived that 20% of governing bodies were very effective but a similar proportion was ineffective.

The consistent theme from research has been that where governors are effective they

- (a) take a strategic role in guiding the school and supporting its work;
- (b) challenge the headteacher and senior leadership team; and
- (c) hold themselves and the school to account in providing good if not excellent educational provision.

The corollary to the above is that there is a relationship between good governance on the one hand and pupils’ progress and attainment, the quality of teaching and learning and the quality of leadership and management at the school on the other.

Gilbert opined: “Governors are most effective when they are fully involved in the school’s self-evaluation and use the knowledge gained to challenge the school, understand its strengths and weaknesses and contribute to shaping its strategic direction. In contrast, weak governance is likely to fail to ensure statutory requirements are met, for example those related to safeguarding. In addition, where governance is weak, the involvement of governors in monitoring the quality of provision is not well defined or sufficiently rigorous and challenging.”

Gilbert’s views (based on Ofsted’s evidence) is mirrored in the research findings where the consistent theme that came across was that where governors undertake a strategic role in guiding and supporting the school’s work and challenging further improvement, they are effective.

A report on the work of governors published by Ofsted in 2002 drew together evidence from inspections, reports and visits to school. Its findings were as follows.

- (1) Governors in areas of socio-economic advantage, measured in terms of the proportion of pupils on free school meals (FSM), were more effective than those in other schools. Overall, the quality of governance declined as the proportion of FSMs rose.
- (2) Where governance was good, standards were likely to be higher than where it was satisfactory or inadequate.
- (3) Grammar schools were found to have the highest levels of effective governors. Over 75% of these schools were found to have good or better governance and no school had unsatisfactory governance.

However, good governance does not guarantee a successful school. A number of factors interact to make some schools more effective than others. Good teaching and learning (predicated on the recruitment of good teachers and inspirational leadership), parental support at home and parental involvement at school were key to making schools effective.

III Teacher governors and their role

Earley and Creese conducted research on teacher governors in 2000. A survey based on a random sample of secondary and primary schools found that

- (i) half of teacher governors were unclear about their role and
- (ii) few had received any training about what they were meant to do. (Altogether, 4% received induction and 22% other training from the local authority.)

Teachers governors were uncertain about whether they were answerable to their headteachers (as members of staff) or to the governing bodies on which they served. Several, in addition, had a restricted view in regard to representing staff opinion to the other members of their governing bodies. A number also felt that their position was to protect their colleagues on the staff. About 42% agreed or strongly agreed that their chief function was to act as “watch-dogs” for staff.

A significant minority – i.e. 22% - reported that they felt excluded directly or indirectly from discussions of particular issues, such as personnel matters and salaries. Governing bodies have no option but to exclude staff from discussion on salaries, because that’s what the regulations prescribe. However, since that research was undertaken, an increasing number of staff governors have been involved in participating in recruiting fellow staff, including headteachers, when the posts fall vacant.

Of those teacher governors surveyed by Earley and Creese, 38% felt that their governing bodies were dominated by their headteacher, 35% by their headteachers and chairs of governors and 24% by their chairs of governors.

Some experience conflicts of loyalty. They felt coy about the prospect of being disloyal to their bosses – the headteachers - when speaking out in their presence. In fact, 24% felt inhibited by the presence of their headteachers. The majority (79%), however, felt that they were able to express freely and honestly the views of their teacher colleagues. A number chose to discuss potentially divisive issues with their heads before governors’ meetings.

Altogether, 91% surveyed saw themselves able to help other governors towards a better understanding of educational issues. Consequently, it was not surprising that 94% felt that their contributions were valued by fellow governors and 64% agreed that their governing bodies were effective in raising the standards and improving the quality of education at their schools.

IV Community governors from the business sector

The research has revealed that volunteers from business who become school governors provide important, transferable skills, which are valued greatly by headteachers, in particular, problem-solving, team-working and decision making. A much lesser premium was placed on specialist skills, such as financial, strategic planning and marketing.

These governors, in turn, reported external benefits such as gaining insights from the work they did in schools, which helped with their “day jobs”. They also cited a greater understanding and respect for staff who deliver good or outstanding educational provision in challenging circumstances.

Punter et al carried out a survey of 600 business governors in 2007 on behalf of the School Governors’ One Stop Shop – governors that SGOSS had recruited. The researchers discovered that these governors were more likely than the others to undertake important tasks like chairing committees, participating in their headteachers’ performance management reviews, appointing new staff and being members of the Pay Review Panels. The skills they used and considered critical by headteachers included decision-making, effective communication (including listening) and team-working.

V Collaboration

In 2007, Lindsay et al carried out an evaluation of the Federation programme where schools, through hard and soft links, work together to raise standards, promote inclusion and build capacity. Most schools in the study had non-statutory, soft federations, where they continued to have their own individual governing bodies with a joint strategic committee to whom discrete powers were delegated. While schools valued the advantages of collaboration to achieve economies of scale and share knowledge and resources, they ultimately valued their independence and powers of autonomy.

