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Preface

We start this issue with a paper on the Hamas/Israel war, which at the time of publication is very far from resolved. The paper gives some background to the Arab/Israeli conflict rooted in the Balfour Declaration and mass Jewish immigration during the British mandate, looks at current developments and the impact of the Gaza war on education and society in the UK and the USA .

In previous rounds of the century long Arab-Israeli conflict public opinion in Britain and the USA has been overwhelmingly pro-Israeli. Not this time. The marches that take place in London every Saturday have drawn from 100,000 to a claimed million people, compared to one pro-Israel march that could only manage 50,000 according to a police estimate or 100,000 according to the organisers.

The growth of greater support for the Palestinian cause pre-dates the Hamas invasion of Israel on 7 October, especially on campuses in Britain and the USA. The way in which educational institutions have been involved in this dispute has been greater than in all precious Arab-Israeli conflicts. Where will it end? A paper leaked from the Israeli Ministry of Intelligence draws some dire conclusions for Israel.

ADCS contribute a paper on how these local authority chiefs of education and children's social services see the future. This is a sector whose budgets have been severely constrained for years. The future they foresee is rather different from the present rather bleak reality.

The last two papers explore issues affecting some of the more marginalised sectors of education. Fleur Sexton looks at alternative provision while Rebecca Kelly and Natasha Mutebi of the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology explore invisible disabilities in education and employment.

Demitri Coryton
Editor

Demitri Coryton

The Israel-Palestine conflict, a brief history and current developments and the impact of the Gaza war on education and society in the UK and USA

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By Demitri Coryton

Abstract: *The current outbreak of war between Hamas and Israel in southern Israel and Gaza has generated much heat about the Israel-Palestine conflict but little light. This paper gives some historical context to the present conflict before looking at the policy options facing Israel now.*

It also looks at changing attitudes to Israel and Palestine in the UK and USA, and in particular at the impact on the education sector.

Key words: Palestine, Israel, Hamas, Palestine Authority, settlers, terrorism.

The outbreak of war between Hamas and Israel on 7 October 2023 began when a couple of thousand gunmen from the militant fundamentalist Islamic organisation Hamas, which is classed as a terrorist organisation by Britain and many other countries but which was responsible for running Gaza with the tacit support of the Israeli government, stormed into southern Israel and killed some 1,400 people, mostly civilians, and captured about 240 hostages. This was swiftly followed by an Israeli counter-attack on Gaza which caused widespread destruction of infrastructure and reportedly killed over 14,000 Palestinian civilians and counting, roughly 40% of

whom were children. Palestinian casualty figures come mainly from the Gaza Ministry of Health, which is part of the Hamas government of Gaza. Israel claims that their figures are inflated, although international organisations regard them as the best figures available. [1]

The initial Hamas attack, which killed more Jews in one day than at any time since the Holocaust, and, increasingly, the Israeli counter-attack and its enormous Palestinian civilian death toll, dominated nightly television news coverage in much of the world. In its first five weeks of bombing, Israel killed more civilians than had died in the nearly two years of war in Ukraine. [2] This led to weekly protest marches in Britain (and in other countries) which grew to several hundred thousand people. Many of those attracted to these weekend marches were students from universities, further education colleges and even, in some cases, schools. The war was keenly debated on university and college campuses and in schools. This led many Jewish students to feel anxious as they feared reprisals against British Jews for what was happening in Gaza, and there was a big rise in anti-Jewish hate crimes. (There was also a rise in anti-Muslim activity, although at a lower rate.) Jewish schools in London laid on extra security, with one being daubed with red paint and another in North London closing for fear of violence. While the protest marches included some Jewish groups, easily identified by their large banners, and individual Jews in favour of a two-state solution and appalled by both the Hamas attack on Israel and Israel's counter attack, many Jewish students and people did feel under threat.

The protests led to many claims and counter-claims, a number of which were not true. In the age of social media, truth and carefully checked facts were an early casualty in the face of emotional charge and counter-charge.

The Gaza war has changed the situation in the Middle East. Hamas has already won a number of strategic victories, and Israel is in a weaker position than it has ever been in before. Despite its overwhelming military superiority, which Hamas was never in a position to overcome, Israel has

suffered a number of strategic political reverses that leaves it with no good options once the fighting eventually stops. A perceptive paper from the Israeli Ministry of Intelligence, *Alternatives for a Political Directive for the Civilian Population in Gaza,* very much in line with the Netanyahu government's thinking, looked at the options Israel had once the fighting stops and concluded that none of them were good. [3]

