



Education Politics

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As politics is suspended and the summer dominated by the Tory leadership campaign, discerning exactly how education will fare under Truss is mainly surmise. There are pointers though.

- Education was not seen as a priority by Truss in her leadership campaign. After all her voters have a high proportion of the privately educated and parents who send their children to private schools. She did raise the issue of grammar schools in her campaign.
- The education bill has been suspended and is being 'reviewed'. It certainly was a dog's breakfast opposed from all sides for different reasons. What emerges from the review will be critical in determining her approach
- With tax cuts high on the agenda, massive increases in energy costs, and unfunded pay increases, education cuts are likely to be the most visible effects of her policies. We need to support and push forward campaigns against cuts and of course for fair pay for education staff. It is important that the NEU et al does not simply accept an increase without significant central government funding or the unions will be agreeing to job cuts, less PPA time, cover, increased class sizes, and consequent increases in workload.
- The ministerial appointments to the DFE are concerning. Two of the junior ministers are strong grammar supporters. It looks as though the issue of selection, 11plus, comprehensive education etc will rear its head yet again, partly it must be said Labour never finally closed the door on it and thought it acceptable that those diehard authorities who refused to go along with Shirley Williams's circular should be allowed to continue with the policy. We should be prepared for more activity on this front.
- In HE admissions, fees, the demise of degree courses which do not deliver paid work', the casualisation of labour, job cuts and redundancies will continue be to the focus of union action and campaigns. FE cuts will echo those in schools and HE too.

Labour in the meantime does not want to be seen to show solidarity with unions taking action, does not want to complete the job on grammar schools and certainly is shying away from the debate on school structures. Cuts in provision are likely to be the main and only focus for the front bench if their current record is anything to go by. This, in spite of the formation of possibly the most divisive government we have known.

The Holland Park debacle, which may be successful in getting better consultation over changes of school governance in future through judicial review, shows how isolated resistance through strikes and parental campaigns is futile. Unless we can learn lessons and apply them nationally through campaigns such as GUBOS, school after school will be picked off. A combination of powers now in the hands of the DFE who can impose governors, the RSC who can nominate a MAT for a school with only derisory consultation, OFSTED who can deem a school inadequate and therefore ripe for absorption into a MAT and the MATS themselves eager to expand and grow, make anything but mass opposition ineffective.

For that reason, the unaccountable top-down nature of the system now in place must be the target of GUBOS. It has to be about giving unions, communities, students, parents back a voice in all aspects of schooling as much as it is about anti-academisation. We must raise these aspects of our campaign through the others which will no doubt arise on cuts, pay, selection etc.

James Whiting, SEA Secretary

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About Education Politics

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The Schools White Paper (2022) and ‘regimes of truth’

In this polemical piece, we argue that policies constitute and are constituted by ‘regimes of truth’. We explore the politics and philosophy of the Schools White Paper (Department for Education, 2022). Using an analysis of the vocabulary deployed, we try to lay bare the taken-for-granted assumptions, the ‘truths’, on which the White Paper is based and which it seeks to promulgate. We contrast this occasionally with snippets about education as experienced in Finland. The purpose of this is to highlight that other ways of thinking and doing are possible in the contemporary world. Having explored the politics and philosophy of the White Paper and considered, briefly, curriculum, assessment and behaviour, we argue that the policy of turning every school into an academy is an integral part of the educational approach of the White Paper. The structure is not an optional add-on. Rather, it occupies the same political and philosophical space, is situated in the same ‘regime of truth’, as the rest of the White Paper.

A right-wing ‘regime of truth’

All societies including our own have ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault, 1979), by which we mean discourses that shape how and what we think, that function as if they were true. Such discourses – thought systems composed of ideas, outlooks, beliefs and practices – construct both us and the wider social processes that legitimate current taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world and the associated relations of power (Povey, Adams & Everley, 2017). Policies are very specific and practical ‘regimes of truth’; that is, the ways in which policies are spoken into being and spoken about, their vocabularies and so on, provide ways of thinking and talking about policies that make them sound reasonable, sensible, unchallengeable and common-sense. Government education policies, currently framed by and within a right-wing political philosophy, operate in that way.

Thus, in the context of this edition

of FORUM, even though research shows that academies do not perform better than local authority schools and indeed, that, averaged out, they do worse, the press release for the new White Paper establishes a different ‘truth’:

By 2030 all children will benefit from being taught in a school in, or in the process of joining, a strong multi-academy trust, which will help transform underperforming schools and deliver the best possible outcomes for children. (Department for Education et al., 2022, n.p.)

The unquestioned and unquestionable ‘regime of truth’ is that schools or standalone academies joining multi academy trusts (MATs) is an unmitigated good; that ‘strong’ is a key, valued qualifier in schooling; that there are underperforming schools that need to be transformed and this is a significant concern within contemporary schooling; that the required transformation can be achieved by schools being forced into MATs; and that education is to be understood as a process of delivering outcomes. We challenge each of these ‘truths’ and argue that their concatenation is not accidental but has deep political and philosophical roots.

The White Paper: what is education?

To understand why the policy forcing all schools to join MATs is a fundamental plank of the government’s educational agenda, we need to unpack what the view of state education is that the White Paper promotes (Department for Education, 2022). A useful place to start is to look at the vocabularies that structure its ‘regime of truth’. ‘Maths’ occurs 46 times and ‘numeracy’ adds a further 30. ‘Literacy’, ‘reading’, ‘writing’ and ‘English’ occur 40, 32, 13 and 22 respectively. ‘Creativity’, ‘thinking’ and ‘critical’ applied to thinking occur not at all. ‘Play’ also is never mentioned and ‘happy’ is only ever used (3 times) in the context of future lives. ‘Trust’ which occurs a massive 138 times only ever refers to groups of academies – if this were not tragic, it would be comic. Compare our proposed ‘fully trust led system’ (Department for Education, 2022, p.2) with a view of Finnish schooling from an observer from the United States:

Trust. This was perhaps the greatest difference I observed. The Finnish government trusts their municipalities, the municipalities trust school administrators, administrators trust teachers, teachers trust students, and in return, parents and families trust teachers. There is no formal teacher-evaluation system. Teachers, similar to doctors in the U.S., are trusted professionals. (Faridi, 2014, n.p.)

The same observer notes the happiness found in Finnish schools. Our children, in contrast, are amongst the least happy in the world (Reay, 2022) and Britain’s schoolchildren are suffering from an epidemic of anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts (Marsh, 2021).

But back to the White paper and the ‘truths’ embedded in its vocabulary. The curriculum is narrow and narrowly focused on the acquisition of knowledge (9 occurrences) and skills (16) with pupil understanding referred to just once. Whilst it lacks any interest in creativity or critical thinking, sport (3) and music (2) do get a look in (within a single paragraph) but we were unable to find any reference to practical or vocational aspects of the curriculum. A feature of the curriculum in existing MATs has been its restricted nature. A school principal on researching a local MAT he might join said:

It’s just shocking. There’s no drama. There’s no music. There’s nothing out of school that’s going on. (quoted in Greany & Higham, 2018, p 90)

The White Paper does not comment on the controversial curriculum changes made since 2010. They have all become part of the ‘regime of truth’ and, in case schools should seek to try alternatives, the changes are all subject to external tests to make sure schools comply. Synthetic phonics, the rote learning of multiplication

tables, grammar taught out of context, compulsory Victorian literature as opposed to female and black writers, the down grading of speaking and listening and hence of classroom talk, the requirement to write about science practical skills rather than demonstrate them, are all examples of how a narrowed, one-dimensional curriculum is now accepted as a ‘truth’. Even delivery of the government’s highly criticised (Duckett, Tatlow & Whiting, 2019) technical education agenda does not get a mention. The state educated pupil is to make do with mathematics and English – there is no mention even of history let alone philosophy or sociology – subjects which might encourage learners to think critically about the world around them and their place in it.

At the heart of the act of teaching is a relationship of love – ‘a mixture of agape and philia’ (Povey & Angier, 2021, p.25), that is, goodwill, benevolence, delight and affection. This involves responding to learners, and the learning community which they form, with respect, reciprocity and creativity. But not so in the White Paper’s ‘truth’. There is to be ‘a new arms-length curriculum body’ (Department for Education, 2022, p.10) which will deliver

packages of optional, free, adaptable digital curriculum resources and video lessons that are effectively sequenced to help teachers deliver an evidence-based, high-quality curriculum...so teachers can concentrate on delivering lessons. (p.28)

Curriculum design is an ‘expert skill’ (p.27) and teachers thinking for themselves and responding creatively to learners is a waste of their time: they are simply ‘reinventing the wheel’ (p.27). Since reducing teacher workload is an Ofsted criterion, it is difficult to imagine that headteachers who do not enforce the use of the new resources will escape penalty.

