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INTERIM
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Research Survey 10/2

THE GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION OF ENGLISH PRIMARY EDUCATION

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THE GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION OF ENGLISH PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Maria Balarin and Hugh Lauder

This is one of a series of 32 interim reports from the Primary Review, an independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England. The Review was launched in October 2006 and will publish its final report in late 2008.

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A briefing which summarises key issues from this report has also been published. The report and briefing are available electronically at the Primary Review website: www.primaryreview.org.uk. The website also contains Information about other reports in this series and about the Primary Review as a whole. (Note that minor amendments may be made to the electronic version of reports after the hard copies have been printed).

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The report forms part of the Review's research survey strand, which consists of thirty specially-commissioned surveys of published research and other evidence relating to the Review's ten themes. The themes and reports are listed in Appendices 1 and 3.

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THE GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION
OF ENGLISH PRIMARY EDUCATION

The governance, administration and control of English primary education and of the national school system in general is one of the policy areas that has undergone the deepest changes in recent decades. Since the rise of the Conservative government to power in the early 1980s there has been a move towards the idea of governance and more decentralised forms of decision-making and administration.

Paradoxically, and while the official rhetoric tends to emphasise autonomy and participation, the shift towards a governance model has been matched by the introduction of some measures of greater control, such as the National Curriculum and the more recent move towards a system of standards, targets and assessments. Lauder *et al* (2006) have called this centralised system of 'learning' the 'state theory of learning' because it mandates for teachers, modes of assessment, the curriculum and elements of pedagogy. Pedagogy is test driven where the criterion for pupil progress and school improvement turn on improvements in a battery of official tests at entry to primary school (baseline tests) and at the ages 7 and 11.

The tensions emerging from the coexistence of such differing tendencies are what characterise the governance arena in the present in what has been described as a new model of decentralised-centralism (Karlsen 2000). New roles have been devised for traditional agencies both at the central and local levels, while yet other instances have been created and new actors have become involved in policies of governance, administration and control.[1]

In the following pages a more detailed description of the current state of educational governance, administration and control will be presented. This will include an account of the transformations that have led to it, as well as a detailed outlook of the current role of different actors. Following this there will be a discussion of the main difficulties and possibilities of the current state of educational governance through the eyes of research findings.

From government to governance – reconfiguring the balance of power

The current configuration of power and relations between different governance, administration and control agents can be traced back to the 1980s, and particularly to the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA). Up to this point school administration had been largely in the hands of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and few forms of centralised control were in existence, with most government control taking place through legislature rather than direct involvement in school matters (Alexander 2001). The rise of the Conservative government to power led to the development of a discourse that stressed the need to make the public sector more efficient and this, it was argued, would be achieved through a reduction of the state.

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[1]   Such shifts are not exclusive to the education sector. On the contrary, they fit a predominant international or global discourse on the role of the state and civil society. While there have been some undeniable changes in the forms of this discourse over the past two and a half decades, there are also some evident continuities. Whereas the early eighties were predominantly influenced by a neo-liberal perspective which highlighted the need to minimise the role of the state in favour of market dynamics, the rise of New Labour to power has involved a discourse on bridging the public/private divide.

In education, as in other policy areas, it was argued that the 'provider capture' on the part of the state was the main cause of inefficiency, and that the monopoly of the state over education had to be broken down (Whitty 1997). The ensuing policies thus promoted the devolution of administrative capacities directly to schools, with the consequent reduction in the authority of LEAs. Not only were funds to go directly to schools, but the possibility of schools opting out of LEAs after a parental ballot and acquiring 'grant-maintained' status was also introduced. Such moves were justified under the rhetoric that school-autonomy was the best way to increase efficiency and generate better educational results.

The focus on efficiency stemmed from a New Public Management discourse which, together with the reduction of the state, led not only to the promotion of the self-management of schools, but also to growing private sector involvement and the introduction of market mechanisms in the administration and governance of schools. The latter refer specifically to the introduction of choice policies that would allow parents to act as consumers in a market that would have to adapt to their demands. Such measures included the opening up of school selection policies beyond traditional catchment areas, so that parents would be able to decide which school they wanted to send their children to, and also the promotion of wider diversity to provide more possibilities from which to choose.

Together with these measures there was a change in the constitution of school governing bodies. While all schools were already required to have individual governing bodies, the latter 'were reformed by removing the inbuilt majority of self-serving local politicians and increasing the representation of parents and local business interests' (Whitty 1997:7).

In parallel, and largely in contrast, to this move towards a more 'fragmented' form of public service delivery (Dale 1997; Farrell 2005) the 1980s saw an unprecedented rise in government control measures. While this was different to direct intervention in the delivery of policies, the 1988 ERA introduced a compulsory National Curriculum – allegedly one of the policies that most radically altered the British education system, at least since the 1944 Education Act – as well as a system of high-stakes assessments that aimed at regulating the operation of the educational market. Thereafter control of the curriculum and assessment would lie in the hands of independent agencies that are, nevertheless, appointed by government and directly accountable to it – initially the National Curriculum Council and the School Examinations and Assessment Council, which were then transformed into the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and more recently into the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

Government intervention later extended to other areas such as teacher training and inspection with the creation of specific agencies such as the Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE, later renamed the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) which in turn morphed into the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA)), and the introduction of requirements for teacher training providers and professional standards to be met by student teachers.

The tightening of central government control intensified with the creation of the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) in the Education (Schools) Act 1992, which came in to replace the traditional His/Her Majesty's Inspectorate. While OfSTED was set up as a non-ministerial government department its activities are 'closely tied to the implementation and validation of government policy', which indicate that 'England thus lost its independent inspectorate' (Alexander 2001:142).

