STAKEHOLDER SCHOOLS

Why collaboration is key to the next phase of school reform

Robert Tinker

FABIAN SOCIETY

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Summary

It will soon be 20 years since Tony Blair announced that education, education and education were New Labour's three priorities for government. Over that time dramatic improvements have been made to England's schools and the quality of education they provide. This report considers how similar improvements can be achieved over the next 20 years.

It argues that the toolkit used to achieve consistently good standards is no longer enough because the aim, for most schools, is to go from 'good to great'. The traditional mixture of structural reform, parental choice and rising resources is inadequate for achieving consistent excellence.

This means rethinking the environment in which schools operate and the way they achieve their outcomes – in other words, what 'success' looks like. Today, the evidence shows that maintaining excellent standards depends on collaboration within and between schools. So dialogue and trust need to be at the heart of how schools improve in the future.

1. Public interest institutions

The best, most well-loved public services are neither old-fashioned bureaucracies nor quasi-businesses, but rooted institutions with broad 'public interest' goals, which they seek to achieve in a spirit of openness, shared ownership, democratic leadership and accountability.

Bringing these goals to life in schools means going beyond an instrumental view of performance based solely on exam results. It is about the rounded experience of service users and the impact on the community as a whole. We argue that schools with a strong public ethos will as far as possible uphold the following six maxims:

1. Help people acquire capabilities to thrive
2. Serve the collective interests of society
3. Champion equality, dignity and respect
4. Set direction through democratic politics and shared ownership
5. Act through collaboration
6. Uphold transparency and probity

Government should champion this shared, public ethos. But it will only truly flourish when it is articulated and owned by the partners in the school system itself. To facilitate this process, we propose that the government develops a national constitution for the school system in England, along the lines of the NHS Constitution. The constitution would define what it means for schools to be strong public interest institutions and translate this into rights and expectations for school stakeholders.

School-level autonomy is an important dimension of this ethos and high performing schools should enjoy discretion and control. But autonomy

should never imply dislocation from local relationships, because the best schools are embedded in networks of collaboration, not autonomous agents in a marketplace. Autonomy should be constrained through accountability to the local community and stakeholder consultation.

To bring this form of 'networked autonomy' to life we recommend that the government recalibrates the criteria used to assess school performance so that it lays greater emphasis on school-to-school partnerships and collaboration. In some cases this calls into question the direction of travel in current policy, particularly with respect to academy chains, where local accountability and improvement relationships are insufficient.

2. Schools in their communities

Democracy and participation are essential for sustained excellence, so as part of a new reform agenda, schools need to weave empowerment into how they achieve their outcomes. This means creating trusting, reciprocal relationships between parents, children, employees and the community. There should be opportunities for all stakeholders to participate in the life of the school.

Opening up schools to greater stakeholder participation entails a break with the last five years of official policy, which has been accompanied by a weakening of local accountability, particularly in the case of academy chains. The process of academy conversion should be opened up to greater community consultation and new governance arrangements should strengthen the voices of parents and the workforce.

Some school models, such as co-operative trust status, have successfully integrated community voice into their activities. Unlike the flat rate grant offered for academy conversion, there is no immediate financial advantage associated with becoming a cooperative school. The government should remove this anomaly so that schools are able to adopt the structure which best suits their needs.

To extend empowerment to every corner of the school system, new institutions will also be required. Developing plans for an autonomous professional institution would help restore a spirit of vocation to the schools workforce.

3. The role of government

To be a success at the school level this new approach must be reflected in the statecraft of national government. Neither mandating what schools can do from the centre nor 'letting go' of the school system will sustainably bring about excellent performance. Central government should only perform the tasks that cannot be undertaken effectively at a more local or regional institutional level.

A lighter touch national statecraft should go hand in hand with a devolution of powers to democratically accountable local bodies. At a time when the direction of travel in most public services is towards local or regional

power, the school system is going against the flow and becoming more centralised. A new phase of school reform should roll this back. The role and responsibilities of local authorities in an autonomous school system should be clearly defined and codified.

For non-government agencies operating at the local school level there should be a duty to collaborate with the relevant local authority. This would help promote innovation among improvement agencies and ensure the accountability of any new arrangements put in place.

Robust and challenging accountability remains essential. However, the schools inspectorate should be set up to undertake its duties in a way which supports a culture of self-improvement, with less focus on lesson observation. And where there are cases of serious underperformance, the government should develop a new system of focussed support, which involves partners from local authorities and other middle tier agencies to help schools turn around.

A NATIONAL CONSTITUTION FOR THE SCHOOLS SYSTEM

A national constitution for the schools system would set out the overarching objectives of the English school system and translate the public ethos into a set of rights and expectations for school stakeholders.

We recommend that the government undertakes an in-depth period of consultation and discussion with parents, professionals, young people and other community stakeholders as part of developing this constitution (as happened with the creation of the NHS Constitution). As an example, key elements of the constitution might include the following.

Schools in England will:

- Help young people thrive as citizens and serve society as a whole
- Champion equality, dignity, transparency and probit
- Share power with young people, giving them appropriate control and responsibility
- Trust and empower employees, so they can use their skills and insights and develop in their vocation
- Be dedicated to continuous improvement and value for money
- Be enduring community institutions, with their own identity, values and relationships
- Set priorities autonomously through shared decision making involving citizens, employees and service leader
- Be accountable to democratic politics, responding to local and national political priorities
- Achieve success through collaboration with partner institutions

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INTRODUCTION

Reforms since 1997 have taken education in England from a system marked by chronic variation and entrenched inequalities to one in which good standards are being secured by the large majority of schools.[1] In the words of one independent analysis of the 1997-2010 government's educational record, "looking at policies, inputs and outputs together suggests that the experience of schooling for children in 2010 would have been substantially different from that of their counterparts in 1997, especially if they lived in disadvantaged areas."[2]

After the 2010 general election the English school system underwent a fresh phase of reform, combining market-inspired, school-level autonomy with a deepening of traditional centrally-driven control.[3] Despite significant budgetary pressures, the coalition government's reforms were implemented at an exceptional speed: when Labour left office in 2010 around 6 per cent of secondary schools were academies – today the proportion is over half.[4] Although standards remain high, it is too early to assess the overall impact of the coalition's reforms, as it is unclear whether new schools introduced by the coalition are performing better than those they replaced.[5]

After two decades of almost continuous reform, what should come next? This report answers that question by exploring what school reform should look like over the next 20 years. Its key point is that the English school system will not continue to improve by relying solely on the principles of reform devised in the period after 1997.[6] Innovation in school structure, parental choice and rising resources may have been the right policies to secure a consistently good school system; but they will be inadequate for maintaining a world class system in the future.

