

Education, Children's Services and Leisure Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Wednesday 16 January 2013

7.00 pm

Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

Membership

Councillor David Hubber (Chair)
Councillor The Right Revd Emmanuel
Oyewole (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Sunil Chopra
Councillor Rowenna Davis
Councillor Rosie Shimell
Councillor Cleo Soanes
Reverend Nicholas Elder
Colin Elliott
Leticia Ojeda
Lynn Charlton

Reserves

Councillor James Barber
Councillor Chris Brown
Councillor Poddy Clark
Councillor Darren Merrill
Councillor Althea Smith

INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

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Contact Julie Timbrell on 020 7525 0514 or email: julie.timbrell@southwark.gov.uk

Members of the committee are summoned to attend this meeting

Eleanor Kelly

Chief Executive

Date: 8 January 2013



Education, Children's Services and Leisure Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Wednesday 16 January 2013
7.00 pm

Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

Order of Business

Item No.	Title	Page No.
	PART A - OPEN BUSINESS	
1.	APOLOGIES	
2.	NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT	
	In special circumstances, an item of business may be added to an agenda within five clear working days of the meeting.	
3.	DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS	
	Members to declare any interests and dispensations in respect of any item of business to be considered at this meeting.	
4.	MINUTES	1 - 10
	To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the open section of the meeting held on 26 November 2012.	
5.	REVIEW ON BULLYING - SCHOOL AND COUNCIL POLICY IN SUPPORTING VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND REDUCING ABUSIVE AND POOR PEER RELATIONS.	11 - 17
	Schools OUT will present. Information is attached.	
6.	REVIEW ON LOCAL AUTHORITY ROLE IN EDUCATION	18 - 29

Item No.

Title

Page No.

The council's role with maintained , academy and free schools - exploring what our governance and influencing levers are in a changing context, and how the council can promote good performance, and tackle poor performance.

Report from LiGU attached.

7. ROTHERHITHE SCHOOL AND SOUTHWARK FREE SCHOOLS

8. WORKPLAN

DISCUSSION OF ANY OTHER OPEN ITEMS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING.

PART B - CLOSED BUSINESS

DISCUSSION OF ANY CLOSED ITEMS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING AND ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR AS URGENT.

Date: 8 January 2013



EDUCATION, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND LEISURE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Education, Children's Services and Leisure Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on Monday 26 November 2012 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02B - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor David Hubber (Chair)
Councillor Rowenna Davis
Councillor Rosie Shimell
Councillor Cleo Soanes
Colin Elliott
Lynn Charlton
Councillor Althea Smith
Councillor Chris Brown

OTHER MEMBERS

PRESENT: Councillor Claire Hickson: Cabinet Member for Communities and Economic Development.
Councillor Dora Dixon – Fyle: Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

OFFICER SUPPORT: Merrill Haeusler: Deputy Director of Children's Services – Education
Kerry Crichlow: Deputy Director Strategy and Commissioning
Colin Gale: Free Healthy School Meals project lead
Graham Sutton: Principal Strategy Officer
Julie Timbrell: Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sunil Chopra and The Right Reverend Emmanuel Oyewole, because he was chairing a community faith meeting. Leticia Ojeda, parent governor representative, also sent her apologies. Councillor

Soanes sent apologies for lateness.

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

2.1 The were no urgent items.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were no disclosures of interests or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2012 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN (CYPP)

5.1 The report was noted and comments made in the following section.

6. SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK AND COLLEGE

6.1 Councillor Claire Hickson; Cabinet Member for Communities and Economic Development, and Councillor Dora Dixon – Fyle; Cabinet Member for Children's Services, drew the committee's attention to the report circulated with the papers. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services observed that one of the biggest commitments made by the incoming Labour administration was the establishment of a £3 million Youth Fund, which has paid for a Southwark Education Maintenance Supplement and a training service. She reported that partly as a result of this Young people Not in Education or Employment (NEETs) are coming down. The cabinet member explained that the service is also helping families to get out of worklessness.

6.2 The Cabinet Member for Children's Services reported that the apprenticeship scheme at the council is going well. An Economic Wellbeing Strategy went to cabinet recently and this includes measures to ensure young people get real work experience. She explained that she recently met with Southwark Youth Council and that there was an exchange of views on the importance of bridging the gap between school and employers through training and work experience.

- 6.3 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Economic Development reported that there is a gap between the London wide and Southwark borough unemployment rate of about 2% and this is quite a challenging gap to close. She commented that young people have a quite straight forward process to negotiate to apply to university from school, however the route to work is more complex and young people do not always know how to access apprenticeships and training, particularly if they are from a less advantaged background. She went on to remark that there is more need for extra support particularly for the less motivated. She commented that there is less unemployment but more long-term employment.
- 6.4 The chair invited Southwark Youth Council (SYC) and committee members to comment. A young person referred to the report on the focus groups that SYC had recently conducted with young people. She reported that young people had identified safety as a number one priority, with decision making as the next highest priority. The chair indicated that the Health and Wellbeing Board might be a good place to raise concerns and both members and officers assured the SYC that the board is very open to hearing young people's views.
- 6.5 A member commented that she is concerned about the young people who may not access SYC. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services commented that the youth service is now focused on localities. She went on to report that there is also a youth bus that goes out to estates and other places.
- 6.6 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Economic Development commented that the council is trying to target long-term unemployment through Job Centre Plus. A member reported that she recently attended a roundtable discussion, but Job Centre Plus was not present. The cabinet member said that she took the members point, and went on to explain that the council cannot force Job Centre Plus to attend, however the council can increase its influence by developing better relationships.
- 6.7 The chair asked SYC members if they have been involved in gathering the 1000 stories for the new Children's and Young People Plan. A young person confirmed that they had, and they are involved in going out and recording stories. She reported that SYC are emphasising the positive as well as the negative. She explained that this is because they want to prevent good services being taken away if they are working well.
- 6.8 A member asked the young people if they feel able to approach the job market and if the Connexions service is assisting. One young person commented that there is a high level of awareness of different types of jobs. Another young person commented at a

national poll identified that getting into work was the fourth most important priority for young people. He reported that his school is organising a business seminar with local providers so that young people can become more aware of the skills needed by employers and the opportunities. A young person added that while retail opportunities were often promoted she would welcome more information about wider opportunities in law, politics or banking, for example.

