
Decline and Fall: are state schools and universities on the point of collapse?

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ABSTRACT This contribution is an edited version of the 'Alumni Lecture' organised by the Department of Education of the University of Oxford at Lady Margaret Hall on 15th September 2011. The article reviews the drift towards the centralisation of power in the way the schooling system is run, the conflict between a desire for equity in education and the promotion of the influence of market forces. It reviews standards of outcome in schools over time with a brief look at similar tensions in the influences on universities and ends with a call for a review of the distribution of powers among central government, local government and the schools.

Introduction

The title of my talk and the summary which accompanied it in the flier for this evening are not quite an accurate description of what I intend to say. They are not well thought through. Some would say that is fairly typical. I was asked to provide a provocative title by John Furlong in order to attract an audience. 'You'll have to do something in that direction – as it's you', he added in somewhat Delphic terms. So I think I had better explain what I intend to cover.

First, I shall elaborate why my title is to some extent misleading and in doing so explore, on the one hand, the dangers of an over-mighty central government and on the other, the need for a stronger and revived local democratic element in the governance, funding and accountability process for schooling and some of the university sector. In the same first section I shall explore the impact on the balance between the democratic voice and professional autonomy.

Second, I want briefly to explore the mantra words of educational White Papers since the early 1980s to the present day. Those words are 'autonomy', 'choice', 'diversity', 'equity', 'equality', 'accountability' and 'excellence'. How

politicians have interpreted their pursuit has had a huge impact on what happens within individual schools and schools as a whole.

Third, I shall consider evidence about whether or why standards in education in schools have risen or fallen over the last 50 years.

Fourth, I examine with a broad brush what has happened to the university sector over the period.

Finally, I ask some questions and speculate about a few possible ways forward, which take account of the lessons of the past, but recognise that learning from them requires us not to repeat mistakes by reinventing similar solutions. In doing so I shall speculate about the place of the private sector in education.

The Dangers of Centralism

First, therefore, let me explain why the title misleads. It lies in the choice of words. For in one sense, the state's role in education has become too strong. 'The power of the state has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished'. The state first became fully involved in education in 1870, as the move towards universal adult suffrage was gathering pace. It seems unlikely that the state is now going to disengage. Nor should it, but *how* it engages is very important.

In an article about to go to press, my friend and former colleague, Peter Newsam, uses the word 'totalitarian' to describe the present arrangements for the school system. That has echoes of a piece entitled 'First Steps on a Downward Path' which I wrote for *The Observer* in the summer of 1987 when the prospect of a national curriculum and some of the other reforms of the 1988 Education Act caused me to compare the impact of the proposed changes to the worst excesses of authoritarian church states of the sixteenth century and, even worse for my audience, the fascist despots of the 1930s. In a purple finale I said that however hard I tried I could not rid myself of flickering images of brown and black and I worried not for myself or my children but for my grandchildren. What a stir that article caused. Oxfordshire County Council, my employers at that time, spent a whole morning debating a motion calling for my dismissal for what one described as my *lèse majesté*. To my relief, the motion was lost. I confess I didn't regret the written piece then. I see no reason to revise that opinion now, when the days have too quickly arrived when my grandchildren *are* going through the schooling system. Consider.

Then I regretted that the Secretary of State would have over 250 new powers, as a result of the 1988 Education Act. His predecessors had enjoyed only three powers of direction: the removal of wartime air-raid shelters from school playgrounds; the determination of the numbers in teacher training and in the colleges where they would be taught; and the approval of the opening and closure of schools and the size of the school building programme. The previous delicate balance of powers and influence among participants was finally fractured by the 1988 Act. This balance had lain among central government, local government, the schools themselves, the churches, the teachers and

representatives of these stakeholders. The balance had been created by the 1944 Education Act. So the Schools Council, with the teachers strongly represented, promoted discussion of the curriculum, for that was seen as a matter for the schools overseen by local education authorities (LEAs). Whenever key strategic directions had to be determined on other matters, Royal Commissions and a Central Advisory Council would be set up and their recommendations accepted or not by discussion among the various partners. So, for example, the future developments in higher education, primary, secondary and teacher education were associated with the names of Robbins, Plowden, Crowther, Newsom, and James, who chaired independent committees of the great and the good which had taken evidence, examined research and then produced reports which powerfully affected future development.