The war has, at least temporarily, derailed Israel's and the USA's attempts to normalise relations between Israel and its neighbours in a way that sidelined the Palestinians. Hamas has put Palestine and the plight of the Palestinians firmly back centre-stage in regional politics, at the UN and in global public opinion. It has weakened Israel's western allies in the eyes of the non-Western world, especially the global South, weakening its support for Ukraine. When the West calls for global support against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the global South sees this as hypocritical in light of Israel's actions in Gaza and the West Bank. In the Arab world the conflict has strengthened Iran, Russia and China and weakened support for the USA. The war has also shone a light on Israel's oppressive and highly questionable actions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which Israel had previously managed to avoid international scrutiny on. [4] For the first time since the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, the Gaza war has led to many in the USA questioning their unconditional support for Israel. Especially in the Democratic Party, the younger more liberal members, including Congressmen, are questioning President Biden's support for Israel and his opposition to a ceasefire. A recent opinion poll showed most Americans support a ceasefire, which is strongly opposed by Israel. In previous conflicts, such American public opposition to the Israeli position was unthinkable. This is very serious for Israel, for without an almost blank cheque from the USA it could not conduct the sort of operation that it is in Gaza.

Yet this move away from American support for Israel did not start with the war in Gaza. For many years now Palestinian Studies departments have been growing in US universities. More education institutions have joined the BDS

movement, BDS standing for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. Launched in 2005 and based on the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, this Palestinian organisation has gained support in the USA especially within higher education. In 2009, Hampshire College became the first U.S. college to divest from companies profiting from Israel's occupation. Relatively few others have followed, but BDS campaigns often have an effect in encouraging debate and raising awareness about an unfamiliar issue. The number of faculty that have taken an interest in Palestinian affairs has grown and this in turn has increased the number of political activists, at least in the Democratic Party, that are sympathetic to Palestine.

Some history

Both Arabs and Jews are and always have been among the ancient peoples who have inhabited what was at various times known as the Land of Canaan or Judea and Samaria. The Jews originate from the ancient Hebrews and Israelites, with the Israelites being a people that emerged from within the Canaanite population to establish the Iron Age kingdoms of Israel and Judah from roughly the 11th century BC. Their neighbours at that time included another semitic tribe, the Arabs of Damascus. In the 9th century BC, the Assyrians made written references to Arabs as inhabitants of the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Arabia. During the period of the Roman Empire, which conquered the area of modern Israel/Palestine, the Jews revolted against Roman rule and were comprehensively defeated in the Bar Kokhba revolt at the Battle of Betar in 135 AD. After this the Roman Emperor Hadrian expelled most of the Jews from Palestine, although there have always been some Jews that remained living there. The Arabs remained living in Palestine throughout this time and up to the present day.

The Romans were followed by the Greeks of the Byzantine Empire, the Arab conquest of the Middle East, followed by the Ottoman Turks and after their defeat in the First World War by the forces of the British Empire. Palestine was under British rule, initially as a British imperial possession

from 1918 and then under a League of Nations Mandate from early 1923 until the end of the Mandate in 1948.

While some Jews had always lived in Palestine, Palestinian Jews were not that different from Palestinian Arabs and usually got on well enough with them. Jews who immigrated to Palestine from the 19th century were different. Firstly, they came from Europe and were seen by the Arabs as outsider colonists and were resented. Secondly, Jewish immigration in the pre-Zionist 19th century was for religious reasons which both Muslim and Christian Arabs were not particularly sympathetic to. [5] Yet Jewish immigration into Palestine in the 19th century was limited.

When General Sir Edmund Allenby conquered Palestine, sealed by his great victory at the Battle of Megiddo in 1918, Palestine was a largely rural land that had suffered greatly under the Turks during the war, with conscription into the Ottoman army, high taxation and starvation partly caused by Turkish confiscation of food for the war effort and partly by the British naval blockade of the Ottoman Empire, devastating the country.

Official population statistics for Palestine under the Ottoman state were non-existent, because there was no such place as Palestine according to the Turks or their Arab subjects. Palestine was a Western construct, not an Ottoman or Arab one. There was no Turkish administrative unit called Palestine. The Turkish administration in the Arab lands was nothing like as efficient as under the British with their monthly statistical reports compiled and published by the (British) Government of Palestine.

There is a British Government map of "Pre-war Turkish Administrative Districts comprised in Palestine and Syria", published at the end of a 1939 British White Paper, Cmd. 5957. [6] Syria, which was an Ottoman administrative unit, a vilayet or province, was the territory inland. Along the coast were a collection of administrative units which the British called Palestine. These were the Vilayet of Beirut (modern Lebanon) and the Free Sanjak of Jerusalem (something less than modern Israel/Palestine). A sanjak was a lower level of

administration, usually with a number of sanjaks to a vilayet.