- 6.9 A young person commented that one of the most important challenges for young people is getting ready for work and being able to contribute to wider society. She commented that the bursaries provided by Southwark are welcome, and went on to suggest that the council contact some of the larger corporations and encourage them to employ Southwark young people.
- 6.10 Charter School's work to arrange placements was cited as an example of good practice by a young person. He reported that they had arranged work experience at News of the World and the Bank of England. He explained that last year they had a careers fair that received feedback from the young people. This year more people are involved from the outside and he is pleased with the progress. He commented that often young people hear of the same jobs coming up and young people would like more variety.
- 6.11 A young person commented that one of the biggest issues is work experience. Often schools provide few or very limited options. She explained that while young people can take the initiative to arrange work experience, many young people found this difficult and they were only sometimes offered one days experience, which was not useful.
- 6.12 The Cabinet Member of Children's Services explained that the council is liaising with Connexions as they are reconfiguring what they offering. The council is encouraging them to offer training and apprenticeships. She also explained that when the council procures large contracts the local authority is asking for the inclusion of apprenticeships and training opportunities. The council is also encouraging business to locate and grow in Southwark. She explained that many of these are construction firms and these will not probably attract women, but the Shard includes a Health and Beauty salon and a florist.
- 6.13 Graham Sutton, Principal Strategy Officer, commented that there is quite a complex picture, and while the council no longer directly influences the provision of employment support, the council does work with Southwark Collage. He explained that apprenticeships offered structured training and the council do know that uptakes are lower in London than the wider UK. Larger employers offer these, however the council would like to see smaller business offer

these too. The council is also promoting the wealth of opportunities for young people.

- 6.14 Merrill Haeusler, Deputy Director Children Services – Education, commented that education are working in partnership with businesses. The education department is also looking at learners who have disengaged and ensuring that there are sufficient providers across Southwark that are providing post 16 training.
- 6.15 A young person commented that often young people do not know what they want to do and of work experience is useful to help them decide. Another young person added that increased awareness of the opportunities available would be helpful, as well as more information on the type of qualifications needed to apply for jobs, for example which A levels which are needed to gain a particular university place.
- 6.16 A young person commented that parents often prefer the more traditional options such as becoming a lawyer or doctor, and creative studies are discourage or often only offered at BTEC. However she commented that there is too much competition at law and it is good for young people to keep their options open.
- 6.17 A member raised a concern about work experience offered that did not then lead to a job and that employers are offering week placements that do not lead to a job. This can be very discouraging for a young person. Davina Bailey, the SYC youth involvement officer, commented that several employers are advertising apprenticeships that are not really providing the training necessary to qualify.
- 6.18 A member encouraged young people to contact her if they wanted work experience in being a local politician, and said that many local members would be willing to assist young people with work experience
- 6.19 The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services commented that work experience is a very important introduction to working life; it is about getting into a routine and introducing yourself to the general skills needed for working life. She explained that she worked in Boots as a young person and found the experience useful. She commented that an apprenticeship is focused on developing particular skills needed for more specialised work, where as work experience or a part time job is good at getting work reading and acquiring general skills. She reported that the council is working with nurseries and encouraging them to train local people in childcare.
- 6.20 Several young people emphasised the importance of work experience. One young person said she did a placement at a

media provider and realised that this was not an area that she wanted to pursue a career in. Another young person commented that her schools careers officer left last year and this has made it more difficult to access opportunities. A young person said that Boots is the wrong place to go as people need something to aspire and motivate them. She went on to comment that work experience needs to be relevant to a college application and that apprenticeships are for later.

- 6.21 A member agreed with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and said that work experience can give a multitude of experiences. She explained that her first work experience was in Sainsbury's stacking shelves and this gave her an opportunity to observe the management structure, to take a disciplined approach to work and develop customer service skills. A youth worker reported that she supports young people at Boots and unfortunately they often do not have the opportunity to observe the wider businesses they are stuck in the back officer arranging stock and on leave this to go on their break. A member commented that if young people are take jobs such as these it is important that they move around different departments and she hoped the council would encourage this.
- 6.22 A young person responded that if you want to make an application to study law then the relevant work experience placement is needed; and that a retail experience will not count is that is not what a university is looking for. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Economic Development said that we need to think about young people who will not get to university too.
- 6.23 A member suggested that young people take part time jobs. A young person responded that she would not be able to take four A levels and do a job and said that she intending to get a job once she had completed her A levels.
- 6.24 The Cabinet Member for Children's Service said that she recently attend an event where young people are given a chance to set up a business for a day. She went on to explain that she is working with London Youth bodies and business support organisations to support young entrepreneurs.

7. REVIEW : BULLYING

- 7.1 The chair invited the young people to give their views on bullying. A young person said that peer pressure is the main issue and this is not direct bullying; but about mental pressure. Another young person agreed and said that this can be sly, for example pretending to be a friend but not really being genuine.

- 7.2 A young person reported that his school uses a box where you can put a slip in talking about bullying , but withhold your name and a teacher will then go and talk to with the named person in a sensitive way . He commented that sometimes group behaviour can be perceived as bullying , even if that is not the intention, for example if someone falls over and then their companions react in a way that makes the person feel bad by laughing.
- 7.3 A young person spoke about his experience of mentoring a younger boy. He visited the counselling programme a Place2be, which really helped. He commented that his behaviour was to do with his home background.
- 7.4 Cyber bullying was raised as an issue of concern and a young person spoke of an image that circulated of a girl, which was not very nice. He reported that the school tackled that very well and as a result relationships improved. A member asked the young people if text and cyber bullying is an area of particular concern and suggested that the committee ask social media and mobile providers to give evidence. She also commented that this is an area that both schools and young people need to work on.
- 7.5 The positive role of School Councils in tackling bullying was cited, however young people spoke about issues outside of school and the 381 bus route was given as an example of poor behaviour. Young people suggested that somebody went on the route to combat bullying.
- 7.6 The education representatives spoke about the video and booklet that Southwark Council produced that is very good.
- 7.7 A member said that her school have instigated a kindness week and added that raising awareness of the different types of bullying; emotional, psychological, physical and sexual is very important in enabling staff to tackle bullying.

