

## **Schools White Paper: The Importance of Teaching**

### **Overview**

The Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, was published on 24 November alongside *The Case for Change*, described as 'an evidence-based publication which outlines the case for change to our schools system'.

In the joint foreword, the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister state that '... what really matters is how we're doing compared with our international competitors. That is what will define our economic growth and our country's future. The truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past.' Citing the most recent (2006) OECD PISA survey as evidence of the UK's decline, they also draw conclusions about the characteristics of the most successful school systems, which the White Paper sets out to emulate: 'This White Paper signals a radical reform of our schools. We have no choice but to be this radical if our ambition is to be world-class. The most successful countries already combine a high status teaching profession; high levels of autonomy for schools; a comprehensive and effective accountability system and a strong sense of aspiration for all children, whatever their background. Tweaking things at the margins is not an option. Reforms on this scale are absolutely essential if our children are to get the education they deserve.'

The White Paper covers teaching and leadership; behaviour; curriculum, assessment and qualifications; the new school system; accountability; school improvement; and school funding. In setting out a major programme of reform for schools, it necessarily also includes some major changes in the role of local authorities (and other bodies). A Schools Bill will follow and most of the proposed changes are intended to be introduced between 2011 and 2014.

### **Briefing in full**

#### **1. Introduction – the future of schools**

This sets out the many acknowledged strengths of schools in England today, but says that 'we can do much better'. Teachers report feeling constrained and burdened by a narrow syllabus, lack of authority and the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils. Headteachers feel constrained to comply with the wishes of government, with too many agencies pursuing different goals and difficulty pursuing their own approach. Schools too frequently adopt an approach aimed at meeting targets, rather than the needs of their pupils – for example, 'teaching to tests' in primary schools and too great an emphasis on GCSE-equivalent vocational qualifications in secondary schools. The White Paper sets out the lessons to be learned from the world's best performing and fastest improving education systems, with the aim of making our system one of the fastest improving – by paying attention to the recruitment, training and practices of teachers and leaders, the standards being set by the curriculum and qualifications, and the autonomy and accountability of schools.

#### **2. Teaching and Leadership**

The most important factor in determining the effectiveness of a school system is the quality of its teachers. Not enough of the most academically able people are entering teaching. There continues to be a struggle to attract enough graduates in shortage subjects like physics, chemistry and mathematics. The government will:

- only fund applicants for the PGCE qualification who have a 2:2 degree, and continue to expand Teach First; provide financial incentives for trainees in the shortage

subjects, and enable 'talented career changers' to become teachers, including a 'Troops to Teachers' programme. Detailed proposals on the funding of initial teacher training will be published in the New Year

- abolish the Teaching and Development Agency and transfer key functions to the DfE; enable more 'on the job' initial teacher training (ITT) which focuses on key teaching skills and managing behaviour; establish a network of teaching schools which brings together the existing training schools which provide ITT and other outstanding schools. The best HE ITT providers will be invited to become university training schools
- from 2011, introduce a competitive national scholarship scheme to support teacher professional development
- encourage schools to make more use of existing pay flexibilities and ask the School Teachers' Review Body to recommend greater freedoms and flexibilities
- shorten and simplify current regulations on teacher competence and review current standards for Qualified Teacher Status
- abolish the GTCE and put new arrangements in place for dealing with professional misconduct and incompetence. There will be a public list of those barred from teaching and there will be no other sanctions (nothing is said about continuing with the current system of teacher registration)
- reform the National Professional Qualification for Headship and increase significantly the number of National and Local Leaders of Education, working with the National College to ensure that they are deployed effectively, often across local authority boundaries
- free head teachers and teachers from bureaucracy and red tape including the removal of declaratory requirements, and specifically the duty on schools to co-operate with local partners to improve the well-being of children, and abolish the requirement on local authorities to produce children and young people's plans. There will be reduced prescription on school governing bodies, and also removal of the self evaluation form. There will be no centralised target setting process. The current financial management standards in schools will be replaced by a simpler version, and much guidance will be withdrawn or simplified, as it is felt to be virtually impossible for even the most conscientious headteacher or chair of governors to absorb it all.