The end of the Conservative era arrived with considerable criticism of its educational policies. Research evidence from the UK and other countries in which choice policies were being deployed suggested that the latter were contributing to the generation of considerable

inequalities. Class variables were seen to affect the structure of the educational market, with the middle-classes acquiring considerable positional advantages in relation to their working class peers in terms of both access to educational opportunities and performance in the system (Whitty 1997; Lauder and Hughes 1999). There were also indications that the stronger central control measures that were being deployed were having negative effects on teachers' morale, while the notion of teacher professionalism was reconstructed (Lauder *et al* 2007).

Furthermore, the Tory reliance on a strong critique of the comprehensive educational system which had led to the promotion of greater diversification in catering for students' needs was also under question. Evidence suggested that this was also leading to forms of selection that discriminated against children according to class characteristics. Besides, there appeared to be clear indicators that market choice was leading to homogenisation within schools as regards the pedagogy, the curriculum, and assessment – rather than to diversity (Whitty 1997).

The advent of New Labour brought some expectations of change, especially as the party had expressed criticisms of the 1988 ERA. However, rather than moving back in terms of decentralisation and control policies, the government moved towards an enhancement of the latter. New Labour's main criticism of the previous government's policies focused on the failure to meet desirable standards of academic achievement. The main shift in the policy discourse thus proposed the need to focus on 'standards not structures' (Taylor, Fitz *et al* 2005), a pledge that led to the introduction of specific targets for test performance which would have to be met by the year 2002 (Alexander 2001). This gave way to the prescription of the literacy and later the numeracy hours, which, 'while allowing for innovation and experimentation in selected areas' (Muschamp, Jamieson *et al* 1999:107) mandated 'a single national formula' (Alexander 2001:143) that was expected to produce the expected outcomes. Such policy moves have been part of a discourse that emphasises the role of accountability in the improvement of public service delivery.

The other major discursive move in terms of education policies was inconsistent with New Labour's Third Way approach to politics and policy making. The latter, with its emphasis on bridging traditional divisions such as those between left/right, public/private and state/civil society led to the establishment and promotion of various forms of partnership and collaboration in educational governance and administration. While in practice many of the policies that have stemmed from this discourse are not far from the more evident move towards private sector involvement that was promoted during the Conservative government, they have often been presented as the way towards more transparent, effective and efficient administration (Cardini 2006).

The two tiers of New Labour's move towards a governance model (see Dale 1997; Pierre and Peters 2000) are thus an emphasis on collaboration and participation, together with a tightening of control through standard setting, assessments and the permanent scrutiny of school practices. This has led to a redefinition of the role of the various agencies involved in the delivery of educational services and to the formation of a new balance of power between and within the various levels of the system.

The new role of central agencies, LEAs and school governing bodies

Changes at the central level

The shift towards a governance model has brought about a 're-agenting' (see Jones, quoted in Hatcher 2006:600) of the school system that has radically altered the role of traditional actors and the way in which policies are developed. A series of new agencies and actors have come to define the education policy arena. The government's Five Year Strategy (DfES 2004a) makes an explicit case for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to assume

fewer responsibilities in terms of direct management and service delivery. By the same token, the more traditional actors in charge of policy development and implementation, such as LEAs and teachers, have been restructured with two new categories of actors becoming involved: on one hand quasi non-governmental organisations which include the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED), the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT); and on the other private companies (Hatcher 2006).

The changing role of LEAs

LEAs had been traditionally dedicated to the provision of educational services, a role that, since 1944, they began to partially share with central government and local institutions. By considerably devolving resources and decision making powers directly to schools, the 1988 ERA radically altered the definition of LEA functions. The Conservative government saw LEAs as representing 'local bureaucracies', and as 'barriers to raising standards' because of their 'liberal' and 'child-centred' views; on the other hand, LEAs appeared to be 'the antithesis of the envisaged market-driven' reforms (Fitz, Gorard *et al* 2002:376). Several policies were introduced to address this situation. As part of the move towards self-management, a large proportion of LEA budgets was to be handed directly to schools; policies of open enrolment meant that LEAs would have reduced decision making powers over this issue; at the same time LEA representation in governing bodies was also reduced; finally, the possibility of achieving grant-maintained status meant that some LEAs could further loose their powers over schools. With their role thus heavily curtailed, LEAs were left in a difficult position (see Fitz, Gorard *et al* 2002; Bache 2003).

While New Labour kept the direction of policies in terms of devolved power to schools and strong central policy definition and monitoring, the role of LEAs became more clearly defined and somewhat strengthened in relation to policies of standard setting, school achievement and enrolment (Fitz, Gorard *et al* 2002).

Several policy documents (DFEE 1998a, b; 2000; OFSTED 2000; 2001a, b) have contributed to redefining the role of LEAs. The 1998 School Standards and Framework Act (DFEE 1998b), aimed particularly at tackling issues of access and created new types of schools (community, foundation and voluntary-aided) open to different degrees of influence from their LEAs. The Act also increased LEA representation in governing bodies, and considerably tidied up the admissions confusion created by the previous governments, especially through the grant-maintained policy (see Fitz, Gorard *et al* 2002 for a more detailed account of current admissions arrangements). The Code of Practice on LEA-School relations (DFEE 1998a), stresses the need to raise standards, it reinforces the self-management of schools and intervention in inverse measure to success, it highlights the importance of partnerships and cooperation, and it establishes a policy of zero tolerance to underperformance. A policy of fair funding has also been deployed which defines the four areas in which LEAs can allocate funds (that is to say special educational needs, access, school improvement and strategic management). The LEA framework for inspection confirms that the government regards 'schools as the main drivers of their own development, with LEAs working in partnership with them to provide support and challenge as necessary' (Hatcher 2006).

Since 1997 LEAs themselves have become the target of government inspection, especially in relation to the meeting of targets and the development of planning strategies (Bache 2003). Inspection has led to the categorisation of LEAs according to whether they are fulfilling their role in a satisfactory or unsatisfactory way. When the latter has been the case, the government has deployed a policy of transferring school administration to local, usually private, partners – the case of the Leeds LEA being a somewhat exemplary one (Bush and Gamage 2001).