RESOLVED

Invite outside organisations and social media and mobile providers to give evidence about their role in tackling cyber bullying

8. LOCAL AUTHORITY ROLE IN EDUCATION

- 8.1 The chair reported that both the Local Government Information Unit (LiGU) and the Local Government Association were doing work looking at this area.
- 8.2 Merrill Haeusler, Deputy Director for Children's Service – Education, commented that the majority of the council's

relationships with schools are very good and they are keen to work with the council She explained that they provide information when requested and are interested in work experience and providing pathways into training and employment. She reported that fewer primaries want to become academies, and went on to report that a recent meeting between the Council Leader and head teachers was positive.

- 8.3 The chair enquired how the council can influence those schools that are not doing so well and the Deputy Director remarked that those schools in an academy chain are less open to influence as the chains have their own ethos. She noted that academies are purposely set up not to be influenced by local authorities.
- 8.4 The chair noted that the council has the power to issues a warning notice to maintained schools, and then asked if the council made a suggestion, and it was not adhered to, would this action be taken. The Deputy Director said this had not been done. She went on to explain that the departments mantra is: support, challenge, intervention. A member asked is the Deputy Director had an open door policy and the officer confirmed that the department does.
- 8.5 An education representative commented that at one point the council had difficulty obtaining information on exclusions. The Deputy Director said that the information is available on exclusions and the Cabinet Member for Children's Service commented that it did take a while to obtain the data. A member commented that her understanding was that Harris Academy took some time to supply this information and their exclusion rates were some of the highest.
- 8.6 A member asked how a complaint would be dealt with by the local authority and the Deputy Director explained that if a parent wanted to complain about a school then they could write to the Secretary of State, or they could approach the council who would pass the information onto the Secretary of State.
- 8.7 A member reported that the Local Government Information Unit (LiGU) has recently produced a report called 'Should we shed the middle tier' about the diminishing role of local authorities.

RESOLVED

Circulate the LiGU report 'Should we shed the middle tier?'

9. REVIEW: UNIVERSAL FREE HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS

- 9.1 The chair reported that he and members of the committee had visited St Francesca Cabrini Primary School. He noted that the committee have now visited a number of schools to consider the

lunches they provide and how they are delivering the new Universal Free Healthy School Meals offer. He commented that a variety of catering methods are used, including in house provision and different external catering companies.

- 9.2 An education representative noted that the universal funding is having the unintended impact of not requiring parents to apply for the free school meal benefit and this is unfortunately affecting the funding that schools receive as free schools meals applications are linked to deprivation funding. Kerry Crichlow, Director Strategy & Commissioning, commented that the council had just received some recent census information which had brought this issue into sharp relief. She went on to report that some schools are managing to record all children receiving this benefit but some are not managing this, and there is a wide spectrum of performance. She reported that the intention is to try to and improve this and review progress in January. An education representative commented that it is important that the council work with the schools to get the most accurate figures possible.
- 9.3 The Director of Strategy & Commissioning was asked by an education representative how the programme links up with work on reducing childhood obesity and she responded that the council is committed to measuring the current cohort of children at entry and year 6. This will give some data on the impact of the free Healthy School Meals programme on reducing obesity.

RESOLVED

The chair indicated that programme should be kept under review for the next 6 months.

10. ROTHERHITHE SCHOOL AND SOUTHWARK FREE SCHOOLS

- 10.1 Merril Haeusler, Deputy Director of Children's Service – Education, referred to the report circulated with the papers and explained that there is no further information on Compass. She explained that Compass's preference is for a Bermondsey site and understands that there is a governance meeting in October. A member asked if the Compass school was factored into the council's calculations and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services explained that the setting up of a free school is completely independent of the council processes.
- 10.2 A member asked what way is the council able to influence the planning of free schools and control provision. The Kerry Crichlow, Director for Strategy & Commissioning, explained that the council's role is very limited and that the council does not have control, however the council can try and influence the process. She went

on to explain that the council does plan for demand and the increasing need for places.

11. REVIEW CABINET RESPONSE: SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND CARERS OF DISABLED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

11.1 The chair noted the cabinet response to the scrutiny review on support for parents and carers of disabled children and young people. He welcomed the resolution to look at establishing a disability register. The Director for Strategy & Commissioning commented that they are looking at a Wandsworth Council pilot which looks at data sharing.

RESOLVED

This will be reviewed later in the administrative year.

12. WORKPLAN

12.1 The workplan was noted.

Meeting ended at 8:42 pm



for teachers



Equality Act 2010

In carrying out their functions, public bodies including all schools will be required to have due regard to the need to:

- 1) Eliminate conduct that is prohibited by the Act, that is discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- 2) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it,
- 3) Foster good relations across all characteristics - between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

www.schools-out.org.uk

classroom OUT

highlighting what's OUT in schools

The Schools OUT Classroom is a brand new, user-led site that contains LGBT related lessons and resources. Site materials cover all Key Stages and include lessons for SEN and mainstream schools that enable teachers to educate students about LGBT lives.

The site was created for busy teachers by busy teachers, with ready-to-go PowerPoint and worksheets and all our lessons have been linked to the National Curriculum to ensure students progress in line with Ofsted expectations.

There are opportunities to comment and rate many of the resources in the Classroom, so you can see through others' experience how various aspects of our lessons have worked or could be improved.

The Schools OUT Classroom is a valuable resource for both you and your class in challenging homophobia and transphobia, raising attainment, learning about diverse LGBT communities and meeting the Public Duty of the Equality Act 2010.

Find this fantastic resource at www.schools-out.org.uk/classroom



Student toolkit

for students



Does your school: Recognise and support you for who you are? Always challenge biphobia, homophobia, sexism and transphobia? Acknowledge and support your family?

If the answer to any of these questions is NO then this guide is for you.

The Schools OUT Student Toolkit is for young people in any British secondary educational setting, who are - or are perceived to be - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual or queer (LGBTQ). It is also useful for your friends and family members. Most of the Student Toolkit is relevant for all schools.

Download the toolkit at www.schools-out.org.uk/STK

Teaching pack

for teachers

- Helps you to tackle homophobia and transphobia and create safer spaces for you and your students
- Includes factsheets on ways you can tackle homophobic bullying, raise awareness of gender identity, use language effectively as well as lesson plans

Download the pack at www.schools-out.org.uk/teachingpack/contents



Climate of homophobic abuse in schools
74% Of teachers had overheard/observed homophobic abuse in their school on a daily/weekly basis.
Prevalence of homophobia survey 2010
www.schools-out.org.uk

64% of young trans men and 44% of young trans women experience harassment and bullying at school from both pupils and school staff.
Engendered Penalties: Transgender and Transsexual
People's Experiences of Inequality and Discrimination.
The equality review
http://www.spectrum-lgbt.org/downloads/reports/equality_review_trans.pdf

Schools OUT is run by volunteers. Our funding comes from individual membership (£20 per annum, free for students), trade union affiliation and ad hoc donations. Membership is open to everybody.