Some other findings were as follows.

- (i) The chairs of governing bodies were vital to setting up federations.
- (ii) Most federated schools retained their own budgets. Hard federations required schools to come together financially.
- (ii) Key to the success of a federation was leadership and collegiality. Federation directors, headteachers and chairs of governing bodies had prominent roles to play in this respect.
- (iii) Most headteachers and chairs of governors judged that their federations had been somewhat or very successful in raising pupil progress and standards with 25% rating it as very successful.
- (iv) While there was no evidence of a statistically significant improvement in pupils’ standards at Key Stages 2 and 3, at Key Stage 4, federated schools had a significantly higher proportion of pupils gaining five GCSEs from A* to G and a higher contextual value added outcome.

VI Concluding remarks

What the recent research concludes on school governance is best summarised by James et al in *The ‘Hidden Givers’*, encapsulated by the following.

- (i) School governors give an enormous amount to the educational system in England, yet their contribution remains largely hidden from public view.
- (ii) The lack of a capable governing body is not a neutral absence for a school; it is a substantial disadvantage.

- (iii) The chair of a governing body and the chair's relationship with the headteacher are very significant in enabling high-quality governance. Being the chair of a governing body is a significant educational and community leadership responsibility.
- (iv) Notions of 'challenging the headteacher' and 'calling the headteacher to account' did not match the practices of the governing bodies....The focus tended to be on scrutiny of information, decisions, plans and policies. The governing task was only described in terms of 'performance'; it was always talked about in terms of the 'school'.
- (v) School governing is important and can be difficult and demanding. It takes place in a range of ways and at various times through informal contacts and meetings, formal meetings, in school and during particular ad hoc events such as 'away days'.
- (vi) The governing of a school and the context for governing are typically in a continual state of flux.
- (vii) The extent to which the governing body focused on the performance of the school and how performance was considered varied under a range of influences.
- (viii) Governance capital is the network of individuals and their capabilities, relationships and motivations that are available for the governing of any particular school. The governance capital available is likely to be greater for schools that are well regarded compared with those that are not; are in higher socio-economic status settings and have higher pupil attainment. These effects may add and mutually reinforce the creation of an 'amplifier effect' which may seriously impact on the governing of some schools.
- (ix) The agency for governance is the energy, level of proactivity (sic) drive and commitment to the governing body, and for the governing, of any particular school. It is highly significant for all aspects of governing and can ameliorate the effects of low governance capital."

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New inspection framework to be introduced in January 2012 (the fourth in the last eight years)

I Introduction

The Office for Standards in Education, Children Services and Skills (Ofsted) is currently consulting on a new model of inspections which has been brought about by impending legislation – i.e. the Education Bill 2011 – heralded by the White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*. This is the fourth time in the last eight years that Ofsted – created in 1992 – will be changing its inspection model, which it has trumpeted as being at the heart of school improvement – an assertion that is strongly contested by those who work in schools.

The proposed inspection arrangements are being introduced in January 2012. Pilots are being run in the summer of 2011. The proposals are the current subject of consultations, which began on 21 March 2011 and ends on 20 May 2011. Details of the consultation document can be accessed on

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Documents-by-type/Consultations/Inspection-2012-proposals-for-inspection-arrangements-for-maintained-schools-and-academies-from-January-2012> Readers can respond directly on an online questionnaire at [the online questionnaire](#)

The intention is that each school will be judged on a smaller number of core aspects than before i.e.

- (i) the achievement of pupils;
- (ii) the behaviour and safety of the pupils;
- (iii) the quality of teaching; and
- (iv) the quality of leadership and management.

The Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) of each school will be removed from the Ofsted website from 1 September 2011. However, there is an expectation that schools will continue with a form of self-evaluation which will feed into the pre-inspection (PIB) briefing prepared by the lead inspector.

II Pupils' achievements

When inspectors make judgements on pupils' academic development, they will focus on special areas.

- (i) How well pupils learn, what is the quality of their work and the progress they make since joining the school?
- (ii) How are gaps narrowing between different groups of pupils?
- (iii) What are the standards attained by pupils by the time they leave school?
- (iv) What is the progress of disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs (SENs)?
- (v) What is the attainment of pupils in reading by the age of six and their numeracy standards by the time they leave primary schools?
- (vi) What progress do pupils make and their standards in literacy in secondary schools?

Contextual value added (cva) is to be removed but straight forwarded value-added measures will be used.

III Pupils' behaviour and safety

In this aspect of inspection, Ofsted will concentrate on

- (i) pupils' conduct in lessons and around the school;
- (ii) pupils' attendance and punctuality at school and in lessons;
- (iii) pupils' behaviour and attitude towards others and their respect for other people and adults, including the way they treat one another;
- (iv) how well pupils are protected from bullying; and
- (v) the views of pupils and their parents and carers.

