

---

## *Education Excellence Everywhere:* **FORUM's response to the White Paper**

### FORUM EDITORIAL BOARD

**ABSTRACT** This article represents the response of the *FORUM* Editorial Board to the Government's White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*. The response is as drafted, and has not been amended to take account of policy changes already announced, and included in the Queen's Speech. As the editorial makes clear in this issue of *FORUM*, these concessions are significant – but they are intended to give the appearance of change, rather than representing any meaningful revision. The arguments outlined in the Editorial Board's response remain fundamentally the same, and so they are included here in their original form.

In March 2016 the Government published its White Paper, *Education Excellence Everywhere* (Department for Education [DfE], 2016). This sets out the Government's policy agenda for schools in England for its term in office through to 2020. As such, it is an extremely important document, similar in significance to *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010) in which the previous Coalition Government set out its agenda for education reform shortly after it came to power in 2010.

Since its publication much of the attention on '3Es' has focused on the Government's stated commitment to ensure all schools are either academies, or in the process of academy conversion, by the time of the next election. It is understandable that this particular policy has been the focus of such attention, but the White Paper is about much more than this single policy. It is about the refashioning of the whole school system, and the creation of a new so-called 'school-led' model. As such, the White Paper contains a whole raft of interrelated proposals that must all be considered together if the full significance of this policy is to be appreciated.

In this response to the White Paper we set out in brief the Government's proposals in relation to the seven different areas identified in the document, and in relation to each one we present our own response and highlight the dangers

inherent in what is being proposed. In so doing we draw extensively on *FORUM'S* rich history and tradition. *FORUM* was established to promote a very different vision of education to that which is on offer in the White Paper. In more recent years the journal has consistently both critiqued the policies that are presented in the White Paper, and offered alternative possibilities. In this analysis our response is informed by all that work. We conclude our response by linking together the issues discussed in order to set out the underlying political priorities that drive this radical agenda of right-wing reform.

The titles for each of the following sections are the same titles as presented in the White Paper and where page numbers are indicated in this document, without any accompanying reference, these relate to the page numbers in the White Paper.

### ***Education Excellence Everywhere – an overview***

In her foreword to the White Paper Nicky Morgan, the Secretary of State for Education, asserts, 'Education has the power to transform lives and, for me, is a matter of social justice – extending opportunity to every child, wherever they live and whatever their background' (p. 3). The White Paper therefore sets out a five-year policy agenda 'building on and extending our reforms to achieve educational excellence everywhere' (p. 3). The document itself makes repeated references to English education becoming 'world class', with further references to 'great teachers', 'great leaders' and 'dynamic MATs' (Multi-Academy Trusts) working in a 'school-led' system characterised by 'freedom' and 'autonomy'.

In the following sections we seek to demonstrate why this language, and the proposals they relate to, are disingenuous, deceptive and, at times, dangerous.

### **'Great teachers – everywhere they're needed' (pp. 24-39)**

In this section of the White Paper the Government promises to support teacher recruitment by introducing 'well-targeted incentives' and the creation of a new teacher vacancy website. The Government also continues its radical reforms to teacher education by shifting the focus to school-based provision in the 'best schools' (defined as 'those up to date with what works best in the classroom and with the keenest interest in maintaining rigorous ITT [Initial Teacher Training] standards' [p. 12]). It also proposes to assert further control over the content of ITT courses. There is a commitment to more emphasis on 'subject knowledge' and 'practical behaviour management skills' whilst the Government will also 'ensure discredited ideas unsupported by firm evidence are not promoted to new teachers' (p. 12).

The document signals that 'qualified teacher status' (QTS) will be abolished, and that a new school-based system of acquiring some sort of equivalent professional status will be introduced. This status will be conferred by the 'best headteachers' working in 'great schools' (p. 13). It will allow for

'experts in other fields' (such as musicians) to gain professional teacher status, presumably without the need to follow any formal teacher education programme.

Other proposals in this section include the development of the National Teaching Service (deploying teachers to 'challenging areas'), the introduction of a new Standard for Teachers' Professional Development and a commitment to the development of a 'strong, evidence-informed profession'. This particular commitment involves three specific policy proposals – further support for the new College of Teaching, the establishment of a new, 'independent', peer-reviewed British education journal and continued, and increased, emphasis on the use of research evidence generated by the Education Endowment Foundation.

### ***FORUM's response: what we say***

Nobody would seek to deny the importance of high-quality teaching in supporting effective and meaningful learning. What is clear, however, is that there are now sharply divergent views about what quality teaching is, and how it might be developed. The view of teaching, and teacher education, presented in the White Paper has long historical roots in the English system. *FORUM's* founding editor, Brian Simon, argued powerfully that the English elite has a history of rejecting 'pedagogy' (rigorous study of the 'art and science of teaching'), preferring instead the type of teacher who will fit into, and reproduce, the school system, and in turn the social system (Simon, 1981). The White Paper's vision of teaching and teacher education is one that is grounded, above all else, in this reproductive, rather than transformative, vision of what education can be.