### **3. Behaviour**

Tackling poor pupil behaviour is fundamental to attracting good people into teaching. Amongst undergraduates considering teaching, the most common reason given for pursuing another profession is the fear of not being safe in schools, and many teachers report a lack of appropriate support; and pupils have the right to focus on their studies, free from disruption and bullying. Proposals are intended to strengthen the discipline and the role of teachers and head teachers, whilst making better provision for pupils who are excluded. They include:

- abolishing the current requirement to give 24 hours' notice for detentions
- new guidance on the reasonable use of force by teachers
- strengthening teachers' powers to search pupils
- better protecting teachers from false allegations, including the introduction of reporting restrictions to prevent a teacher's identity being revealed until they are charged with an offence – and consideration of whether such measures should be extended to the wider children's workforce
- extension of head teachers' powers to punish pupils who misbehave on their way to or from school
- rationalisation and simplification of guidance on bullying, with a particular emphasis on prejudice-based bullying
- a stronger emphasis on behaviour in Ofsted inspections

- reform of independent exclusion appeal panels, retaining a review of decision-making but ending compulsory re-instatement of permanently excluded pupils
- requiring local authorities to provide full-time education for all children in alternative provision from September 2011
- extending to PRUs the same self-governing powers as community schools, including over staffing and finance, opening up the market in alternative provision, and extending diversity by allowing PRUs to become Academies and encouraging Free Schools that offer alternative provision and voluntary sector providers
- piloting a new approach to permanent exclusions, balancing head teachers' authority to exclude pupils with responsibility for the quality of the education they receive and what they achieve; schools would be responsible for finding and funding alternative provision (with funding shifting from local authorities to schools), and the academic performance of excluded pupils would count in the school performance tables. Such a change would take time, and involve working closely with schools and local authorities.

#### **4. Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications**

The national curriculum should set out only the essential knowledge and understanding that all children should acquire, and leave teachers to decide how to teach this most effectively. Teachers will take greater control over what is taught in schools and how they teach, and developing new approaches to learning. Qualifications must match up to the best internationally in providing a good basis for the future of education and employment.

- The national curriculum will be reviewed and reformed so that it becomes a benchmark outlining the knowledge and concepts pupils should be expected to master to take their place as educated members of society; the review of the early years foundation stage will report in spring 2011.
- Systematic synthetic phonics is 'the most effective way of teaching young children to read, particularly those at risk of having problems with reading'. Ofsted will enhance its inspectors' expertise in assessing the teaching of reading.
- An English baccalaureate will be introduced which requires a GCSE at grades A\*-C in English, mathematics, sciences, a modern or ancient foreign language and a humanity such as history or geography. Performance tables will specify the number of students achieving the English baccalaureate in each secondary school.
- Schools will be asked to concentrate on mathematics and science but at the same time be allowed space to provide a truly rounded education. There will be an internal review of how schools can improve the quality of all personal, social, health and economics education.
- Reliance is placed on English school performance in comparison to other developed countries through the OECD tests and surveys. Ofqual will measure English qualifications against the best in the world.
- Key Stage Two tests will be reformed but will still be used to measure progress of primary schools as well as individual pupils. GCSEs and A-levels will likewise be reformed. Ofqual is asked to consider the issue of re-sitting large numbers of units at A-level. GCSE courses will be reviewed to remove modularisation. Ofqual will advise on how marking schemes can take greater account of the importance of spelling, punctuation and grammar for examinations in all subjects.
- The Alison Wolf review on vocational education will report in spring 2011, apprenticeships will continue to be supported for 16-19 year-olds.

## **5. New Schools System**

After rehearsing the arguments in favour of increased school autonomy, from overseas and the experience of City Technology Colleges (CTCs) and Academies in this country, a number of proposals are described:

- Restoration of Academy freedoms through removal of requirements that have accrued over time, whilst maintaining a level playing field on admissions, particularly in relation to children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- Rapid expansion of the Academy programme (already extended to primary and special schools through the Academies Act), with all schools identified by Ofsted as good with outstanding features also now automatically eligible, and all other primary and secondary schools able to apply provided they work in partnership with a high performing school or other sponsor to support improvement (the first group of these schools expected to open by April 2011); special schools will be able to apply from January 2011, and the forthcoming Green Paper on SEN and disability will consider how to best to use these new freedoms.
- The lowest performing schools (in all categories), attaining poorly and in an Ofsted category or not improving, will be partnered with a strong sponsor or outstanding school and converted to become Academies; the Secretary of State's closure powers in the Academies Act will be extended to schools covered by a notice to improve.
- Strong and experienced sponsors will be encouraged to play a leadership role in driving improvement of the whole school system, including through leading more chains and federations.
- There will be more encouragement and support, including through the New Schools Network, for those wishing to open Free Schools, with priority for proposals in disadvantaged areas. Free Schools will also drive innovation through University Technology Colleges (UTCs) and Studio Schools. UTCs will be sponsored by at least one local business and a local higher education institution to offer high-quality technical qualifications combining practical education with academic GCSEs; Studio Schools will be 14-19 institutions with an entrepreneurial and vocational focus, with several business sponsors connected to one sector of industry, in which students will spend time working in these businesses whilst gaining qualifications (the first Studio Schools opened in September 2010 in Luton and Kirklees).