LEAs in general have been encouraged by central government to engage in public-private partnerships which are expected to help towards the development of better planning and target setting strategies, and to school improvement in general. There is an expectation in relation to this that the business model of administration will generate more positive and efficient dynamics within LEAs.

The operation of school governing bodies

With LEA control reduced and the shift towards the self-governance of schools, the role of governing bodies has become increasingly important. This is in line with an international trend underpinned by the idea that school autonomy will lead to better school management and achievement (Farrell 2005). It also fits the 'New Public Management' model, which moves away from bureaucratic organisation and towards more 'fragmented service delivery' (DfES 2004b). The underlying assumption of this is that, by incorporating leaders from the community and private organisations, school management will become stronger and more efficient (Farrell 2005).

Since the mid-eighties governing bodies have been given control over major aspects of school management 'including strategic leadership, resourcing decisions, the employment of professional staff and the development of key policies within areas, including the school curriculum and disciplinary policies' (DfES 2004b). At the same time, participation in governing bodies has been opened up to include representatives from parents and the wider community, as well as from school teachers.

'Governing the School of the Future' (DfES 2004b) offers an official description of the role of school governing bodies as 'equal partners in leadership with the head teacher and senior management team'. In accordance with this the government's 'Five Year Strategy' (DfES 2004a) establishes a series of measures, particularly related to the reduction of red tape, which aim to enhance the role of governors, especially in relation to schools performance management policy and the management of head teachers' performance.

Apart from the making of strategic decisions in the areas mentioned above, governing bodies are seen as having a fundamental role in promoting school accountability. In order to guarantee that governing bodies fulfil this role appropriately, DfES has established a Governor Support and Training Strategy which works with local authority Co-ordinators of Governor Services to deliver a national training programme for both new governors and for the clerks of school governing bodies (Farrell 2005).

Governing bodies have largely been modelled on the basis of the private sector board of directors, which is expected to have an especially positive effect on the development of more strategic forms of school management (Farrell 2005:5). The composition of governing bodies is determined by formula and on the basis of pupil enrolment, and it counts with both elected representatives from the parents and teachers and with co-opted members from the wider community. The latter, together with parent representatives 'have numerical dominance on governing bodies' (Farrell 2005:6).

Together with increasing responsibilities, several measures have been established to enhance governing bodies' accountability, which is seen as a central component of their role. Not only are governing bodies required to publish an annual report and carry out an annual meeting with parents, but they also have 'legal responsibilities to LEAs, inspection authorities and to parents' (Taylor, Fitz *et al* 2005) in relation to both administrative and pedagogic matters.

Alternative models of school administration

The government's encouragement of private-public partnerships in education has also led to the development of a series of initiatives that promote direct private sector involvement in

the running of schools. In this sense, there has been a continuation of the policies of diversification developed during the eighties and early nineties and which were seen, for instance, in the promotion of grant-maintained status for schools that wanted to opt out of or into the public sector. The grant-maintained initiative did not yield the expected results, with only a few schools opting in or out of this scheme (Walford 2000).

New Labour thus decided to put an end to grant-maintained schools and initially seemed to be inclined towards the promotion of greater homogeneity, rather than diversity, with the introduction of programmes such as the 'assisted-places scheme' and the abolition of grant-maintained schools. However, the inclination towards specialisation in schooling remained strong (Hatcher 2006:608). The new legislation identified three main categories of schools: Community schools, which remained under LEA control; Voluntary-aided schools, which were mainly faith-based schools; and Foundation schools, which grouped mostly the former grant-maintained schools. At the secondary level other modalities such as the Specialist Schools and Academies were introduced, with the former accounting for the 'majority of business sponsorship' (Hatcher 2006).

The case of foundation schools is especially important in primary education. Here sponsors are not required to give a financial donation (as in the case of Specialist Schools), but schools are rather run by a charitable trust which is expected to maintain a long-term relationship with the school. This foundation status gives schools a considerable autonomy for controlling admissions policies and entitles the charitable trust in charge to appoint governors.

The government has shown a particular interest in promoting the expansion of faith-based organisations' involvement in school administration, as the latter are seen as particularly successful partners in running schools (Taylor, Fitz *et al* 2005:57). While the government does not have any specific programmes for faith-based schools it clearly sees them as making 'a major contribution to offering a greater choice of schools and encouraging schools to have distinct identities and ethos' (DFES 2002). This can be seen, for instance, in the government's support through the White Paper *Schools Achieving Success* (see Church House Publishing 2001) of the Dearing report, *The way ahead: Church of England schools in the new millennium* (see Church House Publishing 2001), which proposes to increase the number of Church of England Schools[2]. While church involvement in schooling has traditionally been associated with Church of England and Roman Catholic schools, the government's White Paper also makes it clear that there needs to be equal expansion of other faith-based schools.

A different, more specific government initiative for promoting private-public partnerships can be seen in the case of Education Action Zones (EAZ). Following the private-public partnership model, EAZs have been devised to run schools in difficult areas with particularly low educational results (DfES and Ofsted 2005:5). The zones bring together a series of partners that include LEAs, the business and voluntary sector, and community representatives who are expected to work together in running these schools. More recently EAZs have been absorbed by the Excellence in Cities initiative, which has similar aims.

How educational policy is formulated and implemented

The shift towards a governance model has radically altered the way in which policies are formulated and implemented. While traditional actors such as LEAs and teachers were in charge of policy development and implementation, today the balance of power lies mostly between central government and local partners involved in the running of schools. While

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[2]   The report refers specifically to secondary schools, but this reflects the government's general orientation towards faith-based and Church of England schools.

control is in the hands of the former, strategic decisions and the planning of school activities is largely in the hands of governing bodies. It is these non-traditional actors, including members from the community, the private business and voluntary sector and parents who are now in charge of the making, implementation and monitoring of most decisions.