Details of how to join www.schools-out.org.uk

Co-Chairs and helplines

Sue Sanders
(020) 7635 0476
07960 493544
chairs@
schools-out.org.uk

Tony Fenwick
(01582) 451424
07787 194751

Media enquiries:
Nigel Tart
(01273) 298299
07929 271977
media@
schools-out.org.uk

BM Schools OUT
London, WC1N 3XX

What Schools OUT can offer:

- National Curriculum led LGBT-related lesson plans for all key stages
 - Student toolkit
 - Teachers pack
 - Professional support for staff dealing with LGBT issues in schools
- Visit our website at www.schools-out.org.uk

Schools OUT aims:

- To provide both a formal and informal support network for all people who want to raise the issue of homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism in education.
- To campaign on lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans issues as they affect education and those in education.
- To research, debate and stimulate curriculum development on LGBT issues.

SCHOOLS OUT

Working towards equality in education for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people since 1974

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans people are:

black white duel heritage **sons**
aunts mothers sisters brothers
fathers uncles grandfathers
grandmothers **friends** students
teachers customers colleagues
workers **able-bodied** **unwaged**
Jewish Hindu Sikh Muslim
Christian **disabled** **old and young**
living in urban areas **all religions and none**
living in rural areas
every political perspective
women and men and genderqueer

Schools OUT incorporates 'LGBT History Month' and 'A Day in Hand'

12

lesbian
gay
bisexual
trans
history
month

Every February



A DAY IN
HAND

Mission Statement

Schools OUT aims to make schools safe places for all LGBT staff and students, governors and parents to be out and proud. To do this we must raise the visibility of LGBT people. We shall continue to do this through campaigning, training staff and providing LGBT-related resources for the classroom.



Join Schools OUT



Working towards equality in education for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people since 1974

Campaigning

Schools OUT members and supporters are determined that every school should carry out its responsibilities under the 2010 Equality Act. This means eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, religion or whether people are disabled or non-disabled. It also means advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between LGBT people and non-LGBT people. We will challenge any attempt by schools to opt out of these obligations.



Schools OUT launched LGBT History Month; an initiative that has seen institutions around the country celebrate LGBT people throughout the month of February. Each year the number of schools and colleges involved has grown and we aim to make all schools aware of the exciting work being done and encourage even more to join in.

www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk

Training

Our Schools Representative Elly Barnes runs a very successful and highly praised workshop called *Educate and Celebrate* – *How to make your school LGBT friendly*. In 2011 Elly was voted Number One on the Independent on Sunday's Pink List of influential LGBT people.

www.ellybarnes.com

Our Co-Chairs Sue Sanders and Tony Fenwick have many years of experience in staff training aimed at challenging homophobia and transphobia and promoting equality and inclusivity in schools, colleges and universities and can also be booked to come to your institution.

Resources

In 2011 Schools OUT launched The Classroom; a site packed with LGBT-related curriculum resources. The many lesson plans cover all Key Stages and curriculum areas and are linked to the national curriculum. Each has a PowerPoint presentation and secondary lessons include worksheets too. These materials were created by teachers for teachers and have been tried and tested in the classroom. The Schools OUT Classroom is an invaluable resource for both you and your class in challenging homophobia and transphobia, raising attainment, learning about diverse LGBT communities and meeting the Public Duty of the Equality Act 2010. Its new teaching method; 'Usualising and Actualising' enables inclusion of all the diversity groups in every lesson. The TES and Guardian Education have put the Classroom on their websites and the site has already proved enormously popular.



www.the-classroom.org.uk

Join Schools OUT Today

Please support our work by joining Schools OUT today. Your £20 annual membership fee makes a huge difference to the services that we can offer and the publicity that we can put into schools. Becoming a member also means you'll receive an e-newsletter updating you on our activities, keeping you informed of our Conferences as well as giving you a role in helping to shape the future of the organisation.

To join, please visit our website www.schools-out.org.uk and use the paypal button, or complete and return the form below.

Name
Address
Role in School (if applicable)
Mobile Number
Email address

Join Schools OUT

To join, please visit our website www.schools-out.org.uk and use the PayPal button, or complete and return the form below.

- I enclose a cheque payable to Schools OUT for £20
- I will pay by BACS
BACS details 88 16 14 03 (Sort code: 09-01-55)
Bank: Santander.
- International payments (BIC: ABBYGB2LXXX)
IBAN: GB14ABBY09015588161403)

Signature

Please return to: BM Schools OUT, London WC1N 3XX



RAINBOW

Schools OUT is part of the Rights Against Intolerance: Building an Open-minded World (RAINBOW) project. The project connects EU gay, lesbian and trans associations, schools and film/media professionals, who aim to promote the rights of children and young people to be out and proud through education. It will achieve this through studying stereotypes and challenging them. Its outcomes will include films and a toolkit for schools in Italy, The Basque Country, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Bulgaria and the UK. It is funded by the European Fundamental Rights Association.

www.rainbow.ecfa.info

The Prevalence of Homophobia Survey

The NUT Prevalence of Homophobia surveys - carried out since 2007 and ongoing - have found that 74% of teachers had overheard or observed homophobic abuse in their school on a daily or weekly basis. A survey for Transgenderzone in 2008 found that 64% of young trans men and 44% of young trans women experience harassment and bullying at school from both pupils and school staff. Experience shows us that when schools actively seek to challenge discrimination it can be overcome; so LGBT staff and students can feel safe and valued at school. Yet the latest survey in Lancashire shows how little has changed in three years. These surveys may be accessed on the Schools OUT website.

Contact

Co-Chairs (chairs@schools-out.org.uk)
Sue Sanders 07960 493544
Tony Fenwick 07531 183 895
Media (media@schools-out.org.uk)
Sue Caldwell 07817 936152

SCHOOLS OUT

Working towards equality in education for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people since 1974

Make all schools
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
friendly - Join
Schools OUT today!