### **Role of local authorities**

It is in this chapter that the future role of local authorities is described, in the context of a more autonomous school system. It will centre around acting as champions of children and parents, ensuring that the school system works for every family and 'using their democratic mandate to challenge every school to do the best for their population'. LAs' strategic role includes 'bringing together all services for children in a local area so that every child is ready and able to benefit from high quality teaching in excellent schools', and they will be given progressively greater freedom as targets, regulations and ring-fencing of funds are removed. LAs' key roles will include:

- promoting a good supply of strong schools, encouraging the development of Academies and Free Schools which reflect the local community
- ensuring fair access to all schools for every child
- supporting vulnerable pupils, including looked after children, those with Special Educational Needs and those outside mainstream provision
- supporting maintained schools performing below the floor standards to improve quickly or convert to Academy status with a strong sponsor

- develop their own school improvement strategies, marketing their services to all schools, including beyond their geographical area.

LAs will be expected to encourage good schools to expand and encourage Academies or Free Schools to meet demand, focusing on supplying enough good places rather than removing surplus places. Where a new school is needed the preference will be an Academy or Free School; the competition process for new schools will be simplified, and if LAs are unable to identify a suitable sponsor the Secretary of State will work with them to find one.

LAs will continue to lead the coordination of admission arrangements for all schools. The requirements to establish an admissions forum and to submit an annual report to the Schools Adjudicator will be ended, with responsibility for making the process as fair and simple as possible for parents and pupils resting with LAs. The Adjudicator will review specific complaints about admission arrangements for all schools, including Academies and Free Schools. The Admissions Code will be simplified, with consultation in the new year, so that the new Code can be in place by July 2011; it will retain the principles and priorities of the current Code, including provisions for looked after children and pupils with a statement of SEN, and consultation will include the possibility of allowing Academies and Free Schools to give priority to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. LAs will also retain responsibility for school transport arrangements which promote fair access.

Alongside the key roles of the Lead Member for Children and the Director of Children's Services, the White Paper draws attention to the role of other councillors engaged in the scrutiny function in focusing on issues of local concern. LAs will be expected to take action over concerns about the performance of any local school, through different channels in the case of Academies and Free Schools, and will, over time, play a role in commissioning new provision and the transition of failing schools to new management; the DfE will consult LAs and Academy sponsors on the role of LAs as strategic commissioners when all schools in an area have become Academies.

LAs will continue to ensure that disabled children and those with Special Educational Needs can access high quality provision that meets their needs, and will continue to be responsible for funding provision for pupils with statements of SEN; they will be given more freedom to develop new and innovative approaches to providing services for vulnerable children. LAs' role in relation to broader children's services will continue, including acting as corporate parent for looked after children, with a key role in improving their educational outcomes (but the duty to publish a Children and Young People's Plan will be scrapped, as will the duty on schools to cooperate with partnership arrangements). They will also continue to secure the provision of education for young people in custody. And their broad responsibilities for safeguarding will continue – and will develop in light of the Munro review.

Whilst the majority of schools remain as LA maintained schools their funding will be routed through LAs, but it is envisaged that authorities' role will increasingly move towards strategic commissioning and oversight as Academy status becomes the norm. The requirement to appoint a school improvement partner for every maintained school will be removed, along with LA-level targets, and authorities will have increasing freedom to define their own role in school improvement. The Government will welcome a more diverse approach to the provision of school improvement services, and anticipates that school-to-school support will play an increasing part in LA strategies, making more use of National Leaders of Education and encouraging federations.

## 6. Accountability

Schools should be accountable for achieving a minimum level of performance, but current duties, requirements and guidance will be reduced so that, over time, all schools will have the freedoms that Academies currently have. In place of central requirements – such as every school having an improvement partner, and having to complete a self evaluation form – a comprehensive range of information about each school will be made available to enable parents and the public to hold schools to account. All the information which underpins government statistical publications (for example data on attainment in specific subjects, trends over time, class size, attendance, pupil characteristics and financial information) will be published in a standardised, easily accessible online format. Schools will be required to publish a range of information online (for example on admissions, the curriculum, behaviour policy, and how the Pupil Premium is used). Parents will have a route to complain about problems, but recent legislation giving the Local Government Ombudsman a role will be repealed. DfE will work with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to find ways of publishing data on 16-19 education and training that enables parents and students to compare school sixth forms with other post-16 providers.

