

Country Report on School-based Management in England

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Executive Summary

School-based management is not unambiguously beneficial. This Report about the English experience highlights some of the problems that school-based management can bring in a context of increased parental choice of schools and competition between them.

Over the last two decades England has experienced a variety of changes in education policy that has given greater delegation and self-management to individual schools and increased the involvement of parents in their management. These changes include the reconstitution of the powers and composition of governing bodies (which gave greater parent representation) in the 1986 Education Act; and, in particular, the 1988 Education Reform Act's restructuring of the education system through grant maintained schools, local management of schools and open enrolment. The Labour government returned in 1997 made further changes in the 1998 Education Standards and Framework Act, but it can still be argued that state-maintained schools in England remain good examples of 'the self-managed school'.

However, Caldwell and Spinks' concept of the self-managing school has been used in England in ways different from that originally intended. It became entwined with the Conservative government's desire to decrease expenditure on education, weaken the power of Local Education Authorities (to which the central state's control over education had traditionally been delegated), and to increase the marketisation and privatisation of schooling through competition between schools. The end result is that increased competition between schools has narrowed the curriculum and reinforced a hierarchy of unequally funded schools which, in turn, has deepened differences in children's schooling experience.

School-based management was originally justified in terms of the effect that it is said to have on efficiency and effectiveness and, ultimately, on students' attainment. In England, as many of the changes to schools occurred at the same time, it is far from proven that any improvements are related to self-management of schools as such. Indeed, it may be that regular school inspection by the Office for Standards in Education, the introduction of a National Curriculum and, more recently, a number of special initiatives such as the Literacy Hour and the Numeracy Strategy have had an equally important effect on raising students' performance compared to that of the introduction of self-management.

The educational policies of the New Labour government from 1997 are mixed and it is too early to assess their effects. While a basic belief in the benefits of school-based management and diversity of schools has been retained, there is also a recognition that no school exists in isolation. The government has encouraged greater co-operation between schools, given more powers to the Local Education Authorities, and initiated several schemes to deal with groups of schools in poor areas.

1. The concept and definition of educational decentralization in England.

In order to understand decentralization in England it is necessary to review the way in which the highly unusual English education system developed. The fact is that England has always had a decentralized system - the changes over the last two decades have simply attempted to shift the level of decentralization from the district level towards the school level and additionally (somewhat paradoxically) to shift some aspects of control towards the central state.

In England, before the nineteenth century the education of children was considered to be the private affair of parents. Before 1833 all schools, apart from a few in workhouses, were private schools and the vast majority had a religious foundation. During the nineteenth century the state-maintained sector of schooling gradually developed to fill the gaps in private provision. England has always been a hierarchical society. The class-based nature of schooling was emphasized and clarified through the Newcastle, Clarendon and Taunton Commissions of the 1860s, which examined education for the poor, the upper class and the growing middle classes of the time. These Commissions led to a greater separation of schooling for the various social classes, and to the introduction of local School Boards to build and control schools for the working class alongside existing church schools (Walford, 1990, Ch. 2). Thus the state was forced to become involved in the provision, maintenance and organisation of its own elementary schools but, from a very early stage, the central state delegated this responsibility to local School Boards. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were established in 1902, and became the channel through which state funding to all elementary schools, whether owned by the state or by the churches, was provided. Practically all of the central state's control over education was delegated to the LEA level, the number of which has varied over the years but has usually been over 100. Secondary education was available only to some - either those with money to pay substantial fees or those passing a special scholarship examination.

The key 1944 Education Act for England and Wales built upon this existing understanding. To make it possible to provide secondary schooling for all children it was seen as necessary to include as many as possible of the pre-existing secondary schools that had been founded by the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church within the state-maintained sector. While some religious schools remained as full private schools, the majority entered into arrangements with the state in one of three categories - voluntary controlled, voluntary aided or special agreement. The main distinction between the three was the degree of control that the Board of Governors maintained over the school and the size of the financial contribution expected from the Churches in return for this remaining control. While these schools retained their religious denominational character, they became an integral part of the state maintained local authority system. Funding for schooling was, and still is, provided by central and local taxation, with the central part being provided as a block grant to the Local Authorities to cover other social services as well as education.

The 1944 Education Act established free secondary education within the state sector as a distinct stage for all children. In the years following the Second World War secondary schools were provided to 'accommodate all children according to age, ability, and aptitude' which, at that time, was generally interpreted in terms of meritocracy and beliefs from psychology about the necessity for separate provision for three types of pupil. In most LEAs separate grammar, secondary modern and technical schools were proposed to enable children to develop their talents and to fit

them for their future place in the occupational structure.

The technical schools within the tripartite system did not last long, so that selection for secondary schools at 11+ became a contest where those who 'passed' went to grammar schools, but where the majority who 'failed' ended up in the secondary moderns. The rhetoric of these schools being 'different but of equal status' rapidly disappeared as it became evident that the two different types of school were offering highly unequal educational experiences. Moreover, during the 1950s and 1960s evidence showed that there was considerable class bias in the intakes to the two types of school. The selective system was reinforcing class differences rather than offering wider opportunities to all (Floud et al., 1957) and the selective system of secondary schooling was largely gradually replaced by a comprehensive one over the 1970s and 1980s. It is an indication of the way in which power was delegated to the LEAs that this change took place Authority by Authority, and some LEAs still retain a selective secondary system to this day.

By 1979, although the private sector still educated a small but significant number of children, within the state sector, selection of children for separate and unequally provided schools had decreased markedly and more children were taught in comprehensive schools than ever before. There remained some inequalities between schools, of course, and the use of catchment areas (or zones) as a basis for allocating children to schools meant that there were still considerable class and ethnic differences between the intakes of schools, but these differences were decreasing and the aim was to try to ensure greater equality in the educational experiences being offered.