The White Paper does not acknowledge the scale of the recruitment crisis in the English school system. To do so would be to acknowledge failure. It would have to recognise that the problems of poor pay, punishing workload and the joylessness of working in the new exam factories (Hutchings, 2015) are all the responsibility of Government. Instead the White Paper opts for denial, and rather than address the problems facing schools it offers more of the same. Greater pay flexibility will apparently allow head teachers to offer 'well-targeted incentives' while the new online vacancies site will aid recruitment. Such 'solutions' are breathtakingly complacent and several, such as greater individualisation of pay, are likely to exacerbate, rather than address, the problems identified above.

More worryingly, the Government seeks the further deregulation of the teaching profession, and to replace qualified teacher status with an alternative system based on head teacher approval. In an education system that increasingly adopts a 'bring in–burn out–replace' approach to teacher recruitment, this is, sadly, a predictable response. However, in any system that should be committed to the long-term development of highly skilled educators it is irresponsible, short sighted and immoral.

The changes to teacher training (as it is referred to) set out in the White Paper, however, are more than a technical solution to a problem of under-supply. Rather they must be seen as a strategic and concerted attack on universities, which are presented as a dangerous source of alternative ideas with an even more dangerous influence on the thinking of those who are being educated as teachers. In an article in the *Guardian* titled 'Teaching Unions Aren't the Problem – Universities Are', the Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, asserted, 'if the unions aren't the problem, who is to blame for our education system slipping down the international rankings? The answer is the academics in the education faculties of universities' (Gibb, 2014).

In this single statement Nick Gibb roots himself firmly in the traditional anti-intellectual view of teaching and pedagogy in England that Brian Simon analysed so perceptively in his essay in 1981. Gibb makes clear that the Conservative Government's schools revolution is about much more than a few technical changes designed to secure some notional 'school improvement'; rather it is about fundamental ideological transformation which needs to be 'embedded' (a word used repeatedly in the document). In a worrying attack by a government minister on the academic freedom and integrity of the academic community, those who work in our university education departments are cast as the new 'enemies within'.

Perhaps conscious that a crude denial of engagement in rigorous debate about educational ideas and evidence will be met with contempt by teachers, the White Paper continues to champion a claimed commitment to 'an evidence informed profession'. Such an approach sounds eminently supportable. After all, who could possibly oppose teachers engaging with research, and for policy and practice to be research informed? We do not, and many of us have devoted our professional lives to working across the divide between teachers and researchers. *FORUM* has always been an example of that commitment, co-produced by teachers and academics.

However, the reason we oppose what is being presented in the White Paper is because the commitment to being 'evidence informed' is clearly little more than an attempt to construct an 'alternative truth' in which government-endorsed ideas are promoted, whilst others are marginalised. Ian Menter, Vice-President of the British Educational Research Association, has already shown how the White Paper itself fails to live up to its own commitment to being evidence informed (Menter, 2016). These tendencies are then compounded when the White Paper asserts that ideas the Government does not agree with 'are not promoted to new teachers' (p. 12). (These are apparently ideas that are not 'evidence informed' – but what counts as evidence? Who decides?) This is nothing short of Orwellian. In this brave new world the state determines the 'Truth' – and this is then promoted through a series of state-endorsed institutions – a new College of Teaching, a new 'peer-reviewed journal', a new body which is intended to say 'what works' (see Wrigley [2016] for a discussion of role of the Education Endowment Foundation) and a new Leadership Foundation. In each of these cases, there may be sound arguments for these

institutions, but in the context of this dangerous White Paper they must be seen as state-endorsed institutions that are being promoted precisely because they will reinforce, not challenge, the market-driven model of schooling the White Paper seeks to 'embed'.

We believe these developments represent an attack on academic freedom and a dangerous insertion of the central state into both the school and university systems. The White Paper may have much to say about 'freedom', but the proposals contained in the document point to a very different reality.

### **'Great leaders running our schools and at the heart of the system' (pp. 40-52)**

The expansion of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) will both lead to the growth of 'more and better leadership development' and provide opportunities for the 'most successful' leaders to expand their 'reach and influence' (p. 14). A new set of ('world-leading') National Professional Qualifications will be established – although these will not be mandatory.

The White Paper asserts that incentives will be 're-balanced' so that 'great leaders' are encouraged to work in challenging areas. One illustration of this is a 'period of grace' in which a new school leader will be free from Ofsted inspections in order to provide time to bring about any required school improvement.

The National Teaching Service's role in supporting particular teachers to work in challenging areas will also include those in 'middle leader roles' and a new 'Excellence in Leadership Fund' will be established to develop 'innovative ways' of boosting leadership and developing the 'pipeline' of future school leaders. An insight into what these 'innovative ways' might look like can be found in the proposals emerging from Toby Young, Michael Wilshaw and Anthony Seldon (see *Times Educational Supplement*, 2016).

Within this section, although not considered worthy of a bold-type bullet point in the summary, is a commitment to ensure Governing *boards* (significantly re-titled, and no longer governing *bodies*) are 'skills-based' and focused on high-level strategic functions ('setting a vision and holding school leaders to account for the educational and financial performance of their schools' – p. 14). In the full report the issue is elaborated and it is made clear that boards should 'appoint the best possible people with the skills the board needs to be effective' (p. 50). This requires the 'freedom' (p. 51) for boards to dispense with parent governors. Although parent governors can remain, it is envisaged that 'as we move towards a system where every school is an academy, fully skills-based governance will become the norm across the education system' (p. 51).