IV The quality of teaching

Inspectors propose to judge the quality of teaching by giving particular attention to how well

- (i) teachers demonstrate high expectations, and enthuse, engage and motivate pupils so that they learn and make progress;
- (ii) teachers set challenging tasks;
- (iii) teachers use their expertise to deepen pupils' subject knowledge and understanding and teach them the skills needed to learn for themselves;
- (iv) teachers assess pupils' progress, provide them with constructive feedback, and plan lessons to match their needs;
- (v) teaching and other support are provided to meet all pupils' individual needs including those who are disabled and/or with special educational needs; and
- (vi) pupils are taught to read and develop their skills in literacy.

V The effectiveness of leadership and management

The quality of leadership will be judged by how well

- (i) leaders and managers demonstrate ambition for pupils and improvements in their achievements;
- (ii) leaders and managers improve teaching and learning;
- (iii) leaders and managers support and develop staff; and
- (iv) the school is improving and has the capacity for sustaining the improvement.

Also, inspectors will assess

- (i) the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation and the use made of its findings;
- (ii) the appropriateness of the curriculum in helping all pupils to achieve well;
- (iii) the impact of governance on school improvement;
- (iv) how effectively pupils are safeguarded; and

- (v) how well the school ensures equality of opportunity, promotes the confidence and engagement of parents and works in partnership with other schools and external agencies to improve further.

VI The overall effectiveness of the school

In judging the overall effectiveness of the school, inspectors will take account of

- (i) the achievements of all pupils;
- (ii) pupils' behaviour and how safe they are;
- (iii) the quality of teaching;
- (iv) how well the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; and
- (v) the leadership and management of the school.

VII Inspection arrangements

- (1) When inspectors are not visiting a school, they will, notwithstanding, carry out risk-assessments, taking account of
 - (i) pupils' attainment and progress;
 - (ii) the changes in pupils' attainment and progress since the school was last inspected;
 - (iii) pupils' attendance;
 - (iv) the findings of any survey visits (these are school visits in which Ofsted focuses on subject areas or phases of education – such as Early Years or post-16 provision);
 - (v) significant issues brought to Ofsted's attention, including safeguarding and parental complaints
- (2) If a school judged to be satisfactory has, during a monitoring visit, made limited or poor progress in improving its performance, Ofsted will bring forward its inspection from three to fewer years. The circumstances in which this may happen will be where
 - (i) pupils' standards of attainment and progress, including standards in reading in primary schools, are persistently lower and there are few signs that the

teaching strategies adopted by the school are bringing about the necessary improvements;

- (ii) the quality of teaching and learning varies greatly across subjects and/or year groups and this is not being tackled effectively by leaders and managers; and
- (iii) where there is persistent disruption in lessons and misconduct around the school, impeding pupils' progress and undermining parental confidence in the school.

(3) Schools judged to be inadequate fall into one of two categories:

- (i) those given a notice to improve and
- (ii) others that are in special measures.

A school given a notice to improve receives a monitoring inspection visit six to eight months after its previous full inspection and is re-inspected after 12 to 16 months. Many a school, during such a monitoring visit, is judged to be satisfactory or better. Ofsted, therefore, plans to bring the monitoring inspection visit forward – to three months after the full inspection – and re-inspect the school after a further six months. The down side is that if the concerns don't evaporate, the school can be placed in special measures.

Schools in special measures receive termly monitoring inspection visits. Most improve sufficiently by their fifth termly monitoring inspection to be removed from special measures. Notwithstanding, a large number continue to be in special measures for up to two years or more. The pace of improvement is slow and not acceptable for pupils.

Ofsted propose to shorten the time that schools are in special measures by bringing forward the first monitoring visit to a few weeks following the inspection and increasing the frequency of monitoring visits. A school that is rapidly improving will, consequently, be removed from special measures quicker. On the other hand, the school that is improving at a snail's pace (if at all) will require special action from the governing body, local authority, and, in extremis, the government. It could well be closed and reopened as a spanking new school.

- (4) Outstanding schools will not be inspected and good schools, following risk assessments, may not be for five years or more. However, in some circumstances, Ofsted may be requested to carry out inspections of schools.
- (5) Ofsted is going to make it possible for schools and other interested parties to request inspections. However, they will charge fees for obliging – especially if they are routine requests to ascertain whether good or outstanding schools are continuing to maintain

their high standards. Good schools may consider that they have hard evidence that they have improved to become outstanding and may wish Ofsted to validate their findings.

Requests may stem from concerns of poor performance in tests or exams, or deterioration in pupils' behaviour. In such cases, the charges will be dropped.

VIII Commentary

Ofsted's proposals to establish a new inspection framework from January 2012 is very much a curate's egg, good in parts.

- (1) Before dwelling on the pros and cons of the new, inspection proposals, its worth mentioning that Baroness Sally Morgan, former aide to ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair, is the new Chair of Ofsted. However, she continues in her role as adviser to the children's charity, ARK, which runs a chain of 12 academies. She is also governor and Chair of the Curriculum Committee at the Globe Academy in Brixton, one of the schools ARK runs. A number of people have questioned the propriety of having someone who is working in schools which can be inspected heading the watchdog organisation that has to carry out the inspections: a case of Morgan being both, game-keeper and poacher. Add to this the fact that she is also adviser to the New Schools Network, the organisation promoting the government's Free Schools Policy. Ofsted judges schools by using ethical principles it appears to ignore completely.