The 1979 General Election brought a decisive change in government, and a Conservative Prime Minister dedicated to an ideology of individualistic competitiveness and a denial of the very existence of such an entity as 'society'. The concept of the 'self-managing' school was one which could be adapted by the Conservative New Right to suit its own ends, and used to re-establish greater separation in the education for different social groups (Griggs, 1989). In Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's first term of office there were few major changes to the education system but, by 1985 dramatic changes were planned.

2. An overview from 1985-1997.

In their book of that name, Caldwell and Spinks define a self-managing school as one where there has been significant and consistent decentralization to the school level of authority to make decisions relating to the allocation of resources. These resources include knowledge, technology, power, materials, people, time and finance, yet they somewhat naively see this decentralization as 'administrative rather than political, with decisions at the school level being made within a framework of local, state or national policies and guidelines' (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988, p. 5). Their focus is on raising the quality of learning and teaching which they believe can be done through securing appropriate involvement of staff, students and the local community in policy-making through a cycle of collaborative school management. The cycle involves goal-setting, need identification, policy-making, planning, budgeting, implementation and evaluation and, ideally, involves staff, students and the local community in the process through a formal structure such as a school council or board of governors. The model of decentralization put forward by Caldwell and Spinks is not simply that schools should be autonomous, but one which envisages individual schools responding to local democratically-voiced needs within a wider local and

national framework of policies and guidelines to ensure that education meets public as well as private needs. Their model is essentially about improving efficiency and effectiveness, and draws upon a wealth of research showing that schools are more likely to be efficient and effective if those directly concerned with the school are given responsibility for local policy-making and implementation.

There are considerable problems in defining what is efficient and effective within education, and in determining the extent to which the findings of good industrial and commercial practice can be applied to education. There are also questions to be raised about the assumption that self-management can be seen as an administrative rather than political activity. However, these issues will not be discussed here, for, within the context of implementation in England, there were further important issues. Crucially, various New Right groups in England were able to draw somewhat selectively on the elements of the ideas originally put forward by Caldwell and Spinks, and incorporated these elements within wider ideologies of inequality. Under such circumstances, ideas which were intended to improve the quality of education available in schools to all children became part of policies with very different purposes.

In England the moves towards 'self-management' were initially concerned predominantly with finance. The delegation of part of the LEA education budget to individual schools is far from new for, from 1944 onwards, most LEAs had given headteachers the freedom to spend a proportion of the budget as they felt fit. However, the amount of money involved was small and only related to a limited range of spending. In particular, such autonomy rarely included staff salaries, which are the major expenditure item of any school (although the Inner London Education Authority had such a scheme in 1973: see Downes, 1988). During the 1980s there were several experimental schemes where a greater proportion of LEA funding was delegated to schools, but the benefits envisaged by this change were sometimes far from those advocated by Caldwell and Spinks.

At the time a much quoted example of school financial autonomy was that of the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull in the English West Midlands, where a scheme was introduced in 1981 which included expenditure on teaching and non-teaching staff as well as on buildings and maintenance. Even though staff were still employed by the LEA, headteachers were free to spend their budget largely according to their own priorities. But Solihull's experiment was introduced explicitly as a cost-cutting exercise and was not designed to improve schools or make them more responsive to local needs (Humphrey and Thomas, 1986, pp. 513-14). A new Chairperson of the Conservative controlled Local Education Committee had the belief that, if the same sort of procedures were used to run schools as he used in running a small business, savings would be made. Indeed, to ensure that such savings were made, for the first year of operation a bottom line deduction of 2 per cent was imposed on the secondary schools involved. The Director of Education argued that 'standard of service was about to become second fiddle to cost effectiveness' (Humphrey, 1988). As Caldwell and Spinks recognize, this scheme was not introduced to improve schools and did not draw upon the school effectiveness literature its aim was simply to save money (Caldwell, 1987a). Yet Caldwell and Spinks appear to see this as an aberration, rather than as a potent force behind similar changes.

There are clear differences between the context in which the concept of the self-managing school was developed in Australia and the English context in which it was implemented. Caldwell and Spinks developed their ideas about self-management largely through a study of Rosebery District High School in Tasmania, where Spinks

was principal. They state:

The township of Rosebery is located on the west coast of Tasmania. The town has developed in conjunction with the mining industry. The school of some 600 students serves not only Rosebery but also the neighbouring Hydro-Electric Commission village of Tullah and the mining village of Zeehan. The school is referred to as a K-10 school as students are enrolled at the age of four years in kindergarten and continue through until the fourth year of high school, year 10. Approximately one-half of students are of primary age, the other half of high school age (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988, p. 71).

What is evident here is that the school is isolated and that there was no competition between this school and any others. There were no other public schools nearby! Yet in England the idea of the self-managed school became intertwined with ideas of choice of school, competition between schools, and funding based directly upon the number of pupils that competing schools can attract. Caldwell and Spinks' original book had little to say about competition or choice, yet in England this process of linking self-management with choice and competition gradually occurred throughout the 1980s and culminated in the changes in the 1988 Education Reform Act.

Decentralization, self-management, and parental choice.

In England the number of 10-year-olds reached its peak in 1975, and there was a decline of some 30 per cent in the years until 1987. It is this dramatic demographic change that does most to explain the increased popular interest in parental choice of school in England in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. From the mid-1970s it became obvious that many schools had spare capacity, and the then Labour government was faced with a growing demand from parents to have the right to choose a particular school for their children.

Mrs Thatcher's newly elected Conservative government of 1979 rapidly moved to implement a version of parental choice through the 1980 Education Act. From 1982 parents were given the right to 'express a preference' for a school of their choice, and the LEA was obliged to take this preference into account. However, the Act still gave LEAs considerable powers so that they could manage falling school rolls and plan the overall provision of school places in their areas. It allowed the benefits to the community as a whole to override the benefits to individual parents by giving LEAs the right to refuse parents' preferences if this would lead to some less popular schools having unviable numbers.