Control takes place largely through standard setting and monitoring strategies, with OfSTED playing a central role through the development of mandatory assessments and inspections. In 2005 OfSTED released *A New Relationship with Schools: improving performance through school self evaluation*, a document which outlines OfSTED's self evaluation system for schools, and the *Framework for inspection of schools in England from September 2005* (revised in 2007) which describes the new inspection system. The latter is based on much shorter but more frequent inspections, and aims to rely more strongly on the schools' self-evaluation. A system of School Improvement Partners (SIPs) is also being implemented together with the new measures, and is expected to work directly with schools for improvement purposes. The aim of such changes is to lighten the burden on schools without diminishing the rigour of inspection. The documents also place considerable emphasis on improving communications with schools on the basis of more efficient data collection and delivery of inspection results with clear guidance to help school improvement.

The image of centralised-decentralisation is a clear description of the current situation, where administration lies in the hands of local actors and control is in the hands of central government agencies.

Findings from existing research

Governance policies in context

Existing research shows that the trend towards the establishment of governance models has an international scope. Scoppio (2002) compares educational developments in England, California and Ontario and finds similarities in terms of the move towards standardisation, accountability and devolution. At the same time, the author finds similarities in terms of the impact of quasi-markets in education, which in different contexts appear to increase inequalities through processes of 'skimming' good from bad students in the competition for increased funding.

These findings are in line with those of other international studies. Whitty (1997) compares the policies of the UK, New Zealand and the US in relation to the creation of quasi-markets in education. The author's review of existing research evidence is conclusive in relation to how such policies tend to deepen inequalities through processes of cream skimming the most able, typically from professional and managerial backgrounds. Moreover, the creation of quasi-markets in education tends to move schools towards greater homogeneity, rather than diversity, which is against the explicit aims of such policies. Whitty, Power and Halpin (1998), through a comparison of school reforms in England, Wales, USA, Australia, New Zealand and Sweden, show how devolution policies have generally been accompanied by a strengthening of state control through measures of standardisation, assessments and accountability. The authors suggest that the emphasis on consumer rights – seen in the move towards the establishment of quasi-markets in education – raises serious problems for social equality and citizenship formation.

While the direction and the effects of policies are similar, Scoppio (2002) highlights that there are considerable variations in the specific arrangements through which the policies are instantiated. In the case of California, for instance, the author highlights that together with the shift towards standards, assessments and performance-based funding, there has been a strong move towards the creation of charter schools. The latter generally emerge as community based initiatives and although they offer public access they are not responsive to

most school district laws. In this sense they are similar to the UK grant-maintained schools. In the case of Ontario, on the other hand, the author shows that central government control includes also the allocation of funds to schools. In all cases, however, the author finds a common aim of increasing government control while at the same time reducing the power of local authorities by devolving capacities directly to schools.

Bush and Gamage (2001) also identify similar international trends in education policies and focus on the particular ways in which models of self-governing schools have developed in Australia and the United Kingdom. The authors highlight that the idea of self-governance refers generally to the management and allocation of resources, with the assumption being that schools will have better knowledge of their needs and will therefore be better able to allocate resources. The review of the research presented in the article suggests that the move towards self-governance is generally accepted by head teachers, who would not prefer to go back to older centralised models of administration.

Intra-national arrangements vary in terms of the composition of governing bodies, with Australia favouring more voluntary forms of partnership than the UK, where the emphasis has been on empowering parents and business partners. Existing research suggests that it is generally the working relationship between the head teacher and the chair of the governing body that determines the success of partnerships. There is also evidence of low parental participation in governance, as parents often feel they lack the capacities or the knowledge to contribute in useful ways. At the same time there often appears to be a divide between professionals and amateurs – with parents being included among the latter – that hinders better forms of participation.

In an article focusing on the issue of parental participation in schooling, Balarin and Cueto (2007) present a review of the current policy framework in Peru which shows that the move to governance models has spread also to the developing world. This is being promoted by international organisations such as the World Bank, which favour decentralisation and school-based management[3]. On the basis of research carried out in Peru, the authors criticise the assumptions underlying the application of such reforms, which often overlook the difference in national contexts which can seriously limit the ways in which increased parental and community participation can lead to educational improvements.

The idea that within-country arrangements show considerable variations in relation to the broader policy frameworks is also explored by Phillips (2003) in the UK context. The author highlights how in Scotland and Wales strong traditions of autonomy and non-central intervention have led to the development of less intrusive forms of central control over educational matters. This echoes the findings of a study carried out by Ranson, Arnott *et al* (2005) which also highlights the considerable variations between UK countries and suggests that the actual ways in which policies have been implemented is culturally specific.

The role of centralised control in a devolved system of educational administration

On the basis of a study of governance policies and the changes in the role of LEAs, Bache (2003) highlights that the devolution of power to schools has not led to a reduction of state control over educational matters. On the contrary, control has been strengthened, although there has been a shift on its locus from the more traditional local authorities to central government.

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[3] An account of these policies and case studies of their application in various countries can be found in the World Bank's Global Education Reform website at:
http://www1.worldbank.org/education/globaleducationreform/06.GovernaceReform/governace_ref.htm

Lauder *et al* (2006) look at a sample of schools to analyse the effects of current control measures and the emphasis of performativity on teachers' practices. The paper argues that where teachers are driven by targets and test results they are highly constrained in using their own criteria for judging student progress and this undermines their professionalism. The authors focus specifically on the issue of student setting, which is among New Labour's policies. They show that setting requires considerable professional autonomy and contextual knowledge, and that this is contradicted by 'the imposition of particular practices by external agencies'. The paper concludes that current policies of educational governance have a definitive impact on professional autonomy and judgement, and generate problems because of the often contradictory demands placed on different groups (such as teachers).