The performance tables will be reformed (Prof. Alison Wolf has been asked to bring forward recommendations on how best to recognise vocational qualifications in the tables), and the 'contextual value added' (CVA) measure will be dropped in favour of an emphasis on the progress made by pupils. There will be a focus on how well disadvantaged pupils do, with specific reporting measures in the tables showing the performance of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium, and a review of performance measures for those special schools whose intake performs in the main below the levels of National Curriculum tests or GCSEs; the forthcoming Green Paper on SEN and disability will consider how to record in the performance tables the progress of the lowest-attaining 20 per cent, many of whom have additional learning needs.

Ofsted will consult on a new inspection framework, to come into force from Autumn 2011, with a focus on just four things: pupil achievement; the quality of teaching; leadership and management; and the behaviour and safety of pupils. Schools will not be required to complete a self evaluation form, but the DfE and Ofsted will ensure that they set the same expectations of schools, reflecting the starting point of pupils at the school and expected levels of progress during schooling. There will be a highly proportionate approach to inspection, with no routine inspection of schools judged outstanding from Autumn 2011 unless there is evidence of decline or widening attainment gaps; schools judged inadequate will receive termly monitoring visits to assess improvement, and there will be differentiation within the 'satisfactory' category between schools which are improving and those which are stuck. Schools will be able to request an Ofsted inspection if they feel the last judgement is out of date, and Ofsted will be able to charge for this service.

There will be a new minimum, or 'floor' standard, which schools will be expected to meet: for secondary schools it will be 35 per cent of pupils achieving 5 A\*-C grade GCSEs including English and mathematics and pupils making progress between key stage two and key stage four at the national average rate; for primary schools it will be 60 per cent of pupils achieving level four in both English and mathematics and the national average proportion of pupils making the expected progress between key stages one and two. In future, the floor at secondary level will include science, and the floor standard will be raised over time as the system improves. It is acknowledged that schools below the floor standard will be in different situations, and there will be a differentiated approach to supporting their improvement.

The DfE will work with the National Governors Association and others to clarify governing body accountabilities and responsibilities to focus more strongly on strategic direction.

Schools will be encouraged to appoint trained clerks, the National College will offer high-quality training for chairs of governors, and efforts will be made to encourage more business people and professionals to volunteer as governors. Schools will be able to establish smaller governing bodies, with appointments primarily focused on skills – while retaining at least two parent governors; schools with a majority of governors appointed by a foundation will continue to do so.

## **7. School improvement**

The primary responsibility for improvement rests with schools, and the government aims to create a system which is more effectively self-improving, rather than using a centralised approach. Schools will be expected to set their own improvement priorities, choose their own external support and determine how to evaluate themselves. Publication of appropriate information and data will enable schools to identify other schools from which they might learn. The number of National and Local Leaders of Education (successful head teachers with a proven record of supporting improvement in other schools) will increase from 1,154 to around 3,000 over the next four years, and a network of Teaching Schools, with outstanding and innovative practice in teaching and learning, will be established to lead system-wide improvement in an area, with their role growing over time. The Green Paper on SEN and disability will consider how to support the identification and sharing of excellence in teaching for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

From next year, the DfE will publish ‘families of schools’ documents grouping similar schools in a region and providing detailed performance information, enabling schools to identify others which are contextually similar, but may be in a different authority, from which they might learn. The new Education Endowment Fund, to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in underperforming schools, will be £110 million and ‘will run throughout the course of the next spending period and beyond’; it will encourage innovative approaches from schools, local authorities and others, and funded ideas will be evaluated and shared widely. There will also be a new collaboration incentive worth £35 million a year, which will reward schools that support weaker schools to demonstrably improve their performance whilst also improving their own.

As National Strategies and other field forces come to an end, the DfE will support a new market of school improvement services with a wider range of providers and services – including the possibility of local authority services being traded. Where a primary or secondary school is below the new floor standards, or if Ofsted judges a special school to require a notice to improve or special measures, the DfE will ensure that there is focused intervention and support, working with schools and local authorities to ensure there is a comprehensive plan for turning problems round (including an experienced professional to act as lead adviser to implement the plan). Where this does not lead to adequate improvement, further intervention will be required, including conversion of schools into Academies, partnered with a strong sponsor or outstanding school. If Academies or Free School fail to meet floor standards, the response will be similar, including the possible replacement of the sponsor. If school sixth forms fall below the minimum levels of performance agreed for all post-16 provision they will be subject to intervention, and possible withdrawal of funding.

