

Education and Skills Select Committee:

Higher Standards, Better Schools for All (White Paper)

Evidence submitted by the General Teaching Council (GTC)

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The General Teaching Council (GTC) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence on the White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*. The GTC has a statutory remit to contribute to the improvement of standards of teaching and the quality of learning.
- 1.2 Our submission focuses on those areas where the GTC has expertise and accumulated evidence and analysis.
- 1.3 In examining the White Paper, the GTC's principal concern is to evaluate whether the proposals will in fact "*raise standards for all especially amongst the least advantaged*". The correlation between under achievement and social class, gender, ethnicity and deprivation is more severe in England than in many other countries. We have serious concerns that the proposals do not currently contain the right balance of measures to make real progress on the most intractable of all education issues - the attainment gap. Furthermore, pockets of extreme deprivation in relevantly affluent urban and rural areas need to be better targeted.
- 1.4 There is clear evidence from OFSTED and others that it is not school structures that have the foremost influence on outcomes for pupils. It is the quality of teaching and learning, institutional and professional leadership, the curriculum offer, parent/carer engagement and resourcing that make the difference.
- 1.5 The White Paper proposals do not, in combination, place sufficient weight on these factors and so will not deliver an entitlement for all pupils to excellence and equity in either provision or outcomes. The opportunity to make the difference for those children who are least well-served by the system is only half-grasped.

- 1.6 We share the Government's objective to promote the best possible educational provision and outcomes for all pupils but fear that the proposals on school structures cut across that objective.
- 1.7 We propose a series of measures that still deliver flexibility and authority to the local community and schools. However, our proposals focus more squarely on the goal of entitlement for all pupils to high quality provision tailored to their needs.

Summary of recommendations:

- Greater incentives to collaborate across institutions.
- Admissions policies that provide equitable access to high quality provision.
- New providers to demonstrate how they will enhance provision for all children and have a positive impact on disadvantaged children.
- Further resources, including higher staffing ratios, targeted at pupils at highest risk of under-achievement.
- Universal access to continuing professional development for all teachers and staff.
- A commitment to extending expertise in special educational needs throughout the system and to all staff.
- A realignment of accountability of schools from the centre to release local influence.
- Support for families in poverty and with low literacy and numeracy to engage with their child's school.
- Greater clarity in local and national accountability and monitoring combined with a central focus on pupil outcomes.

2 The improvement of teaching and learning for all

- 2.1 The White Paper relies on the ability of Specialist and Academy schools to deliver quality, raise standards and influence other schools for the good. However, as yet, there are no unequivocal evaluation findings or data to support this reliance.
- 2.2 Some of the most important success factors, such as ‘whole-school ethos’, are reported to be the most difficult to transfer, whereas certain processes such as the use of curriculum models, or performance data monitoring strategies, can be more easily transferred.¹
- 2.3 Other research into school improvement indicates that schools respond better to participating in joint projects to support learning rather than models where the “strong” support the weak.²

Research evidence

- 2.4 The expansion of the numbers of Specialist schools, specialisms and Academies, without in-depth parallel research, leaves major questions unanswered. More research is needed on how their distinct ethos and ability to innovate can be sustained; what impact they have on the local area, and on disadvantaged pupils; and the impact of enhanced funding in comparison to other schools.

Collaboration

- 2.5 Research evidence³ indicates that collaboration between providers is more likely to transfer effective practice than central determination. Collaboration across the system can be an essential safeguard against inequitable provision and helps to spread and scale up best practice.
- 2.6 The White Paper does not give schools real incentives to act in collaboration to achieve better outcomes across a whole local area. This is a weakness that should be remedied. Instead it focuses on a market mechanism to remedy local failure, support for quasi mergers in areas where entrepreneurialism is greatest and on the economies of scale which can be produced through forms of federation. The experience of the health sector should be examined for the extent to which mergers and the creation of multi-hospital Trusts has liberated good practice.

¹ JUDKINS, M. and RUDD, P. (2005). ‘*Evaluation of high performing specialist schools*’. Paper presented at BERA Annual Conference, University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd, 15 – 17 September.

² Fielding M et al, (2005) “*Factors influencing the transfer of good practice*” DfES.

³ Fielding M et al, op cit

Variations in attainment

- 2.7 In secondary education, variations within schools remain greater than those between schools.⁴
- 2.8 The test of whether a school or group of schools is successful or high performing, must be the extent to which it secures high attainment of all groups of pupils and has a positive impact on overall attainment in an area, analysed by ethnicity and gender as well as by using a robust and highly localised index of social deprivation.
- 2.9 This means that output measures must not be distorted by excluding tranches of pupils from schools or from tests and exams.