The changing role of Local Authorities

As seen above, LEAs (or Local Authorities as they became under the Education and Inspections Act 2006) are probably the level most affected by the introduction of governance policies. Fletcher-Campell and Lee (2003) carried out a study on how the new role of LEAs is impacting on school standards and achievement. The study showed that there is a strong degree of acceptance of government policies among LEAs. Problems emerge from the different ways in which policies are being implemented. While, as seen above, there is a much clearer definition of the role of LEAs in relation to raising standards, there is still considerable scope for interpretation as to how the policies are actually implemented, with particular arrangements being a function of different variables such as LEA size, organisational dynamics and community composition. Such differences are seen to affect particularly the establishment of partnerships. The latter, 'rather than being underpinned by cooperation and trust, seem to vary between sectors, indicating a variety of struggles for power and recognition' (Fletcher-Campbell and Lee 2003:410). Such variations go from cooperative arrangements to more typical contractual ones, 'where there is no evidence of trust between those involved' (Fletcher-Campbell and Lee 2003:410).

The study also found that the 'strict performance targets that partnerships are supposed to meet' (Fletcher-Campbell and Lee 2003:411) considerably constrain the kinds of organisations that can enter such partnerships, with those in the voluntary and community sectors having much more difficulties. This is in line with the research findings presented by Cardini (2006) who, in a survey of research into educational partnerships, found that the balance of power is considerably skewed in favour of business partners – making the partnership model much more similar to quasi-market policies than the official policy rhetoric seems to admit.

Complementing the above perspective, Farnsworth (2006) presents a critique of an official study, carried out by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), on LEAs that had outsourced their services to the private sector. The author compares the results of this study with findings from his own research to suggest problems with the interpretation of data in the CBI study which led to conclusions about positive effects of outsourcing. Farnsworth shows that many of the outsourced LEAs had been under council control during much of the studied period, making changes attributable to LEAs and not only to the new agents. Besides, improvements appear to have taken place faster in non-outsourced LEAs.

Following from some of the paradoxes involved in the shift towards a model of centralised-decentralisation, Wallace (2000) reflects on research into large-scale reorganisation of schools in England (Wallace and Pocklington 1998) to highlight how the contradictory aims of reforms generate problems in LEA practices. While LEAs had the responsibility of redeploying staff after schools were shut down due to demographical changes, they lacked the authority to carry this out effectively. School heads and governing bodies often differed from LEA views in relation to the redeployment of staff that had been displaced in the

reorganisation. Since schools now have autonomy from their LEAs, the latter were often caught between the different interests of displaced staff and school administrators. While the LEA interest lay in redeploying staff, schools were more interested in selecting the staff that best matched their interest. The study thus shows how the move towards governance may have created 'partially incompatible interests' (Wallace 2000:620) between such primary agents as LEAs and school heads.

Further highlighting existing contradictions between different policies, a study carried out by Fitz, Gorard *et al* (2002) suggests that while the 1998 *Schools Standards and Framework Act* considerably reorganised LEAs and strengthened their role in relation to standards and school improvement, it has proved to be considerably weak – particularly in view of co-existing types of school administration – in promoting more equitable forms of access to educational services.

The operation of school governing bodies

The main area of research in relation to new governance arrangements appears to deal with the operation of school governing bodies. Ranson, Farrell *et al* (2005) report on a study carried out in Wales to gauge the contribution of governance to school improvement. The authors suggest that the emphasis of existing research into governing bodies has focused on the latter's impact on decision-making and school management, and not on how governors can impact school improvement.

The study revealed considerable variation in the organisation of government bodies, which have developed 'different kinds of structure and practice' on the basis of varying definitions of their purposes and responsibilities; different relations of power 'between the head teacher and the chair of governors'; and 'the extent of corporateness of the governing body in its deliberations and decision-making' (p.310). This led the authors to develop a typology of governing bodies in terms of: governance as a deliberative forum; governance as a consultative sounding board; governance as an executive board; and governance as a governing body. Differences emerge in relation to whether the body is a mere space for communicating information or whether it has a central role in school decisions.

The authors conclude that governance can have a positive impact on school improvement where government bodies take the last two forms and show a greater degree of involvement in school decisions. The scrutiny function performed by governing bodies is seen as especially fruitful, particularly when it takes the form of a 'critical friendship' that does not undermine confidence and promotes reflection upon school practices.

A study carried out by Farrell (2005) on the basis of interviews with relevant actors found that governing board members are rarely involved in strategic planning, and that it is infrequent for them to challenge head teachers' decisions. The author concludes that governors tend to act in a reactive rather than in a proactive way, limiting themselves to making decisions, but not getting involved in shaping strategies. Moreover, the evidence suggests that school governors tend to get more involved in school activities which are not educational. This, it is suggested, seems to be the outcome of governors focusing more specifically in the areas where they are specialised, such as accounting or finance, leaving the more educational issues in the hands of school staff. On the other hand, as in other areas, there appears to be excessive government control, so while governors appear to have been strategically empowered to deliver policies, they are 'effectively curtailed in their freedom of action' (Farrell 2005:106). The author suggests that limitations to governor involvement stems also from the fact that governing boards have been modelled on the basis of business boards of directors, which are often not involved in strategic management. Finally, the

author suggests that the leadership role of governing boards has often been neglected in the literature, which tends to focus on the role of head teachers in this respect.

In another article, Farrell and Law (1999) explore the issue of the accountability of school governing bodies. The research carried out into this issue shows that governing bodies are not very accountable and, it is suggested, this has to do with the lack of clear guidance from central government in this respect. The research highlights that the role of governing bodies tends to be one of giving support and advice more than one of accounting for school decisions. While governing bodies appear to have to account to a variety of actors, it is not very clear to whom exactly they are accountable to, or how they can perform such a role – this was the case among head teachers, as well as among co-opted members of governing bodies. Besides, accountability issues only appear to arise when something goes wrong, rather than being something permanent. While mandated annual reports and parent meetings offer a space for accountability, reduced attendance at the meetings suggests a lack of interest on the part of parents, which makes it difficult to establish relations of accountability, especially as the latter depend both on the willingness to account and on the interest of existing parties.