### **FORUM's response: what we say**

In this section of the White Paper the vision of the future English school system becomes more explicit. The school system will be one based on MATs, and

successful MATs will be those that have 'great leaders'. The emergence of the new entrepreneurial CEO, managing their edu-business empire, becomes clear. Within schools there has long been a tendency to rebalance power and authority so that school leaders have more control within the organisation at the expense of, for example, classroom teachers. Schools are now much more hierarchical and top-down institutions. Modern leadership theory (promoted by programmes such as the National Professional Qualification for Headship – soon to be replaced, according to the White Paper) adopts a language of 'flatter structures' and 'distributed leadership' but the reality is that schools are now much less collective and collegial than they were.

For some considerable time a new managerialism has been developing in schools – arguably it has contributed to the crisis in supply of both teachers *and* school leaders. The White Paper reinforces all these tendencies, with 'leadership' emerging as the central strategy for driving change. This is because the White Paper is above all else a managerial and business focused vision of how education should be provided.

Moreover, just as managerial power has been enhanced at the expense of the power of classroom teachers, so too are the new educational CEOs to be insulated from other groups, often elected, who may act as a constraint on managerial authority. Parents, elected and representing a plurality of views, are no longer valued. Self-selecting boards, comprising the people with the right skills (presumably those linked to running a business), and condoned ideas, are to represent the new and acceptable face of school governance. As with parents, formal staff and student presence in governance arrangements is largely invisible.

We recognise the importance of effective leadership – but we have a very different vision of what leadership is, what it looks like and how it is enacted. Our vision of leadership is that it is genuinely shared and collegial. In short, it is a collective process. Moreover, it is not 'accountable' in a narrow sense (i.e. only upwards) but that accountability is democratic – facing downwards and outwards to students, parents and the wider community. Schools are not businesses to be 'managed' but should be places of deep democracy. We believe we learn how to be citizens in a democracy through democracy itself. As John Dewey put it exactly one hundred years ago, 'democracy is more than a form of government: it is primarily a mode of associated living, a conjoint communicated experience' (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 87). To conceive of the school as 'a mode of associated living', and to nurture the democratic dimension of such a conception, requires a very different vision of school leadership to the one articulated in the White Paper.

(For further discussion of recent developments in school governance we recommend Nigel Gann's article in this issue of *FORUM*.)

**‘A school-led system with every school an academy, empowered by pupils, parents and communities and a clearly defined role for local government’ (pp. 53-71)**

It is in this section that the White Paper makes an explicit commitment to all schools becoming academies, with all schools either academies, or in the process of conversion by 2020 (the end of the current parliament). On this basis, a 100% academised system will be achieved by 2022. The document claims a ‘two tier system’ of academies and local authority schools is not possible and therefore new regulations will be introduced to ‘direct’ schools to become academies. It is made clear that the vast majority of schools will be in a MAT. Many schools, including smaller schools, will have no choice. New schools will take the form of free schools, and there will be an expanded role for university technical colleges. Some 500 new free schools are promised by 2020.

The White Paper claims pupils, parents and communities will be empowered within the new system, and that, for example, parents will ‘have a more significant voice in schools’ (p. 17). This appears to be achieved by providing more school performance data through an online ‘parent portal’ and introducing a national complaints service. There is a commitment to make it easier for parents to ‘navigate the school system’ when making an application for school admission.

The document indicates that local authorities will have a ‘clearly defined’ (but much diminished) role, focused on three core functions – ensuring every child has a school place, ensuring the needs of vulnerable pupils are met and ‘acting as champions for all parents and families’ (p. 18).

***FORUM's response: what we say***

Academies and free schools are the latest iteration of a school form that first emerged as ‘opting out’ and grant-maintained schools in the 1988 Education Reform Act (see Chitty, 2013, p. 122). Then, and since then, a string of arguments has been presented to make the case for these schools. These include:

- more autonomy – make decisions closest to where they make a difference;
- increased ‘choice and diversity’ (the title of a White Paper in 1992);
- competition – which will raise standards;
- reduced bureaucracy, as resources residing with local authorities are devolved to schools.

There is almost no evidence, from England or internationally, to sustain any of these arguments. School-level decision making was clearly not the objective as much decision making will reside with MATs, and it is already clear that many MATs are far more controlling in their management of individual schools than LAs ever were. In the new system school head teachers will be little more than branch managers for their academy chain.

Choice and diversity feature to some extent, but in a system driven by the highly centralised demands of Ofsted there is precious little space for diversity, whilst 'choice' is much more likely to be the preserve of schools, than parents (this is the experience provided by international evidence, such as that from New Orleans; see Buras et al, 2010).

It is now widely recognised that 'academisation', and the competitive system it is intended to encourage, has had no discernible impact on standards (see Benn & Downs [2015] and we also recommend the work of the Local Schools Network in this instance – <http://www.localschoolsnetwork.org.uk/>). Whatever the real arguments for academies, they cannot be based on an assertion that academisation will 'drive up' standards.