Whenever the Secretary of State considered issuing a circular, or contributing to the educational debate, he knew he or she could rely on the independent expert advice of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), who sat alongside civil servants, who urged participants to fight at the first ditch should ministers wish to interfere in professional matters. Nor did ministers show any sign of misunderstanding their position. For example, in what now appears as an astonishing 'Foreword' to *Story of a School* (a Ministry of Education pamphlet/circular of 1949 reissued in the 1950s as the best advice to primary schools), readers are encouraged to learn of the adventurous practice of an inner-city primary school and themselves take inspiration from the story and do likewise in exploring new methods. It was the only advice given to primary schools until the Plowden Report of 1967.

The post-war consensus (that education was a good thing and all we needed was more of it), however, was beginning to evaporate. There were the Black Papers of the late 1960s, student unrest in universities and the 'scandals' of the London schools Rivington and William Tyndale, not to mention the oil crisis. Jim Callaghan added fuel to the fire with the launch of the Great Debate in 1976. Subsequently, a circular to LEAs asking how they supervised the curriculum and the establishment of separate governing bodies for every school were straws in the wind. So also was the decision of Keith Joseph to earmark 0.5% of the amount spent on school budgets for specific grants to fund the Low Achievers Project (LAP) and the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI). Ministers for the first time tasted the heady brew of backing their pet ideas with money, which cash-strapped LEAs could be relied on to match even by cutting elsewhere in their budgets because specific funding was financially attractive and a lifeline for beleaguered and corporately managed chief education officers.

Finally and irrevocably, the educational landscape changed dramatically in 1988. Power shifted to the schools on the one hand, in respect of governance and budgetary control through so-called LMS (Local Management of Schools), and on the other, in respect of the curriculum, to central government and in particular the Secretary of State. Inevitably the losers in this shift of power downwards and upwards were those in the middle, the LEAs. The polytechnics

were taken away from local government, which had created them, as were the colleges of further education and the colleges of education.

It is worth mentioning that local government had contributed to its own downfall by enthusiastically adopting what was called 'corporate management' advocated by the Bains Committee, which was meant managerially to complement the Redcliffe Maud Report's recommendations for the size, functions and responsibilities of local government. Whereas the Government largely ignored the key findings of Maud affecting the desirable size and funding of authorities, the reorganised local government post-1974 embraced Bains by appointing chief executives, adopting elected leaders and operating, as they had not before, along strictly party lines. The chief executives and leaders enthusiastically cut down to size their over-mighty chief education officers and education committee chairmen.

I experienced these local government self-inflicted wounds at first hand between 1974 and 1988 in three posts. At the Association of County Councils as Under Secretary for Education I helped create a tightly controlled CLEA (Council of Local Education Authorities) and witnessed the exclusion from national debates of Sir William Alexander, the Secretary for the AEC (Association of Education Committees), which was soon wound up. Then after a spell at the Inner London Education Authority (which had uniquely different arrangements in partnership with the Greater London Council for running education and was to be abolished through the 1988 Act), I suffered corporate management in Oxfordshire where as Chief Education Officer I was dealt a series of chairmen and women who were meant to get a grip on me and the education service. They all became good friends. But I also remember enthusiastically bidding for Keith Joseph's LAP and TVEI projects.]

Since 1988 the move towards centralism has gathered pace. The Secretary of State now has over 2000 powers. The 0.5% spent on specific grant, introduced as I have noted by an agonised Keith Joseph, expanded in the years following 1988 and particularly under the Labour Government, as they used the Standards Funds to promote ministers' pet ideas – whether it was to reduce teenage pregnancy, introduce Education Action Zones or fund Excellence in Cities. The professional autonomy of teachers began to disappear at first in what they taught. Prior to 1988 LEAs, who in those days were experienced partners in making headship and senior appointments in partnership with schools and their governing bodies, looked for candidates who were curriculum thinkers as well as leaders. After 1988 they looked for managers, since of course the curriculum was a given. But it did not stop there. Professional interference was soon to extend beyond what to teach to how to teach it. The promotion of the Literacy and Numeracy Hours had strings attached to ensure compliance with centrally determined priorities.