The next major legislative change came with the 1986 Education Act which greatly increased the powers of school governing bodies (Deem, 1990). The governing bodies established in the 1944 Education Act had previously played a trivial role in the everyday management of schools. Many schools shared their governing body with other nearby schools, and in a few LEAs all schools were served by a single committee. The 1986 Education Act revitalized governing bodies, by ensuring that each school had its own committee and by giving it real powers and responsibilities over appointments, the curriculum and the management of the school. The Act also reconstituted the membership of governing bodies such that democratically elected local politicians and their nominees were no longer in the majority. The aim was that they were to be largely replaced by members of the local community (in particular, people in business and commerce, who were to be nominated rather than democratically elected) and parents of children in the school. The changes were justified in terms of increasing local accountability and fostering

stronger links between schools and the world of work, but they can also be seen as encouraging differentiation and generating competition between schools. 'Responding to local needs' has rather different implications for a school in a working-class inner-city area than it has for one in a middle-class suburb.

At the 1986 Conservative Party Annual Conference which preceded the 1987 general election, a dramatic new form of self-managing school was announced under the guise of giving greater parental choice. The Secretary of State for Education and Science announced the creation of a pilot network of twenty City Technology Colleges (CTCs) to cater for 11- to 18-year-olds in selected inner-city areas. These were to be private schools, run by educational trusts with close links with industry and commerce. The governing bodies of these schools were to include many representatives from industry and commerce but to exclude both parent and teacher governors. The CTCs would charge no fees, and sponsors would be expected to cover the extra costs involved in providing a highly technological curriculum and would make substantial contributions to both capital and current expenditure. In order to dampen criticism that the colleges were equivalent to reintroducing grammar schools, they were to admit pupils spanning the full range of ability drawn from a defined urban catchment area. However, selection was still a major feature of the plan, not according to ability alone, but based upon general aptitude, readiness to take advantage of the type of education offered, and the parents' and children's commitment to the college and to full-time education or training up to the age of 18. The desire to increase technological education was a major feature of the plan, but many public political speeches at the time showed that CTCs were also designed to encourage inequality of educational provision, reintroduce selection, weaken the comprehensive system and reduce the powers of the LEAs.

In my own study of the first CTC (see Walford and Miller, 1991; Walford, 1991a; Gewirtz et al., 1991) it was shown that the way in which children are selected for the CTC from those who apply was of crucial importance. All of the CTCs are required to 'provide education for children of different abilities . . . who are wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the school is situated'. At that time the CTC, Kingshurst selected children from a tightly defined catchment area which included eight LEA secondary schools, and was thus in direct competition with these other schools for pupils. Parents were required to apply for admission to the CTC on behalf of their child. The child took a simple non-verbal reasoning test which was used to ensure that children were selected with a range of abilities broadly representative of those who applied; they were also interviewed with a parent. The study by Walford and Miller showed that the college took great care to ensure that it was taking children with a wide ability range, but the whole entry procedure meant that selection was based on the degree of motivation of parents and children. Children and families where there was a low level of interest in education simply did not apply.

The Conservative New Right in England saw the potential of the concept of the 'self-managing school' during 1986 and 1987. Stuart Sexton, who was advisor to several Secretaries of State for Education in the early 1980s, had an important role in several New Right groups, including the Institute of Economic Affairs Education Unit. In 1987 that body published Sexton's edited version of a set of conference papers on the funding and management of education which included a paper by Brian Caldwell. Caldwell's paper was moderate in tone and explicitly denied the calls for privatization of state maintained schools (Caldwell, 1987b), but the same volume included a summary of Sexton's own vision for a 'system truly based upon the supremacy of parental choice, the supremacy of purchasing power' (Sexton, 1987, p.

11). Sexton's aim was for a highly differentiated and privatized school system which selected according to academic and other abilities, parent and child motivation and parental ability to pay. He proposes that an educational credit for a minimum amount would be usable at any state or private school, both of which would be allowed to charge additional fees. Schools would be fully autonomous, being able to pay teachers whatever they liked. Sexton's emphasis on 'the supremacy of purchasing power' is another way of saying that class-based schooling should be re-introduced and inequities between schools should be increased. Against such powerful ideas, Caldwell's claim that 'there is no reason to fear that quality and equity will be sacrificed' looks distinctly naive (Caldwell, 1987b, p. 53).

The 1988 Education Reform Act for England and Wales introduced a wide range of different ideas at the same time - and there were contradictions between them. School-based management was introduced which shifted power and control away from the LEAs towards the schools. Schools were given far greater control over the allocation of resources - including technology, power, materials, people, time and finance. They were still funded through the LEAs but the LEAs could only retain a small proportion of funding for their own uses. At the same time another new type of school (grant maintained schools) shifted power and control completely away from the LEAs to the schools and (in some ways) to central government which was to fund each grant-maintained school individually. It is also worth recognising that the move towards self-management of schools was also influenced by the Conservative government's distrust of LEAs - especially those in urban areas which were still largely controlled by Labour. Many LEAs had developed highly influential policies on anti-racism, anti-sexism, and anti-homophobia which were seen by some Conservative politicians as an attempt at social engineering and a diversion from raising educational standards. The question of 'What are schools for?' is central to the self-managing school debate, for schools inevitably serve national as well as local needs.

But while the 1988 Act gave all schools greater control of their own budgets and were able to decide, for example, whether to buy more books or spend more money on teachers, the curriculum was centralized at the national level. Before 1988 the only subject that officially had to be taught in all schools was religious education. For all subjects, teachers and schools had had considerable control over what and how they taught within the broad oversight of their LEA. The National Curriculum introduced what was originally a highly specified curriculum covering all major subjects. The resource of 'knowledge' was not delegated but centralized. But, additionally, open enrolment and greater choice of school was introduced for all schools which was designed to increase competition among schools and to encourage parents to make choices among schools.