Meanwhile, Christine Gilbert, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (HMCI), will be leaving her post on 30 June 2011, though her contract is due to expire on 31 October 2011. She has led Ofsted since 2006 and has been rumoured to have a difficult relationship with Gove, the Secretary of State. Gilbert oversaw Ofsted's expansion in 2007 when it took over the role of four inspectorates – i.e. schools, child care, children's social care and education and adult learning.

- (2) So what's good about the proposals? Slimming down the inspection framework is welcome. Focusing on teaching and learning, pupils' attainment and progress, pupil behaviour and school discipline and leadership and management are the classic essentials. The accessories such as community cohesion are being confined to the bin. No one can argue, not even the BNP, that community cohesion is anything but good. But that schools should be responsible for community cohesion is questionable. Also, the idiosyncratic ways that Ofsted deploys in measuring how well schools are doing with this aspect have been the subject of severe censure.

Russell Hobby, National Association of Headteachers' General Secretary, said: "A table and slim-line inspection framework, used by inspectors with credible recent experience in school leadership, would help."

- (3) That contextual value-added is to be removed is definitively a step in the right direction. CVA is based on the lower expectations inspectors have of pupils in receipt of free school meals and those in care because of their difficult social circumstances. It was introduced with the best of intentions, but that has now been recognised as doing these children a severe disservice. Inspectors will focus on **all** pupils' attainment and their rate of progress, in other words, valued added (as opposed to cva). This will mean that teachers will have to lift their sights for all children and avoid making excuses for the failings of those who come from deprived social backgrounds.
- (4) Also welcome is the opportunity for schools to request Ofsted to inspect them, albeit at a price. The provision will enable schools to measure their own improvement and/or alert them to areas that they may have neglected.
- (5) That Ofsted plan to discontinue routine inspections of most schools judged outstanding during their last audits is unfortunate. School improvement is exceedingly daunting and maintaining high standards of provision and achievement challenging. Going downhill, on the other hand, is so much easier. Outstanding schools can become complacent or there could be change of headteachers which mark a downward trajectory in schools' fortune within a relatively short period of time.

Expecting parents and members of the public to make judgements on how well their schools are doing is problematic, given that they are lay-people and have their own day jobs. The country relies on the watchdog to carry out the task of reviewing all our schools' performance and not just those less than outstanding.

On the flip side, middle-class parents with axes to grind against their children's teachers and headteachers can be the bane of their lives if they regularly complain to Ofsted at times when they don't have their wishes granted. Ofsted, during these occasions, will be more engaged in carrying out risk-assessments than doing what it is good at – i.e. inspecting.

Whatever the outcome of this consultation (and it seems that little if anything will be changed within the proposals) would it be reasonable to implore Ofsted to bed this system down for at least five years before contemplating yet a new model of inspections and certainly not do it again in two years and a term – the period during which the current model would have run?

Two Academics and a Minister Make Major Proposals

Early Years, Later Years and Special Educational Needs come under scrutiny

Two major reviews and one Green Paper were published in the Spring. The recommendations of all three, if implemented, will have a significant impact on the work of school governors. The major reviews focused on educational provision for our youngsters at the two ends of the age spectrum. The Clare Tickell Report was on the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Alison Wolf report on vocational education for the 14-to-19-year-olds. Sarah Teather, the Minister for Children and Families, also published her Green Paper on Special Educational Needs which will be the basis of discussion, debate and future legislation.

(1) Tickell proposes to simplify provision for the Early Years Stage

In July 2010, Sarah Teather, Children and Families Minister, commissioned Dame Clare Tickell, Chief Executive of Action for Children (formerly the National Children's Home), to lead a national working party on the Early Years Foundation Stage. The review was to cover four main areas:

- (i) Scope of regulation, in particular, whether there should be one single framework for all Early Years' providers
- (ii) Learning and Development, looking at the latest evidence about children's development and what was needed to give them the best start at school
- (iii) Assessment, i.e. whether young children's development should be formally assessed at a certain age and what this should cover
- (iv) Promoting children's welfare, in particular, the minimum standards required to keep children safe and support their healthy development

On 30 March 2011, Dame Tickell published her report, making the following recommendations.

- (i) The six areas of learning should be replaced with seven. The three prime ones should be
 - (a) communication and language;
 - (b) personal, social and emotional development; and
 - (c) physical development.