Central control now extends to contracts with individual schools. There had been an abortive move in this direction with the creation of Grant Maintained Schools and a central funding agency which Labour in 1997 abandoned. Clearly they were to regret the decision as they promoted in their

fourth term what an internal memo had described in 2002 as the 'Independent State School'. So the Academies were born, at first as a means of bypassing normal planning and funding mechanisms in order to get resources and new buildings to schools which had a long record of chronic and acute underperformance in areas of great disadvantage. That door has now been widened by the Coalition Government so that the expectation is that all schools will become Academies. These new Academies and their cousins, the Free Schools, excused the prescription of the National Curriculum, have leapt out of the frying pan of local authority supposed control and into the fire of the control of a Secretary of State who, through annual funding agreement letters will be able, if he so wishes, to decide what should be taught. Ultimately too, he has the power to decide whether the Academies and Free Schools should be closed or should change their character and remain open. Peter Newsam, whose paper I earlier cited, also points out that the legislation means that it is the Secretary of State, not Parliament itself, who will make all these decisions and exercise this power. He makes the point because, like me, he has worries about the growing febleness of Parliament in holding the executive to account as well as its growing incapacity in scrutinising the plethora of legislation which passes before it.

I have one further reservation, namely the competence of government to manage 20,000 schools even if some of them form themselves into chains. Mistakes were made by the Funding Agency for Schools when it ran a few hundred Grant Maintained schools. There are already signs of strain this autumn that Academies are becoming restless. One head a week ago is quoted in the journal *SecEd*: 'It is an absolute mess [*talking about budgets*]. We were told becoming an academy would free us up but I feel more constrained than ever ... This is incompetence by the DfE [Department for Education] at the highest level'.

Finally, as a result of the bill before Parliament this summer, the Secretary of State will not be constrained by having to take advice from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, which is to be abolished. Many other quangos have become agencies of the DfE so that even those modest checks on ministerial power will be removed. The same legislation means that parents who have complaints can no longer go to the Ombudsman but – yes, you have guessed it – to the Secretary of State, who will be judge and jury in his own house on complaints about the system.

I shall return to two other provisions in this summer's Education Bill in the next section but before doing so, I conclude this opening section by underlining why such centralism is unhealthy. The erosion of professional freedom in what is taught and how it is taught of course matters because it insults and puts at risk the professional judgement of teachers. Take the teaching of reading. Synthetic phonics is an effective approach to the teaching of reading and I admire the work of Ruth Miskin more than I can say. But it is not the *only* approach which is effective, nor even, for some children, in some situations, the right one. Schools and their teachers need to know what research

evidence says about school improvement and where interesting practice exists. But it should never go so far as imposed prescription, which at the level of the nation – I would say at the level of the local authority also – is too remote from the messy realities and complexities of the classroom and the many variables among individual children and teachers. Indeed, even at school level a skill of the outstanding head teacher lies in deciding on what matters, and to what extent it is desirable that staff should ‘sing from the same song sheet’ and on what it is possible to encourage individuality and professional flair and innovation.

One more important point demands notice in this matter of the over-mighty central state. In the 1930s one of the first acts of dictators was to get rid of local government. Indeed, it was a factor which weighed heavily in the minds of those who engaged in the post-war reconstruction of our own and other countries’ education and other public service provisions. Yet the reversal of that is happening in education to an alarming extent.

In the recent riots am I the only person who noticed that there was no trouble in Swansea and Cardiff or Glasgow and Edinburgh? Has it anything to do with a stronger sense of identity, culture, and a stronger and more vibrant local government in those places? If it takes a ‘whole village to raise a child’, what are the consequences of not enabling the village to have a role in running its schools and securing equity for its young? Could it be that when the young realise that their elders no longer seem to care for them, that they burn the village to feel the warmth? As we have seen this summer, a sense of powerlessness is the enemy of democracy.

Market Forces and the Pursuit of Equity

In my second section I want briefly to explore the toxic consequences of the way politicians of all persuasions have casually chanted the mantra of the words ‘choice’, ‘diversity’, ‘autonomy’, ‘equity’, ‘equality’, ‘excellence’ and ‘accountability’ as though they are uncontested and mutually reconcilable desirables. For that is what they have done in all the White Papers preceding the 35 educational acts of parliament in the last 30 years. There has never been any acknowledgement that if you ratchet up the first three too far and create too much of a competitive market, then the sufferer will be ‘equity’ and ‘equality’ of opportunity. Of course by funding and the use of ‘accountability’ the market can be constrained and regulated in order to safeguard ‘equity’ and ‘equality’ of opportunity. It is interesting again to note that Scotland and Wales have been more studied in doing this than England. The legislation of this summer further weakens the role of the local authority, by abandoning the Schools Admissions Forum. Mr Gove’s introduction of the Ebacc, incidentally not using one of his 2000-plus powers, but as a simple measure of accountability, also adversely affects ‘equity’. Resources in some schools were immediately diverted and changes made in the timetable so that high performers would engage with the new measure at the expense of other pupils.