As Palestine did not exist as an Ottoman administrative unit there are no official figures for its population. The 1916 edition of Whitaker's Almanac gives the population of Palestine and Syria as 700,000 of which 150,000 were Jews and the rest Muslim and Christin Arabs and various minorities. The population of the whole Ottoman Empire was given as 31,580,000. [7] When the British conducted a census in 1922 of what would become the British Mandate of Palestine they found 752,048 people living there, of which 589,177 were Muslims, 83,790 were Jews, 71,464 were Christians (mainly Arabs but also some Armenians and Greeks) and 7,617 "others". [8]

During the inter-war period of British rule the population of Palestine expanded considerably, mainly as a result of large scale Jewish immigration. The Royal Institute for International Affairs (RIIA) report, *Great Britain and Palestine 1915 – 1936,* gives the figures each year from 1922 to 1936. [9] As the report notes: "These figures represent official estimates for June 30 each year except 1922 and 1931, in which two years a census provides complete statistics; they exclude members of His Majesty's Forces but include the nomadic Beduin population (66,553 in 1931.) It is estimated that between 1922 and 1936 the population of Palestine expanded from 752,048 to 1,336,578, representing an increase of 78%, which is probably the highest rate of increase of any country in the world during the period." The Muslim and Christian populations increased during this period by 44% and 49% respectively, while the Jewish population rose by 343%. [10] These were estimates of official immigration. Estimates of unofficial illegal immigration also showed mainly Jewish immigration. The report noted that "the Jewish proportion of the population has risen from 11% in 1922 to 28% in 1936." [11]

The rise in the Jewish population was the result of mass immigration. The rise in the Arab population was the result of natural causes. [12] There were also population movements of Arabs from Trans-Jordan to Palestine, but

these did not stay. They came to Palestine to make some money. Once they had done this they went back home to Trans-Jordan, or what is now Jordan. The report noted: "No reliable statistics are available, but it is believed that few remain in Palestine." [13]

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, Zionists claimed that Palestine was "a land without people for a people without land". This was untrue. The population of Palestine in the 19th century was fairly stable [14] but it was also significant.

The British Mandate

During the First World War the British Empire waged an ultimately successful war against the Ottoman Turks on three fronts, in Mesopotamia, Palestine and, at the end of the war after the fall of Salonica, in Macedonia and Thrace. The British wanted to attract as much support for the war as they could, and promised the Ottoman Arab provinces to a number of different groups. In 1915 and 1916 Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt, entered into negotiations with the Sherif Hussain of Mecca agreeing to an Arab kingdom under Hashemite rule. [15] At the same time, in 1916, the British made a secret treaty with the French and Russians, the Sykes-Picot-Sazonov plan, to divide up the Ottoman Empire, including the Arab lands, between them. [16] Then in 1917 the British announced the Balfour Declaration, a statement of policy made by the then British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, promising to fulfil the Zionist dream of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, under British protection. In a public letter to Lord Rothschild, a prominent member of the British Jewish community, Balfour wrote: "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country." [17]

While the rights of the Palestinian Arabs were supposed to be protected, the Arabs who lived in Palestine were not consulted. Exactly where the British thought Palestine was, and therefore the area for Jewish immigration after the war, was kept deliberately vague, for some of the area had also been promised to the French and the Arabs.

Palestine during the British mandate was a territory of two halves. Largely rural, much of the land was worked by poor Palestinian peasants living on land owned by absentee landlords, many in Syria. They used the traditional agricultural methods that their forefathers had used and were resistant to new methods. Into this land came an increasing and large number of Jewish immigrants, hard-working, strongly motivated and well lead. They were well funded by Jewish Zionist supporters in Britain, France and especially the USA who had no desire to move to Palestine themselves but accepted their obligation to help fund those who did. They used the latest agricultural methods and technology and created highly productive farms. The Jewish Agency which represented them was effective at negotiating in the Jewish interest with the British authorities. [18]

The Zionist leader was David Ben-Gurion, an effective, ruthless but when necessary pragmatic leader who became Israel's first Prime Minister. The title of a recent biography of him, *A State at Any Cost*, [19] was a good description of his priority. Throughout the British Mandate he was building what he intended would eventually be an independent state, and was quite prepared to use terrorism against the British and the Arabs, ethnic cleansing of Arab villages during the 1948 war where all the inhabitants were either murdered or driven out, as well as compromise, moderation and reason to get what he wanted.

By the late 1930s the British had started to restrict Jewish immigration because of the violent rection of the Arabs. Yet pressure from Jews desperate to escape Nazi Europe, plus the reluctance of the USA to take in all the Jews who wanted to go to America, increased the numbers trying to get into Palestine. The appalling mass murder of the

Holocaust, the scale of which became apparent after the Second World War ended, with some six million Jews exterminated, both increased the number of Jews wanting to emigrate and the support of Western governments for Zionism in a way that was irresistible. [20]

When the British Mandate ended in 1948 Jewish terrorist gangs became the Israeli army and fought the Palestinians for control of as much land as they could get, while the armies of neighbouring Arab states invaded. The Jews won decisively, and the state of Israel was formed on more land than the United Nations had proposed in its suggested division of Palestine. The Egyptian army was left in control of Gaza and the Jordanians occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Further wars in 1956, 1967 and 1973 left the Jewish state in control of the whole of Mandate Palestine, but with an increasingly alienated Palestinian population resentful of Israeli occupation.

