



# PICKING UP THE PIECES

## A Better Future for Our Schools

This document represents the first updating of 'A Better Future for Our Schools' published in June 2013. Based on the responses given at the Reclaiming Education Conference on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2013, it further develops the first three of the ten original themes.

### How should we determine the aims of Education?

The reform of state education should be distanced from the political arena. There is an overarching need for a nationally agreed set of aims against which policies and achievement can be judged. These aims should define the educational entitlement of every child and should be predicated on inclusion, not seeking to segregate children by any criteria other than age. These aims should be identified not by any one government but through a process of consultation which engages all parts of the community.

We would propose as a starting point for this debate our belief that it is the entitlement of every child irrespective of origin and circumstance to have an education that provides positive life-chances that enable full participation in society through rewarding work, satisfying leisure pursuits and full and active engagement in the democratic life of community and country.

Education should provide a path to independent adulthood. The state system should seek to diminish the inequalities of birth through provision that allows and expects all children to achieve their educational entitlement. It will not make premature judgements about a child's capacity to learn.

### Implications and actions

1. An independent national body, strongly grounded in the expertise of the teaching profession and academia, but including representation from stake-holders and interest groups in a proportionate and accountable way, should be established to oversee the National Curriculum and summative assessment processes.
2. The National Curriculum, which will be part of the entitlement of all students, should define the mandatory outcomes of state-funded education for every child. The details of the National Curriculum should be formulated and kept under review by the independent body but should have nationally and locally defined elements.
3. Part of every child's entitlement should be to be taught by teachers who have good subject knowledge and have undergone proper professional teacher education.
4. Within a defined local geographical area, all the agencies (including schools) concerned with children's education and welfare should be brought under a single accountable authority and should co-operate with each other in the best interests of the child.
5. Standards locally should be monitored and improved by the work of the local authority whose work in turn should be monitored and supported by an independent national inspectorate. For-profit organisations cannot be involved in inspection because of the insurmountable conflicts of interest.
6. Judgments relating to the performance and effectiveness of educational institutions should be made within a framework that requires co-operation between institutions and does not promote competition for potential students.

### How can we make Education accountable to local communities?

It is for national government to set the framework for and ensure the delivery of state education. It is for schools to educate their pupils, supported by governors.

But, to ensure that all children receive their educational entitlement there must be a middle-tier of democratically elected local authorities, which can mediate between national and local wishes and requirements, so that all families within their area have access to a range of local services, including education, publicly funded and managed and free at the point of delivery. They must be responsive and responsible to their local community and be credible advocates for children and their parents, with appropriate legal powers to act as the guardians of individual rights.

Whatever the final decisions on the shape and size of democratically elected middle-tier Authorities, they must provide:

1. strategic planning, review and commissioning of local services; ensuring that all education, health and social service provision work collaboratively to identify and meet family needs, and every child is able to learn.
2. audit, training, advisory and inspection services that can challenge and call to account both schools and other large organisations.
3. Equitable distribution of resources, which includes include a rational provision of school places and public transport to enable equality of access.
4. Planning and oversight of all educational transfers including admissions and independent admission and exclusion appeal services.
5. A transparent local funding system, that covers all types of schools and related services. They should, also, be allowed to raise a portion of their revenue for these services from within their own area. This would allow some independence from central government and ensure that their local electorate has a direct interest in holding them to account for decisions on priorities and the funds raised to meet them.

### **How can we ensure fair access for all pupils?**

Increasingly complex admissions arrangements, as individual schools set their own admission criteria, have made it harder for parents to make informed 'choices' and in many cases prevent children attending their local school.

Many secondary schools are selective, either academically or by covertly managing their intakes. Selecting children at age 11 leads to the widening of the achievement gap between the most and least advantaged. 'Banding' and random allocation, while providing more balanced intakes, can contribute to the breakup of local communities.

#### **Action**

1. In order to ensure equal opportunities, irrespective of social background, an urgent review of school admissions and the Admission Code is needed. This should include the merits of a neighbourhood school and/or a balanced intake.
2. Truly comprehensive schools should be encouraged with the aim of a good local school for all children. Where the local demography concentrates disadvantage, extra resources should be provided to compensate.
3. Selection on ability and aptitude must be phased out without requiring any school to close.
4. The local authority should be empowered to manage admissions, appeals and exclusions so as to ensure fair access to all schools. They should establish local forums involving all stakeholders to oversee all local admission arrangements and ensure that relevant admissions information, including any adjudicator's reports, is easily available locally.
5. Data comparing the intakes of all schools and their communities should be published locally and nationally to support local authorities in ensuring fair admissions.
6. There should be no selection on the basis of Faith.