The four other areas were to be

- (a) literacy
- (b) mathematics

- (c) expressive arts and design
 - (d) understanding the world
-
- (ii) The 69 Early Learning Goals covering the six areas of learning should be reduced to 17.
 - (iii) The early years' practitioners should carry out child development checks of children between two and two-and-a-half years old. The summary report of each check was to be included in "the red book" which the parents of the child were to be given and kept alongside their child's health records.
 - (iv) The Early Years' Foundation Stage Profile should be slimmed down to take account of changes to the reduction of the Early Learning Goals to 17. The Profile should include a simple scale to measure whether the child's learning and development at the age of five is emerging, expected or exceeding the Early Learning Goals.
 - (v) Ministers should consider the findings of the Advisory Panel for Food and Nutrition and provide guidelines for healthy eating and nutritional requirements for under-fives to early years' practitioners.
 - (vi) A graduate-led Early Years' Workforce should continue to be an aspiration for the government.
 - (vii) Entry qualification to the Early Years should be of a high standard consistent with the NNEB qualification.
 - (viii) Ofsted should review the training, capacity and capability of the current Early Years' Inspectorate and existing guidance to inspectors, with a view to setting clear, minimum requirements for all early years' inspectors in terms of experience, skills and qualifications.

In an exclusive interview with Nursery World, Dame Clare said that the framework should remain mandatory but that ministers should consider simplifying the exemption process for independent schools and Steiner Waldorf settings to opt out of some of the EYFS learning and development requirements provided that ministers find a way of assuring on-going quality. Currently, the Steiner Waldorf schools and kindergartens are required to apply individually for exemption from specific Early Learning Goals to which they are philosophically opposed and must have their requests considered on a case-by-case basis.

Reflections

The formative years of our lives determine how we spend the rest of them. A Jesuit famously said: "Give me a child to the age of seven and I will show you the man." It was, therefore, so important to have the well-qualified and distinguished Dame Clare Tickell carry out a review of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

As part of her review, Dame Clare consulted parents widely.

When questioned about what they thought of the EYFS, 72% - a large majority – thought it was successful. Altogether, 82% said that this stage of education provided an effective structure for young children’s learning.

Of parents asked about what was/were the important aspect/s of the EYFS, 81% of respondents said support for personal, social and emotional development, one of the three prime areas of learning recommended by Dame Clare.

- (a) Jean Gross, England’s Communication Champion for Children, expressed delight about her report, remarking that it preserved all the best of the current EYFS whilst helping practitioners focus on making sure they get the basics, i.e. the prime areas of learning – language, social and emotional and physical development - right.
- (b) Kate Groucutt, Policy Director at the Day Care Trust, expressed gratification that Dame Clare listened to the views of the Early Years’ sector by maintaining the Early Years Foundation Stage – introduced in 2008 - as a universal framework for all providers.
- (c) Neil Leitch, Chief Executive of the Pre-School Learning Alliance, said: “We welcome Dame Clare’s review of the EYFS....We trust that in the light of the review the EYFS’s emphasis on learning through play will continue as this is a cornerstone of Alliance’s philosophy....”
- (i) Dame Clare’s recommendation that independent schools be given the opportunity to apply to opt out of the curriculum en masse rather than individually has been welcomed by the Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS), which has stated that the learning and development goals have hampered it work. About 500 IAPS institutions have early years provision. However, Dame Clare has made it clear that arrangements should be in place to secure rigour among those that opt out through a process of external checks.
- (ii) While Dame Clare has recommended that before they reach the age of three all children are assessed in personal, social and emotional development, physical development and communication and language skills to inform provision for their future growth, it is uncertain who will do the assessment and where the funding is to come for them, given the current financial state of the country.
- (iii) The report proposed that there should be an overall assessment of reading skills, to include phonics, rather than base the tests on phonics alone. This will help to redress the lob-sided position into which Gove, the Secretary of State, is pushing the educational world where decoding is the flavour of the month. The reality is that

children's attainment in phonics has improved but is not reflected in their reading scores.

- (iv) Like a swelling numbers of our children, the Early Learning Goals suffer from obesity. There are 69 in all. It is, consequently, most welcome that Dame Clare has proposed that these be reduced to the slim-line 17. However, Christopher Jolly, Managing Director of Phonics Publisher, Jolly Learning, is concerned that in slimming down the paperwork some basic principles are jeopardised. Does he have a financial axe to grind, one wonders.
- (v) Evidence to the Tickell Review raised concerns that Ofsted inspectors did not fully understand the nature of early years' settings. One parent said: "At the moment, (the quality of inspection) depends totally on the inspector's point of view. What one likes, another hates..." It is, consequently, apposite that the report asks Ofsted to work with local authorities to produce consistent information and provide a clear definition of what is satisfactory, good and outstanding practice.

(2) Alison Wolf proposes that 'useless qualifications' be scrapped

On 29 October 2010, Michael Gove asked Alison Wolf to carry out an independent review of vocational education for the 14-to-19-year olds – especially how it could be improved in order to promote successful progression into the labour market and higher education and training routes. She was requested to make recommendations that would inform future policy-making, taking account of the current financial constraints.

The review was to focus on

- (i) institutional arrangements;
- (ii) funding mechanisms including arrangements for who bears the cost of qualifications;
- (iii) progression from vocational education to work, higher education and higher-level training; and
- (iv) the role of the third sector, private providers, employers and awarding bodies.