The present

From this brief history it will be seen that the president conflict did not start with the Hamas invasion of Israel on 7 October 2023. That has to be seen in the context of a century of conflict that has resulted in the dispossession of Arab Palestinian land by what is largely a settler state that now controls Palestinians by a system that a number of international organisations, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, have described as "apartheid". [21] Amnesty's February 2022 report, for example, argues Israel imposes a "system of oppression and domination against Palestinians" through confiscation of land and property, fragmentation of Palestinian populations through land control, and the economic and social disadvantage Palestinians experience. [22] Israel, at least publicly, rejects the accusation and the use of the word "apartheid", although individual Israeli politicians have privately accepted it. [23]

The Hamas attack of 7 October was a profound shock

to Israel, Israeli Jews and to Jews around the world. More Jews were killed in one day than at any time since the Holocaust. It marked a significant failure of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and the intelligence services, which have accepted responsibility for their failings, and of the government of Benjamin Netanyahu who, to public fury, has not accepted responsibility. Israel under-estimated Hamas, and did not think that it was capable of the operation it launched on 7 October. Israeli opinion is divided as to what the long-term solution is, but united on not going back to the status quo ante. Everything in Israel changed on 7 October, with trust in any Palestinian partner for peace at an all-time low.

The security challenge to Israel is extreme. As Adi Schwartz, research fellow at the Misgay Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy in Jerusalem, Israel, and post-doctoral fellow at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel, said when talking to a US based Middle East Forum webinar: "Historically, the Arab-Israeli conflict can be separated into two periods: before and after Israel's 1973 Yom Kippur War. The 1948, 1967, and 1973 wars were each fought to thwart an 'existential threat' to Israel's territory and survival. In each instance, the Arab attempt to destroy Israel via conventional warfare failed. As no major war had occurred since 1973, leading historians believed that bordering Arab states Egypt and Jordan had 'had enough' and signed peace agreements. Still, hostile intentions toward Israel remained 'in some of these circles,' and Israel continued to absorb terror attacks. Although the Jewish state still faced repeated diplomatic attacks and 'attempts at delegitimization,' the general mindset had been that the 'existential territorial threat' of invasion was relegated to history. Hamas's infiltration from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel on October 7 dispelled that assumption and began a new phase." [24]

In Schwartz's view, which is from a Zionist perspective, the attack was a result of the "convergence of two separate trajectories, separate axes" that threaten Israel: the Palestinian Sunni Arab axis, and the Iranian Shiite axis.

Together, they represent an existential threat to Israel. The Shiite threat is from Hezbollah in the north, Iran-backed militias from Syria and Iraq, and Houthi rebels in Yemen who launch long-range missiles aimed at Israel. The Sunni threat is from Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the restive population of Palestinian Arabs in Judea and Samaria, aka the West Bank.

The Israeli Ministry of Intelligence
As referenced above, on 13 October the Israeli Ministry of Intelligence wrote a policy paper, *Alternatives for a Political Directive for the Civilian Population in Gaza*. [3] This paper, originally secret but soon leaked to the Israeli media, started by stating: "The State of Israel is required to bring about a significant change in the civilian reality in the Gaza Strip in light of Hamas's crimes that have led to the 'Iron Swords' war. Accordingly, it must decide on the state's goal regarding the civilian population in Gaza to be pursued concurrently with the removal of Hamas rule." The paper was a thoughtful and accurate description of the options that Israel would face once the fighting stopped. It posed the sort of questions that publicly Israel said it was too early to address, but privately was considering. The problem for the Israeli government was that all the options that the paper identified were not good ones for Israel.

The paper outlined three options for a post war Gaza, but also explored "the ability to bring about ideological perceptual change among the population with respect to Jews and Israel" that applied to all three options and to the West Bank and East Jerusalem as well as Gaza. The paper identifies the need to bring about an ideological change. It states: "It is essential to shape a public narrative that internalizes the failure and moral injustice of the Hamas movement and replaces the old perception with a moderate Islamic ideology. This process is similar to denazification in Germany and Imperial Japan. Among other things, it is crucial to write the curriculum for schools and enforce their use on an entire generation." This, of course, is easier said than done. Denazification in post war Germany was possible

because there had been anti-Nazi people during the Third Reich who were prepared to work with the victorious allies to create a post-war democratic state. While many in Gaza and the West Bank do not support Hamas, none are prepared to work with Israel in creating a pro-Israel pro-Jewish environment.