In the White Paper, the current testing and examination regime is completely unproblematised: ‘We will maintain our current system of primary assessment and world-class GCSEs and A levels’ (Department for Education, 2022, p.31). This despite the nature of what is measured in these tests and how norm referencing and similar practices at GCSE and again at A level ration the number of pass and higher grades. The unjust nature of our norm referenced examination and assessment process was exposed during the pandemic when attempts to use it to moderate teacher awarded grades led to an outcry. But applied to examinations it is hidden and therefore accepted by parents and pupils as fair. Ironically, the White Paper sets a target of raising the average GCSE Maths and English GCSE by half a grade. This does not correlate to a rise in ‘standards’, although this is to be accepted as a ‘truth’, because current GCSE grades are not criterion referenced. Ofqual could simply just increase the pass rate. Tim Brighouse and Mick Waters (2021) argue that:

All externally validated tests and exams should be criterion referenced. We have made the case for replacing a variable and unreliable norm referenced test and exam system, which requires a given number of children to succeed or fail with criterion referenced assessment... (Brighouse & Waters, 2021, p.590)

The assessment regime does not have the broad acceptance that the White Paper implies.

There is an obsession in the White Paper with behaviour (32 occurrences): scholarships are to be provided for teachers ‘who want to develop expertise in high-quality teaching practice’ but, almost unbelievably, this is illustrated by ‘such as behaviour management’ (Department for Education, 2022, p.20). Relationships are never mentioned. Current understandings of ‘behaviour’ in English schools led in 2018-2019 (the last year for which figures are currently available) to 7980 permanent exclusions; the figure for Scotland was 5 (John, 2022). Reports from teachers and parents suggest that the behaviour demanded, in very many cases, includes, for example, instant compliance to orders and only speaking when invited by a teacher to do so.

A major focus of the White Paper is initial, early career and continuing teacher education. In 2021, the government carried out a market review into initial teacher training (sic) to which initial teacher education providers from across the university sector expressed their dismay. The Russell Group responded to the consultation on the ITT Market review with the following:

There is a very clear risk that, in England, the professional body of teachers will in future generations be replaced with a body of executive technicians. Such an outcome would make teaching an occupation that is unlikely to attract high-quality graduates; would provide a limited and limiting capacity for schools to respond to new challenges as they arise; and would have significant long-term impacts on teacher retention and wellbeing. (Russell Group, 2021, p12)

The model of pedagogy the Department for Education is attempting to promote through its core content framework, alongside its narrow factual curriculum, is instructionist and mechanistic, concerning itself mainly with memorisation, retrieval, and behaviour management. It omits any reference to child development or the social context of education. ‘Truths’ related to this technicist approach abound in the White Paper, with, for example ‘the delivery of new, cutting edge, intensive training and practice activity’ (Department for Education 2022 p.23) within the initial education of teachers. A new ‘minimum quality threshold’ will be set with the re-accrediting of all Initial Teacher Training providers against this ‘higher standard’ (p.23). To date, only one third of university teacher education courses have been reaccredited, often because the materials they intend to use do not match the Department’s intentions. At the same time teacher recruitment is in crisis.

Thus there is no sense in the White Paper of education understood as a moral enterprise, a shared good for the benefit of all. Rather it is understood as something ‘delivered’ – the White paper is very keen on delivery (94 occurrences), by itself, by its programme, by teachers – against ‘standards’ (44 occurrences) and measured only by examination results (with no apparent understanding that, in at least some cases, these are not criterion referenced and so, as we saw above, some children are structurally guaranteed not to make the highest grades). Education is portrayed at a national level as a tool to improve the performance of the economy (see Jackson, 2022, p. 29, for a brief discussion) – the wider benefits of pupils meeting the government’s ambitions ‘are estimated to be worth at least £30 billion each for the economy’ (Department for Education et al., 2022, n.p.). Success is only ever success for an individual, never for a community. This individualisation of what is valued is at the heart of the academisation programme. During the period of academisation, schools have become more and more unequal (Greany & Higham, 2018) and the experience for working class children more alienating than ever (Reay, 2017).

A ‘truth’ of the White Paper is that the education envisaged is fair and that all children are included. But despite its title including ‘opportunities for all

(p.1) and the first sentence of its executive summary including reference (p.8) to 'levelling up' (11 occurrences), there is not a single occurrence of 'race', 'ethnic', 'black', 'gender', 'social class' or 'poverty', this despite the overwhelming research evidence that these are all sites of systematic disadvantage in schooling systems world-wide. Individual pupils may be 'disadvantaged (32) or 'vulnerable (20); but the social roots of these conditions is entirely absent. This gives the lie to another 'truth': that the White Paper is based on 'evidence' (70 occurrences) and can be described as having a 'rigorous, evidence-driven approach' (p.23).

So why are MATs integral to supplying and supporting this agenda?

There are many good reasons to oppose academies, their absorption into MATs and their spread: overall, they do not increase attainment; academies employ more unqualified teachers than maintained schools; teachers are paid less but CEOs of MATs are paid (in some cases much) more; excessive expenditure, including on luxuries for senior staff, is common; and the allocation of contracts to family members or other personal connections is becoming rife - see the Anti Academies Alliance Fact Sheet (print (antiacademies.org.uk)) which draws on a variety of reputable sources. The programme is also incredibly expensive. According to research the National Education Union conducted in 2019 (NEU, 2019), the government wasted over £300 million on free schools, UTCs and studio schools which either closed or never saw the light of day. In addition, the marketing of and competition between schools is a fundamental principle of academisation and will continue, with the consequential dehumanisation of children who become known as numbers, an entry on a spreadsheet or a plot on a two-way grid, (Povey & Angier, 2021) and are seen as having market value or otherwise .

The features of MATs that make them integral to supplying and supporting the philosophy and associated practices of education as promulgated by the White Paper are structural: they are in no sense accountable to local communities, parents or, indeed, children. It is the absence of any sort of local democratic control that makes MATs so well adapted to implementing the agenda of the White Paper.

In contrast to maintained schools, where decisions are taken by governors appointed through an open process, academies are run by 'trustees', whose opaque appointments are not subject to openness rules which apply across other areas of public life. (West & Wolfe, 2018, p.5, quoted in the Anti Academies Alliance Fact Sheet)

The White Paper proclaims 'It is only through a collaborative system in which everyone involved in education plays their part that we will achieve our literacy and numeracy mission' (Department for Education, 2022, p.11). The word 'collaborative' implies a partnership between schools but this is far from the model of how the 'trust led system' is designed to work. If it were genuinely partnership working, our system would change and develop in response to innovations on the ground rather than have curriculum, pedagogy and assessment imposed from the top.

In their report *Hierarchy, markets and networks*, Greany and Higham (2018) identify other, more autocratic features of MATs:

This chapter...challenges the notion that such arrangements are partnerships. Instead, we illustrate how MATs are being incentivized and required to adopt hierarchical and increasingly standardized approaches that limit the autonomy and agency of individual schools.' (p.93)

They conclude that MATs increase levels of hierarchy in localities whilst at the same time fragmenting the system. They quote a regional MAT CEO who sums up how they operate:

We know that some of the most successful [MATs] don't muck about with thinking about autonomy. Let's not kid ourselves. We're not in this to be autonomous. It's plan A, and that's what everybody does. (p 88)

In a previous era when state schooling was provided by Local Education Authorities, some provided innovative, progressive policies - for example, the Inner London Education Authority set up and maintained a community theatre, supported all attainment grouping and ran a programme of anti-racist education (see, for example, <https://smilemaths.wordpress.com/>). Others allowed individual headteachers to pursue such policies (see, for example, Burke, 2004). None of this would be possible in a fully trust led system. Under the proposals in the White Paper, central government would have control over virtually every aspect of schooling, vastly increasing the power of the Department for Education and giving communities no say at all. The Department's 'regime of truth' refuses to acknowledge there is more than one perspective on education: there is only one way of organising a curriculum,

one way to effectively assess pupils and, perhaps most worryingly, one acceptable pedagogy.