Replacing failing schools

- 2.10 There is a risk that using market mechanisms will move failure around the system rather than tackling it, accentuating the divide between the most and least advantaged families and pupils.
- 2.11 It must be a requirement that any new form of provision, whether a Trust, Trust Group, Academy or federation, can demonstrate that the attainment and well-being of all groups of pupils within an area will be improved through its creation or expansion.
- 2.12 One role of the School Improvement Partner (SIP) is to support schools in using pupil data to evaluate the school's effectiveness. As well as examining data on gender and ethnicity, local social deprivation and the numbers of children with special educational needs should be taken into account.

3 Measures to target under achievement

- 3.1 The GTC believes the Government is on strong ground in proposing a number of measures to support pupils at highest risk of under-achievement. Evidence is available that certain forms of sustained additional provision⁵ are effective in tackling the persistent correlations between socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity and attainment.
- 3.2 However, the White Paper proposals in this area do not go far enough and they are given much less weight than the proposals for restructuring schools and using market approaches, for which the evidence is less compelling.
- 3.3 There are a number of measures in the White Paper for which the Government has earmarked funds within the schools grant.

⁴ OECD (2001) *Knowledge and skills for life*: First Results from Pisa 2000

⁵ For example, family literacy and numeracy and reading recovery

- 3.4 These are designed to provide additional expert support and staff development where there are greatest numbers of underachieving children and young people. Reading Recovery once abandoned regains Government support with business involvement. These measures are to be welcomed but their scope and resourcing is limited.
- 3.5 Currently, the proposals simply bundle together and extend existing provision for pupils at either end of the attainment spectrum.
- 3.6 The White Paper also presents a more limited interpretation of personalised learning than previously suggested by Government. The GTC urges the Government to hold fast to its earlier vision of personalised learning. This envisaged much greater use of assessment for learning matched with resources and flexibility to tailor the curriculum and teaching and learning offer to each student. This is key to raising attainment.
- 3.7 Similarly, extended schools are represented in the White Paper largely as a means of offering booster tuition to those who fall behind, or additional teaching for the gifted and talented. The GTC had previously understood the extended school concept to be focused on enriching and supporting children and young people in a holistic way in all aspects of development.

Special educational needs and equalities

- 3.8 Crucial to system wide achievement of higher standards for all is the use of special educational needs (SEN) expertise beyond centres of excellence. All staff need support and development in teaching and learning for SEN pupils, starting in initial teacher education and continuing thereafter.
- 3.9 There is specific provision in the White Paper to ensure that special schools use the School Evaluation Form (SEF) to meet requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. The GTC urges the Government to extend this to all schools.
- 3.10 By the beginning of 2007 schools will have to produce their Disability Equality Scheme (DES), alongside their Race Equality Policy, and, in the future, a gender equality scheme. There is scant mention in the White Paper of supporting schools down the complex journey of mainstreaming equality in policy and practice.
- 3.11 This will best be supported through the increased emphasis on school self-evaluation. Additionally, the role of the SEF, which Ofsted will evaluate, will be important in monitoring school's progress in mainstreaming equality and diversity.

4 Pupil behaviour

- 4.1 The GTC has conducted two major surveys of teachers, using a fully representative sample of 10,000 teachers drawn from the GTC Register. In 2005, we asked teachers to identify the principal rewards and frustrations of teaching. The principal reward can be summarised as the satisfaction gained from working with pupils and helping them achieve their potential. Among the frustrations identified by teachers, the poor behaviour of some pupils was identified by 16 per cent of the sample. Although poor behaviour is not therefore a dominant issue for the majority of teachers, it was the third most commonly cited cause for complaint. This underlines the importance of continuing and concerted effort to address this difficult issue effectively⁶.

5 Importance of workforce in the quality of teaching and educational outcomes

Most sources of evidence (Ofsted, research studies and teacher testimony) agree that the highest impact factor on pupil learning within school is the quality of teaching. However, in terms of factors external to the school, educational attainment in the UK continues to be closely correlated with socio-economic status. The GTC believes that the White Paper fails to place sufficient weight on the effort to improve the quality of learning and to personalise learning for all children regardless of background.

- 5.1 Any plan to link progression with professional development must be underpinned by the requisite access to high quality professional development, using the wealth of evidence now available on effective approaches to professional learning.
- 5.2 Structured career development for support staff is crucial. This must be based on clear and advancing standards of practice and professional development.

Investment in the poorest communities

- 5.3 Greater proportionate investment and external expert support for pupil learning and school development must go to schools serving the poorest communities. Weighted funding is needed to resource the wrap-around provision, staffing and staff development that are pre-requisites to higher standards for these pupils.
- 5.4 Falling rolls in primary schools offer an opportunity to create better staffing ratios to support additional provision, personalise learning, deliver on the five outcomes of Every Child Matters and release further resource into staff, curriculum and school development.