The paper was right in identifying the school curriculum in Gaza and the West Bank as entirely anti-Israel. The paper notes: "Integrating the PA (Palestinian Authority) will greatly complicate the creation of study materials that legitimize Israel. Even now, the PA's curriculum, much like those of Hamas, instils hatred and animosity towards Israel. While it is possible to condition the importation of PA material on Israeli dictation of written study materials, there is no guarantee that this will happen, as the PA is fundamentally opposed to Israel. One can assess that the PA will not act resolutely to shape a public narrative that exposes Hamas' failure and moral injustice or promote a moderate Islamic ideology."

Looking at the strategic implications for Israel, the paper noted: "The PA is a malevolent entity for Israel that stands on the brink of disaster. Strengthening it could result in a strategic loss for Israel." This is a reference to the paper's first option of installing the PA to run Gaza, which it thinks would be "a disaster" for Israel.

Although the paper was mainly focused on Gaza, it did look at the West Bank. It observed: "The divide between the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza is one of the major obstacles today to the establishment of a Palestinian state. It is inconceivable that the outcome of this attack will be an unprecedented victory for the Palestinian nationalist movement, paving the way for the establishment of a Palestinian state." This reflects the view of the Netanyahu government which has always been hostile to a Palestinian state. The paper continued: "The current model in the West Bank, involving Israeli military control and the civil authority of the PA, is unstable and is destined to fail. It can be tolerated in the West Bank only because of the extensive

Jewish settlement in the region. This is because there is no possibility of Israeli military control without Jewish settlement (and one cannot expect the mobilization of settlement movements [for establishing Israeli settlements in Gaza] under the condition of the PA's return to Gaza)." This reveals that while Israel was negotiating for a two state solution under the Clinton Administration in the US, it was at the same time undermining the negotiations by increasing Jewish settlements on the West Bank, and that this was deliberate Israeli government policy aimed at securing control of the West Bank for Israel.

Returning to the main point of the policy paper, which is what happens the day after the fighting stops in Gaza, the paper outlines three policy options. Alternative A has the civilian population remining in Gaza and the rule of the Palestinian Authority (PA) imported to run the Gaza Strip. This has "the majority of the population" remaining in Gaza. The paper does not say what will happen to the minority, or how large the minority will be. Initially "Israeli military governance" will be installed and "later on, the importation of the PA and its establishment as the governing authority in Gaza" will take place.

The paper regarded this as the worst of all options for Israel. The PA would not be acceptable to the people of Gaza, and, although the paper does not acknowledge this, the PA knows this and is unlikely to accept this role unless it is as part of a move to a two-state solution which is anathema to Bibi Netanyahu and Likud, to say nothing of the settlers and those parties to the right of Likud, that are the majority of the present coalition government.

Alternative B is the civilian population remains in Gaza and "local Arab governance is fostered". This option also requires Israeli military governance in the initial phase, while "continuing efforts to establish a local, non-Islamist, Arab political leadership for managing civilian aspects" are undertaken. The paper does not say how this would be done, given that any such local Arab involvement would be seen as Quislings by the civilian population. The authors of the paper

were clearly aware of this, as they note: "A permanent solution within this alternative does not seem to be on the horizon."

Alternative C is the expulsion of the entire Arab population from Gaza to north Sinai in Egypt. This is the preferred solution. As the paper notes: "Alternative C is the one that yields positive and long-term strategic results for Israel, but is a challenging one to implement." That is an understatement. The paper goes into detail about how this could be achieved. It would require the active support of Egypt and the international support from the USA, neither of which would be forthcoming. Indeed, the paper is delusional in thinking that any of the actions Israel would have to rely on other countries for is remotely realistic.

What the paper warns is that if Israel invades Gaza (and the paper was written before Israel did) then Israel would be left with no good options once the fighting stopped. It also assumes that Israel can destroy Hamas, which it may well not be able to do.

The end game

At the time of writing (the end of November) we are 55 days into the war. There is a cease-fire to allow for the swapping of hostages and for humanitarian aid to enter Gaza. As Michale Clark, visiting professor in defence studies at King's College London, observed in an article in the *Sundy Times,* "after 50 days, Israel has lost control of the war". [25] Israel has reportedly killed a very large number of Palestinian civilians, many of them children, but has not yet managed to knock out the Hamas system of tunnels or eliminate all its leaders. Both Hamas and Israel say that after the ceasefire they will re-start hostilities, which Israel would have to do to have any hope of defeating Hamas.