Of crucial importance here is that state funding to individual schools became largely linked directly to age-related pupil numbers. Popular schools gain extra funding as they attract more pupils, while less popular schools lose funding as their numbers decline. The funding formulas which were used to allocate block funding to individual schools were designed specifically to make sure that LEAs lost practically all of their power to give extra support in areas of special need, or temporarily to adjust funding to particular schools to ensure that future needs are met. At a time of falling school rolls this meant that the choice of which schools would close was left largely to the summation of the decisions of existing parents. The needs of future parents, or the society as a whole, were forgotten.

In many American versions of self-management and choice there is at least the recognition that it might be desirable to allocate more resources to low-income/low-achieving schools to ensure equity (for example, O'Connell, 1991), but in England LEAs had to fight central government to retain even minimal powers to adjust the per-pupil funding. What happened in England was in direct contrast with the ideas expressed by Caldwell, who states that the 'crucial pre-requisite for success in self-management is that the lump-sum allocation of resources to schools should take account of factors which distinguish pupils' needs and interests (1987b, p. 27). He continues, 'A single formula allocation on a per pupil basis will be as inequitable as the most centralised decision-making process.'

Competition and self-management or inspection?

The 1988 Education Reform Act was presented as a loss of confidence in the Local Education Authorities' abilities to raise standards and ensure quality. Instead, individual schools, whether they were given greater independence through grant-maintained status or still remained within the Local Education Authority sector, received their own delegated funds and became self-managed. The belief was that individual schools were better able to make decisions about their own priorities and activities than were bureaucratic local councils. Moreover, the increased power given to parents about the particular school they wished their children to attend, by being able to express a preference for any school, was designed to ratchet up quality through head-on competition between schools for students.

In this context a school's performance within the structure of the National Curriculum must be seen as the key variable on which the government wished parents to make their choices. The National Curriculum was designed to standardize what should be taught in schools, and the associated assessment of children within each school was designed to provide information to existing and prospective parents on the quality of each provider.

Following 1988 successive legislation tried to ensure that more information was available about schools such that families could make a more informed choice. The 1992 Education (Schools) Act, for example, gave new powers to the Secretary of State to require all schools (including private schools) to provide more information. The aim was to assist parents in choosing schools for their children and, as is made explicit within the Act itself, to 'increase public awareness of the quality of the education provided by the schools concerned and of the educational standards achieved in those schools' (HMSO, 1992: 11). Here, consumer choice within a market of self-managed was expected to drive up quality. Quality was seen as measurable, or at least can be identified by, performance on certain pre-determined indicators such as examination results and staying-on rates. The government was acting to improve the information available on the range of possible providers in a similar way to enforcing the publication of the list of ingredients on food packaging. The implication was that, once parents had sufficient information they would act together to drive the poor producers out of the market.

This last aspect - driving poor quality providers out of the market - is central to any understanding of how markets might relate to quality, yet it is only feasible in very restricted circumstances. One feature of the 1988 Act that is rarely discussed is that it coincided with a period of dramatic decline in the school-age population. Between 1982 and 1989 the number of children in all schools in the UK fell from 9.93 million to 9.01 million - a fall of over nine per cent (DFE, 1993). This led to some schools being closed, but not nearly in line with the decline in pupil numbers. The overall student/teacher ratio improved from 17.8 to 16.9 in the same period, mainly

because the decline in the number of schools and teachers did not keep pace with the decline in student numbers. Although many welcomed this improvement in student/teacher ratios, it was not necessarily the result of a deliberate policy. The truth is that schools are very difficult for local authorities to close. In almost every case parents tend to object to the proposed closure of their local school. The closure process becomes politically sensitive and can extend over very many years. Additionally, the Local Education Authority had responsibility to think about future needs of the area when there might well be an expansion in student numbers which could not be accommodated if some existing schools were closed.

It can thus be seen that the 1988 Education Reform Act was, in part, designed to deal with this specific problem of falling school rolls and the perceived need to 'rationalise provision' - that is, to close schools. At a time of over-supply of school places, it was seen as desirable to encourage parents to make choices about the schools they wished to use, and for the summation of these choices to lead to the closure of particular less popular schools. Parents' choices helped to make decisions about which school should be closed - the assumption being that these would be the 'bad' schools, and that other schools would increase their quality to ensure their survival within this market.

However, once sufficient schools had been closed such that the number of places available roughly matched the number of students, this direct pressure of competition (even if all the assumptions were correct) would be insufficient to ensure that quality was continually improved. Once the number of places roughly meets the number of students there is no direct threat of closure. If quality is to be maintained and enhanced through market competition there needs to be an oversupply of places and the ability of new suppliers to enter the market.

In fact, the Conservative government itself quickly lost its faith in the market as the sole way of raising standards and ensuring quality. Whilst the ideology of the market was still evident in government rhetoric, the same 1992 legislation that gave greater powers to the Secretary of State to demand further information from schools, also established the Office for Standards in Education and ushered in a new era of school inspection. Teams of registered inspectors conducting regular four-yearly inspections of all schools were now seen as the way to ensure quality. To report on 'the quality of the education provided by the school' is the first of the four general reporting duties of any registered inspector (HMSO, 1992: 6). This is followed by the duty to report on standards, on finance and on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Here quality is to be maintained by quality control through inspection.