Standards of Pupil Outcome

My third section is about standards. Have they gone up or down over the last fifty years? Has there been grade drift as O levels became GCE and CSE and then GCSE and finally GCSE and GNVQs and BTECs? And are A levels now of a similar, lower or higher standard than they were then?

How does one begin to present the evidence to answer these questions? About the only organisation which could have enabled us to keep track of it all, the Assessment of Performance Unit, was abolished by Mrs Thatcher. Even today successive governments fail to understand that you cannot use the *same* assessment processes to measure the progress of pupils and schools in comparative league tables, *also* as a means of tracking standards over time. To achieve the latter you would need random and sufficiently large samples, using tests carefully standardised and modified over time to be confident of what was happening. Nobody has done that and even the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests are of doubtful reliability when international comparisons are made. Most people take their view of the answers to these questions from the media and personal anecdote. I prefer to examine what facts are to hand.

I was rereading Harry Judge's book, *A Generation of Schooling* – still the most readable account of secondary schools between 1944 and the mid 1980s. There he quotes the Central Advisory Council report on Early Leaving in 1954 reporting the facts that of those entering grammar schools in 1946, more than half failed to secure more than three O level passes when they left. Later, in the mid sixties, as Harry points out, J.W.B. Douglas in *The Home and the School* shows that of those born in that year (1946) and who later went to grammar school, over 70% left at 15 in 1961 before they even took O levels. Small wonder that the studies of grammar schools of that period, such as those of Colin Lacey, show miserably low percentages (51% in the case of Lacey's Hightown Grammar, but much lower in many other schools including that in which I started my teaching career) of youngsters sitting the exam achieving five or more higher O level grades. Forget the present gold standard of five or more higher GCSE grades *including English and Maths*. Oh yes, I forgot the issue of grade drift. So let's put it this way. If you take the percentage of the present generation achieving five or more *Grade A* and A*, it exceeds the percentage of those achieving five or more O level *passes* in the 1960s.

How about HMI evidence? I give you the following two series of extracts from HMI reports, the first relating to English and Maths:

- 'Reading ability is poor ... by the end of their school careers few pupils can be considered established as readers' (Birmingham Secondary Modern [SM] 1956)
- 'There is a problem of illiteracy' (Birmingham SM 1958)
- 'Problems of illiteracy persist into the fourth year' (Cheshire SM 1957)
- 'A few boys in each form cannot read ...' (Boys SM Liverpool 1956)

- 'Many boys write with difficulty' (Cheshire Grammar School 1958)
- 'Pupils show an insecure grasp of the fundamentals' (Derbyshire SM 1960)
- 'Maths is not a strength of this school' (North Riding grammar school 1956)
- 'The work is mainly elementary arithmetic from books more suitable for primary children' (Swansea SM 1956)
- 'Although all boys follow the O level course quite a number experience such difficulty that they do not sit the examination' (Cheshire Grammar School 1958)
- 'Many leave school ill-equipped to deal with everyday matters of money and measurement' (Middlesex SM 1956)

Of the over 300 HMI reports surveyed critical comments of the sort quoted here were found about English teaching and standards of outcome in one-third while it was an ever-present feature regarding maths. Small wonder that surveys of adult illiteracy and numeracy in 2005 find that over half my generation have levels of competence similar to that expected of present-day nine-year-olds.

The second set relates to the HMI judgements of the school as a whole:

- 'There are real weaknesses. Efforts are uncoordinated. Much clearer guidance is needed from the Headteacher and heads of subjects on the content of courses and teaching methods' (Bradford Boys SM 1959)
- 'The standards of work are nowhere high. There is a tendency to underestimate the girls in their academic work and in their roles as responsible people' (Hull Girls SM 1960)
- 'Many pupils waste their time in school' (London SM 1958)
- 'Problems with academic studies, as well as education in the widest sense remain' (Liverpool Grammar School 1956)
- 'The last report drew attention to weaknesses in staffing, organisation, standards and discipline. It cannot be said the school has advanced' (Liverpool SM 1959)

Perhaps the most amusing comment came from an HMI reporting to governors of a school in Middlesex that the work in the school was 'dull and plodding ... in accordance with the abilities of the staff'.