Israel's reputation has certainly suffered, especially in the United States which is the one country that really matters. A spotlight has also been shone on its occupation of the West Bank which was not there before the invasion of Gaza. Israel likes to portray itself as a liberal western

democracy, with the rule of law. Inside the pre-1967 borders it is. In the West Bank it is not. Large numbers of Palestinians are held in custody, some of them without charge or trial in "preventative custody" which can last years. It is a harsh occupation that seems to have no end in sight, and as the Israeli Ministry of Intelligence paper acknowledged, is unsustainable and will ultimately fail. The preferred choice for the future of Gaza is the expulsion of Palestinians into Egypt, and the inference of the paper is that a similar piece of ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, with Arabs expelled into Jordan, is the preferred option there.

It is important to note that these are options prepared for a coalition government made up of Likud, settler interests and the ultranationalist Jewish Power and Religious Zionism parties even more right wing than Likud. There are others in Israel with very different views, and they are likely to be a louder voice if, as expected, Netanyahu is swept from power once the Gaza war is over. For example, Ehud Olmert, Prime Minister of Israel from 2006 to 2009, speaking to the POLITICO website on 9 November 2023, supported a two-state solution. He said: "If Israel produced a serious proposal for two-state negotiations it would have a dramatic impact on the international community. It would give us more space and time to achieve the aims of our military operations — it would have an impact on public opinion in Western countries and in the media. It would show Israel is committed to doing something it hasn't wanted to in the past 15 years. So, something positive could come out of all of this. But we're not doing it, and no one wants to think about it. No one wants to spell it out. No one wants to say it." [26]

Yet long term trends in Israeli politics suggest that even if Netanyahu goes that does not mean that his policies will go as well. As Israeli pollster, Dahlia Scheindlin, showed in an article in *Foreign Affairs* [27], far more Israelis identify as right wing than left wing, and in most cases of violence on Israel that has resulted in a further shift to the right. At the moment, polls show voters flocking to the National Unity Party led by Benny Gantz, a former Chief of the Israeli General

Staff. His party is centre-right, and while Gantz would probably avoid the hard right populist rhetoric of Netanyahu he has never shown any support for a two-state solution. As Scheindlin observed: "As recently as last year, he referred to the idea of 'two states for two people' and said, 'I am against this'."

Scheindlin concluded her article in *Foreign Affairs* thus: "One of Netanyahu's worst mistakes was to view the Palestinian problem purely in security terms, as if the politics behind the conflict could be ignored. That, of course, led to the blind spot that helped make the Hamas attacks so deadly. But as an IDF man, Gantz seems likely to view the Palestinian problem in much the same way—as a security threat to be contained rather than an acknowledgment of the Palestinian right to self-determination. And if that is the case, for all its horror, October 7 seems likely to result in more of the same—including future cycles of misery on both sides."

Already the damage to Israel's international reputation is considerable. In the UK, the weekend marches in favour if the Palestinians have had around 100,000 minimum taking part, with three times that number for some of them. A counter protest that was ostensibly against anti-Semitism, but which the number of Israeli flags present would suggest was really a pro-Israel march, had attracted about 50,000 people. [28] In previous conflicts public opinion in Britain (and other Western countries, especially the USA) was pro-Israel. Because of the number of civilian casualties in Gaza and what appears to be the indiscriminate bombing there, that is no longer the case.

If, as seems likely, hostilities continue after the ceasefires then more civilian casualties will be inflicted by Israel and more reputational damage will be sustained by Israel. International pressure will mount to stop the war, including crucially from the USA which is the only foreign country that really matters, and it is unlikely that Israel will have the time it needs to destroy Hamas. Its fighters dress as civilians not as soldiers, and mix with the local population among whom Israel has zero support. To give a comparison

that while not exact is similar, when the USA liberated Mosul from ISIS control it took nine months. The Americans went to great lengths to plan humanitarian aid for civilians at the same time as war against ISIS. Israel has not done that. Instead, it has imposed a blockade on the Palestinians keeping out food, water, medication and fuel that led to hunger and the threat of starvation. This may be a war crime. It has also disabled all the hospitals, claiming that Hamas has military facilities underneath them. It is very unlikely that President Biden will tolerate continuing negative coverage on American TV during an election year for anything like as long as Israel would need to eradicate Hamas, even if it could do that, which is by no means certain. And even if it could, as the Israeli Ministry of Intelligence paper noted, once the fighting eventually stops there are no good options for Israel.