Terms such as 'self-improving school system', 'whole system reform' and 'good to great' have all been used to describe the contours of a new improvement journey which goes beyond securing basic standards and towards achieving consistent excellence.[7] All share a view that how schools achieve their outcomes in the future needs to evolve. Schools and school leaders need to think of themselves as part of a system rather than individual institutions. Success will be achieved by strengthening inter-school collaboration and empowering staff to adopt evidence-driven innovation, rather than through nationally prescribed strategies.[8]

Many schools are already geared towards high performance of this kind. The public service workforce has never been more highly trained than it is today.[9] Equally, innovative practices which are shown to lead to improvement, such as school-to-school partnership working, exist in many parts of the system. However, previous and current reforms have created incentives within the wider school system which militate against the relationships, reciprocity and co-operation on which sustained high performance is founded.

While prescriptive centralism in schools was a necessary response to the

under-performance witnessed in the mid-1990s, today administrative diktat is at odds with the need for a culture of mature professionalism and front-line innovation. Indeed, since 2010 there are signs that the progress of school improvement may have slowed, just as the government has centralised power to Whitehall, disempowered the sub-national tier and permitted fragmentation at the local level.[10]

This report argues that greater stakeholder engagement, participation and dialogue is a condition of the transition from 'good' to 'great' in schools and that these principles should be institutionalised at three levels: first, in the ways schools and school leaders think about their goals and how to achieve them; secondly, in the stakeholder relationships within the school community; and finally in the role of government in its dealings with the school system. Our argument is that, over the next 15 to 20 years, schools should strive to become places of dialogue, adaptation and self-generated innovation guided by a philosophy of stakeholder empowerment.

BOX 1: WHY TRUST WITHIN SCHOOLS MATTERS

Moving a school system from good to excellent performance relies on trust. While attainment data shows that prescription worked well in driving up low performance after 1997, even the architects of New Labour's reforms acknowledge that this agenda had negative side effects by entrenching mistrust between schools and central government.[11] Michael Barber, who led many of the Blair-era reforms, now argues that when there is fast moving change in complex systems, "innovation and creativity at the frontline…is of vital importance" and this will be more difficult to achieve when reforms are perceived to be imposed externally on schools.[12]

There is a wide ranging literature on the role of trust in high performing, complex systems. In schools it is found to be an important form of social capital which helps to sustain relationships of mutual accountability and environments where creativity is seen as central to high performance rather than a risk.[13] Trust is needed at all levels:

Frontline relationships: Studies of the relationship between children's outcomes and parental involvement show that high engagement is best realised through a "focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members".[14] And another study concluded that, "collective moral purpose is more easily achieved among staff and students if…high social capital [is] already well established".[15]

School networks: A recent study on collaboration in the school system found that trust is key to enabling autonomous schools to overcome the tension between competition and partnership. The London Challenge and other improvement initiatives during the 2000s put these themes at the core of their work and their experience of "building communities of active trust, engagement and advocacy" has been identified as an important dynamic in the improvement journey in other London boroughs.[16]

1 PUBLIC INTEREST INSTITUTIONS

The evidence suggests that sustained excellence in schools will require high levels of trust, dialogue and self-generated innovation. The task of reform is to create the conditions in which these all flourish – and it is a task to which the existing toolkit of government intervention is ill-suited.

Instead of focusing on central prescription or market-like incentives, the aim of government should be to support schools to become strong public service institutions, with the right ethos, relationships, accountability and autonomy to excel. The Fabian report *Going Public*, which looked at all public services not just schools, put it like this:

> *Providers should not be treated as snooker balls that can be mechanistically manipulated. Instead, a more organic statecraft is needed that dwells on the internal qualities of good public interest institutions. The aim of politics becomes to found, steer and strengthen autonomous and enduring institutions with strong shared ownership. This means creating conditions in which institutions thrive and achieve for themselves, taking responsibility for their own direction and innovation.*

This chapter explores what this should mean for schools specifically: what it is to be a strong public interest institution, why being one matters, and how schools can become one. Our central proposal is that the government should champion a new focus on 'ethos' and 'institution' by developing a national constitution for the English schools system which articulates the institutional qualities to which all schools should aspire (see box 2). Then in the rest of the chapter we look in detail at key dimensions of what it means to be a public interest institution.

BOX 2: A NATIONAL CONSTITUTION FOR THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN ENGLAND

A national constitution for the schools system would set out the overarching objectives of the English school system, define what it means for schools to be strong public interest institutions and translate this into rights and expectations for school stakeholders. We recommend that the government undertakes an in-depth period of consultation and discussion with parents, professionals, young people and other stakeholders as part of developing this constitution (as happened with the creation of the NHS constitution).[17] The constitutions should define what it means to be a strong public service institution, drawing on principles developed in the Fabian report *Going Public*. For example this could mean commitments along the following lines.