The 1992 Education Act's confusing, if not contradictory, messages about the means to improve standards are also to be found in the 1993 Act. In the 1993 Education Act (HMSO, 1993) the market was potentially strengthened through the publication of even more information on schools but, most importantly, through the inclusion of legislation that encouraged new providers to enter the state-maintained school market. From 1994, it became possible for existing private schools to become fully-funded by the state through sponsored grant-maintained status, or for potential sponsors to establish entirely new grant-maintained schools (Walford, 1998, 2000). With its Anglican, Roman Catholic, Jewish and other schools, England has always had a diversity of providers of schools even within the state-maintained sector, but always within the tight planning framework of the LEAs. This 1993 legislation was designed to encourage an even wider range of potential suppliers and, being grant-maintained, these schools were outside the LEAs' responsibilities. Existing or new

educational trusts were encouraged to transfer existing private schools to the state-maintained sector or build new schools, and had to provide at least 15 percent of the capital costs. However, in practice, only 15 schools took advantage of this legislation (Walford, 1997), for it was interpreted in ways that made entry into the market very costly in time and finance. However, as the group includes two Muslim primary schools and a Seventh Day Adventist secondary school, there has been a significant opening of the market to new suppliers. Following the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act (HMSO, 1998) these schools have been re-named and had their relationship with their Local Education Authorities partially restructured to become Foundation schools or Voluntary Aided schools and that Act provides ways by which similar new Foundation or Voluntary Aided schools may be established by a diversity of sponsors.

But while the number of providers, and the nature of provision, was expanded, at the same time, this 1993 Education Act showed that the government had increasing doubts about the ability of the market alone, through parents' choices, to ensure the quality of schooling. While the 1992 Act had made provision for action plans to follow Ofsted inspection reports and for the monitoring of the implementation of those action plans for failing schools, it was left to the 1993 Act to give specific powers to LEAs to introduce special measures to deal with failing schools. This Act also gave powers to the Secretary of State to establish small independent groups of education managers, called 'education associations', where it was felt that the LEA was unable or unwilling to deal satisfactorily with a failing school. Quality control through inspection was strengthened by powers of intervention. Subsequent legislation by both Conservative and Labour governments has given even greater powers to the Secretary of State to intervene if a school is perceived to be failing as a result of inspection.

3. Key effects of decentralization and school-based management

In England it is very difficult to disentangle the various effects of the National Curriculum, school inspection, open enrolment and greater choice of school from the strictly school-based management aspects of educational change. Most research in this area has actually been conducted on school choice.

One focus of research has been on the reasons that parents give for choosing a particular school, and the effects of this choice on the schools. One way of conceptualizing these aspects is through 'process' and 'product' criteria (Elliott, 1982). 'Process' criteria involve factors indicative of the capacity for human relationships such as the happiness of the child, whilst 'product' criteria refer to outcome such as examination results. Early studies showed that parents were more concerned with 'process' than 'product' criteria. For example, early studies carried out by Alston (1985), Boulton and Coldron (1989), Woods (1992), and Webster et al (1993) have all shown that 'parents are just as, if not more concerned with 'process' issues than measured outcomes when choosing schools' (Webster et al., 1993: 18). Other studies reporting similar findings include those by Hunter (1991), and West (1992a, 1992b).

However, later work by David et al (1994) and Carroll and Walford (1997), for example, has suggested an increase in the emphasis given to examination results by parents at both the primary and secondary levels, but the ways in which examination results of particular schools are taken into consideration by families may be complex. These research studies have shown that, while it is rarely the only criterion, or even the first criterion, examination results seem to act as a screening

mechanism - deselecting particular schools from consideration. For many parents, schools have to show that their examination results are above an acceptable minimum before they become potentially acceptable.

The latest large scale study of choice conducted by Woods, Bagley and Glatter (1998) takes this one stage further. Their research uses a case study approach and focuses on three contrasting groups of secondary schools selected such that they can be seen as representing three separate local competitive markets. Their findings about the relative importance of 'academic-centred factors' and 'child-centred factors' in choice are complex. They find differences between the three groups of schools studied. Overall, they do not find that academic concerns are generally of greater importance to parents, but that they are roughly equal. However, even though this is true, they find that the schools themselves have reacted *as if* parents have academic factors as their major criterion. They find that 'there is a sharpening of the focus on the academic in most schools and that, further than this, there is a privileging of the academic' (Woods et al, 1998: 162). They found that, when school managers talk about the attractiveness of their school, they talk of academic progress and examination performance. These are 'the major and widely accepted currency of 'good schooling' in the climate of enhanced emphasis on choice' (p. 163).

Now, of course, there is nothing wrong with schools attempting to improve the academic performance of young people! What is at issue here is that this seems to be becoming almost the one and only way in which schools judge themselves and expect others to judge them. Not only does this suggest a corresponding decrease in the emphasis given to social, cultural, moral, and aesthetic activities, it also implies that schools can be ranked within a single hierarchy. Thus, rather than leading to greater diversity of schooling and greater autonomy of individual schools, within England, school-based management within the context of greater choice appears to be leading to greater uniformity and conformity. Schools have attempted to become more like each other, in the sense that they are either 'better' or 'worse' than competitor schools on this single criterion. As has been indicated above, the evidence that we have on the effects of markets is that there has been a narrowing of the criteria by which parents and particularly schools judge quality and self-managed schools have acted to narrow the main purposes of schooling

The effects of school-based management in a context of greater choice on social inequalities are also now well researched. The studies by Stephen Ball and his colleagues have been particularly influential (Ball, 1993; Ball et al, 1995; Gewirtz et al, 1995; Ball et al., 1996; Ball and Gewirtz, 1997; Reay and Ball, 1997; Ball and Vincent, 1998; Reay and Lucey, 2000). In the main study, they interviewed a broad spectrum of parents who had recently decided which secondary school to send their child to, and examined in detail the ways in which various families responded to the market situation in which they found themselves. Ball argues that families are privileged or disadvantaged by the values that inform their conceptions of choice-making.

Gewirtz et al.'s (1995) study of the workings of choice and the market since 1988 examined in detail the ways in which various families responded to the market situation they found themselves in. They identify three broad groups of parents, defined in terms of their position in relation to the market - the privileged/skilled choosers, the semi-skilled choosers and the disconnected - and show the ways in which working-class or newly immigrant families were disadvantaged in the market. They present a picture of a complex situation where patterns of choice are generated both by choice preferences and opportunities, and where reputation and desirability

are played off against other factors. But they also show that the way in which parents played the market was strongly related to social class, and that working-class parents were much more likely than middle-class parents to see the child's views as decisive. This last finding is supported by other research (for example, Carroll and Walford, 1997b, Taylor, 2002).