Writing in *The Times* two days after the Hamas invasion of Israel, the former British Foreign Secretary, William Hague, wrote that "Hamas has set a trap that Israel must avoid". [29] Israel didn't. It walked straight into the trap. Hague looked back to the time when American Secretary of State John Kerry in 2013 tried to broker a peace agreement based on a two-state solution. Hague noted that "no one could have tried harder. He failed because of Israel's steady building of settlements on the West Bank and divided leadership among Palestinians. There was no trust then between the two sides and there is even less now." He thought that the time for a two-state solution had passed. Yet Israel's strategic failures in the war have revived interest in the two-state option. For that to have any chance of success it will take a change of leadership on both sides. In the case of Israel that will come about after a general election. It won't come about at all with Hamas. It is difficult to see how it can happen with the PA leadership which hasn't had an election for years and which is now being surpassed by Hamas on the West Bank. So, it may just be too difficult to pull off. But what is the alternative? A continuation of a policy in Israel that has failed for 70 years and which will result in future attacks from Hamas, or a group similar to them, every few years. Or an

attempt to drive the Palestinians out of Palestine completely, into Egypt and Jordan, which even the present Israeli government sees, in the words of the Israeli Ministry of Intelligence options paper, as "a challenging one to implement".

Meanwhile, in Britain and other Western countries, Jews will feel even more under threat. Jewish students will feel more uncomfortable to the point where some will want to avoid studying at universities with a strong Palestinian-supporting student body. Some may even decide that they don't want to study in Britain at all while Jewish academics may also decide to look elsewhere to further their careers. That would be a loss to British higher education.

For many years Israel was blessed by leadership that was rather good at taking a long-term view. That is certainly not the case with Bibi Netanyahu. Who follows him will determine the course that Israel takes. Whether they can find a new generation of leadership among the Palestinians with whom to negotiate remains to be seen. If not, and it may simply be too difficult, then Dahlia Scheindlin is right. The carnage we see on our television screens each night will be repeated every few years.

Foot notes

[1]   Figures for Israeli dead and captured were released by the Israeli government. The death toll varied from 1,200 to 1,400 as there was some initial confusion over who had been killed and who captured. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), which publishes daily updates on casualties, says that more than 1,417 Israelis have been killed and 5,413 injured. (Source: House of Commons Library research briefing CRB 9874, *2023 Israel-Hamas conflict: UK and international response*, 2 November 2023.) The number of Palestinians killed was announced at regular intervals by the Ministry of Health in Gaza, which is run by the Hamas government. Israel claimed that these figures were

inflated for propaganda. However, international organisations regard their figures as the most accurate available. They are the basis for the daily reports of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which collates locally collected data. (Source: House of Lords Library In Focus briefing, Friday 20 October 2023.) These figures are up to the end of November 2023.

[2]   Reported by the BBC.

[3]   *Alternatives for a Political Directive for the Civilian Population in Gaza* (2023), Israeli Ministry of Intelligence, dated 13 October 2023. Originally secret, the paper was leaked to the Israeli press on 24 October, a leak reported by the US based English language liberal Jewish news website Mondoweiss. On 28 October the Israeli news website Local Call published the entire ten-page document in its original Hebrew. On 1 November 2023 Mondoweiss published an English language translation, which is the document quoted in this paper. The report was verified by the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies (RUSI) and referenced in its members only briefing on the Gaza war on 27 October 2023.

[4]   Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, have all accused Israel of practicing "apartheid" in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. (Source: *Human Rights Protections for Palestinians,* House of Commons Research Briefing CDP-2023-0083, 17 April 2023.)

[5]   Dowty, Alan (2019), *Arabs and Jews in Ottoman Palestine. Two Worlds Collide,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, USA.

[6]   *Correspondence Between Sir Henry McMahon GCMG, GCVO, KCIE and CSI, His Majesty's High Commissioner at Cairo*

and the Sherif Hussein of Mecca, July 1915 – March 1916 [With a Map], Miscellaneous No. 3 (1939), Command paper No. Cmd. 5957, 1939.

[7]   *Whitaker's Almanac 1916*, published by Joseph Whitaker, London. Whitaker's describes the area as "the Biblical district of Palestine now forms the Muttesfarifilks of Jerusalem (El Kuds), Lebanon, Acre and Nablus" with an area of 11,000 square miles.

[8]   Government of Palestine, *General Monthly Statistics of Palestine,* which formed the basis for the table *Population of Palestine* on page 61 of the Royal Institute for International Affairs Information Department Paper, No. 20, *Great Britain and Palestine 1915 – 1936,* published in 1937.

[9]   Ibid., table on page 61.

[10]   IbId., page 61.

[11]   Ibid., text on page 61.

[12]   There were three main reasons for the increase in the Arab population. The first was the cessation of Turkish conscription, which had emptied Palestine of young men who fled during the war. The second was a lower death rate as a result of the activities of the Public Health Department. The third was the stopping of emigration of "Asiatics" to South America. See *Great Britain and Palestine 1915 – 1936,* page 63.

[13]   Ibid., page 64.

[14]   Ibid.

[15]   Barr, James (2011) *A Line in the Sand. Britain, France and the Struggle that Shaped the Middle East,* Simon & Shuster, London. There was also a secret treaty between

Britain, France, Russia and Italy, which promised the Italians Turkish territory in Anatolia.