Finally, the argument that local government was bureaucratic and deflected resources from schools is similarly unsustainable. It is already clear that in the new 'school-led' system MATs are becoming ever-growing bureaucracies, and in turn are taking resources away from schools. Again, this is consistent with international evidence. In the USA it has been demonstrated that Charter Management Organisations (similar to English MATs or academy chains) result in a lower proportion of the education budget being spent on 'direct instruction' than in district (or local authority) schools. (For an excellent overview of US charter school research we recommend the work of the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice.[1])

Whether it is what we already know about academies in England, or free schools in Sweden (Wiborg, 2010), or charter schools in the USA, there is no compelling, evidence-based, argument for the reforms presented in the White Paper. Indeed, and as Ian Menter has demonstrated in relation to teacher education (see above), the White Paper flies in the face of evidence. Why then, the drive to a fully academised system?

Our answer is best captured in the words of Brian Simon, in an article he wrote in 1987 analysing the bill that, in time, became the 1988 Education Reform Act. In describing the key features of the bill (a national curriculum, standardised testing, local management of schools and 'opting out') he made the following observation: 'a subtle set of linked measures are to be relied on to have the desired effect – that is to push the whole system towards a degree at least, of privatisation, establishing a base which could be exploited later' (Simon, 1987, p. 13).

'Later' has become 'now'. We believe that the relentless drive towards 100% academisation, which started with grant-maintained schools in 1988, has been a long march towards a fully privatised system in which public funds are used to pay for privately provided schooling. These processes are already well established and although the system remains, technically, 'not for profit', we are already seeing significant private sector involvement in state education, schools behaving as if they were businesses in a market, and public funds leeching out of the system to pay a range of 'for-profit' providers, from 'consultants' to those who provide so-called 'back office' services.

We believe that the current commitment to ensure state schools are not provided on a 'for-profit' basis is no more than political expediency. The history of school reform since 1987 is that it has been piecemeal and practical. It will continue to be so – and once 100% academisation has been established, the introduction of 'for-profit' provision will be presented as the logical next step. If the Government believes it can introduce it, it will do it. All the evidence since 1987 points to this.

(We strongly recommend reading Brian's article from 1987. It is referenced in full below and available as open access. It provides an excellent analysis of the Education Bill in 1987, which is essential to understanding the White Paper today. See also Sue Cox's article in *Forum* 58(1) (2016), rereading Brian Simon's intervention into the Great Education Debate of 1987/88.)

**'Preventing underperformance and helping schools go from good to great: school-led improvement, with scaffolding and support where it's needed' (pp. 72-87)**

The White Paper makes repeated reference to 'supported autonomy', which effectively refers to interventions guided towards schools deemed to be 'underperforming'. Local authorities will no longer have a role in bringing about school improvement, but rather this responsibility will be transferred to MATs, teaching school alliances and 'system leaders' including National Leaders of Education (NLEs). These networks will be extended to areas where they are less prevalent, and new 'brokering' arrangements will be introduced to connect 'underperforming schools' with these networks of support.

Significant emphasis will be placed on 'growing' sponsors and MATs, and using these to support schools identified as in need. 'At the heart of this approach will be supporting the strongest schools and sponsors to expand their reach' (p. 19). Areas identified as suffering from 'persistent underperformance' will be designated as 'Achieving Excellence Areas' and in these areas interventions will 'jump start an even faster rise in standards than we expect to see elsewhere' (p. 19).

**FORUM's response: what we say**

Where schools are considered to be underperforming it is claimed the new 'school-led system' will step in to remedy this situation. It is by no means clear that those who intervene will have the capacity to bring about any 'improvement'. Nor is it clear why they should necessarily want to do so. Within the new school system it may be fashionable to talk about moral purpose, but the system still often punishes those who exhibit it (Institute of Education, 2013).

Where one school, or MAT, intervenes to support another, it may be that the decision is based on what is in the interest of the sponsor rather than the school requiring support. We believe the thrust of the White Paper encourages

opportunism and predatory practices, whilst the references to 'brokering' point to recent experiences of bullying schools into academy status (Millar, 2014).

What is missing from this process, as it is missing from virtually every aspect of school governance, is any sense of democratic responsibility and accountability. To what extent might any local decision about who manages a school reflect local priorities, let alone community involvement in the decision itself? Given this absence of democratic control it is difficult see these proposals as doing anything more than accelerating the processes of undemocratic monopolisation that are built into the White Paper.

The commitment to designating 'Achieving Excellence Areas' is risible. Like so much modern policy, it represents the destruction of the old, and then its recreation dressed up as the new. The designation of geographical areas where educational attainment is lower than elsewhere dates back to the 1960s. We support the principle of identifying such areas but would argue that the areas, and the policies put in place to support them, have never been adequately resourced. Given this Government's record on public spending, the chances of this resourcing being made available now are more remote than ever. Furthermore, an intensified application of approaches to schooling which, although urged by Government, have time and again failed children, will not serve. The way forward will not be found via test-drilling, drastic narrowing of the curriculum, denial of pupil choice and voice, and teaching-as-delivery. Only an approach predicated on an entirely different understanding of what education is, and what teaching-and-learning is, will enable pupils to flourish, and attainment to rise.

### **'High expectations and a world-leading curriculum for all' (pp. 88-103)**

The White Paper commits to embedding 'a knowledge based curriculum as the cornerstone of an excellent, academically rigorous education up to the age of 16'. These changes will be accompanied by a reform of national assessments and qualifications, with an emphasis on 'basics' at primary level (referred to as 'essential building blocks') whilst secondary examinations will be 'rigorous and trusted': 'we will embed these gold standard qualifications and ensure the vast majority of pupils study the English Baccalaureate (EBacc)' (p. 20).