She was asked to submit her report in spring 2011. She received 400 pieces of evidence from the public, made a number of visits to colleagues, academies and training providers and interviewed and had discussions with key partners in the sector, following which she published her report on 3 March 2011.

Alison Wolf is the Sir Roy Griffiths Professor of Public Sector Management at King's College, London, specialising in the relationship between education and the labour market. She has been adviser to the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Skills and a presenter for Analysis on Radio 4.

Wolf's key recommendations are as follows.

- (i) Young people should be given incentives to undertake the most valuable vocational qualifications pre-16, with the removal of a large number of vocational qualifications that exist to the detriment of core studies.
- (ii) The government and providers should introduce principles to guide young people on study programmes leading to post-16 vocational routes to ensure that they are gaining skills which lead to progression in a variety of jobs or further learning, in particular to ensure that those who have not secured good passes in English and mathematics GCSEs continue to study these subjects.
- (iii) The government should ensure that there is a system for evaluating the delivery and content of apprenticeships to ensure that young people have the right skills in the workplace.
- (iv) The government should ensure that the regulatory framework moves away from accrediting qualifications to regulating awarding organisations.
- (v) The requirement that all qualifications offered to the 14-to-19-year-olds fit within the Qualifications and Credit Framework because its absence has had a detrimental effect on their appropriateness and left gaps in the market.
- (vi) Make it possible for FE lecturers and other professionals to teach in schools, to ensure that young people are being taught by those best suited to do so.

The government will be publishing a formal response to the review later in the summer of 2011 on how it intends to take the recommendations forward.

Reflections

The initial scepticism towards Wolf and her findings appears to have been transformed into hearty applause. This is unsurprising because Wolf has suggested that 14-to-19 vocational provision be simplified and the government refrain from micro-managing it. She has also recommended that all teenagers, who are illiterate and innumerate, be given a double dose of tuition to lift them up to at least a grade C in GCSE for English and Mathematics. Additionally, she has proposed that work-based apprenticeship be enhanced.

Professor Wolf asserted in her report that too many vocational qualifications are useless. However, it will be daunting for the movers and the shakers in education to decide which qualifications are dodgy (used by schools to enhance their standings on the league tables) and so be ditched, and which live on.

What is heartening is that Professor Wolf has endorsed vocational education at a time when Gove appears to be driving ahead on the academic. Remember the new English Baccalaureate which appeared out of thin air and landed in the secondary league tables? Wolf said: "Conventional academic study encompasses only part of what the labour market values and demands. Good vocational programmes are respected, valuable and an important part of our educational provision."

However, there is nothing new in all this. Ex-Chief Inspector Tomlinson drew up a post-16 curriculum based on the dual track of the academic and vocational that would have given both parity of esteem. However, because of the hue and cry mainly from those who came on the right side of the political spectrum, the Tomlinson Report was binned.

The Wolf Report is published at a time when the number of unemployed young people from 16 to 24 nudges a million. Youth unemployment is set to rise with the abolition of the educational maintenance allowance. The outgoing Director-General of the British Chamber of Commerce, David Frost, censured an education system that left school-leavers unequipped for the workplace. Similar sentiments were echoed by former CEO of TESCO, Sir Terry Leahy, and former Chair of Marks and Spencer, Sir Stuart Rose.

Successive governments have been intimidated by the prospect of offending the right's assumptions of university and the left of condoning links between social class and trade. An antithetical culture exists in countries like Germany, Sweden and Israel where vocational learning is highly valued. Professor Wolf is showing the way.

Lord Baker, former Conservative Education Secretary, has, along with the late Sir Ron Dearing, begun to redress the balance with the University Technical College (UTC) programme. Lord Baker intends to open more than 24 UTCs with matched funding from industry because of the increased demand. Lord Baker said: "I hope to see a UTC in every town and city in the country. We are being inundated with requests for the colleges, with FE colleges comes to us, universities and even groups of teachers who are saying: 'This is the way forward.'"

George Osborne, the Chancellor said that he would make £150 million capital funding available to support improved technical and vocational education, including the UTC expansion. UTCs will teach a range of practical and vocational skills in everything from engineering and product design to health sciences and construction. The first UTC, the JCB Academy in Staffordshire, opened in September 2010. It is already oversubscribed. The Black Country UTC, sponsored by Walsall College and the University of Wolverhampton, will open later this calendar year.

The teacher and headteacher unions are not happy bunnies. Brian Lightman, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said that he was concerned about the growth of UTCs in areas where there was a surplus of places. Christine Blower, General Secretary of the NUT, averred that UTCs will lead to a two-tier system with technical schools being seen as the poor cousins. “It is unacceptable to force pupils into specific routes at such an early age which could restrict their future career or educational choices.” I am mystified by what makes her come to the conclusion that at least 350,000 youngsters (according to Wolf) who get “little or no benefit from the post-16 education system” will be “forced” into something that they may love to do?

UTCs are manifestations of what Professor Wolf envisages. However, there are two flies in Wolf’s ointment.