Announcing... The Schools OUT National Festival February 2013



- Are you thinking of how you cover diversity in your new school?
- Are you developing and coordinating your PHSE work this year?
- Want to learn more about inclusion and diversity through the LGBT lens?
- Do you want to ideas for how to address homophobic and transphobic bullying on your school?
- **Are you a science, technology, engineering or maths (STEM) teacher and think this doesn't apply to you? Think again.**

Save the dates

Schools OUT are running a programme of events for LGBT History Month in 2013. The theme for this coming year will be science, technology, engineering or maths (STEM). These events are designed for all teachers and education professionals.

- **30+31st January** pre conference seminars
- **1st February** event for Higher Education
- **2nd February** Conference for teachers and education professionals (including Schools OUT AGM), Manchester

For more information contact
strategic@lgbtynw.org.uk

Or text 'Schools OUT' to
0781 398 1338 for updates



SCHOOLS OUT

classroom
We embrace diversity and bring the best in everyone

Follow our progress on the LGBT History Month facebook site and Schools OUT website

**Claiming
our history,
celebrating
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SHOULD WE SHED THE MIDDLE TIER?

Report authors: Laurie Thraves, John Fowler
and Jonathan Carr-West, LGiU


UNISON
the public service union


NATIONAL UNION OF
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The middle tier debate

More and more schools are becoming academies and free schools: independent of local authorities and accountable to the Secretary of State. LGiU research, conducted in partnership with the NUT and UNISON, has found that the majority of councils expect that most schools in their area will convert to academy status by 2015.¹

Conversions to academy status, as our research highlighted, are reducing the influence and resources of local government in education. This is making it harder for councils to fulfill their role as the “middle tier” of the education system providing accountability, admissions monitoring, school support services and place planning.

The result, as one education expert argues in this report, is that we are “sleepwalking into the centralisation of the education system” with up to 24,000 schools and governing bodies accountable solely to the Secretary of State.

Key findings

While the contributors to this research came from a variety of different perspectives, and political positions, consensus emerged that some kind of middle tier was required. Admissions and accountability were identified as central to the role of the middle tier since these could not be provided effectively by schools or central government.

Local authorities were seen by many contributors as best-placed to act as a middle tier. There was little appetite for the creation of new bodies, such as regional commissioners or school boards. However, there was agreement that this new middle tier role would not resemble the current local government role.

The middle tier role envisioned by contributors would, in some respects, be a reduced role in comparison with local government’s current responsibilities. There was, for instance,

This diminished role of the middle tier in the school system poses three key questions for policy makers.

First, do we still need a middle tier at all? Second, if so, what middle tier functions currently provided by local government and other organisations need to be maintained going forward? Third, how can these functions be discharged?

These questions have been the subject of extensive, and at times heated, debate. It is for this reason that the LGiU, in partnership with the NUT and UNISON, has produced this report which takes an objective look at the middle tier debate.

The LGiU conducted interviews with leading politicians, researchers and policy-makers who are engaged in this debate and, in some cases, have proposed their own models.

consensus that local government would provide a reduced school improvement and school support offer.

But there were also areas where the middle tier role would be more developed than is currently the case. In particular, there was agreement that a middle tier was a better source of strategic management and accountability for academies and free schools than the Secretary of State.

The arguments assembled in this report should give pause for thought both to education policy makers, who may see reforms undermined by “collateral damage” to important functions such as accountability and admissions, and to advocates of the status quo who have failed to recognise the need for a middle tier that evolves in response to the needs of all local schools.

1 LGiU, NUT and UNISON (2011) *The future of local government’s role in the school system*

At a time when the educational landscape across the country is changing rapidly, debate about these changes is becoming increasingly polarised and shrill.

We urgently need to establish a rounded, pragmatic discussion about the best way to organise middle tier functions within a more diverse landscape of school provision.

We hope that this report will provide a good starting point for that debate.

Interviewees

Interviews were conducted with:

- Melissa Benn, Comprehensive Future
- Cllr Judith Blake, Deputy Leader, Leeds City Council
- Caroline Boswell, Head of the Children and Young People's Unit, Greater London Authority and Head of the Secretariat for the Mayor's Education Inquiry
- Sir Tim Brighouse, Visiting Professor, Institute of Education
- Jon Coles, Chief Executive Officer, United Learning Trust
- Lucy Heller, Chief Executive, ARK
- Robert Hill, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, King's College London
- Debbie Jones, President, Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)
- James Kempton, Director, Kempton Consulting
- Cllr Jane Scott, Leader, Wiltshire County Council
- Cllr Rob Wood, Cabinet Member for Children and Education, Portsmouth City Council

The functions of the middle tier

The LGiU asked interviewees to identify functions that in their view could not be discharged by schools or central government and, in consequence, required some kind of middle tier to fulfil. Functions that emerged in discussion included:

- accountability
- admissions
- school improvement and support services particularly those for vulnerable children and children with special educational needs (SEN)
- school place planning and capital allocation
- funding.

Admissions and accountability were identified as the core functions that could not be provided effectively by schools or central government and required a middle tier.

1. Accountability

Central government does, and should, provide an important element of democratic accountability for the education system. As Lucy Heller argued, any government will want to be accountable for the performance of the school system given the pivotal role learning has in the development of the nation. Indeed, increasingly, central government appears to want to be accountable for individual schools.

However, all contributors to the LGiU research argued that central government alone could not provide effective democratic accountability for the education system. Tim Brighouse argued strongly that it was simply not possible for the Secretary of State to hold each of England's 24,000 schools to account for their performance and so has instead chosen to manage them through contract law via "funding agreements".

Some have argued that governing bodies provide sufficient accountability to the local

communities that schools serve. As Jon Coles noted, however, the independence of governors is an important guarantee of their integrity. Governing bodies can lack this independence as a result of their “critical friend” relationship with headteachers. There is also the question of who should monitor the performance of governing bodies.

Contributors also raised the point that accountability focused on an individual school, rather than a whole-systems level, can have counter-productive consequences.

For instance, as Jon Coles argued, parents may support an exclusion policy that may benefit an individual school but is ultimately detrimental to the education system as a whole. Contributors argued that there is, therefore, a need for a body that is independent of schools and takes responsibility for the interests of all children.