Gewirtz et al. (1995) also indicate that, where curriculum specialisms were being introduced by schools, they were sometimes acting as selection mechanisms for high academic ability and middle class children. In particular, the development of specialisms such as dance or music indirectly discriminated against working class children, and allowed schools a greater chance to select what they deemed to be 'appropriate' children. However, they show that, despite the specialisms, rather than schools becoming more diverse, the pressures of competition between schools has led to schools becoming more similar in what they offer, but within a hierarchy of perceived ability to offer advantage. They conclude that local hierarchies of schools were developing where resources flowed from those children with greatest need to those with the least need. The finding that schools have become less rather than more diverse in their offerings is supported by considerable research including that by Glatter et al. (1997), Gordon and Whitty (1997), and Halpin et al. (1997).

A recent series of papers from Gorard and his colleagues (Gorard and Fitz 1998a and b, 2000; Gorard, 1999a and b, 2000a and b; Fitz et al., 2002; Gorard et al., 2001, 2002a & b; Taylor 2002) has partly challenged this general picture developed from qualitative research. In their several papers they draw year-by-year comparisons using statistical data available from government sources of the social composition of schools. Using indicators such as the percentage of children in each school who have the right to Free School Meals (which is a commonly used indicator of poverty), they argue, amongst other things, that in most cases social segregation is actually decreasing rather than increasing as the qualitative studies have found. Their methodology is relatively simple. In most of their work they take the local education authority as the unit of analysis and compute the 'expected' percentage of students eligible for Free School Meals in each school. They then compare the 'expected' percentage with the 'actual' percentage in each school in each year of the analysis and show that the differences have declined since families have been given greater choice of school. In their recent studies they have also used alternative indicators of deprivation such as the percentage of children with statemented special educational needs, or with English as a second language. In all of these cases their calculations lead them to conclude that, overall, increased marketization has not lead to increased segregation or, indeed, to some schools entering a 'spiral of decline'(Gorard et al., 2002a). While they do find some indications of a rise in segregation after 1997 (Gorard et al. 2002b), the balance of their evidence points in the opposite direction. One of their interesting arguments is that, while market forces may have theoretical polarising effect, because they were introduced into a system that was already deeply polarised through 'selection by mortgage', the result has been that pre-existing polarisation has decreased.

Their work is important, but has been the subject of some criticism. Gibson and Asthana (1999, 2000), for example, have argued that the unit of analysis taken by Gorard and Fitz is inappropriate. They claim that while local education authority level statistics may well show decreased polarisation, within competitive local markets there may still be increasing differences. Leva and Woods (1999) also argue for the importance of studies of groups of local schools. Their study of over 300 schools which they have tracked in detail over the period 1991-1998, broadly supports the

work of Gorard and Fitz and they estimate that between 30 and 40 per cent of localities have experienced increased social polarisation. However, they find that social polarisation is more likely to have occurred where there are high levels of competition between schools and greater school type diversity. It may simply be that polarisation has not occurred in local areas where competition has not been great.

Another group of researchers (Bradley and Taylor, 2000; Bradley et al., 2000) have used data from the national Youth Cohort Survey to investigate changes in segregation in England during the 1990s. They use the same indicator of segregation as Gorard and his colleagues - the percentage of children eligible for free school meals - but find that, although small, differences in the social segregation of schools have widened during the 1990s. Additionally, they found a significant positive relationship between school examination results and any decrease in the proportion of children eligible for free school meals in the schools. Expanding schools were found to be decreasing their proportion of children with disadvantage and thus increasing their examination results. Meanwhile, the less popular schools were increasing their proportion of such children. The differences between the various studies are well discussed in the work of Adnett and Davies (2002: 196 ff.) Who argue that the differences between the various findings may not be as great as they believe. The main problem is that studies at the national and local education authority levels may conceal results that would emerge from the study of identified local markets. They argue that the effects of choice on social segregation will be strongly affected by local conditions.

However, there are two further comments on this work worth making. First, the indicators used are all indicators of deprivation. Only about 20 per cent of children are eligible for Free School Meals and the percentages of children with statemented special education needs or with English as a second language are smaller. These are measures of social disadvantage not social advantage, and are used as bipolar either/or indicators. Further, taking 'English as a second language' as a single category, for example, conceals the known differences in academic performance of children from different backgrounds and ethnic groups. These single bipolar indicators do not give information on the whole distribution of social polarisation, but only on how particular extreme (but still sometimes heterogeneous) groups have coped with marketisation compared with the rest. It is certainly not unimportant that these groups may not have fared as badly as expected, but such data gives no information at all about how the most advantaged or even the average students have fared. We need research that uses the full range of social class, income and wealth variables to enable a true test of the polarisation hypothesis to be made. The qualitative and quantitative research are not necessarily in disagreement.

Second, while the usual social indicators of social class, income, wealth, ethnicity and gender are important, the detrimental effects of marketisation do not depend on disadvantage being linked to these variables. Several of the detailed small-scale studies already discussed have shown that families are differentially placed before the market. Choosing a school has now become a complicated process where local knowledge, interest in education, and degree of motivation of parents and children have become a vital indicator of successful acceptance of a child in a leading school. Children and families where there is a low level of interest in education simply do not give this process sufficient attention. Put crudely, if there is a hierarchy of schools, someone has to attend those at the bottom of the hierarchy if others are selected for those schools at the top. With a quasi-market, the children at the bottom are likely to be those with the greatest need for high quality schooling - whether or not

this need can be identified by standard social indicators of class, gender and ethnicity.