Schools in England will:

1. Help young people thrive as citizens and serve society as a whole
2. Champion equality, dignity, transparency and probity
3. Share power with young people, giving them appropriate control and responsibility
4. Trust and empower employees, so they can use their skills and insights and develop in their vocation
5. Be dedicated to continuous improvement and value for money
6. Be enduring community institutions, with their own identity, values and relationships
7. Set direction autonomously through shared decision making involving citizens,employees and service leaders
8. Be accountable to democratic politics, responding to local and national political priorities
9. Achieve success through collaboration with partner institutions
10. Achieve success through practices that are sustainable for pupils, staff, parents, the community and the environment

The public interest

The success of a public service cannot be reduced to a set of transactional results; it is about the rounded experiences of users and the impacts on the community at large. And the best, most well-loved, public services are those which not only 'deliver' discrete service goals, but do so in a spirit of openness, shared ownership, democratic leadership and accountability. In other words, in their purposes and accountabilities, public services are different from businesses.

And this is the way the public want it too. Fabian research conducted in 2012 found that almost four times as many people were convinced as unconvinced by the statement: 'services like health and education should not be run as businesses. They depend on the values and ethos of the public good'.[18]

But this instinct – that public services are different – has often been disregarded in the last 20 years. The coalition government emphasised 'open' public services, run by 'any willing provider', over any concern for the ethos or institutional qualities of services.[19] Before that, under New Labour, public service reform had a utilitarian bent, distilled in Tony Blair's maxim that 'what matters is what works'.[20] This saw the ends of public service (what is delivered) as having priority over the means (how services are delivered).

The separation of ends and means also led New Labour to think too readily in terms of doing things 'to' services and service users, rather than appreciating that excellent outcomes can only be achieved on the basis of shared effort and reciprocity.[21] As a result Labour paid too little attention to the fact that authentic public service institutions do not exist to produce externally-defined, transactional results. They are instead distinguished by their own independent values, which guide their relationships and decision-making.

In *Going Public*, the Fabian Society identified the key qualities that the best public services exhibit and argued that a 'public' ethos means striving to live up to six maxims:

1. Help people acquire capabilities to thrive
2. Serve the collective interests of society
3. Champion equality, dignity and respect
4. Set direction through democratic politics and shared ownership
5. Act through collaboration
6. Uphold transparency and probity

These 'public interest' qualities all help define what it means to be a good school. They give schools their character as strong institutions: places which shape and are shaped by their members; and which are guided by an ethic of care and empowerment. They are intrinsic to the success of schools, since they reflect both their purpose (ie: to support all children to become capable citizens and to serve society as a whole); and also the means of achieving these ends.

Living up to these maxims is an exacting requirement which goes beyond an instrumental view of performance, based on exam results alone. It relies on school environments which are rich in social capital – where trust, dialogue and reciprocity are intrinsic to the work schools do, not an afterthought or external demand.

So the starting point for a new phase of education reform involves empowering schools to better reflect these 'public interest' qualities. In part this will require regulatory changes above schools (ie: performance improvement, inspection etc). But, above all, it needs a change of culture, which can best be achieved through sustained national and local dialogue.

This is why we think the government should seek a new shared understanding of the purpose and values of schools, by supporting the development of a national constitution for the school system. This would set out the overarching objectives of the English school system and translate a shared understanding of 'public interest' into a set of rights and expectations for professionals, young people, parents and the community.

Autonomy

To bring this conception of 'public interest' to life, schools need control and discretion: this is not something that can be done for them. Autonomy is also a key ingredient in school improvement and one that becomes more important as schools get better. As one study of self-improvement in school systems notes: "…when teachers achieve a higher level of skill… tight central control becomes counterproductive to system improvement".[22] Strong prescription from the centre can conflict with employee-led experimentation, which is one of the channels through which better performance is achieved (discussed further in chapter two).

Autonomy is also needed in order to strengthen relationships between schools and their local stakeholders. As the experience of many services with co-operative or deliberative structures shows, autonomy can create space for stakeholder dialogue and contributes towards participative cultures which characterise the best schools.[23] This is autonomy rooted in relationships.

By contrast, since 2010, the government has encouraged autonomy without insisting on local relationships and accountability. This is most obvious in the case of large chains of academy schools, where local voice has been side-lined and decision making powers transferred to often unaccountable sponsor bodies operating outside the public sector. It is also visible in wider reforms of school governance, which have significantly reduced the scope for stakeholder representation among governors. However, the determination to expand this context-free version of autonomy has created its own contradictions, because it has forced the government to take more power itself and enter into clumsy, heavy handed interventions when things go wrong.

School autonomy should be informed and constrained by a clear understanding of 'public interest'. For example, schools should not abuse their freedoms, by centrally outsourcing key functions, if this jeopardises frontline relationships of trust, responsibility and empowerment. This seems to be a risk in the development of academy chains. For example, in 2014 the academy chain Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) announced it would review whether to out-source all non-teaching roles across the chain's 80 academies.[24] These proposals exemplify a narrow, instrumental view of support staff as costly 'overheads' disconnected from the ethos, relationships and success of each school.

It is perhaps understandable that autonomy for schools became a vexed issue in the last parliament. However, it is not the principle of autonomy which is problematic, but the government's decision to prioritise this single aspect of reform above all others – and to conflate it with a market ethos in education. In reality, school freedoms and a self-governing ethos should go hand-in-hand with high-trust relationships within schools, community dialogue and accountability, and intense collaboration between local providers. The task facing the new government is to restore a balance to these features of school improvement.[25]

Collaboration

International evidence shows that autonomy is an ingredient of higher performance when coupled with policies to encourage school-to-school collaboration.[26] The activities which take place through partnership work are strongly associated with higher performance because they create opportunities for self-generated improvement among professionals and school leaders (discussed further in chapter two).[27] These include day to day problem solving and information sharing; mutual learning about 'what works'; collaborative models of professional development; and more innovative techniques of peer review and accountability.[28] Above all, collaboration provides the opportunity for institutional learning and professional feedback in a mutual, non-judgemental environment.