There was broad agreement that independent inspection was not a middle tier function. Several contributors pointed out that Ofsted should provide a necessary degree of independence in holding schools to account for their performance. However, it was also recognised that high-stakes inspections by Ofsted were not sufficient to ensure the day-to-day management of schools. Debbie Jones argued, furthermore, that combining these functions “is a recipe for confusion and poor performance”.

2. Admissions

Admissions was agreed to be one of the most important middle tier functions. Contributors argued that schools cannot fully monitor their compliance with the admissions code without some guarantee of independence. Central government, meanwhile, cannot monitor 24,000 schools from a single Whitehall department.

There was broad consensus from all contributors that a local body of some sort was required to monitor compliance with the code on admissions. Tim Brighouse argued strongly that such a body was required to oversee practice on admissions and ensure equity in the education system.

There was recognition that such robust practice on admissions was not a pro- or anti-competition point. Lucy Heller argued that some local body is needed to stop schools choosing students and make parental choice real.

Similarly, Jon Coles argued that education cannot be about a narrow competition for the most able students. Rather, competition must be set within a robust framework on a level playing field.

3. School improvement and school support services

Councils currently provide a range of support services to maintained schools. These include school improvement, provision of services for vulnerable children, children with SEN, arts and cultural services, curriculum support, behaviour support, library services, buildings maintenance and school dinners.

Contributors were agreed that school improvement was best delivered by schools working with other schools to provide high-quality continuous professional development for teachers.

Debbie Jones, Jon Coles and Tim Brighouse argued that a middle tier can help develop and strengthen these partnerships. The direct provision of these services is likely to be limited going forward as a result of the impact of budget cuts, and academy conversions, on local authority budgets.

Debbie Jones did emphasise, however, that most authorities are retaining a quality team and some are even expanding to provide traded services in other authority areas. In a market scenario, school improvement services must either be high-quality and cost-effective or they will fail.

Several contributors argued that there was a stronger case for a middle tier role in securing critical and specialist services that cannot be provided by individual schools for themselves, in particular services for vulnerable children and children with SEN. However, there was no consensus on how such services should be provided.

4. School place planning and capital allocation

The majority of contributors identified the strategic planning of school places as a middle-tier function. Contributors were agreed that some local discretion on the use of capital funds to create new school places, and take redundant school places out of use, was required if sufficient good-value school places were to be created. Interviewees expressed scepticism that central government could secure sufficient school places without a local partner with local knowledge, connections and influence. Similarly, scepticism was expressed that market forces alone could create and sustain sufficient school places. Contributors noted that the location of free schools did not always appear to take account of need for additional school places.

5. Funding

The introduction of Local Management of Schools led to the replacement of locally-

determined funding for schools with a national funding formula.

Concern was expressed by interviewees about the equity of this funding formula. Tim Brighouse and Jon Coles both expressed concern that similar schools are receiving very different funding. Cllr Scott added that the uncertainty of funding arrangements from 2013 made planning very difficult, especially for vulnerable children and children of military personnel. Small school funding looks set to become another issue.

There was no consensus, however, that current variations in the funding of schools meant that funding should be a middle tier function. Tim Brighouse argued that a nationally-determined formula with a locally-determined element should be introduced to help tackle unfair variation. Jon Coles, however, argued that the problem is not a national formula *per se*. Rather, it is the fact that the national formula was based on local authority allocations at the time the legislation was passed.

Delivering the middle tier

As outlined above, contributors identified some functions that could not be discharged by schools or central government and, in consequence, required some kind of middle tier. This raises the question of how and by whom the middle tier should be organised.

The LGiU asked contributors to the research to identify the organisational means by which middle tier functions could be discharged. These included:

- local government
- local or regional commissioner
- local or regional body
- chains of schools
- school-to-school support.

A number of models have been advanced in the course of the last year. The LGiU conducted interviews with researchers and policy-makers who have made leading contributions to this debate. These include: Robert Hill who argued for education to be part of sub-regional government in an RSA report²; United Learning Trust's Jon Coles who called for a more localised approach to strategic management of academies and free schools; the Greater London Authority's Caroline Boswell who is currently undertaking the Mayor's Education Inquiry that will look at where the Mayor can add value to London's school system; and ADCS which called for councils to use statutory powers and moral influence to hold schools to account when standards decline.³

The LGiU now wants to take an objective look at the advantages and disadvantages of some

2 Robert Hill (2012) *The missing middle – the case for school commissioners*

3 ADCS (2012) *The Missing Link – the evolving role of the local authority in school improvement*

of the different models that have been proposed for a middle tier. In doing so, we recognise that there is no consensus on this, that there will be no perfect solution and indeed that the solution may look different in different parts of the country. We hope that this will provide a stimulus to a better grounded debate across the country.

There was a range of views from the contributors to the research. The majority of contributors, however, saw local government as best-placed to deliver a middle tier. There was no strong appetite for the creation of new bodies, such as regional commissioners or school boards, although a strong interest in working in partnership with these bodies where they exist or evolve in future.

There was disagreement about what this new middle tier role would mean for local government. Some contributors argued that local government would only be able to provide effective, independent challenge once its service provision role had ended. Others, however, maintained that local government's role in the school system could not survive without some kind of provision role.

1. Local government

Middle tier functions have traditionally been delivered by local government. The majority of contributors believed that local government was best-placed to perform a middle tier role. None of the contributors, however, suggested that this would amount to "business as usual" for local government.

Several contributors argued that the creation of a new middle tier was an unwelcome distraction. Melissa Benn and Lucy Heller argued that, in the current economic climate, resources should be prioritised on supporting existing structures. Jon Coles, meanwhile, argued that creation of a new middle-tier creates systems-type challenges where people have different understanding and expectations.

The majority of contributors recognised the importance of local government's democratic mandate and its local knowledge. Cllr Scott argued that local authorities combine the authority of their local democratic mandate with

on-the-ground knowledge and data. This allows local authorities to intervene early before performance issues escalate. Lucy Heller argued that a "regional office" not grounded in local accountability may not have the same credibility.

James Kempton and Debbie Jones also emphasised local government's broader-based understanding of a local area. James Kempton was critical of the way that the national system places influence in the hands of a few high-achieving schools. Local government, in contrast, is closer to people's real lives and priorities. Debbie Jones emphasised that councils are aware of non-education issues, such as the impact of the current welfare reforms on families, and can therefore help to provide effective support.

Several contributors emphasised that local government was already carving-out a new role in education and working pragmatically to support local schools of all types.

