



Policy Position Paper

~ Education ~

ADCS Policy Position Paper

Education (March 2015)

Executive summary

Education is a vital service for children, young people and the wider community. School leaders, governors and parents lead the drive for improvement in standards to ensure all learners thrive at school. To do this they need to be assured that the local education system is working in the best interests of all learners, and supported and challenged to develop our school system to become the best in the world.

Over the next decade we can anticipate severe pressures in several key areas of education:

- Ensuring a sufficiency of high-quality school places meet the needs of a growing school-age population;
- The supply of high quality teachers, especially in the core subjects of science and maths;
- The successful transition of young people aged 16-19 years, through school to training, further and higher education and work.

Unless there is a coordinated and coherent approach to dealing with these stresses inherent in the education system today, too many children will be at risk of falling between the cracks tomorrow and the nation will not be as competitive or productive as a result.

Local authorities play a critical role in ensuring the education system works effectively and the fragmented accountability arrangements that currently characterise the oversight of our schools system is getting in the way of establishing:

- Effective planning for school places, including the quality and quantity of post-16 provision;
- A transparent process for school admissions;
- A framework to provide more support for those with additional learning needs in school;
- The reliable supply of high quality teachers;
- The championing of the success of schools and pupils;
- Rapid, early action to prevent failure in individual schools;
- The capacity to deliver a broad, balanced and challenging curriculum in each school;
- The resources to ensure all children in all schools are safeguarded;
- Clear pathways into higher education, training or work.

Amongst providers and policy makers alike there is a general agreement that the education system is becoming increasingly incoherent and that more must be done



to simplify it and provide greater transparency. Achieving this goal will ensure schools are more effectively supported to work with each other to drive further improvement and increase pupil achievement.

To deliver a system that meets the needs of every learner, the incoming government must act swiftly to ensure national educational objectives can be delivered effectively at local level. This will require clear, unambiguous guidance on the role of the local authority in relation to all schools (academy, faith, community, foundation, free and voluntary). The system will experience further difficulties if the support and guidance that comes from a range of organisations and agencies continues to vary in relation to core policies about school places, teacher recruitment and pathways to employment, training and higher education.

Local residents, parents and guardians tell us that they want a clear accountability system that is local so they know instantly who to go to if they have a complaint, concern or issue which cannot be resolved directly by the school. The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) believes a local authority, working on behalf of all pupils and all schools, is uniquely placed to undertake that vital role for the benefit of children, young people and their families.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Local authorities have direct and specific duties with regard to school standards, school place planning, admissions, special educational needs, safeguarding, and children in care; these duties apply to all children in all schools. While these functions are given statutory force by legislation set out in the Education Act (1996), local authorities also have a democratic mandate and a moral purpose to act as champions for the citizens they serve.

1.2 The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) believes in both principle and practice that the development of effective and sustainable education services in a locality are best delivered via genuine partnership working to ensure that all children and young people receive a good education, and that they, and their families, are treated fairly and equitably.

1.3 The characteristics of an effective education system are as follows:

- It offers high quality educational opportunities, available locally for all children and young people including: effective early years provision, good or outstanding full time education for all learners of statutory school age and a varied and flexible post-16 offer so that young people are fully prepared for employment or further study;
- There is a sufficient supply of high quality teachers across all subject areas;
- There is an equitable distribution of resources in line with needs and that the system is financially sustainable;
- A system that is sustainable, without either excessive surplus or a deficit of places in a locality;
- School-to-school collaboration is supported to ensure excellence is shared throughout the local education system, local leaders also work collaboratively to tackle issues that cut across more than one school;
- There is a clearly defined framework of accountability so that the performance of all schools can be monitored and the early signs of poor performance tackled in a timely and decisive way;
- Fair access to local school places is encouraged through admissions policies that are clear, straightforward and consistently applied, with rapid redress for parents where there are problems;
- Schools are engaged with partners to support the development of a broad and balanced curriculum that meets local and national skills and employment needs.

1.4 The most successful local authorities have always worked hard to build and maintain relationships with all schools in their area, providing important links between central government and the frontline, and have been willing to intervene robustly when things go wrong. This ADCS policy position paper concerns local

authorities' responsibilities to promote educational excellence, ensure fair access for all and to champion the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people. It does not seek to address all areas and aspects of education policy; instead it focuses on three key areas that ADCS members believe urgently require the attention of government in 2015 and beyond.

2.0 There should be clear and unambiguous guidance on the role of a local authority in school education to enable them to fulfil their statutory duties regarding safeguarding and education standards and to ensure effective forms of local support and intervention are available to enable all education providers to thrive.

2.1 Schools should work in partnership with their local communities and the local authority in order for a single conversation about educational standards and attainment for a local area to take place. The local authority is the constant in a system of disparate arrangements and as a consequence seeks to ensure whole system accountability. At present concerns about the performance of school governance or safeguarding arrangements must be raised with different individuals and agencies. This is confusing and ultimately it is the learners who are at the greatest risk of being left at a disadvantage.

2.2 Parents and carers continue to look to their local authority to address concerns and complaints regarding their child's education. Remote commissioning (whether regional or national) cannot adequately hope to replace this long-standing local relationship and accountability structures should reflect this reality. Similarly, national agencies are too remote to deal with such vital matters as safeguarding.