Many of these techniques were used effectively in the London Challenge and City Challenge initiatives of the New Labour governments and in the intervening years a patchwork of innovative school partnership models have emerged.[29] These range from formal school partnerships developed by school federations and some academy chains, through to more informal initiatives between institutions that share values and history.[30]

Over the next 15 years, government has an important job in assisting schools to expand and formalising these examples of 'networked autonomy',

where a culture of independence creates space for stakeholder accountability and frontline innovation. Reforms need to improve the level and quality of partnership working between institutions while being sensitive to their organic, school-specific foundations.[31] This is one reason why the existence of large multi-school chains may conflict with high quality collaboration, where the structure and governance of the chain is insensitive to the history and ethos of local schools.

As the experience since 2010 has shown, Whitehall itself is too distant to directly support collaboration. But the centre can help in signalling the importance of partnerships and incentivise their development (for example, by revising the criteria for judging school performance) at the same time as preserving the freedom for innovation in how these goals are achieved.[32]

This focus on collaboration in education is part of a broader move to think about public services as networks, where the answers to complex problems arise at the level of the systems within which autonomous agents interact. As Atul Gawande argued in his recent Reith Lectures on the future of medicine, thinking about creativity as an individualistic or 'scientific' enterprise is now outdated – today whole systems are the laboratory of a more effective form of shared innovation and creativity.[33]

Leading schools as institutions

Acting in the public interest means that schools should neither be unresponsive bureaucracies nor market agents responding to competition. Instead they need to be rooted institutions with values, vocation and collective leadership. *Going Public* identified the key features of strong institutions: they shape norms and values; they create affiliation; they have a feeling of permanence; they are unique because of their context and history; and they have multiple purposes, stakeholders and lines of accountability. That report said:

> *Institutions are more than legal entities because they shape group norms and relationships – so they act as vessels for intangible qualities... And in institutions, improvement, innovation and adaptation can be intrinsic, internal processes – not just reactions to outside forces – so that the values and culture of each organisation helps shape its own future.*

This has important implications for the manner in which schools should be led:

> *Strong institutions should be places of constant dialogue, adaptation and self-generating innovation which means they should embody 'shared ownership' – where citizens, employees, elected politicians and other stakeholders all feel they have a stake and take part in deliberative decision making.*
>
> *Shared ownership is partly about psychology. It arises when citizens, employees and all other stakeholders feel and behave as if they own the service: they have a sense of belonging and control. But it also requires a style of governance, where the public interest is identified through inclusive democratic and participative forms of decision making.*

To bring about this new style of leadership, all schools should be expected to develop, in collaboration with all stakeholders, their own user-friendly 'constitution', setting out values, expectations and roles for all stakeholders.

These should have a specific focus on authentic engagement and deliberative leadership.

Governing bodies would then have a vital role to play in bringing these constitutions to life. They should be the bridge between schools and their communities; and should hold leaders to account with respect to 'ethos' and 'institution', not just short-term performance.

Since 2010 governing bodies have had to respond to the more autonomous school environment which has emerged. One answer to this challenge, emphasised by the coalition government, has been to require greater financial and managerial expertise in the composition of governing bodies, for example from the business community and elsewhere.[34] However, the trend towards professionalisation also creates risks, to the extent that it reduces the role of governors as a bridge between schools and their communities.

The government should instead be seeking to strengthen community voice in school governance arrangements, while also introducing a national programme of governor training. This would help achieve the widest possible representation on governing bodies while embedding rigour and a critical perspective into their work.

As the school system moves from good to great the outcomes they are expected to achieve become more complex: from nationally prescribed strategies to inter-school collaboration and from evidence-led practice to evidence-driven innovation.[35] The role of governors in holding leaders to account for the institutional qualities of schools will become more important as the school system moves along this arc.

This is because great leadership is dependent on institutional context not uniform prescriptions. It is found to be strongly rooted in the day to day life of institutions and exhibited in personal qualities which support innovation among frontline employees: motivating and valuing others; promoting professional development and coaching; encouraging initiative and discretion; being community-minded; and building effective, collaborative teams.[36]

This collegiate or shared model of leadership complements the autonomous professional practice which underpins the status of teaching as a profession (discussed further in chapter two). But it does not mean an increasing workload for frontline employees or side-lining proper accountability. Talented school leadership is best understood as the practice of cultivating the highest professional standards and orienting the whole workforce towards shared institutional outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS – PUBLIC INTEREST INSTITUTIONS

The government should:

Publish a 'constitution for the English school system', setting out the overarching principles, values and objectives of the school system for today. This document would define what it means for schools to be strong public interest institutions and translate this into rights and expectations for school stakeholders.

Assist individual schools to work in dialogue with councils and their stakeholders to **produce their own user-friendly constitution setting out their public purpose, values and key commitments to citizens.** As part of this process schools should lead conversations with stakeholders about their public purpose and accountability, bringing to life the public ethos at a grassroots level.

Put school partnership work and collaboration at the centre of the Ofsted inspection framework.[37] This would help restore a balance between collaboration and the competitive influences associated with autonomy. It would also have the advantage of signalling the importance of strong school to school relationships while remaining as non-prescriptive as possible about the ways in which they are achieved.[38]

Develop a system and structure for inspecting academy chains. Ofsted currently inspects schools which are part of chains as individual schools.[39] However, in light of the concerns raised over the transparency and accountability of some chains, Ofsted should be given legal powers to inspect and publish information about the performance of academy chains as institutions, as well as about the individual schools they manage.

Introduce a national system of induction training for school governors and clerks. Any newly designed system would need to be sensitive to the lifestyles and learning styles across the governing body, so should aim to offer a range of flexible opportunities for learning. The introduction of induction training could be allied with efforts to raise the status and profile of school governors to ensure the highest possible levels of representation and skill among governors.

2 SCHOOLS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

This report makes that case that excellence in schools will in future depend on trust, collaboration and empowerment. These qualities require schools to have a 'public interest' ethos and strong institutional qualities; and this implies a participative form of leadership that engages with all the communities schools touch. This chapter explores the issue of trust, power and voice for school stakeholders in greater depth, looking in turn at each of the key groups with whom schools must work.