Debbie Jones argued strongly that the "important thing is to get on with the business of supporting schools". Good local authorities will continue to fulfill their statutory duties, especially around securing sufficient school places and vulnerable children. Her priority is forging on-going relationships with the family of schools.

Cllr Judith Blake, Cllr Jane Scott and Cllr Rob Wood strongly echoed this view. Cllr Wood emphasised that Portsmouth is committed to working with all schools in the local area. Schools in Portsmouth can, for instance, choose academy status with the support of the council. The council's role is to promote a common vision about what the community wants for its children, based on empirical evidence and sound data. This is done in Portsmouth through an active Schools Forum, a schools standards and improvement group and an education and skills body for employers.

Cllr Blake, meanwhile, pointed out that Leeds City Council maintains a full range of services to schools and the council is talking to the academy sponsors about maintaining these services. Her aim is for the council to achieve a

collective sense of responsibility for the school system and strong leadership in a collaborative structure.

However, there was also recognition that local authorities will face challenges in implementing this new role. Debbie Jones pointed out that there will always be a way to share hard information. However, sharing of soft information and intelligence is much more valuable – but also much harder. Successful local authorities will need to work pragmatically through existing and new frameworks such as federations.

Two contributions posed a significant paradox: that a local body needs to be both independent but also funded in some way by local schools. Currently, local authorities receive a top-slice from the government's grant to schools.

Cllr Blake was clear that local government would face “real and significant” problems in continuing its education functions if a large number of primary schools became academies due to the resources implications. The current “mass experiment” does not, in her view, give local authorities sufficient time to adapt to this changed environment. Jon Coles, however, argued that councils could only be a real provider of an independent accountability function once, as in housing, they no longer had a significant provision role.

Several contributors argued that improvements were needed in the performance of some local authorities. Lucy Heller argued that the effectiveness of some authorities, as much as the number of academy conversions, explained why the middle tier role was not being fulfilled in some cases. James Kempton, meanwhile, argued that, although we must recognise the current success of many local authorities, there is a case for removal of powers where there are unsatisfactory schools.

2. Local or regional commissioner

Directly-elected commissioners are, increasingly, regarded as one way of introducing greater democratic accountability over key services. On 15 November, the public

will elect police and crime commissioners for the first time.

The idea of a dedicated commissioner in education did not receive strong support. Lucy Heller argued that there was little point in “recreating the wheel” by setting up separate local school commissioners when one already existed in local government. As argued above, local government can draw on a more holistic understanding of an area, and more diverse powers, than a specialist education commissioner.

However, some support for the commissioner model was expressed if it operated between central and local government and assumed some of the Department for Education's functions over the local school system. Cllr Rob Wood argued that a commissioner located at this level, appointed by either central government or a group of councils, could usefully oversee strategic governance of all schools, including academies and free schools. Responsibilities could include issues such as school clustering, leadership, sustainability and regulation.

3. Local or regional body

Local or regional bodies play an important role in the governance of education around the world. In some large economies, notably the United States, education is the responsibility of dedicated elected school boards. In others, such as Germany, education is the responsibility of regional rather than local government.

Dedicated local or regional education bodies responsible for education did not receive strong support from the majority of respondents. Jon Coles argued that a local elected school board or similar could help to encourage people to vote on local education issues. However, his preference for driving participation in education decision-making would be improved public awareness of the local government role.

Considerable enthusiasm was expressed for working within existing and emerging regional structures. The majority of contributors were agreed that the UK was becoming more sub-regional. Robert Hill pointed out that there were more sub-regional arrangements with the

creation of new structures such as city region authorities, elected mayors and police commissioners. He argued that these may constitute a “back door” route to elected mayors and education cannot detach itself from this trend.

This analysis was echoed by contributors who described how sub-regionality is emerging organically. Debbie Jones argued that, in her view, there is no need for a middle-tier to necessarily conform to council boundaries. She noted that trading across local authority boundaries is already blurring the boundary between authorities.

Cllr Blake agreed with this assessment. She noted that local authorities will work together at the sub-regional level, as happens in Leeds, where a single authority is not large enough to procure or co-ordinate a service. Cllr Scott concurred with this. She was very happy for Wiltshire to work with neighbouring authorities.

Contributors were also careful, however, to place limits on the power of city regions. Cllr Blake emphasised that individual authorities must be closely involved in the governance of city regions to ensure strong local accountability. This view was echoed by Caroline Boswell who is leading the Mayor of London’s Education Inquiry. Caroline emphasised that the boroughs are the best source of this local awareness and understanding.

The Mayor of London’s Inquiry is focused on the important space that exists between central and local government in London. Caroline argued that creating new school places, a tough challenge for London, is intrinsically linked to policy areas with a strong whole-London dimension such as economic regeneration and transport. Caroline noted that investment in new educational resources, by all schools including academies and free schools, can be a vital part of regeneration.

The Mayor of London will seek to ensure that decisions about the location of new school places have the best possible synergy with other policy areas by sharing intelligence about demand, bringing players together and using his political leadership and influence to support

collaboration and networking. It is not, as noted above, about seeking to create a new bureaucratic tier.

4. Chains

“Chains” of schools are groups of schools that share functions such as procurement, strategic management and human resources.

Some education policy-makers have argued that formal or informal chains at the intermediate level would emerge organically to deliver middle tier functions on behalf of schools. However, as James Kempton noted, there is no evidence that these are emerging. James pointed out that more than half of academies are single schools and, in the case of small chains, are not strong enough to advocate at the centre.

At a national level, some strong chains have developed and are fulfilling key middle-tier functions, in particular school improvement and some school support services. Even in these cases, however, chains are not a replacement for a middle tier responsible for strategic management of the school system. As Jon Coles argued, a key quality of the middle tier is that it is independent of local schools and has a view of the totality of the local education system.

5. School-to-school support

Contributors were, as noted above, agreed that school improvement was best delivered by schools working with other schools. The middle tier role is likely to be confined to developing and strengthening these partnerships. To continue to influence the character of educational provision in their area, Robert Hill argued that local authorities will need to develop a “shared mission” with school leaders and employers around what the key things that they need to do together to improve outcomes.

However, although recognising the benefits of school-to-school support in some key areas, contributors also emphasised that a key quality of the middle tier is independence from local schools and a whole-system view. Peer-to-peer support, although beneficial, cannot provide this kind of strategic oversight and direction.