There are two ways of ensuring that the Department's agenda and nothing but their agenda is 'delivered'. One, totally anathema to the Conservative Party, is for the state to control and, for example, issue all curriculum materials as has happened in some other countries. The Tories' way is more like the London Bus model. The route and fares are decided by the state along with health and safety regulations and payment methodology. The buses are run by large multi-national companies who pay the workers and keep the profits once the contract has been agreed. This is not too dissimilar from how MATs operate in delivering the government's ideology. The White Paper's reference to the necessity of having 'strong' trusts indicates the government's intention to whittle down the current 1269 trusts to the 'strong' few. Along with Sainsbury's, Tesco and Morrisons, there will be a Harris, an Outwood and a Star in every town.

MATs do not operate under an agenda over which they have no control. The Department have employed MAT CEOs in every part of the system, not only to advise but act as members of panels implementing the agenda. They are the government's go to people, instead of subject associations, trade unions, professional bodies and most academics. They are the new blob. Warwick Mansell's Education Uncovered website (Education Uncovered | News) is the place to go for detailed information. The market review into initial teacher education was led by Ian Bauckham (Tenax Academies), with John Blake from Ark. Unsurprising perhaps that it is MATs (Harris, Outwood, Ark and Oasis) who will run the new Institute of Teaching which will have degree-awarding powers (Department for Education, 2022, p.22). Ian Bauckham now runs Ofqual. The Children's Commissioner is Rachel de Souza who ran the Inspiration Trust. The HMCI Amanda Spielman is a non-teacher executive from Ark. This is just the tip of a large iceberg. It appears, though, that the Department has perhaps given MATs too much influence even for their own purposes. At the time of writing, some of the relevant clauses in the proposed legislation have been temporarily removed for re-drafting because their supporters in the Lords, Lord Nash, Lord Askew and others, are concerned about

MATs being more centrally regulated and losing their 'freedoms'.

In order for the delivery of the most right-wing education project England has experienced, incidentally one out of kilter with the rest of the UK, the Conservatives have arrived at the school structures that they think need to be in place to deliver it. MATs are seemingly removed from government but also immune from any other democratic form of accountability.

Last word

It is said that words can liberate as well as imprison. Returning to our opening paragraphs, we believe that we have to fight for a radically different 'regime of truth' in which it becomes common sense that education is a collaborative moral endeavour, humane, imaginative, respectful and loving. To achieve such an education, it is vital that communities, parents, schools, teachers and children all have their voices heard and that they all are democratically involved in decision making at a local level. And that means structures of schooling matter.

This article was written for the Forum journal's November issue. They have kindly agreed for us to publish it too.

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The Strange Case of OFSTED and Holland Park School

For the inspectorate to gain trust from parents and teachers that its judgements are arrived at fairly, one would have thought that it must arrive at its conclusions independently and without undue influence from the DFE or Regional School Commissioners (RSCs). This is particularly the case when an inadequate judgement is reached because it enables the relevant RSC to broker the school into a multi academy trust (MAT). Surely OFSTED does not want to be seen as one of the mechanisms by which government policy on pulling all schools into MATS is achieved? Trust in its judgements would be undermined if this were seen to be the case.

Holland Park School has been labelled by the press as the 'socialist' Eton because Tony Benn et al sent his children there. More recently it has become the 'conservative comp' with Nadim Zahawi as an alumnus and Michael Gove as a current parent. It is well known, well-endowed and previously one of the Labour run ILEA's flagship schools. Therefore, it is a big fish for any MAT to catch. Undoubtedly Holland Park became a victim of the government's academisation policy which allowed schools to break away from local authorities to become 'stand-alone academies. Such a policy left schools entirely without oversight except by governors and trust members many of which were self-picked. This left famous schools like Holland Park as places where maverick heads could make a name and start to build their own MAT. I do not have time to here to consider the allegations against the previous head at Holland Park, but it is clear the system (or lack of it) allowed him to operate without constraints leading to the allegations of bullying and financial impropriety.

The crisis led to mass resignation of the board of governors/trustees and a new team being appointed by the DFE who were all miraculously supporters of MATS and it transpired, one in particular: United Learning Trust (ULT). In the meant time a joint campaign from teachers and staff which included twelve days of strike action, demanded proper consultation and

a locally based solution. Though all the power was in the hands of the governors, the DFE and the RSC, the mass opposition to the plans was becoming embarrassing, especially as the school could claim it was 'outstanding' in its previous OFSTED report. A judgment of inadequate would both challenge the campaign's case and make the process of brokering the school into a MAT much easier. It would be seen then as a rescue of a school in trouble.

In April 2022 OFSTED descended on Holland Park School at the height of the turmoil the school was going through as a result of the campaign. Was this a coincidence? Was it a straightforward inspection? OFSTED claim it was a normal section 5 inspection and that as now 'outstanding' schools can be inspected, Holland Park was due one. It may well have been triggered by concerns identified by their risk assessment process. Parents though smell a rat. The inadequate rating takes the decision out of the school's hands. So, were there any differences between a routine inspection and the Holland Park one? Having worked for them I think they have questions to answer though so far, they refuse to comment.



1. Why was the inspection team made up entirely of HMI?

Those unfamiliar with OFSTED may not know that there are two types of inspectors. First there are His (previously Her) Majesty's Inspectors who are full time contracted employees of OFSTED. As well as leading and carrying out inspections they are involved in compiling reports on a range of educational topics and subjects. They make up one third of the inspection workforce nationally. The remaining two thirds are OFSTED inspectors (OIs) employed on a casual basis. Most work in schools, some are recently retired senior leaders etc. The Holland Park inspection team was made up entirely of HMI. This is highly unusual. There was only one other all HMI inspection in the year previous to the Holland Park inspection in the London region and it was a much smaller team. Why is this significant? Because it would have been difficult to assemble a team including OIs if the inspection was to be carried out at short notice because most OIs have other commitments and agree to inspections way in advance. It is much easier to redirect full time employees. Is this a sign that the decision to inspect was taken rapidly in response to some external request?

2. Why did two inspectors from the team return for two further days?

Again, highly unusual. Perhaps the team had not collected enough evidence to reach the conclusion they wanted?

3. Why was the draft report (factual accuracy check) sent to governors?

Before the final report is published a draft is sent to the head to check for accuracy. OFSTED state this is purely to ensure accuracy e.g. correct numbers in the sixth form. It should not provide an opportunity to challenge the report itself though in reality this happens. One person's fact can be another's opinion. It is not uncommon for a head to ask for a change of wording at this stage to put the school in a better light. I do not know whether the school leadership received the draft. It did though go to the governors. This again is highly unusual. In an inspection, governors play a minimal role. They are interviewed and attend the final feedback. They normally do not get to see the draft report. The campaign submitted an FOI request to see the draft. It was refused on the grounds it would undermine the inspection process. Is the real reason for the refusal that the governors put pressure on OFSTED to absolve them from any blame for the conflict in the school? The final report effusively endorses their role.

'Members of the new governing body are very experienced. They bring a range of expertise and have devoted considerable time to their work following their appointment in September 2021. New governors have quickly got to grips with serious issues that have emerged and are taking significant action to tackle these. They have a credible action plan to secure further improvement and create a more cohesive culture'

4. Why was the Regional School's Commissioner involved in this inspection and why did she direct inspectors to the LA?

The FOI request also revealed the RSC had been in touch with the OFSTED team. She wanted to check that OFSTED had contacted the local authority to hear their concerns. The DFE website in its job description of RSCs is quite clear that they should pass on intelligence about schools to OFSTED. 'RSCs may share intelligence with Ofsted about underperforming schools and MATS, and share other concerns where relevant to Ofsted functions'

This must be a conflict of interest if their role is to broker schools into MATs. It is very telling that they only share intelligence about under performing schools. This certainly happened in Holland Park's case. According to the report inspectors conducted three interviews with LA officers. This is highly unusual when the school has left the auspices of the LA. Usually in academy inspections the LA is only contacted in relation to SEND provision or safeguarding, if at all. Why the LA wanted to have this input is also unclear given Councillors' apparent support for the campaign's case.

5. Why does the report absolve the new governors of all blame for the conflict and disharmony at the school?

The school was found to be inadequate because behaviour and attitudes plus leadership and management were. Inspectors identify a cause of poor behaviour in the school to be 'uncertainty and discord in the community about the future direction of the school'. However, new governors are seen to be battling against mistrust and resistance to change.