First, her recommendation to limit vocational courses to 14-to-16-year olds to 20% of the curriculum time will deny youngsters significant practical experience. It also undermines the role vocational education can play academically.

Second, good vocational education does not come cheap. Sadly, Wolf has steered away from mentioning the f word – i.e. “funding”. Osborne has recognised this in his pledge to make £150 million available for UTCs. But what about the finance that schools will need if they are to provide high-quality vocational education for 20% of the time for pupils from 14 to 16 years of age?

(3) Government goes green on new approach to SEN and Disability

On 9 March 2011, the Children and Families Minister Sarah Teather published her Green Paper, *Support and Aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability*. The full document can be accessed at

<http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM%208027>

and

<http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Green-Paper-SEN.pdf>

Responses to the Green Paper must be with the government by 30 June 2011.

Altogether, two million children, i.e. 21% of the total in England have special education needs. The proposals outlined in the Paper have been billed by the government as radical and far-reaching. Much of the document, however, contains what we already know and, of course, aspirations about how to achieve the Holy Grail of improving provision for our most vulnerable segment of young people.

At the risk of distorting the detail (hence it would be useful for the reader to go through the full Green Paper), the proposals in brief are as follows.

- (1) The present system for statementing a pupil with profound educational needs and/or disability – which has been in existence for 30 years – is to be replaced with a “combined education, health and care plan”, which could be in place till the young person reaches the age of 25. The plan will give a pupil the same legal rights as a statement. The voluntary and community sectors are to be involved in the initial assessment. How this is to be done has yet to be defined. From September 2011, Pathfinders will be given resources to work out the detail in practice.
- (2) Measures of school performance have “created perverse incentives to over-identify children as having SENs”. This, in turn, has encouraged “a culture of low expectations and not led to the right support being put in place”. Accordingly, the School Action and School Action Plus categories for children with SENs will be replaced with a simple category. Children in it will be placed on a register to “help teachers focus on raising attainment” and stop what ministers view as “over-identification” of SENs.
- (3) Parents of children with SENs will be given funding (by 2014) for the purposes of enabling them to buy into services that their offsprings may need and thus have greater control to improve the quality of their (both parents’ and children’s) lives. However, details of this personal budget have not been announced. Presumably, some of the money allocated to local authorities will be redirected to parents. The funding could be used for special equipment, language support and physiotherapy, among other things. It will not be used for independent school fees.
- (4) Parents will be required to go to mediation if they disagree with local authority decisions about SEN support in a bid to reduce if not eliminate legal action.
- (5) Local authorities and schools will be compelled to set out in simple language all the services available to support children with special educational needs.
- (6) Powers will be transferred (presumably from local authorities) to front-line services and local communities to enable the latter to “innovate” and exercise “influence over local services”. The intention is to expand the range of special needs provision and “entice” parents to choose special schools by reducing the “bias towards inclusion” into mainstream schools. Parents of children with SENs will be able to express preferences for any state-funded schools, Academies and Free Schools and have their preferences met as long as they are compatible with the efficient education of other children and the efficient use of resources – something that is no different from what currently exists.

- (7) There will be initiatives taken to train teachers and other staff in SEN matters to build their confidence in identifying and overcoming a range of barriers to children's learning, especially if they have SENs.

Under the government plans, every teacher will be expected to have "excellent knowledge and skills" to support pupils with SENs. Trainee teachers will have more opportunities for developing their skills in special schools. A new scholarship programme will fund teachers to study for higher level qualifications in SENs. Teaching Assistants (TAs) and support staff will also receive funding for extra training under the Green Paper proposals.

Potential Headteachers will learn more about SENs through the reformed National Professional Qualifications for Headteachers (NPQH).

- (8) All special schools judged by Ofsted to be outstanding will have the opportunity of becoming Academies and parents and members of local communities will be able to establish Special Free Schools.
- (9) New league tables showing the performance of special school pupils in detail and their progress are to be published to make teachers more accountable.

The Green Paper's proposals are set out in five chapters:

- (a) Identification and support
- (b) Giving parents more control
- (c) Learning and achieving
- (d) Preparing for adulthood
- (e) Services working together for families

In the final section, the Green Paper sets out the next steps and how to respond to the consultation by answering 59 questions.

Reflections

The Green Paper on special educational needs has been long overdue and welcome. Clearly there are some plans which will be heavily contested as the government aims to translate its aspirations into good practice.

- (a) The Pros
- (i) On the credit side, plans to overhaul training will be well received. PGCE and other courses will be "vastly improved" and lead to the creation of more SEN "experts" in the classrooms. The NPQH will also be reviewed to include extra dollops of SEN training.

More teacher trainees will be placed in special schools – something that is currently offered exceptionally. Additionally, a new scholarship programme will fund teachers to study higher level qualifications in SENs.

TAs and support staff will receive funding for extra training and be able to develop their careers as this could well be a new route into qualifying as teacher.

Special schools, rated as outstanding, will be able to become teaching schools.