Adrian Elliott's analysis of the 300 HMI reports from which these extracts are drawn reveals that in present-day terms 20% were failing. But his book, *State Schools: the good news*, provides a comprehensive review of what has happened to standards in the classroom and in schools as a whole over the last 60 years. His conclusions are that standards have improved.

It would of course have been surprising if they had not. We know more about the development of the brain and have more persuasive psychological theory about the development of the mind. The training of teachers has become much more school-based and effective, largely as a result of pioneering work here in the Oxford Department. Most importantly of all, Michael Rutter's ground-breaking *15,000 Hours* in 1979 and Peter Mortimore's *School Matters* in

1988, ushered in research into school effectiveness and school improvement which has had a huge impact on expectations of what is possible in schools.

Moreover, over the last 15-20 years, since the publication of pupil outcomes, it is possible to note some areas, for example Birmingham and especially London, where the rate of improvement in pupil outcomes has far outstripped the national rate of improvement. No research has been undertaken on why this is so and why in other areas there has been obstinately sluggish progress. Naturally I could speculate both about why these abnormal rates of progress have been made and why no government has been interested in publicising the reasons.

University Expansion and the Forthcoming Changes to Student Fees

Fourthly, there is the story of the universities over the same period. When I went to university in 1958 just 3% of youngsters had access to higher education. Now the figure is about 45%. Again we are not comparing like with like but it strikes me as improbable that the price of widening access has been at the expense of the achievements of the equivalent of the percentages of my day.

The number of universities has of course increased tenfold to accommodate this expansion. First there were the so-called new universities of the 1960s, then the colleges of advanced technology, followed by the polytechnics and finally the former colleges of education and higher education. There have been some private universities too. Perhaps the most significant success in the university sector in terms of expanded access and high standards has been the Open University.

The nature, funding and assessment of university research have changed radically. Academics with research pedigree are signed up, like footballers during a 'transfer window', just prior to the research assessment exercise. Teaching, as in America, has become partly shared with postgraduate students. Universities are differentiated according to their local, national and international reputations. There is a clear pecking order of universities, with the Russell group at the top and other, quaintly self-described groupings, below.

Nobody here needs reminding of the huge turbulence now being experienced as a result of the cuts in the government's grant for university teaching and the introduction and then the raising of student fees and loans. The presentation of what in effect is a deferred graduate tax has been so poor that it is almost certain that there will be a drop in those entering higher education next year. Indeed, in preparing this paper I asked a number of people in the system for what their vision was of the future. Nobody would admit to any coherent vision because of the uncertainty. To ask government ministers is to receive the same response.

A Summary of My Arguments So Far

In short, for both universities and schools there is no government vision, just a belief that the market will provide the best answer.

So to summarise my position:

1. Centralism in education has occurred and is inherently unhealthy especially in a large state. It:

- induces a sense of powerlessness which is the enemy of democracy;
- undermines teachers' professionalism;
- in its present form, concentrates power in an individual member of the executive, the Secretary of State, without sufficient parliamentary or other accountability; and
- is beyond the competence of central government to manage effectively.

2. Market forces in education, through the pursuit of institutional autonomy, parental choice and diversity of provision, can be the enemy of equity and equality of opportunity and lead to an alienated, non-achieving tail. The use of 'accountability' measures such as Ofsted, league tables and their content, and admission arrangements have a powerful impact on either re-enforcing or mitigating the worst effects of market forces.

3. Standards of educational school and pupil outcomes have risen over the period of the last 60 years and, in the last 15 years more markedly in some areas than others.

It is worth noting that I have to deal with the apparent paradox that a period of centralism has produced better results. I do so by reminding us that all the other developments – more research into the brain, more and less crude psychological theory about learning and school improvement – have also occurred. Moreover, the two geographical areas, Birmingham and London, where there appears to be greater and more rapid progress and improvement, are places where the accountability process and the lessons about teaching and school improvement have been applied locally with a sensitive understanding of differing contexts.

4. The universities have expanded and lost focus and a clear rationale. There is no plan to make sense of the present changes in the financing of universities beyond a reliance on the market. Moreover, there is a fierce debate about the place of the private sector in the provision of university places.