'New governors have quickly got to grips with serious issues that have emerged and are taking significant action to tackle these. They have a credible action plan to secure further improvement and create a more cohesive culture. However, there is dissonance between the governors, some staff (including some established senior leaders), and other stakeholders. This is because not all recognise the need for change. Some hold widely differing ideas for the future of the school. Mutual distrust between the governing body, several stakeholders (including a group of parents and carers) and the local authority is adding to disharmony in the community.'

There is no recognition from inspectors that a group of imposed governors trying to push the school into ULT with paltry consultation and against the wishes of parents and staff is a major factor in the discord in the school.

The OFSTED handbook lays out the expectations they have of governors.

- ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff
- overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure that its money is well spent, including the pupil premium'

Arguably these governors have destroyed any clarity of ethos and have imposed rather than 'ensured' strategic direction. They have also overstepped the role of governors by involving themselves in the day to day running of the school, for which the governors receive positive recognition in the report.

'Some governors have had to step in to work alongside the interim headteacher and get involved with day-to-day operations.'

The inspection of Holland Park in April was far from routine and OFSTED need to answer why. Otherwise, the suspicion that OFSTED inspections are becoming a weapon in the government's armoury to force school into MATS, will become increasingly strong.

*James Whiting,
SEA Secretary*

SEA Curriculum Framework. (After the Cambridge Primary Review)

The Curriculum

The overall framework should be nationally determined with non-statutory guidance for schools showing how the framework might be implemented. There should also be capacity for local councils to consult on plans for a local curriculum. Likewise, there should be capacity for individual schools to create their own curriculum ideas. How the national framework is delivered in different places, plus local community and school-based curriculum plans should be available to all providers.

Aims

- well-being
- engagement
- empowerment
- autonomy

*Encouraging respect and reciprocity
Promoting interdependence, sustainability, the need for urgent action to tackle the climate crisis.
Developing understanding of the causes of exploitation, poverty, racism, sexism, ableism and all forms of oppression.
Empowering local, national and global citizenship
Appreciating the contributions of a range of cultures to human experience
exploring, knowing, understanding, problem solving, critiquing, making sense, making creative productions
celebrating culture and community
fostering skill
exciting the imagination enacting dialogue*

Domains

- arts and creativity
- citizenship and ethics
- faith and belief
- language, oracy, literacy, drama
- digital literacy
- mathematics
- physical and emotional health
- place and time
- science and technology
- human actions and their environmental impact
- practical and technical skills including skills needed for retrofitting and other 'green' jobs

do not just how they compare with other.

Currently the school curriculum is overwhelmingly set by central government with ministers playing a significant personal role in its design. A new approach to curriculum design is needed. There will need to be some national direction to ensure consistency and to facilitate assessment and accreditation. However there needs also to be space for schools to develop aspects of the curriculum in ways that reflect their particular context and ethos while being consistent with the national statement of aims and appropriately preparing students for the next stage in their lives. Different and innovative approaches should be welcomed and evaluated through an open process of professional dialogue. Above all, curriculum design should be a transparent process which engages all stakeholders with an interest in the outcomes of education.

We want to see a curriculum which ensures children and young people:

Are respected for the knowledge and cultural experiences they bring to education

Are willing to contribute to solutions to global problems such as climate change and poverty

Are aware that the economy and society are open to change and that there are alternative ways of organising them

Are able to choose areas of study to focus on in more depth depending on their interests in the upper secondary phase

We want to see young adults who have the skills, knowledge and personal qualities to:

Ensure their personal wellbeing – this would include physical and mental health, social and emotional well-being including friendships and relationships, personal autonomy and creativity and the practical aspects of life including managing money, entering employment and

living independently.

Make a positive contribution to society – this would include contributing in their roles as a citizen and a member of civic society and through a contribution to the economic well-being of the country.

Appreciate the contributions of a range of cultures to human experience and understand history from the perspective of those who have experienced oppression and colonisation.

Achieve their full potential in both their personal life and in their contribution to society.

In order to do these things, young adults need:

A high level of key skills including literacy, oracy, numeracy and the ability to engage with the digital world, i.e. they understand, the intention behind and veracity of, information posted on line

Important areas of knowledge – including a grounding in science and scientific method, an understanding of how human society is organised, has evolved and interacts with the physical environment and the creative and artistic achievements of people now and in the past; When they learn in subjects they acquire skills as well as knowledge e.g. they learn to act as historians as well as learn history or they express themselves as artists as well as learning about art.

Critical thinking skills and competence to communicate and express their ideas effectively through a variety of media

A critical understanding of the key characteristics of British and global society including the values of democracy and social justice, respecting diversity, the world of work and the challenges of sustainability;

Practical and technical capability in a wide range of contexts and the opportunity to develop their own creativity;

The ability to analyse and solve problems, to empathise with and work collaboratively with others and to understand and meet appropriate expectations;

To know about the opportunities, open to them both in education and employment and to understand how they can access them;

The motivation and ability to go on learning throughout life and to meet the challenges posed by an age of rapid change and longer life expectancy.

Supplements - Early Years

• The SEA agrees with criticisms of the new Early Years Framework and accompanying guidance from the Early Years Coalition:- The child is always seen as in deficit.

The new document contains 'a prescriptive, simplistic, limited curriculum and pedagogy, and does not reflect and respect practitioner expertise and excellent practice in the sector'. 'It also fails to recognise all children as active and capable learners and does not provide for the breadth of challenges they will face in a complex and unknown future.

'As such, this document does not provide a sound foundation for providers to build a curriculum in the best interests of children,'

• The SEA wants the Early Years Framework replaced with a document which emphasises social development, imaginative play and communication rather than the start of formal education.

• The SEA supports, in the meantime, guidance within the EYC's 'Birth to Five Matters' which seeks to implement the Early Years Framework in a much more child centred way.

Primary Education

• The SEA welcomes the principles set out in the Cambridge Review which celebrated the achievements of primary educators

• We would like to see a move away from rigid subject boundaries which have led to some subjects particularly the Arts, being marginalised

• A curriculum built around children's self-expression as a medium for learning new knowledge and skills, would be a great improvement on the current narrow test-driven offer.

• We agree with the UCL Institute that the current emphasis on

synthetic phonics in the teaching of reading is 'uninformed and is failing children'.

• A wider understanding of the research on reading needs to be taken account of in UK primary schools including that good readers use all the cues when encountering new words and phrases

• The SEA supports the More Than a Score campaign which would see an end to all externally set tests in the primary phase including the 11 plus.

14 to 19 Principles

• The SEA believes in an updated version of the Tomlinson vision encompassing 4 or 5 years of secondary and further education and that in curriculum terms this should be considered as one 14 to 19 phase.

• The fifth year should be fully funded to support disadvantaged students and those who experience barriers to learning

• Assessment should be flexible and take place when students are ready rather than at a set age

• Academic, vocational and technical elements of the 'diploma' must be of equal parity

• Students must be able to mix vocational, technical and academic elements if they choose

• There should be a common wraparound, curriculum for all students including citizenship, RSE, project work and skills development.

• Non-assessed enrichment activities including sport, and the arts must be fully funded and available to all students

• The SEA believes that coherent local offers based on collaboration between providers, rather than selection, is the best way of organising the curriculum across an area

The Diverse Curriculum Charter

The SEA supports Afzul Khan MP's Diverse Curriculum Charter and similar initiatives such as the black curriculum in Hackney.

'We are Committed:-

• To ensuring provision of a wide-ranging curriculum that reflects the make-up of our society and empowers our ethnic minority communities

• To reviewing and diversifying the decision makers, academic sources and content of our curriculum to include broader British histories of empire, enslavement, colonialism, migration and emancipation

• To providing a diverse and accessible curriculum that covers the contributions Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities have made to the UK across our history

• To equipping staff with the knowledge and tools they need to teach anti-racism and racial literacy across all subjects through development and training

• To looking beyond the curriculum at embedding a culture of anti-racism and racial literacy at all levels of leadership, teaching and learning.

• To raising the attainment and agency of all young people in the UK by providing an inclusive education that offers a rich sense of belonging and identity'

Climate Change and Climate Justice

• The SEA believes that all children should build strong knowledge of the impact of climate change, the human actions which cause it, and the disproportionate effect it has on less affluent regions of the world.

• Children should be given opportunities to develop ideas for solutions and more sustainable development and apply them to their school and local communities. They should also be supported in developing critical perspectives on policies to address climate change and climate justice.

• The 14 to 19 curriculum should include technical and vocational courses which teach skills needed to service a green economy such as retrofitting.