In addition to the above, steps will be taken to promote 'character and resilience'. Support will be provided to promote 'evidence based character building opportunities' (p. 20) and 25% of secondary schools will be encouraged to extend their day to undertake activities that will develop 'character building and resilience'.

A short paragraph commits to 'focus on boosting the attainment of four groups of children neglected by the previous curriculum and accountability system' (p. 21). These groups are the 'lowest attaining', the 'most academically able', children with special needs and children with disabilities. Reforms will be

made to alternative provision (AP) and mainstream schools will remain accountable for the education of pupils in AP.

### **FORUM's response: what we say**

This section of the White Paper has attracted fewer headlines than many others, for example those relating to forced academisation. This is in part because they build on already announced reforms to the curriculum and assessment. However, in our view this is arguably the most significant, and amongst the most dangerous, set of proposals in the White Paper. Schools are inevitably about structures, and we recognise the importance of such. However, education is fundamentally about the curriculum and pedagogy – what children learn and how they learn it.

The White Paper uses a range of discursive techniques to give the impression that only the Government and its supporters believe in 'standards'. The document repeatedly asserts that the Government is 'unapologetic' about wanting high standards and that it is committed to being 'world class', 'rigorous' and 'ambitious'. The wordsmiths in the Department for Education may have worked hard on impression management in the text – but such talk is cheap. What is required is a more thorough analysis of what is being proposed. We have in mind the ringing words of our late Chairperson, Michael Armstrong, who held up for scrutiny the concept of educational standards. Such a concept is troubling because:

a standard is a measure ... but the most dynamic characteristic of learning, which for want of a better term I will call its creative aspect, cannot be measured ... Moreover, a standard is a measure of conformity whereas education is as much, if not more, concerned with non-conformity: with exception rather than rule; with the novel, the unexpected, the re-described and re-constructed; with the revival of learning no less than its transmission, and with innovation as well as tradition. In short, education is a critical practice.  
(Armstrong, 1999, pp. 109-110)

By contrast, and predictably, the curriculum set out in government reforms, and reaffirmed in the White Paper, is little more than a traditional reassertion of a conservative, content-filled timetable, dressed up as a commitment to a 'world-class education'. Rather than a commitment to ambition, the reality envisaged in the White Paper is better characterised as poverty stricken in its aspirations. The vision of the curriculum in the White Paper owes much to the work of E.D. Hirsch (1988), and his emphasis on 'core knowledge', largely determined by what neo-liberal and neoconservative elites decide constitutes 'official knowledge' (Apple, 2000). Layered on top of this is the promotion of state-approved personal characteristics ('resilience' and 'character') combined with a commitment to what the Government has determined represent 'British values'. An aggressive individualism is promoted in every aspect of the curriculum,

reinforced by endless testing. On offer is an education system in which education itself is conceived, first and foremost, as a race.

The justification for these reforms, and for 'equipping children with the core knowledge about the best that has been thought and written' (p. 89), are legitimated by selective references to particular aspects of cognitive science, which are invoked to justify what is presented, yet again, as an 'evidence-based approach' to the curriculum. This selective use of evidence is much the same approach that has been used to impose, for example, phonics screening on teachers in primary schools. In short, the White Paper may be replete with references to 'autonomy' and 'professional freedom' but such freedoms only exist for those teachers who are willing to 'deliver' the curriculum set out in the White Paper. It is the educational equivalent of Fordism – 'you can have whatever colour you want, as long as it is black'. We have already argued that the promotion of the discourse of what is 'evidence informed' is an attempt to control teacher education. Here we see the same in relation to the school curriculum. Such dangerous tendencies are likely to be further reinforced, in time, by the promotion of centrally approved textbooks:

We are working with the publishing industry and with schools, MATs and others to encourage them to develop and share a new generation of teaching materials, textbooks and resources to help teachers *deliver* [our emphasis] the curriculum. (p. 90)

Between a state-sponsored curriculum, 'evidence-informed' teacher education and professional development, an obliging (and profit-driven) publishing industry and an omnipotent inspectorate, all the mechanisms are in place for the state's control of every aspect of the education of the children in state schools. Constantly referring to autonomy and being 'school led' changes none of that. The only children exempted from this exam factory approach to schooling will be those whose parents can afford to buy themselves out of it.

However, what these reforms also allow for is the return of a quasi-selective form of education, not based on any crude (and politically unpopular) 11+ style exam, but on the promotion of a hierarchical market in which 'branding' and 'product differentiation' will be used to provide all the social stratification of schooling that those nostalgic for the return of selection have ever wanted.

Perhaps more than anything the White Paper intensifies the drive to school as businesses and the school system as a market place. Markets create inequalities and are driven by inequality – they function by rewarding winners and punishing losers. This stands in contrast to the values of the post-war welfare state. The welfare state was largely established to ensure that basic citizenship rights (health, education, social security broadly defined) were removed from the vagaries and insecurities of market forces. However, for those on the political right the creation of a welfare system that challenged, rather than reinforced, market values posed an existentialist threat to the functioning of the capitalist system. Hence much welfare reform since at least 1979 has been

devoted to reinserting the market into every aspect of welfare provision. This is central to the White Paper, in which MATs can, for example, 'build more stretching curricula, to meet the particular needs of their pupils or their local area or the particular ethos of the school' (p. 90). This is code for a socially divisive education system in which class privilege will be imposed through the invisible hand of the market rather than through an 11+ exam in which the middle class is hugely advantaged but always risks buying a losing ticket in the lottery.