⁶ GTC/NFER 2005, Survey of Teachers 2005

6 Accountability and governance

- 6.1 The GTC considers that the model chosen to encourage parental influence upon provision and to facilitate parent and pupil choice is not sufficiently inclusive. Families who remain in the cycle of inter-generational poverty and educational disadvantage, where functional literacy and numeracy is lowest, and newly arrived families, are least well-positioned to exercise influence.
- 6.2 The measures intended to support inclusion of these groups of parents and pupils – travel to school support, advice on choice and an element of admissions banding which schools can choose to adopt or ignore – are inadequate. They are not a sufficient safeguard against the risk of the quality of local provision being driven by socio-economic advantage. Admissions policies must provide equitable access to high quality provision.

Securing the engagement of poorer families

- 6.3 There is a significant body of work on parental engagement – research and evidence from family learning programme outcomes⁷. Both demonstrate that a key determinant of children's chances is the engagement of parents and carers with their children's learning. Where quality targeted programmes are in place to achieve this, they have the added benefit of significantly increasing these parents' engagement with the wider issue of whole school development and governance.
- 6.4 It is this order of intervention which the Government needs to focus effort upon to achieve its adult literacy and numeracy targets and its aspiration to engage parents inclusively in the schooling system.
- 6.5 From our work with teachers and parents there is clear evidence⁸ that they would welcome a system in which schools were primarily accountable to the parents and pupils they serve. The GTC acknowledges that the requirement in the White Paper for more frequent communication with parents, and existing measures within the New Relationship with Schools policy both represent a shift in the focus of accountability.
- 6.6 However, the White Paper fails to deploy two significant levers which would free up the system to deliver personalised learning and local influence on schooling. These are change to the assessment regime and a radically reformed approach to the publication of performance tables.

⁷ Basic Skills Agency/NFER *Family Literacy Works* (1996), *Family Numeracy Adds Up* (1998) and DESFORGES, C. and ABOUCHAAR, A. (2003). *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: a Review of the Literature*. DfES Research Report 433. London: Department for Education and Skills.

⁸ GTC Annual Survey of Teachers 2005, op cit

Performance tables

- 6.7 It is clear from work undertaken by the GTC that parents do not place the same value on performance tables as Government. In this work parents express an overall preference for verbal information on pupil progress and performance as it is considered more tailored to the individual pupil and offered the opportunity for discussion with teachers.
- 6.8 Parents want more tailored and descriptive information, focused on both the academic and personal development of the child. Parents see effective accountability on an individual school basis rather than on a regional or national level. Performance tables in isolation are not thought to provide valuable information on schools. Parents raise questions over the tables' validity, particularly as they do not take into account the broader context of schools, such as the demographic profile of the pupils. Therefore, parents believe schools are not compared on a meaningful basis.
- 6.9 Overall, performance tables are not the significant factor in these parents' choice of school or their subsequent evaluation of the school.⁹
- 6.10 Although the introduction of contextual value added tables in 2006 will be a step forward in providing more meaningful data, the continuing focus on cross national comparison means that test results remain very high stakes.

Assessment

- 6.11 The introduction of cohort sampling for the purpose of trend analysis would alleviate the high stakes nature of testing and allow tests to be used for their proper purpose, to ascertain individual pupil achievement.
- 6.12 The focus for the system must be on combining quantitative and qualitative pupil level data and using this, in partnership with pupils and parents, to plan the personal learning pathway of the child or young person. As the White Paper acknowledges, Ofsted reports that assessment is still one of the weakest aspects of teaching.
- 6.13 It therefore requires a significant commitment from Government and investment in the development of teachers' and schools' ability to use a variety of assessment techniques confidently and accurately and to communicate the lessons learned to pupils and parents.

⁹ JOHNSON, F and MILLETT, C. (2005). *Usage and Utility of School Performance Tables: Parents' Views*. London: MORI. KRISHNAN, S. (2005). *Research among Parents: a Qualitative Study*. London: GfK NOP Social Research.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The Government's ambition is that its proposals should be an enduring and ground-breaking vehicle for educational reform. The GTC contends that this will only be achievable if the proposals are rebalanced to focus squarely on the most intractable of education issues, the attainment gap. In doing so the Government should address variation of attainment within and between schools to ensure that educational failure is tackled, not merely moved around the system.
- 7.2 The criterion for change of school status or school expansion should be whether change will improve the attainment and well-being of all groups of pupils in an area. This should be placed alongside sustained additional provision to tackle the persistent correlation between socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity and attainment.
- 7.3 The GTC wishes to see the Government hold fast to a more rigorous and wide ranging vision of personalised learning. It should extend expertise in special educational needs throughout the service and to all staff; and give more weight to the effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning. There is a need to expand quality targeted programmes to increase the engagement of parents and carers of pupils at greatest risk of low attainment.

November 2005