2.3 School-to-school collaboration is an effective means of challenge and improvement. Ofsted should expect and inspect schools' and local authorities' success in this regard. All schools in a locality should be expected to develop a common set of sector-led improvement arrangements that drive up achievement by drawing on the strengths within and between local systems and reflect the needs of local communities.

2.4 Our education system is fragmented, and as a consequence, no longer fully transparent nor publically accountable. This is concerning for directors of children's services and for parents too. A national data-sharing protocol between all schools and their local authority will enable any decline in performance to be identified and addressed before more intrusive intervention is required.

3.0 The DfE's planned expenditure in 2014/15 is £50.9 billion, £42.6 billion of which will be spent on schools. ADCS would like to engage in a balanced, evidence-led debate, to ensure that there is effective and equitable deployment of resources, and that best value is being achieved with public funds.

3.1 The rising birth rate is putting real pressure on the ability of a growing number of local authorities to ensure a sufficiency of school places in a locality. In London an

additional 118,000¹ places are needed by 2016 while recently released data from the DfE predicts² an additional 900,000 children will enter the education system by 2023. If significant capital investment is not forthcoming to rebuild, improve or extend existing schools then local and national government must work together, as a matter of urgency, to ensure new institutions open only in the areas of greatest need. This issue also brings with it the pressing requirement to train and recruit a substantial number of additional teachers.

3.2 The establishment of free schools and university technical colleges (UTCs) in areas with a surplus of school places is compounding this problem and, moreover, is a poor use of scarce public funds. Policy makers must seek innovative solutions as a matter of urgency to prevent a crisis of pupil places.

3.3 Local authorities must also be involved in the strategic planning of, and decision making about, post-16 provision. The increasing fragmentation of this offer is narrowing the range of options available to young people in many areas of the country and institutions must work together to strengthen and broaden the local offer instead, of restricting or duplicating it. This issue is particularly acute in rural areas.

3.4 Children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds do not achieve as well as their peers - over two thirds fail to meet the accepted measures of success. The ADCS supports the continued drive to close the attainment gap so that those children living in economically deprived households have the opportunity to achieve as well as any child. However, a strong body of research shows that high parental aspirations and a good quality home learning environment has the strongest impact on a child's development and can even counteract the negative effects of social deprivation. A more adaptable approach to use of the pupil premium, and all other funds currently targeted at educational outcomes, should be considered in order to provide holistic support for all children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable or disadvantaged, enabling them to thrive now and in the future.

4.0 Young people need a post-16 offer that is relevant to their needs and takes account of the national priorities, so that they are fully equipped for further study and the world of work.

4.1 The raising of the participation age brings a clear and pressing need to ensure that young people are fully informed of the various education, training and employment opportunities available to them. This requires access to high quality and impartial careers guidance at school. According to a recent Ofsted survey³ only one in five schools have well-developed careers advice, while three quarters of schools were found to have guidance services which were less than good. Education should prepare young people to make the successful transition from adolescence to adulthood and in a fiercely competitive employment market it is more important than ever that they can access suitable careers advice and guidance to allow them to

¹ *Do The Maths*, London Councils, April 2013

² *National pupil projections: trends in pupil numbers*, Department for Education, July 2014

³ *Going in the right direction? Careers advice in schools from September 2012*, Ofsted, September 2013

continue learning, evolve their skills and to ensure continued employment success in the future.

4.2 The government should require each local authority to ensure a systematic careers education programme exists for 11 – 18 year olds, supported by the Local Enterprise Partnership. Partnerships of local schools, colleges and employers should plan, commission and publicise the local offer in conjunction with the local authority and the Local Enterprise Partnership to reduce skills shortages and promote entrepreneurship. More employers also need to be encouraged to recruit more apprentices, particularly those aged 16 – 18 years, including higher level apprenticeships.

4.3 Increasingly schools and colleges are working together to ensure level 3 students make the best progress. This should be further incentivised by ensuring provision available at local FE colleges is more routinely part of the school based offer and that vocational options become more commonly available in schools. Likewise, early links between schools and universities should be fostered to ensure students from low income backgrounds are more effectively and routinely supported and encouraged to apply to good universities.

4.4 Young people are less likely to achieve excellent outcomes or continue with further studies if they are disengaged from the education process, to this end the curriculum must not continue to foster an increasingly rigid and narrowly defined view of success. Low attainment as a young person is a key risk factor for poverty as an adult⁴.

4.5 Too many young people, their parents and teachers still perceive vocational routes as a second-class option next to academic routes⁵. The introduction of the 'EBacc' and the 'Achievement 8' progress measures have resulted in academic subjects receiving precedence over the arts, sport and vocational study options in schools. This in turn undermines the wider agenda of government to promote vocational and work-based options, such as apprenticeships. We must therefore develop a vocational route of excellence that is of equal value to the traditional academic pathway in such a way that a 'gold standard' applies equally to each path.

⁴ *State of the nation*, The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, October 2014

⁵ *Going in the right direction? Careers advice in schools from September 2012*, Ofsted, September 2013