In line with other studies referred to above, research carried out by Ranson, Arnott *et al* (2005) highlights the considerable variations in the way that governing bodies operate in relation to central government policies. While this is so, their study also found that there are some widespread problems in the composition of governing bodies, which tend to have low levels of parental participation. Moreover, the study showed that class tends to mediate volunteer recruitment, with women, ethnic minorities and disadvantaged classes tending to be under-represented in governing bodies. All this, they suggest, raises questions in relation to how democratic governing bodies really are.

On a more positive note, the authors highlight the ways in which volunteer members of governing bodies tend to progress from 'initial preoccupation with their own child to growing understanding of and commitment to the needs of the institution and the wider community' (Ranson, Arnott *et al* 2005:361). This, they suggest, indicates that when participation is achieved it generally has a positive impact. The authors thus conclude that while 'participation has developed to strengthen institutions in the official world of the public sphere, it remains incomplete' (p.370).

Research into alternative models of school administration

As seen above, the involvement of key partners from the private and voluntary sectors is one of the central elements of New Labour's emphasis on the development of educational partnerships. While a variety of partnerships have developed, the case of the Education Action Zones, now included within the Excellence in Cities initiative, constitutes a paradigmatic case of public-private partnership directly promoted by central government to improve the quality of education in areas with low results. While EAZs have had considerable funding from central government, they are also meant to gather resources from private sponsorship. EAZs were generally composed of about 20 schools and, while they counted with an appointed director, they were run by an Education Action Forum which had planning, implementation and monitoring responsibilities.

A study carried out by Power, Whitty *et al* (2004) into the effects of EAZs showed that their achievements were far from those expected by the government. Their regression analysis of zone effects showed that 'if anything, a negative EAZ effect' could be perceived, 'with zone schools doing less well than the same LEA's non-zone schools' (p.460).

At the same time, the authors found that in terms of innovation – which was one of the zones' main aims – there was a tendency towards homogeneity rather than diversity among

zone schools. This, the study argues, was partly because of the strong emphasis on meeting targets, which considerably reduced the scope for actual changes within zones – a suggestion that is in line with other studies mentioned earlier.

Moreover, the study showed that private investment in the EAZs had been reduced. The authors argue that this has to do with the limitations established by government for the establishment of for-profit investments in education, something that is not likely to change (see also Hatcher 2006). Apart from this, access to private funding seemed to depend on zones' location and proximity to sources. But, as the authors highlight, 'the most striking thing about business involvement was its banality (...) there was little evidence that business had the capacity, energy, creativity, and know-how to transform education in socially disadvantaged areas in the radical manner originally envisaged' (p.462).

As other studies have suggested, Power, Whitty *et al* (2004) found that parental involvement was also rather weak, and tended to be limited to breakfast clubs and parent-as-educator schemes, which do not necessarily generate positive educational changes. On a more positive line, however, EAZs did appear to have desirable effects in terms of bringing the parental community closer.

One final issue highlighted by the study has to do with the role of teachers in the development of the EAZ initiative. Findings suggested 'a general trend towards fragmentation within professions' (Power, Whitty *et al* 2004), which was generally articulated around the issue of support or rejection of the reforms. The authors thus suggest that teachers have frequently been caught in the middle of the transformation agenda and with their role as insiders/outsiders remaining unclear.

While the EAZs constituted an 'attempt to rebuild collaboration in areas where the market-oriented reforms of previous Conservative administrations were clearly not working' (Power, Whitty *et al* 2004:467), the study is not very positive in relation to the partnership policies of New Labour's Third Way government. The overall findings of the study suggest that the impact of EAZs has not been very important in terms of achieving the aims that were originally set for them or in terms of improving governance, innovation and learning. Some changes were found in the erosion of traditional public/private boundaries, but the effects of this were varied, and in many cases new boundaries emerged.

Voluntary sector partnerships

Given the failure of the grant-maintained scheme to attract more support, New Labour halted the policy and replaced it with various initiatives such as the creation of the Voluntary Aided sector. The latter offers incentives for the establishment of voluntary-aided religious schools which are, however, more subject to local authority and central government control than the grant-maintained schools were. Existing research suggests that these measures are still not enough to encourage the development of more voluntary aided faith-based schools. The main deterrent appears to be precisely the extent of central government control (Walford 2001). Voluntary-aided schools, while having considerable freedom of selection, have to submit to central government policies and implement the National Curriculum, while the private sector does not. The latter thus appears to be more attractive.

One of the main areas of research in relation to faith-based schools focuses on the issue of selection. Various studies suggest that one of the reasons behind the good performance of such schools is the freedom they have to select pupils, which leads to processes of skimming that raise serious questions in relation to the provision of equal opportunities (Muschamp, Jamieson *et al* 1999; Fitz, Gorard *et al* 2002; Fitz, Taylor *et al* 2002; Power, Whitty *et al* 2004).

While the 1998 *School Standards and Framework Act* introduced considerable changes in relation to Conservative policies of open enrolment in schools, current research suggests that voluntary schools are still contributing to local patterns of segregation by having the possibility to expand their catchment areas as well as to deploy various measures of selection (Fitz, Gorard *et al* 2002).

Conclusions

Throughout this report the reader will have found a descriptive account of the current situation of the governance, administration and control of primary education. This has fed from existing academic and policy literature and includes an outline of the main changes that have taken place in this area over the past decades. This account shows how, since the rise of New Labour to power, there has been a clear move towards the establishment of a governance model in which the devolution of powers to schools has been complemented with a strong emphasis on the development of partnerships. The latter are part of the government's discourse of bridging traditional dichotomies such as those between private/public, market/state, or state/civil society. The move towards a governance model has thus entailed a shift from traditional actors, such as local authorities and teachers, to new ones, such as parents, and business and voluntary organisations, which are now in charge of the making and implementation of policies. At the same time, however, government control has strengthened to a point never seen before. Such control takes place through policies of standard setting, assessments and inspections, and a strong emphasis on accountability and performativity.

The move towards a governance model thus constitutes a change from the policies of previous Conservative administrations, which were more geared to keeping government intervention reduced and placed much more explicit emphasis on the operation of market mechanisms in education.