Empowering parents

Schools are shared, community institutions so the views of parents should not simply be treated as market signals. Yet for the last 20 years this has been the dominant perspective, guided by the belief that encouraging transparency and competition is the most effective way of giving power to parents.[40] Now, as part of the journey to becoming strong institutions, a richer view of parent power should be woven into the fabric of what schools do and the way they achieve their outcomes.

The principle of control for parents is not problematic in itself. There is an important association between parental involvement in school and the outcomes which young people achieve.[41] At a more general level, creating power in people's lives should matter for every public service and studies show that people treat choice as a good in itself, enriching their experience of service provision.[42] But these arguments apply to choice within institutions as much as between them. Choice between institutions becomes problematic in two instances: first, when it creates a highly-marketised system where co-ordination and collaboration frays; and second when it becomes a substitute for broader parent empowerment or democratic engagement within institutions.[43]

Studies show that parental involvement brings benefits for young people when there are strategies in place to create trusting, collaborative relationships which are attentive to families' needs.[44] There is also evidence that parents' views about good school performance are ahead of the government's official approach to performance measurement, encompassing the social, cultural and emotional development of students.[45] Parents often want to know about the internal culture and ethos of schools and the development of pupils with regard to confidence, self-esteem and respect.[46]

This means that in the future schools need to strive to go beyond transactional forms of empowerment: market choice can only ever provide a thin form of power, based on choice and exit.[47] School systems should therefore replace a market model of empowerment, with a stakeholder model which reflects the true interest parents have in the wider dimensions of school life. All parents should have the opportunity to reflect their views in dialogue

with other school stakeholders, leading to better representation and understanding.[48] In this respect schools can learn from the experience of many co-operative schools in England, which have been successful in combining many of the freedoms of academies with a rich approach to stakeholder democracy.

Empowering children

Participation and engagement is important in schools because they are 'relational' services, where the types of outcomes achieved are based on shared effort and creative interaction between learners and educators. However, because market choice leaves little room for authentic empowerment within institutions, many schools have not kept up with the turn towards 'people power' at a time when the role of citizens is expanding in public services as a whole.

Empowering young people by involving them in decisions which affect their lives is a requirement that all public institutions should live up to.[49] When a climate of participation and democratic engagement is strong in schools it can feed through into positive outcomes for young people, because learning occurs through complex interactions and experiences between children and their peers, teachers and others.[50]

At the personal level, the participation of children in collective decision making ('pupil voice' as it is often referred to) is associated with greater self-esteem and self-efficacy, sense of agency, responsibility, engagement with work, and improved meta-cognitive skills.[51] A systematic review of national and international studies conducted for the Esmee Fairburn Foundation found that participation through structures such as community involvement, school councils, and committee work can bring "positive and definite outcomes" for young people at school.[52] This is corroborated in recent research in the field of early intervention which underscores the centrality of non-cognitive, social and emotional skills to outcomes in later life (which a focus on pupil voice can enhance).[53]

It will be for professionals to decide the appropriate remit of pupil participation in the internal life of schools. However, expanding the opportunities for pupil voice and cultivating professional empowerment and discretion should be seen as complementary endeavours.[54] Evidence on high quality teaching finds it is associated with dialogic approaches, such as encouraging enquiry-based learning, interactive teaching styles, personalised learning and other collaborative techniques.[55] A stronger focus on pupil voice reflects the evidence that children are not passive recipients of information but co-constructors of their own learning.[56]

Empowering the workforce

The philosophy of 'choice and exit' not only falls short of meaningful empowerment for parents, it also implies conflict between the interests of external stakeholders and the school workforce. This is perverse because the free play of stakeholder voice and autonomous professional practice is the engine of innovation in self-improving institutions. Creating trust and power within the school workforce is not a sacrifice to a producer interest, but a condition of higher performance in the future.

There is compelling evidence that teaching quality is the single most

important factor determining pupil attainment and that high-performing school systems depend on valued employees who enjoy meaningful levels of discretion and responsibility.[57] However, too often this is not reflected in the schools debate. Indeed, sometimes it seems that policy makers see a disempowered workforce as the price that must be paid for improvement.[58]

Staff motivation and self-confidence is a critical input in high-performing school systems.[59] Evidence shows that highly performing institutions (public and private) rely on continuous, incremental innovation led by trusted frontline employees where "breakthroughs set the standard to be achieved through the system".[60] Improvement is not linked to reduced staff morale, but associated with strategies which cultivate core competencies, relying on expert practice and professional judgement among employees. Evaluations of successful initiatives developed by the last Labour government show that a confident, respected and valued workforce was one of the most potent ingredients in the policies which led to change.[61]

Practice-based judgement, enquiry and innovation, supported by the use of evidence and research, are the building blocks of a mature professionalism which contributes to self-improvement in schools.[62] However, in a high-performing school system the local instances of professional innovation should lead to stronger collective capacity as knowledge is transferred through professional communities and institutional partnerships.[63] Thinking about mature professionalism in this way is an example of how stakeholder engagement dovetails with the 'networked autonomy' discussed in chapter one.

At a minimum government and schools should work with trade unions to promote empowerment by improving working conditions, job design and opportunities for employee learning, innovation and progression. At a local and institutional level trade unions should be trusted as partners in the workplace to support innovation and learning and in turn, trade union representatives should work collaboratively with service leaders. In national negotiations the government will need to recognise that the quality of workplace performance will depend on employees being fairly rewarded.

Strategies to increase the spirit of vocation and autonomous professional practice of the schools workforce could be augmented with an autonomous professional body for teachers. An institution of this kind would not act as a substitute for trade union representation, as many unions play a strong role in supporting professional practice. Creating a new institution led by professionals would provide an umbrella for the cluster of employee activities associated with school-led improvement, including an entitlement to 'continuous professional development' and forums to reflect on the practice of teaching with other professionals and peers.