We believe that the references to 'all children' in the White Paper are at best naïve, and more likely disingenuous, shot through as they are with fixed-ability thinking and determinist assumptions about 'ability' (see Drummond & Yarker [2013], and also the special issue of Forum 55[1] devoted to these issues). The White Paper embeds an education system designed to reproduce, not challenge, existing inequalities.

### **'Fair, stretching accountability, ambitious for every child' (pp. 104-113)**

The White Paper claims to promote forms of accountability that will focus on the progress of every child, and that will neither favour those with advantaged intakes, nor penalise those facing disadvantage. The document suggests that where schools are clearly 'successful' they will experience a lighter touch inspection process.

Performance tables will be produced for MATs and accountability to parents and governors generally will be increased by providing these groups with the 'right information' on school performance. Where a judgement is required about how best to respond to a school's (under) performance 'we will rely on the expert educational judgement of the RSCs [regional schools commissioners]' (p. 22). These will be supported by head teacher boards, made up of 'top headteachers elected by their peers and appointed for their track records' (p. 22). (We have quoted directly here to clarify that the confusion about whether these roles are elected, or appointed, is in the document.)

### **FORUM's response: what we say**

This section of the White Paper is a clear acknowledgement that the educational market place that has been put in place since 1988 has resulted in chronic gaming across the system. The White Paper claims that new performance criteria will be introduced that focus on 'every child'.

We do not believe it is possible to create a system focused on meeting the needs of 'every child' within a competitive market environment in which schools will always be encouraged to focus on particular children. In the market-driven, school-led system the Government has created there may be a rhetoric that all children are equal, but some children are clearly more equal than others. We do not believe that this Government wants to fundamentally

change this because the market-led school system will always protect the privilege of the already privileged. We also do not believe change is possible as long as the school system remains one that is, ultimately, driven by market imperatives. No amount of 'market regulation' will fix this.

As indicated, the size of the problem is already evidenced by large-scale 'gaming' (playing the system in order to achieve 'competitive advantage'). In a recent report by the Centre for High Performance the authors studied several 'failing schools' in the secondary sector and the strategies they used to 'turn around'. Under the heading 'Learnings for Academies' the authors argue, 'academies should make eight changes in the following order', and identify the fourth action as 'Student quality – exclude poor quality students, improve admissions and acquire a local primary school'. (At the time of writing the report appears to have been withdrawn but is available via John Tomsett's (2016) blog site – see References below). In the new education market place those students with the greatest need are often seen as being the least valued – and treated accordingly. These gaming strategies are indefensible educationally and morally. They will not be fixed by tweaking the targets schools are judged by. Nor will they be fixed by providing parents with yet more information, and we do not believe that unelected and unaccountable regional schools commissioners have any role in addressing these issues.

### **'The right resources in the right hands: investing every penny where it can do the most good' (pp. 114-122)**

The White Paper asserts that a national funding formula will be developed and applied, in order to ensure a 'fair allocation of funding'. It notes that 'implementing the national formulae asks the most generously funded to support their less generously funded peers' (p. 22). It is claimed the formula will allocate resources according to the 'circumstances of children and local costs' (p. 22). Allocation will not be according to 'arbitrary historical factors' (p. 22).

The Government will continue with the pupil premium with schools encouraged to allocate pupil premium funds according to the 'evidence-informed' strategies promoted by the Education Endowment Foundation.

### ***FORUM's* response: what we say**

Ever since the introduction of Local Management of Schools governments have made strenuous efforts to use changes to funding formulae to drive down costs, almost always in the name of 'fairness' and/or efficiency. The developments proposed in the White Paper continue that tradition.

The imposition of a national funding formula is one of many nationalising trends in this White Paper. The White Paper may have many references to autonomy, but this proposal further undermines the significance of democratic local governance. It is apparently acceptable to see the national curriculum as a 'basic framework' upon which schools can build, but there is no similar

opportunity to provide minimum thresholds of funding upon which local communities can further determine local priorities.

A national funding formula is likely to skew resources away from urban areas. It will threaten the survival of smaller rural schools (whose potential closure will no longer be the subject of a local council debate) and will encourage increased variation in teachers' pay and conditions (because, it will be argued, a teacher in Northumberland does not need to get the same pay as a teacher in Bristol, let alone London).

This proposal denies local democracy and puts the Treasury in charge of funding every school. It is one more centralising proposal in this White Paper that we consider to be deeply dangerous.