As indicated above, school-based management in England does not extend to the curriculum. All state-maintained schools are required to follow the National Curriculum and to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. England has always had a national system of examinations at 16 and 18, with entry to university being based upon competitive results in these examinations, which has meant that there has been little diversity of curriculum or pedagogy for older school students. The years from 14 onwards have been structured by these examinations for many years. However, the introduction of the National Curriculum, with testing at 7, 10 and 14 as well as (now) 16, 17 and 18, have led to a similar straight-jacketing of the curriculum throughout primary and lower secondary schools. While superficially England now has a diversity of school types, including various specialist schools and schools for religious minorities, the curriculum and the students' experiences of schooling are now less diverse than ever before. The actual differences between schools are few and relate mainly to how they are placed on the hierarchy of their students' performance in academic tests.

This leads directly to a consideration of whether the introduction of greater choice of school and greater school self-management has led to improvements in academic performance as was predicted by the advocates and the Conservative Government. The fact that Ofsted inspection was established so quickly after the introduction of market mechanisms into state-maintained schooling means that it is almost impossible to make judgements about the independent effects of these conflicting strategies for maintaining and improving quality. While several of these advocates have asserted that this is true, if modest in size (Adnett and Davies, 2002), the situation is actually too complex to unravel (Gorard and Taylor, 2002; Walford, 2001).

It is certainly true that the overall academic performance of all schools, as measured by examination successes at age 16 and 18, has improved greatly since the introduction of school-based management and greater choice, but this is not necessarily a causal relationship. The introduction of the National Curriculum with regular testing of all pupils, followed by two separate, yet linked, developments - the public publication of the examination results of all schools and the introduction of regular inspection of schools with, again, the results being made public - may well have had a greater effect on performance (Walford, 2001d). More importantly, as Leva and Woods (2002) have recently shown, individual schools have had differential rates of improvement. Those schools with low concentrations of social disadvantage relative to other local schools are likely to have higher rates of improvement. Those schools with high concentrations of social disadvantage are more likely to suffer the dual handicap of being low down the local hierarchy of schools and finding that this relative social disadvantage worsens over time. As other local schools are more able to select and shape their intakes, so it becomes more difficult for more disadvantaged schools to improve.

4. Programmes designed to overcome these problems

A New Labour government was elected in 1997 with the three priorities of 'education, education and education'. Since that time there have been five major Education Acts and very many separate education initiatives from government. While many of these initiatives have been directly aimed at reducing inequality and providing better educational opportunities for the disadvantaged, other initiatives have

unintentionally acted in the opposite direction. Many commentators have argued that there have been contradictions between many of the initiatives and a lack of overall coherence. However, there are two overall thrusts in terms of school-based management and decentralization: 1. the central government has increased its role in relation to curriculum and pedagogy, especially through initiatives such as the Literacy Hour and the National Numeracy Strategy; 2. there has been an encouragement of cooperation between schools and a focus on improvement at the district level rather than at the school level alone.

During the first Labour government there were major centrally-planned programmes designed to 'raise standards' in primary schools and in the second term this has been extended to secondary schools. The Literacy Hour and the Numeracy Strategy were both introduced without specific legislation, yet they have transformed the experiences of most primary school children. The Literacy Hour, for example, is a specific programme that leads children through a structured hour-long session each day with periods of instruction from the teacher, small group work and then plenary. It was introduced through separate training for the literacy co-ordinators in each school who then used video and other pre-packaged materials to 'cascade' the training to the other teachers in each school. Mountains of documentation were produced and circulated to schools. Although it is not statutory, practically all primary school teacher and their children follow this strictly determined and centrally initiated pattern of English teaching. The Numeracy Strategy followed a similar method of implementation and is just as prescriptive. The implementation of both initiatives is checked through the regular Ofsted inspections.

There are, of course, questions about the desirability of such a programme but, in terms of raising the overall attainment of children on particular tests, it has clearly been successful. However, this may be at the expense of narrowing the curriculum, and boring and de-motivating many children in the longer run. Both interventions are based on a neo-conservative model of the 'basics' in education and of providing materials and teaching tactics that are 'teacher proof' but which thus constrain the imaginations and creativity of the best teachers. There has been a narrowing of the curriculum which, very recently, the government has made moves to partly correct.

In addition to this move towards greater centralisation of control to the national level, there have been moves to strengthen the district level and shift some control from the schools to the LEAs. There has also been a push towards greater equity between the various types of school. For example, the grant-maintained schools, with their greater funding and assumed higher status were abolished. The new system of schooling with community, voluntary controlled, voluntary aided and foundation schools introduced by the 1998 Education Standards and Framework Act is still hierarchical, but at least direct funding to all schools is now more equitable and all schools now have local education authority representatives on their governing bodies. Extra funding is now more likely to go to schools with particular needs than to those that already had multiple advantages as had been the case with most grant-maintained schools.

There has been a focus on the disadvantaged and excluded in many of Labour's policies both in education and elsewhere. Very quickly after the 1997 Election the Social Exclusion Unit was established within the Cabinet Office and this has been crucial in advocating many policies (not just in education) that have targeted the poor and excluded. In education, one of the main targets have been inner-city schools which generally do not do well in the competitive league tables of results. It has also targeted particular areas of deprivation with its Education Action Zones and

Excellence in Cities programmes. There have been several initiatives designed to link schools more closely to their local communities.

Several of the new Labour initiatives have been targeted at the 'inner city' which is in some ways a code for 'ethnic minority' and 'working class'. The Education Action Zones are perhaps the most well known of these targeted programmes. Here clusters of schools, usually one or two secondary and the related primary schools were given a special status and modifications to teaching contracts and to the national curriculum were allowed. The idea was that schools would work together with parents, businesses and other community organisations to raise school standards and combat social exclusion. Business was supposed to 'provide leadership or management expertise'. Each zone received up to £1 million extra funding per year, with £750,000 coming directly from government. The remaining £250,000 had to be raised by the zone sponsors themselves. In practice these EAZs have not been particularly successful, and they are now to be incorporated into the Excellence in Cities programme which does not involve competitive bidding.