Empowering communities

Trust and reciprocity between parents, employees and children can sustain improvement in schools. However, it is important that schools are also much more than places children arrive at after breakfast and leave in the middle of the afternoon. Schools are also community institutions and stakeholder engagement should extend well beyond the school gates and into localities to reflect this.

Communities are inextricably bound up with the experiences and outcomes that local schools create. Parents and the wider community come to

think of schools as 'their schools' not because they are established by government or parental demand, but because they act as stewards of intangible local assets, common values and experiences, which over time shape civic identity. Schools are shared 'place making' institutions, which strongly condition and are conditioned by the ethos and character of a locality.

Stewarding institutions for the wider benefit of the community is at the core of public service professionalism – a concept which goes beyond the mastery of knowledge or technical expertise, and into the attitudes and disposition which guide the practice of professionals.[64] The transformation in educational performance made by a number of London boroughs during the 2000s was achieved by employing systematic approaches to community planning, putting local people and the wider locality at the core of schools' activities.[65] More generally, under Labour's Every Child Matters initiative, schools were expected to support community cohesion and in the latter years of the last Labour government school buildings were designed to be hubs for community activity.

Improving schools know their community well.[66] Evidence from previous improvement journeys suggests that creating a 'common cause' between school reform and local communities sustains the momentum of improvement.[67] However, the idea of schools strongly rooted in their locality could not be further from the direction of travel adopted in the last parliament. For example, sponsor bodies which have taken over the running of schools have few responsibilities for community engagement or empowerment in terms of formal governance.[68] In its guidelines the Department for Education states that academy trusts "have almost complete flexibility to shape their governance arrangements", save for the requirement of two elected parent governors, and ministers have openly criticised stakeholder models of governance.[69] Multi-academy trusts have the freedom to include parents only in an advisory capacity (as part of local governing bodies) rather than as trustees holding decision making powers. In the case of maintained schools, regulations introduced in the last parliament diluted representation from a requirement that one third of the places on governing bodies are constituted by parent governors to a requirement for just two.

The strengthening of Whitehall's role has also been disempowering. The Department for Education has heavily promoted conversion from maintained to academy status, but with little pressure from the centre to consult parents (or staff) in conversion process.[70] And there have also been instances of 'hostile takeovers' through the practice of academy orders, where underperforming schools have been issued with a requirement to convert to an academy, regardless of local wishes.

The direction of travel between 2010 and 2015 has thrown up significant questions of local democracy and transparency which go to the heart of the public interest ethos of schools. However, almost in spite of the national policy framework there have been positive developments too. A growing number of schools have chosen to adopt co-operative governance models and led the way in integrating community voice into their activities. The 'trust' model of these schools represents an alternative to single school academy status or joining an academy chain.

The growth of the co-operative sector has been called a 'quiet' revolution and one that in some ways has been held back by national policy. In particular, schools do not receive financial support to convert to the foundation trust status, preferred by many co-operative schools. So unlike the flat rate grant

that schools receive for conversion to academy status, there is no immediate financial advantage associated with becoming a co-operative trust. There is no reason in principle why a government (which officially welcomes more diversity in the school sector) should discriminate between preferred structures in this way. A level playing field should be established with respect to these funding arrangements to provide schools with a genuine choice over the different conversion routes available to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS – SCHOOLS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

The government should:

Provide funding support for schools wishing to convert to a co-operative foundation trust model in the same way it does for academy convertors. This would this level the playing field between the different structural models and end an implicit prioritisation of one school structure over others. Promoting the co-operative trust model will ensure that the innovative practices used by co-operatives to embed democracy and participation would become more widely shared.

Create a legal requirement for full and meaningful consultation with parents, staff, pupils and the community in the process of academy conversion and clarify the time period over which this takes place. At present governing bodies are required to consult such persons as they think appropriate before academy conversion takes place. A new process should be formalised by government to ensure that the requirement for consultation is understood.[71]

Strengthen stakeholder voice in governance arrangements by increasing parent and workforce representation in the composition of governing bodies. This could be augmented by the creation of new bodies within schools aimed at promoting dialogue between groups which is too often episodic (such as parents and the workforce) and keeping the wider community well informed of school developments.[72]

Support teachers to found strong, autonomous professional institutions to define professional practice and support learning. A professional membership institution would help give life to the belief that in a self-improving school system professionals should increasingly 'lead the profession'. A body of this kind could set professional standards, award qualifications, create a code of values, and lead research, policy development and peer to peer forums. Unions which play a strong role in supporting professional practice could be strengthened as part of this process. This is not to support one model of professional body over another.

Promote new standards of professional practice in teaching to provide a route map for mature professionalism among the schools workforce. These new standards would incorporate the activities associated with self-generated improvement and anchor entitlements to 'continuous professional development'. These new standards could be housed within a new autonomous institution led by the teaching profession.[73]

3 THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

For trust, collaboration and empowerment to flourish locally the relationship between government and schools needs to evolve too. This does not mean writing government out of the script. High performance will not be sustainable over the coming years if schools are just directed from the centre; but nor will it be achieved if government 'lets go' of system stewardship altogether. Instead, in the next phase of school reform, government should see its job as creating the conditions which strengthen the capacity of schools to lead their own improvement.

Role of the centre

Since the late 1980s there has been a contradiction at the heart of schools policy. Successive waves of ministers have devolved powers to schools, but at the same time they have micromanaged significant aspects of school life from the centre.[74] This was true under the last Labour government and the 'hands on, hands off' approach has worsened considerably since 2010.

The coalition's education reforms diluted oversight of an increasingly autonomous schools landscape (for example, by reducing the powers of local authorities), yet today the secretary of state for education also wields more powers than any in recent history to intervene in the day to day running of schools.[75]

This position is unsustainable if future improvements in performance are to be led by schools in dialogue with their stakeholders and partners. There are many roles that only the national government can undertake effectively in education. However, Whitehall should not kid itself that it can 'deliver' discrete outcomes in schools and should instead see its task as creating the conditions in which self-led improvement will emerge.