- (ii) Parents will relish the prospect of being empowered with a modicum of resources, which they will be able to use to access services for their children, which are currently elusive because of the bureaucratic jungle through which they have to hack paths. The details of the personal budget have yet to be announced but it is likely to come from a reallocation of resources that goes to the local authorities.
- (iii) Parents may be more wary of the plans to compel them to go to mediation – where they disagree with their local authorities - before deciding to pick up the legal cudgels that they more readily do now as they stride to court action. However, mediation makes sense if the intention is to require local authorities to use resources more judiciously and curtail the current practice of giving legal aid to those who have the loudest voices among parents.
- (iv) All schools will be required to publish “core” information about their SEN services, which will provide parents with the necessary know-how to express appropriate preferences for the SEN provision they wish to have for their children.
- (v) While league tables have serious disadvantages, creating one for special needs pupils to demonstrate the progress they make will result in greater accountability, which, like motherhood and apple pie, is a good thing.

(b) The Cons

- (i) The key concern that I, like many others have, about the Green Paper is that it is silent about the extra funding that will be required if the proposals are to be fruitful. For instance, where will the extra money come for initial and inservice training of teachers to create a robust cadre of expertise in our schools? While Teather may argue that some of it can come from a more effective use of current resources others will strongly contend that this will not be enough.

For the “extra”, Teather has hinted at the use of the Pupil Premium. However, the Pupil Premium is reserved for those children entitled to free school meals (FSM) and such children don't necessarily have special needs, while others from the more well-heeled segments of our society (and thus not entitled to the Pupil Premium) do.

- (ii) The “combined education and health care plan” that will be replacing the statement of special educational needs aims to bring about some joined up thinking among the services. This is well-intentioned but the confusion it can cause could be the way to “hell” like many good intentions. Details of how this is to work on the ground have not been defined. If one agency is not given overall responsibility (and thus control) for drafting statements, it will be a case of “too many cooks spoiling the broth” rather than “many hands making light work”. The government must also have clear legislation that will require the health and social care services to work more closely with local authorities.

In the meantime, the previous government established the pilot, Achievement for All scheme in 455 schools within 10 local authorities, which will end in August 2011. The aim was to enable teachers move away from labelling pupils and encouraging them to support all rather than single out a few as having SENs.

Teather visited Lyng Hall School in Coventry one of the 455 where the pilot has been working with amazing success. Half of the pupils had previously been on the SEN register. Among 16-year-olds, this has reduced to 32%. The proportions of good GCSE results rose from 25% in 2006 to 80% last year. All pupils are treated as “special”. Where they have additional needs, they are given extra support in groups of 15 or smaller. Teather was impressed with the success stories.

Tayyib Khan and Tom Jepson, who had statements when they joined in year 7, now (while in the sixth form) plan to become PE teachers. Cihan Ordu, of Turkish origin who came to the school in year 9 not knowing a word of English, is now studying for his A levels. He received extra help at lunchtimes. Rebecca Mason, in year 8, with severe dyslexia, intends to become a marine biologist.

Many teaching assistants at the school received extra training to become “associate teachers” and learning mentors, saving the school £100,000 on supply teachers. The overall aim of staff is to remove the barriers to children’s learning.

(4) Concluding Thoughts

So there we have it: two cutting-edge reports and one substantive Green Paper to chew on over the next few months. There is nothing “funny” about Dame Tickell’s review of the Early Years; the Professor of Public Sector Management in King’s College London is definitely not crying “Wolf” and is certainly not one in sheep’s clothing when assessing what exists for the 14-to-19-year-olds against what the provision should be; and Sarah Teather, the young Children and Families Minister, has demonstrated that she is no more green but a well-seasoned politician keen to improve opportunities for all our pupils, especially those who have special needs.

School governors – among other stakeholders and members of the public - are being encouraged to submit their views to government on the three documents. It will certainly be well worth doing so, because it is always better to light little candles than grumble at the darkness.

Glossary of Terms Used in This Issue

ARK	Absolute Return for Kids
ASCL	Association of School and College Leaders
ATL	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
BNP	British National Party
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
cva	contextual value added
DfE	Department for Education
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
FE	Further Education
FSM	free school meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GTCE	General Teaching Council of England
HMCI	Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools
IAPS	Independent Association of Prep Schools
LA	Local Authority
NNEB	Nursery Nurse Education Board
NPQH	National Professional Qualifications for Headteachers
NUT	National Union of Teachers
Ofqual	Office for Qualifications
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PIB	pre-inspection briefing
PwC	Price WaterhouseCoopers
QCDA	Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency Quango quasi-autonomous non-judicial body
SATs	Standard Assessment Tests
SEF	Self-Evaluation Form
SENs	Special Educational Needs
SFVS	Schools Financial Value Standards
SGOSS	School Governors’ One-Stop Shop
SIP	School Improvement Partner
SSSNB	School Support Staff Negotiating Body
TAs	Teaching Assistants
TDA	Training and Development Agency
TES	Times Educational Supplement
UTC	University Technical College
VA	Voluntary Aided
YPLA	Young People’s Learning Agency