In all of these initiatives there is a recognition that schools do not exist in isolation and that support networks at the local level have a part to play in school improvement. The Beacon School programme (now to be re-launched as Leading Edge Schools), where selected schools were expected to share 'good practice' with neighbouring schools, has had mixed results in practice, but it is a acknowledgment of the fact that self-governing schools need support at the local and national level if they are to be at their most effective (Fullan, 1999, 2003).

However, as the same time as recognising that school-based management in a competitive environment can be damaging, the Labour government has continued with some the push for greater diversity of schools and some new forms of school-based management. The City Academies programme was theoretically aimed at disadvantaged children in the inner-city, although recent changes in the 2002 Education Act (which changed the name to Academies) opens the scheme to a wider group. Academies are independent, non fee-paying, mixed ability schools established by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups and managed by a charitable trust. The admissions, special educational needs and behavioural policies must comply with those of maintained schools, but Academies have a specialism, or combination of specialisms and are expected to share their expertise and facilities with other schools and the wider community. Sponsors contribute 20 per cent of the initial capital investment up to around £2 million with the Department of Education and Skills meeting the remaining capital costs and all running costs. They can be either an entirely newly built school or dramatically modified pre-existing (and closed) schools. The current aim is for 50 Academies and, at the end of July 2002 there were 22 Academies under development. The first three opened in September 2002.

What we see in the Academies initiative is the neo-socialist idea of helping inner-city children being swamped by neo-liberal beliefs in the benefits of competition in the quasi-market and of the superiority of the private sector and privatisation. The desire to balance these two elements has been a constant feature of Labour policy-making and has led to incoherence and rapid changes to policy.

One of the cornerstones of the 2002 Education Act was a plan to allow schools that were deemed to be 'successful' the freedom to set their own curriculum and set teachers' pay rates. This marked a considerable change in policy, with the second aspect being something that previous Conservative governments strongly desired but were never prepared to implement. At present all schools have to pay nationally-

agreed salaries, but have the power to appoint who they wish. In general younger teachers are on lower salaries than older teachers, but teachers also gain extra salary for special responsibilities and for passing a threshold. At the time of the Act, Ministers championed 'earned autonomy' for schools that had shown themselves to be 'successful' and saw this as the next stage in school-based management. In practice, with a change of Secretary of State for Education and problems with the teacher unions, the idea has been quietly shelved. There are currently no plans to issue the guidance that was initially expected in late 2002.

5. Future trends and plans.

Since 1997, the Labour government has introduced a great number of new initiatives. Many of these have focussed on the disadvantaged and excluded and have tried to reduce inequalities, and many have also recognised the importance to raising standards of external agencies to the self-managed school. The former grant-maintained schools have been brought back into the LEA framework and there is greater co-ordination of admissions. There have been attempts to encourage the spread of good practice from one school to others rather than encourage competition between schools, and the Education Action Zones and Excellence in Cities programmes have demanded that local schools work together to improve the whole area. In general there has been an official recognition that 'no school is an island' and that cooperation between schools is likely to bring about improvements for all schools.

However, alongside these ideas, Labour has embraced the neo-liberal belief in the benefits of the quasi-market. It has attempted a 'modernisation' of the comprehensive school and has championed diversity and choice. A new hierarchy of schools has been established such that there are now Foundation, Voluntary Aided, Voluntary Controlled and Community schools. The traditional Christian denominational school have been supplemented by some supported by Muslims, Seventh Day Adventists and Sikhs. All of these types can be selective or non-selective, single-sex or co-educational. Superimposed on this matrix are further chances for schools to be designated as specialist schools or beacon schools. Just outside the maintained system, the City Technology Colleges remain as private schools mainly supported by government, and the Academies have been started by Labour. However, while there are many names, and there appears to be a greater variety of schools than before in terms of type, there is actually greater uniformity in what is taught and the way it is taught.

Moreover, in England inequality of provision has been directly and indirectly encouraged. City Technology Colleges were explicitly established with the intention that they would be funded at a higher level than other schools. Specialist schools have to find an initial contribution from business and industry and are rewarded with even greater additional funds from government. Schools are encouraged to 'bid' for particular programmes in competition with each other. Thus the schools with the most active and innovative staff, parents and governors get extra funding. The schools which already have support from business and industry get further extra funding. Those schools at the bottom drift further down the hierarchy. Ironically, Labour's support for self-management and autonomy for schools (where all schools are encouraged to find additional funding from external sources) has the potential to negate their policies attempting to reduce inequalities. It is the schools that least need extra funding that have often received higher overall funding.

The title of the 1992 White Paper that preceded the 1993 Education Act was *Choice and Diversity* (DFE, 1992). It was expected that the introduction of a quasi-market would bring with it greater diversity of provision. Yet, the situation is now that increased centralised control of the curriculum and pedagogy has led to greater uniformity within a framework of pseudo-diversity. Within such a system some parents and children will be more highly motivated, more concerned and better informed about schooling than others. Some parents are more able to pay for the transport of their children to school, and may be more able to ensure that their choices become a reality. Some schools will be able to draw on national, local and parental financial support for new buildings and equipment or to pay for additional teachers and helpers. Other schools will not be so lucky. As choices are made and pupils selected, it must be expected that schools will become more differentiated - but only in their ability to achieve examination successes with particular selected intakes. We are moving towards a hierarchy of schools where the examination success of schools is the main criterion for choice, and the diversity of other talents that children have are being devalued. There is no evidence that school-based management in a context of increased choice, in itself, has acted to increase examination success but, coupled with a initiatives of a more centralist government, it has led to a potentially damaging narrowing of the focus of schooling onto examinations. There is also a real danger that greater autonomy for schools will lead to increased inequities between the experiences of children attending them.

Note

This Report draws on several of my previous publications including Walford, 1990, 1993a & b, 1994, 2001, 2003.

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