Over the next 15 years, government should practise as well as preach a model of subsidiarity: performing the tasks that cannot be undertaken effectively, or with the necessary scale, at a more local or institutional level. This is not about the centre washing its hands of responsibility because the most effective approaches to school improvement creatively reconcile the tension between 'centralism' and 'localism', 'top down' and 'bottom up'. For example, the success of the London Challenge programme lay in skilfully blending these approaches: using the power of the centre to broker and share the existing knowledge in the school system and balancing the mature professionalism described in chapter two with rigorous mechanisms of professional accountability.[76]

By contrast, today's settlement – where power is formally decentralised but with the last resort of episodic, heavy handed central interventions when things go wrong – means that support and scrutiny for coasting schools is likely to veer wildly, from distant neglect to binding direction. The disrup-

tion, short termism and uncertainty this implies is at odds with the effective school-led improvement.

In future, central government should adopt a role focused on:

- Setting the strategic direction for the school system and articulating the high level outcomes (rather than activities) schools should achieve over time
- Outlining a basic set of entitlements for all young people, ensuring fair access and monitoring standards across the school system as a whole
- Setting the overall level of resources available for schools
- Setting core elements of the curriculum and maintaining the integrity of qualifications

Role of local government

The 'view from Whitehall' is too far removed from schools to support ambitious, ongoing improvement. Local support is necessary. An effective layer between central government and local schools is shown to be a powerful driver of school improvement practices.[77] Agencies operating at this level can achieve contact with schools on an ongoing basis, leading to higher levels of trust and the creation of soft intelligence which central government would always struggle to achieve. This 'middle tier' perspective is also far enough removed from day to day operational considerations to broker collaboration between clusters of schools at an area based level.

However, today there is a concern that the activities taking place at this intermediate layer lack the coherence to lead to meaningful school improvement. The weakening of local authorities after 2010 soon led to a 'missing middle' – the situation in which there is insufficient oversight to manage schools at an area based level, risking isolation, fragmentation and drift in standards.[78]

The consequences of dismantling the middle tier in the name of autonomy were identified early on in this parliament by Michael Wilshaw, the Ofsted chief inspector, in evidence to the education select committee:

> *"We could have a situation where Whitehall is controlling an increasing number of independent and autonomous schools, and finding it very difficult to do so … There needs to be some sort of intermediary layer that finds out what is happening on the ground and intervenes before it is too late. But when failure does take place, who is going to broker support? Who is going to intervene at the right time? Who is going to approach the successful school and a successful head or an academy chain to come in, in support?"*[79]

As a result, there is an ongoing debate over how to reassemble this middle tier in a way which supports the principles of a self-improving school system. The government has recently introduced eight regional school commissioners to impose more coherence on the academies programme. Meanwhile, before the 2015 election, the Labour party proposed new directors of school standards working above the level of individual local authorities, serving clusters of councils.[80]

In this debate, however, local democracy has been treated as a marginal consideration, when in fact it is fundamental. School support and account-

ability is not just a question of technocratic expertise, because to reflect the public interest schools need a relationship with local democratic politics and the voice of their communities.

The next phase of school reform must therefore include a place for local authorities as the democratically-mandated agency sitting above schools. As things stand academy trusts have a direct relationship with the secretary of state and no requirement to collaborate with local authorities. Yet councils have always retained a legal responsibility for ensuring the good provision of education to all children in their area. So the government should codify the enduring responsibilities of local authorities and create a corresponding duty for all schools in a local area to collaborate with it.

These responsibilities would reflect the role local authorities should have for:

- Setting educational ambitions and strategy for the local area, working with schools, colleges, universities, trade unions and employers
- Planning and ensuring the adequate provision and supply of school places (as well as decommissioning schools if necessary in order to ensure that all young people have access to a broad and balanced education, including access to stretching vocational learning)
- Coordinating inter-agency work (for example, where vulnerable children are concerned)
- Ensuring equality of access and fair admissions
- Ensuring the sufficient supply of teachers and other school staff
- Identifying underperformance and brokering and overseeing support for school improvement
- Ensuring access to quality careers education and guidance
- Acting as the democratic voice of the community by providing scrutiny and accountability and being answerable for the outcomes in the area
- Championing the involvement of the local community, families, parents and children.[81]

The role of local authorities should not be unchanging. As the schools landscape evolves the leadership role of councils should become increasingly supervisory, overseeing a range of activities led by clusters of school and other middle tier agencies aimed at school improvement. However, where middle tier responsibilities are handed to non-government agencies in the future, the enduring role for councils must be to ensure these arrangements are in place and to be accountable for their outcomes.

Accountability

High-performing schools need to be supported by a system of robust accountability. An intelligent accountability regime provides school stakeholders and the public with information on standards, shines a light on underperformance and helps government dig beneath the headlines and start to explain improvement or decline.[82] At its best, an accountability regime provides a shared system of reference points so that multiple agencies and

stakeholders are singing from the same hymn sheet when it comes to understanding school performance and what drives it.

There is no reason why this should not all apply when schools lead their own improvements. Acknowledging that institutions and the teaching profession contain the seeds of higher performance does not preclude the leverage and traction provided by transparency and accountability. The question is not whether to have accountability, but how to make it consistent with the other outcomes schools should bring about.