The research discussed shows that the move towards a governance model and the combination of decentralised administration and strong government control has an international scope. This is not only the case among developed nations, but also among developing ones, where international organisations such as the World Bank have been keen on promoting the governance model.

Existing research suggests that the paradoxes involved in a model of 'decentralised-centralism' (Karlsen 2000) are at the core of the difficulties found in the application of governance practices. In the UK, the case of local authorities is particularly illustrative of the ambiguous role that this model sets for many actors, whose autonomous decisions are often curtailed by external demands and requirements to meet specific targets. The same is applicable to teachers, who have seen their professional autonomy increasingly limited by new governance policies.

One of the central findings encountered across various studies is the idea that the instantiation of policies tends to be context specific, with some places showing positive changes in the direction expected by policies and others not. The same is applicable in the case of school governing bodies, which also appear to have developed in different ways, with some generating more positive working relations with schools than others.

The notion of partnerships that has been central to New Labour's governance policies appears to be problematic at the level of its definition, with some (see Cardini 2006) suggesting that they are not at such a distance from Conservative marketisation policies as the official discourse asserts. At a more specific level, research findings suggest that private involvement in education has not brought about expected changes in terms of increased funding and innovation at both the administrative and pedagogic levels.

The operation of governing bodies is one of the main arenas for the operation of partnerships, and here, as in the case of LEAs, research suggests the existence of considerable variations in terms of how governance arrangements operate. While a good working relationship between head teachers and chief governors is seen as crucial, the governance partnerships can vary considerably producing different results. While research suggests that governance can definitely have a positive effect on school improvement, this is not necessarily so, and will depend on a combination of variables. This suggests the need to provide better guidance for the operation of governing bodies.

Another issue in relation to this is the reduced participation of volunteer citizens and members from the parental and wider community in school governance. Existing research points to a widespread divide between the professionals (teachers, head teachers, private business members) and amateurs (parents), which hinders more and better parental involvement.

The general idea that stems from this research survey is that while the governance model seems to be progressing and is generating positive results in many cases, there are still important improvements to be made in order to achieve the desired results. There are already some indications that some of the issues raised by the research might have begun to be tackled, with central government recently proposing considerable changes in relation to school inspection and relations with schools more generally. However, progress is measured according to the State Theory of Learning, which in itself raises profound questions as to whether it provides the most appropriate structure for learning (Lauder *et al* 2006).

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APPENDIX 1

THE PRIMARY REVIEW PERSPECTIVES, THEMES AND SUB THEMES

The Primary Review's enquiries are framed by three broad perspectives, the third of which, primary education, breaks down into ten themes and 23 sub-themes. Each of the latter then generates a number of questions. The full framework of review perspectives, themes and questions is at www.primaryreview.org.uk

The Review Perspectives

P1   Children and childhood
P2   Culture, society and the global context
P3   Primary education

The Review Themes and Sub-themes

T1   Purposes and values
        T1a   Values, beliefs and principles
        T1b   Aims

T2   Learning and teaching
        T2a   Children's development and learning
        T2b   Teaching

T3   Curriculum and assessment
        T3a   Curriculum
        T3b   Assessment

T4   Quality and standards
        T4a   Standards
        T4b   Quality assurance and inspection

T5   Diversity and inclusion
        T5a   Culture, gender, race, faith
        T5b   Special educational needs

T6   Settings and professionals
        T6a   Buildings and resources
        T6b   Teacher supply, training, deployment & development
        T6c   Other professionals
        T6d   School organisation, management & leadership
        T6e   School culture and ethos

T7   Parenting, caring and educating
        T7a   Parents and carers
        T7b   Home and school

T8   Beyond the school
        T8a   Children's lives beyond the school
        T8b   Schools and other agencies

T9   Structures and phases
        T9a   Within-school structures, stages, classes & groups
        T9b   System-level structures, phases & transitions

T10   Funding and governance
        T10a   Funding
        T10b   Governance

APPENDIX 2

THE EVIDENTIAL BASIS OF THE PRIMARY REVIEW

The Review has four evidential strands. These seek to balance opinion seeking with empirical data; non-interactive expressions of opinion with face-to-face discussion; official data with independent research; and material from England with that from other parts of the UK and from international sources. This enquiry, unlike some of its predecessors, looks outwards from primary schools to the wider society, and makes full though judicious use of international data and ideas from other countries.

Submissions

Following the convention in enquiries of this kind, submissions have been invited from all who wish to contribute. By June 2007, nearly 550 submissions had been received and more were arriving daily. The submissions range from brief single-issue expressions of opinion to substantial documents covering several or all of the themes and comprising both detailed evidence and recommendations for the future. A report on the submissions will be published in late 2007.

Soundings

This strand has two parts. The *Community Soundings* are a series of nine regionally based one to two day events, each comprising a sequence of meetings with representatives from schools and the communities they serve. The Community Soundings took place between January and March 2007, and entailed 87 witness sessions with groups of pupils, parents, governors, teachers, teaching assistants and heads, and with educational and community representatives from the areas in which the soundings took place. In all, there were over 700 witnesses. The *National Soundings* are a programme of more formal meetings with national organisations both inside and outside education. National Soundings A are for representatives of non-statutory national organisations, and they focus on educational policy. National Soundings B are for outstanding school practitioners; they focus on school and classroom practice. National Soundings C are variably-structured meetings with statutory and other bodies. National Soundings A and B will take place between January and March 2008. National Soundings C are outlined at 'other meetings' below.

Surveys

30 surveys of published research relating to the Review's ten themes have been commissioned from 70 academic consultants in universities in Britain and other countries. The surveys relate closely to the ten Review themes and the complete list appears in Appendix 3. Taken together, they will provide the most comprehensive review of research relating to primary education yet undertaken. They are being published in thematic groups from October 2007 onwards.