***FORUM: what we say – Education Excellence  
Everywhere: Thatcherism's long shadow***

Before presenting our views of the White Paper overall we wish to preface our comments by emphasising how the White Paper represents everything that is wrong with how, as a country, England develops and implements education policy. Despite all the assertions to the contrary, the White Paper can make no claim to be an expression of the evidence-informed policy it seeks to promote. Nor can it claim to be based on professional expertise and opinion. No effort has been made to develop a consensus that reflects the wider opinion of educators – the type of approach to policy making that has been advocated by school leaders such as Eddie Playfair (2015) in his recent piece in *FORUM* or by Alasdair MacDonald, Jemima Reilly and Laura Worsley from Morpeth School, East London when they argue:

As school leaders we feel that an alternative 'vision' needs to be articulated, a vision that is rooted in the knowledge and experience of schools, teachers and other educational professionals, a vision that is evidence-based and a vision that starts with teaching and learning. (MacDonald et al, 2016)

This has to be a debate that does not seek to deny the political dimension of education, but which rather seeks to make the political explicit, and which engages the broadest possible audience in debate about the education we want – see Stephen Ball's (2015) article in *FORUM* 57(1) for an elaboration of this argument.

In contrast, the White Paper exemplifies, *par excellence*, an approach to policy making that rejects professional opinion, community involvement and consensus building, and instead asserts that the only way to make progress is to destroy, defeat and then rebuild. All that may be tainted by the influence of alternative ideas must be swept away and then reinvented. Whatever the area of policy, the approach is the same – destroy, defeat, dictate.

How then to explain this *education-policy-as-vandalism* approach, when all good sense points to the need to discuss, debate and develop consensus as a

means of promoting effective and enduring educational change? The answer to this question lies in understanding the White Paper, and the thirty years of education reform that it encapsulates, as principally a political project, not an educational one. The White Paper is but the latest manifestation of English education policy as the class politics of the country's elite – a toxic mix of neo-liberal and neoconservative ideology intended to dismantle the welfare state, open up every aspect of our social lives to the market and profit and to ensure that those with privilege have their privilege maintained. As such it represents the latest, and decisive, stage in restructuring English state education along lines first initiated in the heyday of Thatcherism (Stevenson, 2011). The Thatcherite legacy is most obvious in the following four features of policy:

*Tell Sid ... It's all about privatisation*

We reiterate the point made by our founding editor, nearly thirty years ago, that the reforms that have been pushed by Thatcherite education ministers since at least 1987 have always had the long-term objective of breaking up the system of local authority control so that public schools (in the true sense of that term) in England can be parcelled up and handed to private providers. Globally, vast multinational edu-businesses are circling public systems of schooling, eager to siphon huge sums of public money into private hands. This has been happening indirectly in the English school system for many years, and the process will be accelerated by the White Paper. If the White Paper is not halted, 'for-profit' provision will not be far away. But even without the accounting nicety that can make this happen, we must recognise that public education is already being gift wrapped and handed to the privatisers.

*There is no such thing as society ...*

The White Paper further embeds the notion of education as a private consumption good, to be traded in a market. There is no space for the public good, or for education as a public, or community, enterprise. Collective provision, collective decision making, indeed the collective in any meaningful sense, is to be expunged. Local government, parent governors, union representation – any such manifestations of the collective will are to be denied. The opportunity to discuss and debate, let alone decide by voting, is to be closed down. To prepare young people for a world of precarious employment and ruthless individualism students must experience schooling in the same terms – society is a race, and so too education becomes a race. Only winners count. It is about 'me', and not 'us'.

*There is no alternative ...*

Central to the success of this political project is the refashioning of a new hegemonic settlement in which alternative visions of what is possible are

similarly closed down. Local authorities, teacher unions, democratically elected governing bodies and universities are all capable of generating alternative ideas and of offering different narratives to those considered acceptable by the state. This is why all these bodies must be attacked and marginalised. Even better, abolished and swept away. Meanwhile, new narratives are promoted: in this parallel universe policy is 'evidence informed', whilst schools enjoy 'freedom' and 'autonomy'. All this is done whilst the state promotes particular forms of knowledge (or 'truth') and dismisses others. Similarly, it promotes new 'independent' organisations, such as the College of Teaching and a new Leadership Foundation. The White Paper is not about the creation of a self-improving school system, but of a self-reproducing school system in which those who accrue power and influence are only allowed to do so in so far as they are willing to reproduce the status quo. We are reminded of the observation of Fielding and Moss (2010) that 'the dictatorship of no alternative cannot be overthrown without ideas' (p. 2).

### *A grammar school in every town*

A market-driven school system in which schools can 'innovate' (or, more accurately, 'differentiate') within certain prescribed parameters is a recipe for division. The education market will act as the social sifter and sorter – not only reinforcing, but increasing, existing inequalities. The long-held aspiration of many conservatives for a grammar school in every town will become a reality – even if we will not always recognise it when we see it. A narrow and nationalist curriculum, supported by endless testing, and linked to so-called 'parent choice' policies, will serve to reinforce conservative values and reproduce social privilege. Expect working-class kids, living in working-class communities, to get a working-class curriculum.

### **In Conclusion**

For all the reasons we set out above we believe that the White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, is to be opposed. It is not just bad policy in terms of its impact on education, and the experiences of students, but it is deeply undemocratic – so much so we believe it to be dangerous. Andrew Gamble (1994) famously analysed Thatcherism as a complex fusion of free market and strong state. The White Paper adopts the language of the free market ('choice' and 'autonomy') whilst reinforcing the authoritarian instincts of an *exceptionally* strong state. This is 1984. The power of education is being mobilised, as a part of the apparatus of the state, to reinforce a very particular ideological project. At the same time it necessarily seeks to crush any democratic impulse in the system.

Every element of the White Paper must be opposed, and from this struggle a new and more hopeful vision of education will emerge. What this will look like will in part be shaped by the struggles that give birth to it.