Summary

This paper aims to contribute to the debate about the middle tier in education in England by asking a number of leading practitioners and commentators for their views.

Our research found that a middle tier is needed for the efficient strategic management of the school system and that local government performs that role well. It is also healthy for democracy, giving local people a say in how their school system is run. There was no support for abolishing the local authority role and replacing it with direct management from Whitehall or with a complex pattern of academy chains.

Contributors did point to the need for central government to want to make local government's middle tier role work. James Kempton asked for central government to "talk up the capacity and power of local authorities" and to tell schools to listen to their local authority. Cllr Scott spoke of the need for central government to be clear about where the current changes to the school

system would lead over a five-year period in order to allow local authorities to manage change effectively.

Local government is central to the network of services that support the local education system. Their middle tier role is a vital complement to: their provision of social care services for children and families; their support for economic development, skills training and working with local employers; and their development of local infrastructure including transport, planning, leisure activities and public protection.

Our research found that, in the absence of a national lead, local authorities are actively seeking out and developing a middle tier role.

As Debbie Jones argued, local authorities need to actively embrace this leadership role if they are to continue to work in support of the interests and welfare of the children and young people that they serve.

Concluding essays

Schools policy needs to come from communities, not Whitehall

Dr Jonathan Carr-West, Director, LGiU. The LGiU is a localist think tank and membership organisation.

The LGiU believes that there are compelling reasons to support a middle tier of governance in the school system.

This is in part a question of practicality. We do not think it is feasible for the secretary of state to directly manage 24,000 schools from Whitehall. As the contributors to this report have demonstrated, there are a range of functions such as accountability and schools place planning that are much better delivered at a more local level.

But it is also a question of principle, or at least of principled pragmatism. As committed localists, we believe that it is more effective and more democratic when decisions are made as close as possible to the people that they most affect and when those people have the greatest possible influence over those decisions.

Schools are a vital part of our communities and schools policy should therefore as far as possible reside in those communities and not in Whitehall.

This commitment to local, community-led schools policy has consequences that are challenging to all sides of the debate. Given the different needs, resources and priorities of communities across the country, it is hard to imagine a one size fits all solution to the problems raised in this report.

Our contributors proposed different ways of organising a middle tier. There was no consensus and we believe this should be welcomed. Each of the solutions proposed had merits and disadvantages. A future system may well be emergent, variable and localised.

There's no reason why a middle tier should be the same in every part of the country. What is important is that we find ways to open up a democratic conversation with people across the country about how they want schools to be organised in their community, for their children.

Don't shed the middle tier

Christine Blower, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers. The NUT represents over 320,000 teachers and school leaders.

I welcome the consensus that without some form of middle tier it is difficult to see how the school system as a whole will function – and that local government is best placed to perform this role. The key role local authorities play in the support system for schools must be recognised. Their role in securing democratic accountability, service provision and efficiency must not be undermined.

The NUT has long championed the vital role of local authorities in education but recognises that successive changes to the system have fatally undermined their strategic role. The NUT believes that it would be a shocking waste of expertise and resources to limit the role of local government still further.

Further, it is the view of the NUT that as national pay and conditions are important for the profession, our clear policy preference would be for all teachers to be employed by the local and diocesan authorities.

Effective commissioning, shared services and collaboration require appropriate funding mechanisms to be in place. The government's cuts, academies programme and drive to maximise delegation to schools have all had an adverse impact on the delivery of high quality support services to schools. Cuts to valuable support services are a false economy

reducing as they do high quality but cost effective support to schools, in particular support for SEN.

To ensure a fair and transparent admissions system all state-funded schools must be included. Any system should be administered and overseen at local level with independent rights of appeal by parents and carers to the schools' adjudicator or SEN appeals tribunal.

The current power of the Secretary of State to exempt some schools from their obligations under the admissions code and to vary the admissions' arrangements should be removed.

There is a great deal of expertise in school improvement among the teaching profession in schools. However, a local authority – rather than an academy chain sponsor or a private consultancy – with its understanding of the context in which its schools operate, is well placed to both co-ordinate school improvement and to provide additional expertise and capacity as required.

Mind the gap

Jon Richards, UNISON National Secretary, Education and Children's Services. UNISON is the UK's largest public service union and represents more than 1.3 million people.

The government's uneasy relationship with the role of local government in education continues. Suspicion remains that some in the government still believe that local authorities' micro-manage community schools and that councils' "education monopoly" must be broken. In reality it has been central government that has been hoovering up powers and increasing control over schools.

The rapid increase in the number of academies and reduced funding has seen key local authority roles, such as performance management and school improvement, diminished. These losses and the changing responsibility for admissions, which ought to be geographic and even-handed, will inevitably lead to an incoherent education system, undermining good government policies on access and social mobility.

It is argued that academies and free schools increase parental choice. However, as initial data seems to suggest that academies in national chains perform better than unaligned ones the government is pushing academies towards these chains. Yet this move runs counter to local innovation and also distances schools from their community as distant head offices begin to exert their control in their long march towards state funded monopolies.

The serious imbalances in the system need to be levelled. Of course central government should set strategic frameworks and be able to intervene if necessary – but how much more? On the frontline, schools should focus on the direct delivery of education, with school staff autonomy but with strong links to the community to ensure accountability. But what of admission, improvement and support services, surely these need to be separate

from schools and central government and be the responsibility of a middle tier?

Alternative middle tier structures also have their problems. How democratic, costly and accountable would appointed school commissioners be?

Elected commissioners may be democratic, but would have weak links with both local support structures and national academy chains (and as mayoral referenda have shown may not be wanted), Ofsted would be conflicted and seems easily influenced by central government.

So unless a better model is proposed, UNISON believes that local authorities remain the best model for the middle tier – albeit one that itself needs to be opened up further to transparent inspection and critical challenge.

The LGiU is an award winning think-tank and local authority membership organisation. Our mission is to strengthen local democracy to put citizens in control of their own lives, communities and local services. We work with local councils and other public services providers, along with a wider network of public, private and third sector organisations. The LGiU convenes the Children's Services Network (CSN), which provides policy briefings, reports and events for children's services professionals.

LGiU

LOCAL GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION UNIT

22 Upper Woburn Place
London WC1H 0TB
020 7554 2800
info@lgiu.org.uk
www.lgiu.org.uk

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