Searches

With the co-operation of DfES/DCSF, QCA, Ofsted, TDA and OECD, the Review is re-assessing a range of official data bearing on the primary phase. This will provide the necessary demographic, financial and statistical background to the Review and an important resource for its later consideration of policy options.

Other meetings (now designated National Soundings C)

In addition to the formal evidence-gathering procedures, the Review team meets members of various national bodies for the exchange of information and ideas: government and opposition representatives; officials at DfES/DCSF, QCA, Ofsted, TDA, GTC, NCSL and IRU; representatives of the teaching unions; and umbrella groups representing organisations involved in early years, primary education and teacher education. The first of three sessions with the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee took place in March 2007. Following the replacment of DfES by two separate departments, DCSF and DIUS, it is anticipated that there will be further meetings with this committee's successor.

APPENDIX 3

THE PRIMARY REVIEW INTERIM REPORTS

The interim reports, which are being released in stages from October 2007, include the 30 research surveys commissioned from external consultants together with reports on the Review's two main consultation exercises: the community soundings (87 witness sessions with teachers, heads, parents, children and a wide range of community representatives, held in different parts of the country during 2007) and the submissions received from large numbers of organisations and individuals in response to the invitation issued when the Review was launched in October 2006.

The list below starts with the community soundings and submissions reports written by the Review team. Then follow the 30 research surveys commissioned from the Review's consultants. They are arranged by Review theme, not by the order of their publication. Report titles may be subject to minor amendment.

Once published, each interim report, together with a briefing summarising its findings, may be downloaded from the Review website, www.primaryreview.org.uk .

REPORTS ON PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

1. *Community soundings: the Primary Review regional witness sessions* (Robin Alexander and Linda Hargreaves)

2. *Submissions received by the Primary Review*

PURPOSES AND VALUES

3. *Aims as policy in English primary education*. Research survey 1/1 (John White)

4. *Aims and values in primary education: England and other countries*. Research survey 1/2 (Maha Shuayb and Sharon O'Donnell)

5. *Aims for primary education: the changing national context*. Research survey 1/3 (Stephen Machin and Sandra McNally)

6. *Aims for primary education: changing global contexts.* Research survey 1/4 (Hugh Lauder, John Lowe and Rita Chawla-Duggan)

LEARNING AND TEACHING

7. *Children's cognitive development and learning*. Research survey 2/1a (Usha Goswami and Peter Bryant)

8. *Children's social development, peer interaction and classroom*. Research survey 2/1b (Christine Howe and Neil Mercer)

9. *Teaching in primary schools*. Research survey 2/2 (Robin Alexander and Maurice Galton)

10. *Learning and teaching in primary schools: the curriculum dimension*. Research survey 2/3 (Bob McCormick and Bob Moon)

11. *Learning and teaching in primary schools: evidence from TLRP*. Research survey 2/4 (Mary James and Andrew Pollard)

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

12. *Primary curriculum and assessment: England and other countries*. Research survey 3/1 (Kathy Hall and Kamil Özerk)

13. *The trajectory and impact of national reform: curriculum and assessment in English primary schools*. Research survey 3/2 (Dominic Wyse, Harry Torrance and Elaine McCreery)

14. *Primary curriculum futures.* Research survey 3/3 (James Conroy, Moira Hulme and Ian Menter)

15. *Assessment alternatives for primary education*. Research survey 3/4 (Wynne Harlen)

QUALITY AND STANDARDS

16. *Standards and quality in English primary schools over time: the national evidence*. Research survey 4/1 (Peter Tymms and Christine Merrell)

17. *Standards in English primary education: the international evidence*. Research survey 4/2 (Chris Whetton, Graham Ruddock and Liz Twist)

18. *Quality assurance in English primary education*. Research survey 4/3 (Peter Cunningham and Philip Raymont)

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

19. *Children in primary education: demography, culture, diversity and inclusion*. Research survey 5/1 (Mel Ainscow, Jean Conteh, Alan Dyson and Frances Gallanaugh)

20. *Learning needs and difficulties among children of primary school age: definition, identification, provision and issues*. Research survey 5/2 (Harry Daniels and Jill Porter)

21. *Children and their primary schools: pupils' voices*. Research survey 5/3 (Carol Robinson and Michael Fielding)

SETTINGS AND PROFESSIONALS

22. *Primary education: the physical environment.* Research survey 6/1 (Karl Wall, Julie Dockrell and Nick Peacey)

23. *Primary education: the professional environment*. Research survey 6/2 (Ian Stronach, Andy Pickard and Elizabeth Jones)

24. *Teachers and other professionals: training, induction and development*. Research survey 6/3 (Olwen McNamara, Rosemary Webb and Mark Brundrett)

25. *Teachers and other professionals: workforce management and reform.* Research survey 6/4 (Hilary Burgess)

PARENTING, CARING AND EDUCATING

26. *Parenting, caring and educating*. Research survey 7/1 (Yolande Muschamp, Felicity Wikeley, Tess Ridge and Maria Balarin)

BEYOND THE SCHOOL

27. *Children's lives outside school and their educational impact*. Research survey 8/1 (Berry Mayall)

28. *Primary schools and other agencies*. Research survey 8/2 (Ian Barron, Rachel Holmes, Maggie MacLure and Katherine Runswick-Cole)

STRUCTURES AND PHASES

29. *The structure of primary education: England and other countries*. Research survey 9/1 (Anna Riggall and Caroline Sharp)

30. *Organising learning and teaching in primary schools: structure, grouping and transition*. Research survey 9/2 (Peter Blatchford, Judith Ireson, Susan Hallam, Peter Kutnick and Andrea Creech)

FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE

31. *The funding of English primary education*. Research survey 10/1 (Philip Noden and Anne West)

32. *The governance and administration of English primary education*. Research survey 10/2 (Maria Balarin and Hugh Lauder).

The Primary Review is a wide-ranging independent enquiry into the condition and future
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The Review was launched in October 2006 and aims to publish its final report in autumn 2008.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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