UNIFY – one union for education. The Time has Come

It is 1996. In my classroom a small group of union reps and officers from Brent ATL, NUT and NASUWT meet to discuss the future of education trade unionism. We all agree that competitive recruitment and continuing inter union squabbling is harmful to our cause. Uniting into one union made sense.

Professional Unity 2000 was born. We felt that this was so obvious and what most in our schools and colleges wanted, that we could achieve this in four years. The idea was right. Its implementation was to prove considerably more difficult than envisioned. We grew and gained large support but the year 2000 came and went. So, we changed our name to UNIFY.

There followed many years of relentless undermining not only of teachers' conditions and professional autonomy, but also of the very foundations of state education, its fragmentation and increasing privatisations.

The lessons from abroad and at home clearly showed the way forward. Ritva Semi of OAJ, the Finnish education union, said in a speech to the NUT hosted joint unions Unity conference in 2014, "Unity of the teacher organisations has been a success story for teachers and education in Finland". She also made it clear that the Government in Finland cannot and does not ignore the OAJ. The Union is involved at every level of Government decisions on education.

I know from personal experience that getting all the unions in a school, not only to agree to take industrial action, against for example academisation, but coordinate the strikes, is an immensely difficult task. This would evaporate if there was one union.

For over 20 years UNIFY carried the torch and battled to advance teacher union unity. In 2002/3 an amalgamation of all three main education unions looked possible. Unfortunately, it fell at the last post when Eamonn O'Kane, then General Secretary of the NASUWT who supported unity, failed to take the majority of his conference with him to go forward and then tragically died soon after.

In May 2012 the NASUWT and NUT reached an 'historic agreement' which was indeed historic, and some co-operative progress was made in some areas on reducing workloads and bureaucracy. But long-term, whilst membership wars exist, alliances will inevitably and sadly breakdown, allowing sectarianism to again rear its ugly head.

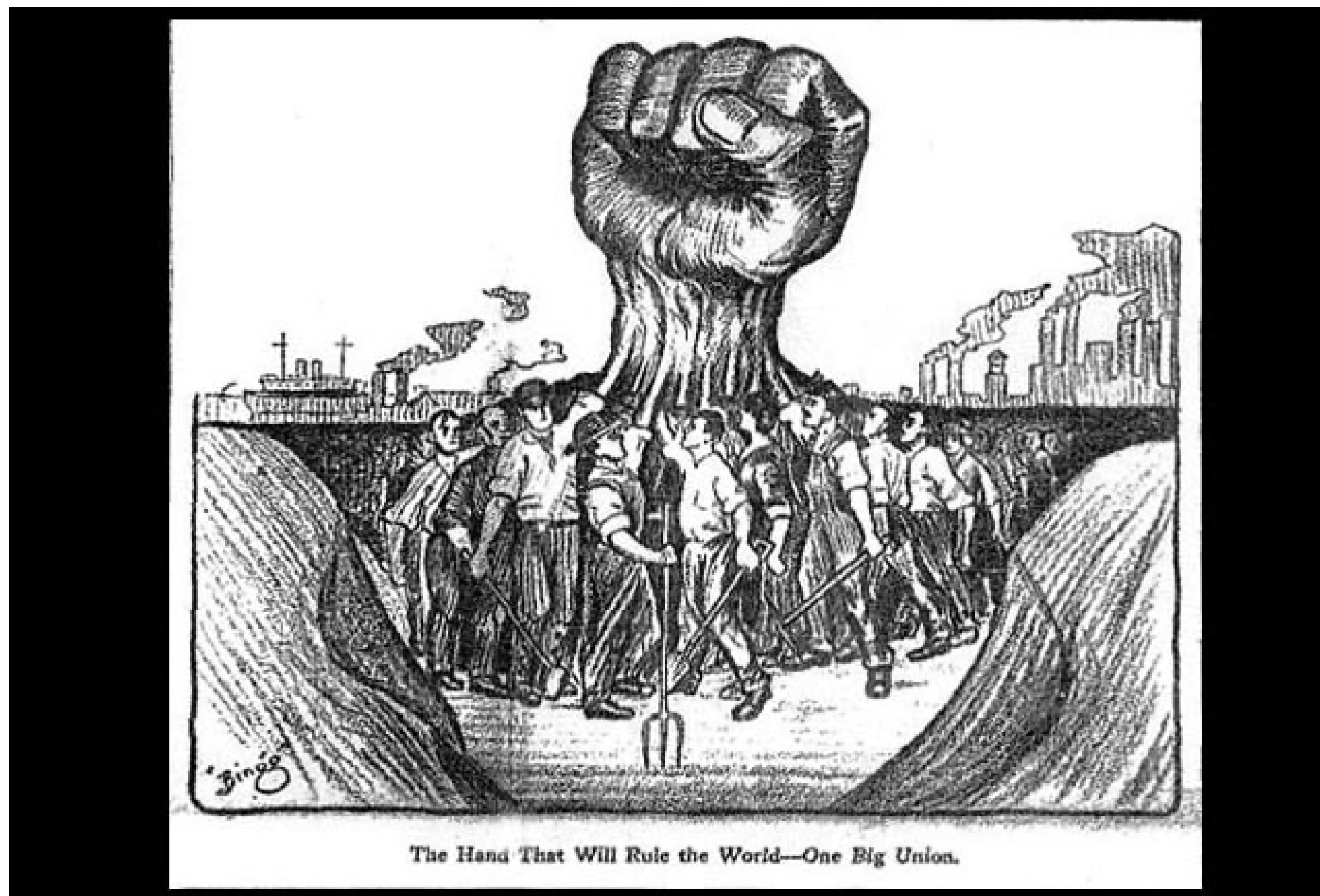
Historic leap forward

Following the ATL and NUT London Special Conferences on November 5th 2016 where both unions voted by 97% to proceed to a ballot of their respective memberships, 1st September 2017 marked an historic leap forward. The ATL and the NUT, which had both existed for over a hundred years, united into a new legal entity, the National Education Union (NEU) with around 450,000 members. This makes it the fourth largest union in the TUC, and a union that represents staff across the entire education sector.

During the pandemic our defeat of the government over schools opening gave an astonishing and game changing lead to our whole trade union movement. We have been assisted in this by a vital structural difference from the other three big TUC unions. We only have members in education. We are a sectoral union. We need to develop this growing unity across the whole of education. A single union for education would be a million strong. In the light of what we have done and achieved as we presently are, think of what we could do. For example, renationalise education, take it back from the privateering profiteers.

We need to, by example and strategy, give a lead to the campaign to develop sector unions. It would strengthen us mightily ending competitive recruitment. It will not be easy, but it should and must be done. If you do not reach for the sky, you will never even touch the clouds.

The British trade union movement was once the strongest in the world. It saw off legislation attempting to shackle the unions (In Place of Strife and the Industrial



Relations Act) and their threat of a general strike forced the release of the imprisoned dockers.

We are now more than halved in numbers and the assaults on our ability to defend ourselves, never mind advance, is still near an all-time low, though at last there are stirrings.

What to do? In truth, our organisations, from our unions to the TUC, are not yet fully fit for purpose. Look at education and the Government's (and capitalism's) plans. All schools to be turned into academies and following with certainty their being opened up for private profit. Plus, all the other outrages teachers know so well, complain about, but so far in the main, still tolerate. Having many unions assists this process by a non-united response enabling the Government to get away

with divide and rule.

Nonetheless, education being the most unionised profession puts us in the forefront of the Government's attack, because their true aim is to destroy not just effective trade unionism, but trade unionism per se.

This requires that we unite our forces. That this could occur between ATL and NUT was wonderful; a breath of fresh air.

We urgently need to address the task of uniting all in education – teachers, lecturers and support staff – to counter attack on a united front. Long term I think it should go further – the US Chicago model, 'If you're in the building you're in the union'. We in education can give a lead. But the process must extend across the TUC. We need a coherent structure. Competition between unions for members

is not just a waste of our money and resources, but a complete misdirection of our effort and activity, so vitally needed to confront our enemies.

In addition to restructuring our army – the TUC and constituent organisations – we vitally need to become social movement trade unions. The wrongs we face are not facing just our sector. They face the whole of society, or rather the whole of society excluding the tiny ruling elite. We are, as unions and workers, all under massive attack on multiple, but totally interconnected fronts. Government actions in one area have connections to, and repercussions in, all the other areas.

The priority aim of an education union shouldn't be membership growth. It should be saving state education; of which, having sufficient staff, fully qualified, properly paid and not overworked is a crucial factor as is having a comprehensive well-funded state education system. Acting in unity through one united organisation at workplace level is an absolute necessity to save our state education system and indeed our country. Let's get to it. Rome wasn't built in a day, but it was built.