However, we believe it will reflect the aspirations articulated by Robin Alexander (2016) in his response to a recent Education Select Committee inquiry in which he set out many of the values and ideas that have been an enduring feature of *FORUM* throughout its history.

In 1987 Brian Simon's acute understanding of the past allowed him to anticipate the future better than anyone else at that time. Brian also understood that whatever the political realities, bleak or optimistic, those who seek to promote 3-19 comprehensive education will always have to fight for it, because those with privilege will always resist it. In opposing this White Paper we reaffirm our commitment to a much more optimistic vision of what education is, and can be.

## Note

[1] [http://greatlakescenter.org/charter\\_schools.php](http://greatlakescenter.org/charter_schools.php)

## References

- Alexander, R. (2016) What is Education For?, *FORUM*, 58(2), 155-165.
- Apple, M. (2000) *Official Knowledge: democratic education in a conservative age*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
- Armstrong, M. (1999) The Quality of Learning, in B. O'Hagan (Ed.) *Modern Educational Myths: the future of democratic comprehensive education*, pp. 109-120. London: Kogan Page.
- Ball, S.J. (2015) Back to Basics: repoliticising education, *FORUM*, 57(1), 7-10. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15730/forum.2015.57.1.7>
- Benn, M. & Downs, J. (2015) *The Truth about Our Schools: exposing the myths and exploring the evidence*. London: Routledge.
- Buras, K., Randels, J. & Ya Salaam, K. (2010) *Pedagogy, Policy and the Privatized City: stories of dispossession and defiance from New Orleans*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Chitty, C. (2013) *New Labour and Secondary Education, 1994-2010*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cox, S. (2016) A Second Look at Brian Simon's Bending the Rules, *FORUM*, 58(1), 93-108. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15730/forum.2016.58.1.93>
- Dewey, J. (1916/1944) *Democracy and Education: an introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Department for Education (2010) *The Importance of Teaching*. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf)

- Department for Education (2016) *Education Excellence Everywhere*.  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/508447/Educational\\_Excellence\\_Everywhere.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508447/Educational_Excellence_Everywhere.pdf)
- Drummond, M.J. & Yarker, P. (2013) Editorial. The Enduring Problem of Fixed Ability: but is a new conversation beginning?, *FORUM*, 55(1), 3-7.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/forum.2013.55.1.3>
- Fielding, M. & Moss, P. (2010) *Radical Education and the Common School: a democratic alternative*. London: Routledge.
- Gamble, A. (1994) *The Free Market and the Strong State: the politics of Thatcherism*. London: Palgrave. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-23387-8>
- Gann, N. (2016) Capturing the Castle: an exploration of changes in the democratic accountability of schools, *FORUM*, 58(2), 177-194.
- Gibb, N. (2014) Teaching Unions Aren't the Problem – Universities Are, *The Guardian*.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/23/teaching-unions-arent-problem-universities-schools-minister>
- Hirsch E.D. (1988) *Cultural Literacy: what every American needs to know*. New York: Vintage.
- Hutchings, M. (2015) *Exam Factories? The Impact of Accountability Measures on Children and Young People*. NUT. <https://www.teachers.org.uk/files/Exam-factories.pdf>
- Institute of Education (2013) Risky Business: should headship in challenging schools come with a career warning?  
<https://ioelondonblog.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/risky-business-should-headship-in-challenging-schools-come-with-a-career-warning/>
- MacDonald A., Reilly, J. & Worsley, L. (2016) There is Another Way: building a new vision for schools from the bottom up, *FORUM*, 58(2), 195-204.
- Menter, I. (2016) Use, Misuse and Abuse of Research in the Education White Paper, *Times Higher Education*, 1 April. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/use-misuse-and-abuse-research-education-white-paper>
- Millar, F. (2014) Bullying Academy Brokers Are Bad Policy in Action, *The Guardian*.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jan/14/michael-goves-bullying-academy-brokers-are-bad-policy>
- Playfair, E. (2015) Market Madness: condition critical, *FORUM*, 57(2), 213-226.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.15730/forum.2015.57.2.213>
- Simon, B. (1981) Why No Pedagogy in England?, in B. Simon & W. Taylor (Eds) *Education in the Eighties: the central issues*. London: Batsford.
- Simon, B. (1987) Lessons on Elitism, *Marxism Today*, 12-17 September.  
<https://www.unz.org/Pub/Marxismtoday-1987sep-00012>
- Stevenson, H. (2011) Coalition Education Policy: Thatcherism's long shadow, *FORUM*, 53(2), 179-194. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/forum.2011.53.2.179>
- Times Educational Supplement* (2016) Wilshaw, Seldon and Young behind New College to Parachute NQTs into School Leadership. <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/exclusive-wilshaw-seldon-and-young-behind-new-college-parachute-nqts>

Tomsett, J. (2016) The Centre for High Performance Report: *How to Turn around a Failing School*. <https://johntomsett.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/full-research-report.pdf>

Wiborg, S. (2010) Learning Lessons from the Swedish Model, *FORUM*, 52(3), 279-284. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/forum.2010.52.3.279>

Wrigley (2016) Not so Simple: the problem with 'evidence-based practice' and the EEF Toolkit, *FORUM*, 58(2), 237-252.