## **8. School funding**

The Government proposes to take action to end the current variation in funding between similar schools in different areas, to ensure that more of the money allocated on the basis of need reaches schools, and to equalise post-16 funding across providers.

The new 'Pupil Premium' (see 'related briefings'), providing additional money for each deprived pupil, will be distributed in addition to the underlying school budget from 2011-12, and will rise to £2.5 billion per year by 2014-15. Whilst head teachers will be free to decide how to use this additional funding (*i.e.* it will not be ring-fenced), performance tables will include information about the achievement of eligible pupils.

There will be consultation in Spring 2011 (following discussion with a range of partners, including LAs) on the introduction of a new national funding formula for schools which is intended to be clearer, more transparent and fairer than the present system; it will be introduced with transitional measures to minimise disruption and undue turbulence. It is intended to replace the Young People's Learning Agency with a new Education Funding Agency (EFA) as an executive agency of the DfE with responsibility for the direct funding of Academies and Free Schools and all 16-19 provision; the EFA will also distribute resources to local authorities for them to pass on to LA maintained schools. The DfE is reviewing the calculation of the additional funding received by Academies and Free Schools for the services which maintained schools receive from LAs to ensure that it is fair, and the reform of school funding will take account of the needs of vulnerable pupils, such as those with complex Special Educational Needs, who are the responsibility of LAs. Subject to the outcome of the proposed trials, it is anticipated that in the longer term funding for alternative provision will go directly to schools, which will assume responsibility for pupils they exclude.

The commitment to all young people staying in education and training to age 18 by 2015 is to be underpinned by a simple post-16 funding system which will bring the funding levels for school sixth forms into line with colleges; this will begin in 2011-12 and will be complete by 2015, with transitional protection for schools facing significant changes.

In order to maximise the funding going straight into schools' budgets, the Government is to 'reduce all the Department for Education's other activities, programmes and initiatives by more than half over the next four years' (there is no further detail of what this means). Guidance on LAs' claw-back of school budget surpluses will be reviewed, with consultation on making changes from 2012-13 and removal from 2011-12 of the requirement for LAs to have a claw-back mechanism (though it is acknowledged that there will continue to be situations where claw-back is appropriate). The current Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS) will be replaced with a simpler standard during 2011-12, and schools are encouraged to obtain the services (shared or full time) of a high quality business manager to assist with financial management, and save head teachers' time. It was anticipated in the Spending Review that schools should be able to save at least £1 billion on procurement and back office spending by 2014-15.

Finally, the announced 60 per cent reduction in education capital spending will lead to expenditure being prioritised to address the poor condition of some schools, and to ensure that there are enough places for the predicted increase in pupil numbers, particularly at primary level.

## **Comment**

The White Paper sets out a quite radical set of proposals, with the aim of lifting aspiration, raising standards, increasing social mobility and, specifically, improving the nation's position in the international 'league table' of school improvement. The most recent (2006) PISA survey of student achievement in OECD countries is cited as evidence of our recent decline – and it will be interesting to see what the new PISA survey shows, to be published on 7 December. In addition, the DfE has published *The case for change* alongside the White Paper, which draws together a wide range of evidence, much of it from more successful jurisdictions overseas, to demonstrate that the proposals are the right ones. But previous



White Papers have had a similar aim, and have often been supported by evidence, and importing ideas and approaches from abroad will not be sufficient without recognising that the social and historical context is often different.

Much in the White Paper is to be welcomed: for example, the emphasis on teaching, improving the status of teachers, and restoring their scope for exercising their professional judgement; the reduction in the Government's management of the system from the centre; the recognition that collaboration is a powerful force for change, and the focus on improving the attainment of disadvantaged children and young people.

But there are tensions: there will clearly be central prescription on some aspects of what and how to teach, and changes in examinations which have attracted criticism from teacher unions and head teacher associations; there is a view of how 'good schools' do things which partly underlies increasing their autonomy, but there are also academically successful schools which are insular, exclusive and lack a broader sense of social responsibility; and the ambition for the disadvantaged appears to lack sufficient understanding of the challenges faced by many children and young people, and by many schools whose intakes are significantly unbalanced.

And some aspects of the White Paper are problematic: increasing school autonomy does not necessitate breaking up the system into its component parts – and many schools clearly feel this strongly, so there is a clear sense of 'fracture'. The diminishing role of local authorities threatens to reduce coherence, as well as local accountability. Some of the detail remains quite sketchy, and some issues await further consultation (though mostly fairly brief). The forthcoming Education Bill will doubtless generate a lively debate, but the White Paper suggests the Secretary of State has already decided what he's going to do; the interesting question will be to what extent schools follow the path he is indicating.