Today the accountability regime is one of the main reasons why, despite autonomy, many schools feel they dance to the tune of national government. Over the decades the accountability regime for schools has exemplified what the philosopher Onora O'Neill describes as the paradox of trust: that the drive to inspire trust in our public institutions has involved tighter regimes of performance measurement and control by central government.[83] The result, as the educationalist Tim Brighouse has written, is that Britain is "the only developed country with such an elaborate system of school accountability, based essentially on professional mistrust".[84]

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the way the schools inspectorate, Ofsted, has been set up to conduct its work over the years. Ofsted is accused of many failings, but the heart of the problem is that it is tasked to discharge its functions in a way that is corrosive to the culture and ethos which prevail in high performing school systems. Rather than encourage long-termism, trust and transparency, the high-stakes inspection regime it oversees incentivises tactical, short-termist behaviours such as trivial planning and over-rehearsal.[85] In the past, the manner in which the inspectorate conducts lesson observation has been seen as out of step with the dynamic qualities of good pedagogy, distorting the professional judgement described in chapter two and encouraging compliance and rule-following rather than creativity and innovation.[86]

It is sometimes said that the side-effects associated with this system is a price worth paying for a body that drives up standards.[87] Similarly, it is argued that reducing the power of a strong, centralised inspectorate would be a worrying risk for the school system. But these arguments rely on an artificially short-termist view of performance. From the left to the right of the political spectrum there is a growing feeling that the costs associated with Ofsted's current role have begun to outweigh its benefits.[88]

Moving on from a model of inspection based on suspicion and high-stakes judgements does not mean abolishing Ofsted, but instead thinking about how school outcomes can best improve and how to ensure the inspectorate works in a way that supports these practices. Ofsted's job is to monitor basic standards across the school system as a whole and it should conduct its work in this spirit rather than overstepping its remit into detailed delivery issues. The body does not have time nor resources to undertake school improvement functions, which should be the responsibility of middle tier agencies with more continuous contact with schools and the 'soft intelligence' to promote collaboration and school to school partnerships.

High performing schools should continue to be inspected. However, government should bring forward plans for a new model of shorter standard school inspections with a reduction in the level of lesson observation and a stronger focus on validating schools' self-evaluation.

Assessment

Assessment is sometimes called the second pillar of school accountability, because it is strongly orientated towards generating information on which schools are judged. There will always be some tension between the transparency generated by standardised assessment and innovation, which is inherently risky but is essential for higher performance. But at present England's assessment regime falls short on both of these fronts. There is overwhelming evidence to show that the use of high-stakes testing has encouraged behaviours which conflict with children's ability to gain the rounded knowledge, capabilities and experiences that schools should provide.

Data derived from testing and assessment form the key measures of school performance. The principle of using assessment for the purpose of accountability is not problematic in itself. Assessment can be negative, neutral or positive in the context of school outcomes depending on how it is designed – like inspection, it is laden with incentives which affect behaviours in school. However, today only a vanishing minority think that the assessment regime is well aligned with the outcomes schools should seek.

Assessment regimes which only value what is measured through high-stakes testing have been criticised for capturing only a small part of what matters in young people's development. For example, employer organisations such as the CBI have argued that the teaching techniques incentivised in this environment leave children ill-prepared for later life and employment.[89] Research has also revealed a strong predictive relationship between a range of (unassessed) non-cognitive skills and outcomes in later life (including educational attainment, labour market success and socioeconomic status).

In a world of narrow, high-stakes assessment, experimental approaches to learning are considered too risky by teachers who feel under pressure to improve pupils' measured test scores.[90] The result is a narrow curriculum, shallow learning and teaching to the test. This has been exacerbated by reforms introduced by the coalition which have increased the stakes for schools which fall short of measured test results. For example, academy orders have been used to convert schools to academy status as a response to underperformance. Meanwhile, assessment techniques designed to understand the learning needs of children (formative testing) are demoted alongside the personalised learning which they make possible.[91]

There is now a strong degree of consensus that the assessment regime has become so high-stakes that it is in tension with the other outcomes schools should produce. In opposition the Labour party acknowledged this problem, pledging an end to the 'exam factory' model borne from the narrowing of assessment over the years. The negative externalities caused by the assessment system will take many years to unpick and almost certainly encounter opponents who would accuse reformers of being 'soft on standards'. But a first step should be taken, laying greater emphasis on formative assessment techniques designed to assist learning.[92]

RECOMMENDATIONS – THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The government should:

Codify the role of local authorities in an autonomous school system and designate in law their role as 'ringmasters' for school services in their community.[93] Codifying the place of local authorities within an autonomous school landscape would provide much more coherence; and empower authorities to conduct their statutory responsibilities alongside the activities of other middle tier agencies more effectively.

Create a new duty for all schools in a local area to collaborate with local authorities. Local authorities are legally responsible for ensuring the provision of good education for all children in their area, but they do not have powers over academies. Schools and local authorities should set area-wide community plans setting out a strategy for how schools plan to work together, to engage with the local community and increase stakeholder participation.

Develop a new model of shorter school inspections. We support proposals for shorter standard inspections with a reduction in the level of lesson observation and a stronger focus on validating schools' self-evaluation, supported by consultation with parents, staff and the wider school community.[94] This 'light touch' framework would apply to schools judged good and outstanding with schools falling below this measure moving onto a more in-depth inspection.

Bring the practice of 'academy orders' to an end to allow professionals to focus on both the summative and formative dimensions of assessment regime, instead of teaching to the test.

Create a new system of focussed support for instances where serious underperformance is identified. Under this system a requirement would be issued for a period of targeted support to begin involving partners from central government, local authority representatives and other middle tier agencies involved in school improvement. The emphasis would not be on a distracting period of structural conversion but rapid, targeted support aimed at helping the school 'turnaround'.[95]

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STAKEHOLDER SCHOOLS

WHY COLLABORATION IS KEY TO THE NEXT PHASE OF SCHOOL REFORM

Robert Tinker

It will soon be 20 years since Tony Blair announced that eduation, education and education were New Labour's three priorities for government. Over that time dramatic improvements have been made to England's schools and the quality of education they provide. This report considers how similar improvements can be achieved over the next 20 years.

It argues that the toolkit used to achieve consistently good standards is no longer enough because the aim, for most schools, is to go from 'good to great'. The traditional mixture of structural reform, parental choice and rising resources is inadequate for achieving consistent excellence.

This means we must rethink the environment in which schools operate and the way they achieve their outcomes – in other words, what 'success' looks like. Today, the evidence shows that maintaining excellent standards depends on collaboration within and between schools. So dialogue and trust need to be at the heart of how schools improve in the future.

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