Hank Roberts
UNIFY Organising Secretary

A summary of the SEND Review:

Right support, Right place, Right time – the government’s SEND and alternative provision (AP) green paper.

The government’s SEND review began in September 2019, looking at the impacts of reforms to the SEND system introduced in 2014. Three years on the publication of this green paper marks the start of a consultation process which closes on 1st July 2022. The SEND system is in crisis and this delay will have resulted in blighted lives and lost opportunities.

The document is split into six chapters, with the 22 consultation questions inserted at relevant intervals. The questions are also listed at the end of the document.

Published on 29 March, the day after the Education White Paper, social media traffic suggests it has not gone down well with parent/ carers, whose existing concerns about lack of accountability and parent voice have not been assuaged.

As Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, commented, “In the meantime, many thousands of children and young people will continue to pass through a broken system, with schools left to pick up the pieces without sufficient resources.”

The review lands in a bleak landscape: Local Authority SEND budgets are at breaking point with SEND deficits expected to total up to £3bn by 2023; schools are struggling to fulfil their commitments to children and students with SEND under the Code of Practice; schools have no specific funding allocated to them for students with SEND; COVID 19 has disproportionately disadvantaged children with SEND further. Families face extensive delays in the diagnosis and assessment of SEND and the allocation of EHCPs (Education, Health and Social Care Plans).

Over the past decade Ofsted has driven a narrowing of the curriculum, punishing workload and an obsession with meaningless data and accountability. Judgements are unreliable, specialism is patchy and inspections discriminate against schools in deprived areas, where there are higher numbers of children with

disabilities. In this hostile environment, creative teaching and inclusive practice cannot flourish.

Real terms cuts have caused shortages in specialist teachers, hit support staff and are undermining schools’ abilities to meet SEND and mental health. The job of SENCo has become increasingly unsustainable. Higher needs funding is insufficient, leading to top slicing of schools’ budgets and an Education Health and Care Plan if eventually agreed does not automatically lead to the funding required to meet needs. In too many cases, parent /carer trust and confidence in schools and local authorities has been profoundly damaged.

The Green Paper has received mixed reviews, including a warm-ish welcome from my union the NEU. Mary Bousted, joint General Secretary stated, “National standards for SEND have the potential to act as a catalyst to better support, but they must come with sufficient funding. Collaboration across agencies, and the personnel and financial resource this requires, is vital if the new National Standards are to work on the ground. Good outcomes for children with SEND are particularly dependent on retaining experienced teachers and experienced support staff.”

Bousted called for funding for the banding framework to level up, proper staffing and expertise in schools, and a phased reduction in places in specialist setting. She added that, “Staff retention is the elephant in the room in this Green Paper.”

At 106 pages long, the review is a hefty document with a lot to digest. There is a summary but no ‘accessible’ version available for young people with SEND, and it is distinctly not ‘child centred’, or indeed family centred. How many exhausted parents / carers (or education workers!) will have the time and energy to read the full document? Nevertheless, it is vital that the views of pupils, families, and the SEND workforce are voiced and that they shape future provision and end inequalities.

Summary of changes – 5 key areas

“A single national SEND and AP system”, including:

- creating consistent standards across all authorities
 - updating the SEND Code of practice
 - establishing new local SEND partnerships that bring together key services to produce local inclusion plans
 - simplifying the EHCP process including access to information and enabling parents to make informed choices on educational settings
- “Excellent provision from early years to adulthood”, including:
- more money invested in schools’ budgets for SEND provision
 - possible introduction of a new SENCo National Professional Qualification
 - increasing the number of staff with SENCo qualifications in early years settings
 - investment in SEND teacher training and development in mainstream schools
 - more places created in special schools and alternative provision
 - investment in the supported internships programme to improve transition into higher education and employment

“A reformed and integrated role for AP”, including:

- distributing an AP-specific budget to local authorities
- developing a framework to ensure that pupils in AP are progressing and have sustainable options beyond AP

“System roles, accountabilities and funding reform”, including:

- clarifying roles across provisions and ensuring professionals are equipped to meet their responsibilities
- introducing new inclusion dashboards for 0-25 years provision so that parents and professionals can see at a glance, how the SEND system is performing at local and

national levels

- introducing a new national framework of banding and tariffs for funding matched to levels of need and types of education provision

“Delivering change for children and families”, including:

- investment in local authorities that have the biggest deficits for SEND
- the publication of a delivery plan for how change will be implemented and by whom, in line with this consultation
- a new National SEND Delivery Board to bring together government and national delivery partners, including parents, to ensure timely implementation of proposals

The money

The Green Paper proposes that the government will:

- increase core schools’ budgets by £7 billion by 2024-25, compared with 2021-22 figures
- spend £2.6 billion over the next three years to deliver new and improve existing specialist and alternative provision
- invest £18 million in the supported internships programme over the next three years

Some observations

From the outset, the review states that there are 3 key challenges facing the SEND and alternative provision system:

- Navigating the SEND system and alternative provision is not a positive experience for too many children, young people and their families.
- Outcomes for children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision are consistently worse than their peers across every measure.
- Despite the continuing and unprecedented investment, the system is not financially sustainable.

It points to ‘post code’ inconsistencies in the system and recommends some useful adjustments including SENCo and teacher training, a standardised EHCP format, and local inclusion plans to set out the provision that is available in each area. These are to be co-ordinated by new local SEND partnerships. But despite a promise to inject £7 billion into school budgets over the next three years and to expand AP, there’s no commitment to scrap the huge council SEND ‘overspends’ or truly transform the broken SEND framework.

There are plans for new local inclusion dashboards for 0-25 years provision, to monitor performance. The examples of data that will be tracked include school attendance rates, attainment, percentage of children with EHCPs, waiting times for access to services and numbers of

tribunal appeals. The danger of course, is that these will just become another tickbox exercise with no guarantees of quality or even accuracy of data.

Proposals to “support parents and carers to express an informed preference for a suitable placement” by providing a tailored list of settings, including mainstream, specialist and independent are also questionable. Many parents and carers who already feel patronised and marginalised will see this as a move to further restrict choice, sitting alongside forced mediation, delaying redress in the tribunal process.

The ever shrinking curriculum in mainstream state schools, driven by relentless Tory cuts and emphasis on SATs and league tables, has turned so many settings into hostile environments for children with SEND. There is a massive missed opportunity to address the curriculum in any meaningful way in this review. The few mentions are references to supporting access to the mainstream curriculum and the 2019 Ofsted EIF (Education Inspection Framework) demanding that all children access ‘the same broad and ambitious curriculum’. We will not see full inclusion without a transformed flexible, decolonised and trauma-informed curriculum, with more creative Arts, physical education, and powerful interactive connections with local communities.

Pupils with SEND should be entitled to access alternative accreditation instead of the current punishing one size fits all approach, which is driving off-rolling, exclusions and an increase in need for EHCPs with some children sometimes inappropriately placed in special schools, which tend to have a more pupil-centred curriculum.

Alternative Provision is a central plank of the review. While the vast majority (82%) of



HM Government

SEND Review: Right support Right place Right time



pupils with SEND are in state-funded mainstream schools, around 1% are in Alternative Provision. APs are the likely destination for most children with SEND if they cannot be included in mainstream or are not considered appropriate for a local specialist school. Children with SEMH (Social, Emotional & Mental Health), autistic children or those with SLCN (Speech, Language and Communication Needs) struggling in mainstream will be placed in AP units.

However, it appears the success of APs will be judged mainly on attendance and behaviour, and not on the quality of in-house provision, including tailored therapeutic packages of input from speech & language, occupational therapy and other specialists and visiting professionals. There is a real risk that MATs will regard their APs as cash cows and will try to keep running costs as low as possible for the children on whom they may see as of lesser value.

It is astounding to read that only now does the government see the need to analyse NHS workforce data to ascertain if it is possible to meet the 'rising demand in SEND' that it has been referencing for years. It seems obvious that recruitment of SALT, OT, clinical psychologists and CAMHS professionals, alongside specialist teachers, SENCos and educational psychologists should have been a first step towards meeting demand created by the expansion in 2014 of the SEND framework to age 24, plus the rise in identification of special need. As a Qualified Teacher of the Deaf working for a local authority sensory team in London, I am alarmed at the falling numbers of professionals holding the mandatory qualification for working with deaf learners, visually impaired children and pupils with multi-sensory impairment, with no sign of a government funded recruitment drive.