So What Should be Done?

Let us deal with the university sector first. Here I think a combination of experience from America and Australia provides a model which bears some sympathetic examination.

The American model is exemplified in California where, for instance, Berkeley and Stanford – both in their Ivy League – co-exist in the same part of

the same state, one private and the other part of a differentially funded multi-sited state university. Both receive federal funds and both have private endowments principally from their alumni. Berkeley receives state funds too. Neither is run for profit. There are other smaller, less distinguished, private liberal arts colleges and universities, for example Occidental in Pasadena attended by Barack Obama, which flourish too alongside an array of state-provided institutions such as community colleges. In America it seems to be the case that most young people believe in and take seriously the prospect of higher education, even if one of its weaknesses is equality of access. Moreover, the system is reasonably well regulated within each state.

So the new proposed private university in London, which has caused such heated arguments, seems of a match with the American experience. Clearly, doubts can be cast on the motives of some of the academics who have signed up, and its viability, but the Bloomsbury initiative, if nothing else, should cause some worthwhile discussion of both the purpose and teaching arrangements of universities. I expect it will get sidetracked by political debate among academics and by discussion of what appears to be a very high fee level which is going to deter access by all but the rich.

That highlights the issue of how to pay for higher education. In Australia there is a graduate tax approach to cover some of the costs of a university education. When the present changes to fees and student loans were proposed I argued in the local and national press that it would be better to pay for at least part of the costs by introducing a graduate tax on all those like me who benefited from grants and free tuition to the tune of at least £100,000 in today's money. Such a tax would affect all those aged 45 upwards but only if they are earning at the (40%) top rate of tax. Irrespective of the virtue of that proposal – and it has to be admitted it was met with a deafening silence – some sort of graduate tax must surely be introduced to show some intergenerational solidarity. But it should be paid partly, as Harry Judge has suggested, in a hypothecated way to the taxpayer's chosen university and partly, in my view, to the taxpayer's local government. Outside Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, local government has no stake in higher education but it should – just as it has in America and Australia. So the reformed local government to which I am about to refer would have a shaping role in the more local universities.

There will emerge from the present uncertain arrangements at least two sorts of university. There will be a group of universities which are acknowledged as private, of which this would be one. The role of the central state would be to distribute research monies and deploy some carrots and sticks to ensure that the poorest have the opportunity to obtain entry to such a set of internationally renowned and respected universities. (It is worth noting that in the forthcoming changes the level of support offered by Oxford to poorer students will be the best in the country.) The other universities would ideally have more local ties without in any way diminishing their capacity to operate as they see fit and have national and international reputations, which some of them

already have. Some would be eligible for national research and other research monies.

So far as the schooling system is concerned, I believe that its future health depends on a new settlement among three main partners: central government, a reformed local government and the schools. (The churches and the various chains of schools would also have a role.)

Who does what and to what extent will be a key question to be resolved. For example, each has an important role to play in determining the curriculum. Central government should confine itself to formulating aims at the most general level. The schools should determine most, bearing in mind that the exam system at 14 or 16 and at 18 will powerfully affect the taught curriculum. It seems to me that the universities should, as they have in the past, have a major role in that – though I am not sure they should profit from their involvement, as Cambridge does at present to the tune of £30 million per year!

A reformed local government should have the strongest role in securing equity of access to schooling, in the planning of school places, in the provision of special educational needs services and being answerable for the standards of outcome of the schools in their area. They are best located to harness the services, such as housing, health and leisure, which affect the general well-being of the community and whose efforts can complement those of schools.

A crucial precursor to such a settlement is a root and branch review of local government along the lines of the Maud review in 1970, which was ignored both in the 1974 settlement and in every tinkering in the following years.

Until that review takes place, local authorities in their present form and with their present staff have not the capacity to take on the major educational role which I have argued they should have. They will and must do some of it of course. But an interim solution might be the re-creation of 1870-style School Boards. Elected members would be educational guardians charged with the important task of securing equity, and *therefore working with existing local authorities to ensure admissions are fair*, promoting an improvement in standards and holding schools and local authorities to account for standards of outcome.

In a short lecture of this sort it isn't possible or appropriate to elaborate the detail but I hope I have made the case for some review before we stumble into a chaotic fragmentation which will lead to even more inequity than we know exists at present.

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