The paper also fails to grapple with the real inequalities at Post 16. FE and employment are virtually invisible taking up just two pages on the review, with specialist colleges hardly mentioned. Too many young people with SEND have been short-changed by the system and while promised investment in the supported internship programme may be warmly greeted, parents and carers are justifiably angry that there is no national system of special paid apprenticeships for young people with SEND. SEND funding for FE colleges is so restricted that some are covertly rationing the numbers of students with EHCPs they take, fearing they will not be able to support need.

As Matt Keer points out in his piece on the Special Needs Jungle website (<https://www.specialneedsjungle.com>), six of the 106 pages of the review cover accountability issues. Yet astonishingly, not a single one of the 22 consultation questions asks about the issue of accountability – this cannot be accidental.

The six pages on accountability sit in Chapter 5: System roles, accountabilities and funding reform. While the DfE acknowledges a need to "align system incentives and accountabilities to reduce perverse behaviours that drive poor outcomes and high costs in the current system", it fails to elaborate on who are the culprits or how they might be brought into line.

Coming hot on the heels of the Education White Paper, the review must be set in the context of the government announcement that by 2030 all schools in England will be required to be part of a MAT (Multi Academy Trust), including special and alternative provision, "sharing expertise and resource to improve outcomes". Putting all special schools and APs into the control of unaccountable MATs, many of which see no role for parents/carers in education is hugely problematic. The drive towards total marketisation and privatisation of the system will effectively strip away any of the transparency and democracy offered by local education authorities, put more public assets into private hands and create further mining of funds that should be spent on children in order to feed CEO salaries of up to £450,000 per year.

Rightly, the SEA's GUBOS (Give Us Back Our Schools) campaign, calls for an end to the structures and systems that give rise to zero tolerance behaviour policies, isolation booths, and toxic coercive relationships with pupils and staff that demand silence. These are the conditions which gave rise to the Child Q case, and so many other abhorrent abuses. Until then we cannot even guarantee that every child has a place at a good local school with effective safeguarding.

You can respond to the Green Paper here: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/send-review-division/send-review-2022/>

Amanda Bentham,
SEA NEC

Labour Party Conference

The following two motions were discussed and agreed by the NEC. The emergency motion focusing on child poverty highlights the increasing impact on poverty on young people and the need for universal free school meals for all. It also highlights the staffing shortages many schools are facing and the lack of funding to manage the huge increase in energy bills.

Motion for Labour Conference

LP Annual Conference Motions 2022 -

1. This Conference notes that

- i. The Tory Government's White Paper 'Opportunity for all: Strong Schools with great teachers for your child' is based on false claims about the success of academies and is underpinned by a right-wing ideology of marketisation and out-sourcing.
- ii. It ignores peer-reviewed research related to teaching, learning and assessment and marginalises the professional expertise of teachers and lecturers including those in universities' teacher education departments. Instead, it seeks to impose rigid, mechanistic classroom practice on teachers.
- iii. As a result of Tory policies, there is a teacher shortage crisis with applications in 2021 24% down on the previous year, 8% down on 2019. Over 30% of teachers are seeking to leave the profession.
- iv. The Public Accounts Committee and investigative journalists have repeatedly exposed the scandal of financial mismanagement, rocketing CEO salaries and lack of community involvement and accountability of the academy system

Conference calls on Labour's shadow front bench to

- i. vigorously oppose the Schools Bill which enables local authorities to force state-maintained schools in England to join multi-academy trusts, perpetuates the role of Ofsted and transfers England's school system into the hands of unelected Regional Directors,
- ii. work with education trade unions, the SEA and other stakeholders to produce a radical vision for a National Education Service which ends academisation and reverses the marketisation introduced by the Tories in the 1988 Act, restores local democratic control, free access to higher and further education and gives more professional autonomy to teaching staff.

Emergency Motion

Conference agrees to support the 'No Child Left Behind Campaign' launched on September 22nd by the Daily Mirror and National Education Union for free school meals for all children.

It notes that post-pandemic 93,000 students have disappeared from roles. A non-means tested right to food will bring many children suffering from deprivation back into school.

It notes there is a crisis in school budgets and that the government has so far not committed to fund the massive increases in energy, staffing and food costs schools face. Hungry and cold children cannot learn. It notes too that there is a growing shortage of teachers and support staff. Schools would be in a position to provide much needed welfare support to families if they are properly funded.

Conference therefore calls on the party at all levels to campaign for an increase in school funding to cover increased energy costs, free school meals for all, breakfast clubs and decent pay rises for teachers and support staff.

Conference calls on the party, including the front bench, to support education unions should they take action to protect their living standards.

Who controls our schools?

Part 1: The Current Mess

This was the title of the first of two webinars organised by Reclaiming Education, a consortium of educational pressure groups, on March 16th. The speakers were Warwick Mansell, Meg Hillier, Louise Regan and Melanie Griffiths.

Warwick Mansell, a journalist who has spent much time investigating the “academies” movement in English schooling, spoke of the lack of democratic control which characterises academy schools and trusts. He began with an account of the control structure of The Mellor Educational Trust, a now defunct academy trust set up by David Mellor, a former Conservative minister. The governing body of the trust was overwhelmingly made up of governors appointed by the sponsor, with only a tiny minority of governors representing any other interests than those of the sponsor. This structure gave the sponsor complete control over the decisions of the trust.

In 2018 Mellor’s involvement in a scandal had led to the trust being wound up and its schools being transferred to the Future Academy Trust controlled by Schools’ Minister Lord Nash and his wife, Caroline. Futures had already attracted considerable criticism for its unbalanced approach to curriculum: 19 lessons per week in English and Latin but no computing, no R.E. and only two science lessons.

Warwick illustrated the point further by referring to the Harris academy chain, whose trust deed allows control of the chain to pass from Lord Harris to Lady Harris and then to their son and on to other family members.

In contrast with Local Authority maintained schools, which are accountable to the public through their elected representatives and which have mechanisms that allow local people and parents to join their governing bodies, academy schools are accountable only to governors most of whom are privately appointed and whose relationship to their trusts is more like that of shareholders than of public representatives. Yet academy trusts are financed from the public purse with the express purpose of raising standards, a purpose that all available evidence suggests is not being achieved.

Warwick concluded by pointing out that the lack of democratic accountability of academy schools and chains has led to abuses and scandals which the government’s own accountability structure of Regional Schools Commissioners has been unable to prevent. He felt that there needs to be far greater awareness of these issues and that the commentariat has been guilty of not taking sufficient interest.

The second speaker was Meg Hillier, Chair of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and a Labour MP. She pointed out that now over 50% of schoolchildren attend academy schools, of which the great majority are secondary schools. Originally academy schools were conceived of as autonomous institutions, free from LA “control” and able to use this freedom to experiment with alternative approaches. However, the growth of multi-academy trusts (MATs) – greatly encouraged by government – has put paid to autonomy. Compared with LAs, MATs have no geographical identity: one MAT has schools in both Cumbria and Cornwall. Since 2017, both MATs and the few remaining stand-alone academies have been funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, a Whitehall body that, in the case of MATs, requires accounts to be filed only for the MAT as a whole. MATs are not required to furnish the agency with accounts for their individual schools, the dangerous implications of which are obvious. Moreover the governors of schools within a MAT are effectively “puppets”, having no power to take decisions, other than those sent down from the MAT’s headquarters. Because MATs are free to reject “failing” schools, as indicated by poor academic performance and/or financial problems, there now exists a body of “orphan” schools which are unable to find sponsors but are unable to revert to LA status under current regulations (Editor’s note: there were 92 such schools in 2019).

Meg also spoke about “free” schools, a subset of academy schools based upon an idea imported from Sweden. These are brand new schools set up by individuals and groups regarded by the government as legitimately interested parties. Originally the government had a target of 500 such schools. The PAC had found that, in its eagerness to launch this idea, the government had allowed the ESFA to overpay for prospective

school sites. Moreover the earliest “free” schools had been given public money to purchase the freehold of a site, although later ones had been obliged to purchase a 25 year lease, suggesting that the government had little confidence in the longevity of such schools. In Meg’s view the “free” school initiative had been characterised by enormous incompetence, which had resulted in the closure or take-over of many schools.

The government’s belated strategy for exercising public control over academies – the creation of Regional School Commissioners – was hopelessly inadequate and huge sums of money have been wasted. Meg agreed with Warwick that, although there are some very good academy schools, MATs are inherently prone to corruption. Some of this has now been reigned in, notably the practice of awarding contracts for materials and services to “related parties,” but not before huge sums of public money have gone to waste. One outcome of all this wastage has been a real terms decline in per pupil funding from which the greatest losers have been children from the most deprived backgrounds.

The third speaker was Louise Regan, a National Officer of the National Education Union. Louise pointed out that academy schools were a descendant of the Major government’s Grant Maintained schools but that, whereas parents had been able to vote about GM status, academy status had simply been imposed. The NEU was opposed to the principle of academy schools but continued to support those of its members who worked in them. She went on to outline some of the untruths promulgated by government about academy schools:

1. That such schools improve attainment – research by UCL and others demonstrates that this is not so.
2. That adopting academy status will result in greater approval by OFSTED – it doesn’t.
3. That disadvantaged pupils benefit from their school’s adopting academy status – in fact the opposite is the case.

Louise repeated the problem, alluded to by Meg Hillier, of “orphan” schools and that alluded to by Warwick Mansell that MATs ignore the views of parents and the local community. She listed other problems: that academy schools are much more likely than LA schools to employ unqualified teachers; that LA schools had much better financial protection than academy schools (although this is



diminishing), and that pay differentials in academy schools were much greater than in LA schools.

Louise concluded by contrasting her very positive experience of working with a good LEA with an example of current malpractice: a “free” school which had been opened in a factory building. This school not only had no playing fields but did not even have any outdoor play space for the children. In an attempt to ensure good academic results, the school had organised a catchment area which included only high attaining primary schools.

The ensuing discussion tended to focus on the general sense of disappointment that Labour seemed to have no plans for reforming the current educational structure and was implicitly repeating the mantra of the Blair government: “standards, not structures”.

The event concluded with a brief address by Melanie Griffiths of the SEA. Looking forward to part 2 of “Who controls our schools?” she made four brief points:

1. Much of education had been taken away from publicly accountable institutions and handed over to private, corporatised bodies.
2. It was simplistic just to blame recent government because the seeds had been sown by the 1988 Education Reform Act.
3. The tide of de-regulation needs to be reversed.

4. Labour’s belief, which it has clung to since 1997, that structural reform is unnecessary as long as “classroom standards” are addressed, is profoundly mistaken.

The event was attended by 116 participants.

Part 2: The Remedies

The second of the two webinars organised by Reclaiming Education took place on Wednesday, March 30th. The speakers were Nigel Gann, Georgia Gould, Anntoinette Bramble and John McDonnell MP. 87 people attended.

Nigel Gann, former headteacher, educational consultant and author of *The Great Education Robbery*, began by reminding us of a point made in the first webinar: that the governing structures of the academies programme are often in the hands of people who are not suitably qualified to supervise the education of children. This raised the question of whether publicly provided education should be regarded as a common good or merely as a public utility – an important distinction because the notion of a common good implies that all recipients have an equal entitlement to be well-educated, regardless of their social position. The idea of a public utility, by contrast, implies a set of outcomes that are largely transactional, an attitude exemplified by former Education Secretary Gavin Williamson, when he stated that the purpose of education is to instil into children the skills necessary for a fulfilling working life. Such an approach treats children unequally, deprives the community of engagement and control and deprives the workforce of professional autonomy. These are all characteristics of the model of education favoured by government since 2010.

Nigel suggested a four-point framework for reform:

1. the development of a National Education Service based upon common standards and principles;
2. the introduction of Local Education Boards with a duty to oversee all statutory provision;
3. the designation of schools as membership charities owned by the community;
4. the introduction of a curriculum which, as well as being broad and balanced, is responsive to local, as well as national, needs.

Nigel was followed by Georgia Gould, Leader of Camden Borough Council, who reminded everyone that there had been a disastrous real terms fall of 9% in education funding since 2010. In spite of this, Camden had worked hard to develop a successful

model of LA stewardship, as shown by the fact that no Camden schools had chosen to become academies. Central to the model was the principle that education should develop the whole person. To put this principle into effect, Camden had developed a joint venture between the LA and its schools called “Camden Learning” (<https://camdenlearning.org.uk>) This scheme brings together representatives from schools and the LA in a series of “hubs” designed to produce a collaborative approach across Camden’s schools to a wide variety of issues and matters of concern. Camden Learning has developed collaborative policies for knife crime, the avoidance of pupil exclusions and ensuring that ethnic minority children see themselves properly reflected in the curriculum. There are, among others, hubs for maths, English, oracy and the arts. Among its other achievements, Camden has developed an in-house school maintenance service, offers free instrumental tuition to children eligible for free school meals and has established a number of Youth Opportunity Programme centres.

Like all local government, Camden had suffered financial problems caused by the decline in funding from central government and poverty was forcing some families to re-locate out of the borough. Nevertheless, Camden was a successful model of LA governance. In the light of the new White Paper, it may be forced to set up its own academy trust but will do so only as a last resort.

The third speaker, Anntoinette Bramble, Deputy Mayor of Hackney, reinforced the message that LAs continue to have a valuable rôle in the education service in spite of government attempts to downgrade them. Anntoinette had played an important part in developing for Hackney schools “the Diverse Curriculum” - an approach which ensured that ethnic minority children were properly represented within the school curriculum, both currently and historically. This was important because the standard curriculum tends to ignore the contribution of ethnic minorities to UK life and avoids uncomfortable but essential discussions around race and ethnicity. A major aim of the Diverse Curriculum was to bring to light “untold stories”: for example, that in Roman Britain there were black dignitaries. The Diverse Curriculum was taught in units which were directly linked to the National Curriculum. More than 2000 schools (including some in foreign countries) have now signed up for the programme and its

associated training. The success of the programme has led to the development of plans for expansion, particularly in the field of “untold stories.” Anntoinette was at pains to emphasise that the Diverse Curriculum should not be seen as “for” any one group but for everyone.

Anntoinette felt that initiatives such as the Diverse Curriculum would be much less likely to develop within a multi-academy trust (MAT) and that the White Paper’s ambition to move all schools into MATs was unhelpful and would lead to further fragmentation.

John McDonnell MP paid tribute to the achievements of Camden and Hackney in the face of massive reductions in funding from central government - £100bn since 2010. He argued that public institutions must be under democratic control because, for the majority of people, democracy is the only available source of power. The academy programme has allowed private interests to exercise control over public services and could lead to the full privatisation of our schools. The White Paper was crushingly disappointing in its desire to hand over all schools to MATs: 63% of primary schools had resisted 10 years of pressure to become academies so the government was now planning to force them to submit. To restore schools to democratic control Labour should plan to

1. end the academies programme;
2. develop the National Education Service promised in the 2019 manifesto;
3. ensure that parents and teachers are fully involved in planning and development;
4. ensure that education is properly funded;
5. integrate schooling with other public services and end the practice of “outsourcing” ancillary services;
6. end 11+ selection and integrate private schools into the state system.

Currently, Labour policy was to avoid these difficult issues by disinterring the Blairite slogan of “standards, not structures.”

(At this point John McDonnell was obliged to leave the meeting in order to take part in a parliamentary vote. He very kindly returned, following a short Q&A session, and offered the following additional thoughts):

1. Labour should learn from the good practice of some of its own councils, who engage properly at community level.
2. Collaboration between schools is a far more effective approach than the competitive model favoured by the government.
3. Reclaiming Education needs to make every effort to engage with the Labour front bench in order to strengthen opposition to current policy.

The Question and Answer session itself focused upon three issues:

1. What is the best structure for restoring democratic accountability? All the speakers agreed that the current model of academies being directly responsible to Whitehall via Regional Schools Commissioners was not working but there was not unanimity about the best structure. Nigel Gann defended his idea of elected school boards by arguing that local government was currently overwhelmed by the breadth of its responsibilities and that school boards would have a better focus but the other speakers favoured the restoration of LAs.
2. How can schools build better relationships with parents of SEND children? Who makes the strategic decisions which determine the context in which this can be done? Georgia and Anntoinette described the practice in Camden and Hackney, in which strategies are developed collaboratively by teachers and parents. Although successful up to a point, these strategies were handicapped by inadequate finance.
3. What is the way forward? Nigel Gann argued that a major impediment to reform was that parents and the community generally do not have a good understanding of the education system and that this needs to be remedied in order to achieve full democratic participation. Anntoinette stressed the importance of working through Labour councils at grassroots level. Georgia stressed the importance of collaboration, rather than competition and also suggested that MATs could be made accountable to Local Authorities.

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