[16]   British Foreign Office (1939) *Miscellaneous No. 3 (1939). Correspondence Between Sir Henry McMahon GCMG, GCVO, KCIE, CSI, Mis Majesty's High Commissioner at Cairo and The Sherif Hussein of Mecca, July 1915 – March 1916 [With a Map]*, Command Paper Cmd. 5957.

[17]   Letter from Arthur Balfour, British Foreign Secretary, writing on behalf of the British Government, to Lord Lionel Walter Rothschild, a banker and leading British Zionist, for onward transmission to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland, dated 2 November 1917. The letter was made public and published in the press on 9 November 1917.

[18]   Stein, Kenneth W., (1984). *The Land Question in Palestine, 1917 – 1939*. The North Carolina University Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA.

[19]   Segev, Tom (2019). *A State at Any Cost. The Life of David Ben-Gurion.* First published in Hebrew in 2018 by Keter Books, Israel. Published in English in a translation by Haim Watzman in 2019, published by Head of Zeus, Apollo Books, London.

[20]   For a description of the persecution of the Jews in the Holocaust in the context of the mass slaughter of civilians by totalitarian states like Nazi Germany and the USSR, see Snyder, Timothy (2010) *Bloodlands. Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. Basic Books, New York, USA.

[21]   *Human Rights Protection for Palestinians,* (2023), House of Commons Research Briefing, CDP-2023-0083, 17 April 2023.

[22]   *Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians. A Look into Two Decades of Domination and Oppression* (2022), a report

from Amnesty International, February 2022.

[23]   Conversations with the author.

[24]   Schwartz, Adi (2023) text based on his address to a Middle East Forum, Philadelphia, PA, USA, webinar on 13 November 2023, published on 24 November 2023.

[25]   Clark, Professor Michael (2023) writing in the *Sunday Times* of 26 November 2023.

[26]   Olmert, Ehud (2023), interview with POLITICO, 9 November 2023.

[27]   Scheindlin, Dahlia (2023), Why Israel Won't Change. The War in Gaza Will Likely Reinforce the Country's Rightward Tilt, in *Foreign Affairs*, 29 November 2023.

[28]   These were numbers reported in *The Times* and on the BBC. The organisers, as always happens with demonstration marches, claim far higher numbers.

[29]   Hague, William (2023), *The Times*, 9 October 2023.

A future vision for the education system

An ADCS Policy Paper by the Association of Directors of Children's Services

Abstract: *The education system in England is increasingly fragmented and lacks coherence, locally, regionally and at the national level. Since 2010 the role of local authorities (LAs) in education has been partly eroded by design due to a shift from an LA led and coordinated system to one that is less rooted in place. Schools and trusts now operate in a more autonomous environment that has incentivised greater competition between individual schools, coming at the expense of inclusion. Recent reforms have not centred on the needs of all children and young people, instead having the opposite effect of marginalising learners who are not well suited to the current high stakes system that prizes academic attainment and inspection outcomes above all else.*

Education is about more than just the acquisition of qualifications; it should also prepare children and young people to become active citizens of the future. The purpose of education therefore needs to be re-considered so that it is inclusive of all learners. The early years and further education (FE) sectors are critical to improving social mobility by addressing emerging needs early and allowing young people to pursue a range of skills and qualifications via vocational routes. Both sectors have suffered due to a sustained policy focus on the school system and an absence of both a long-term strategy and adequate funding.

There is a clear need for the government to articulate a long-term vision for the entire education system. Members of ADCS believe this must be rooted in place and inclusive of all children and young people's needs. The role of the LA as leader of place is central as a holder of multiple statutory

responsibilities in relation to education (although the powers and funding to fulfil these important duties have been eroded over time).

Key words: Palestine,

The education system in England has undergone significant and prolonged change over the past decade. The school system in particular has experienced various reforms regarding funding, curriculum change and structure. As a result, it has become fragmented, leading to discordant and unconnected actions. Education is a fundamental right for all children and young people, it is central to achieving a more equal society, where every child is given the same opportunity, regardless of background, to pursue their interests and achieve their potential. A good education can be transformative, both academically and socially, and offers children a strong sense of belonging. It is a protective factor for more vulnerable children who can benefit most from a consistent and nurturing environment with professionals who can help them grow and develop confidence and skills.

Since 2010, the role of local authorities (LAs) in education has been partly eroded due to a shift by design from an LA led and coordinated system to one that is fragmented and less rooted in place. Schools and trusts now operate in a more autonomous environment that has incentivised greater competition between individual schools at the expense of inclusive practices. The rapid growth in the number of academy schools and multiacademy trusts (MATs) over the past decade has accelerated this with nearly half of all schools now academised (NFER, 2023). The system of competition, as seen through the introduction of league tables and a sharper focus on inspection outcomes, pre-dates the existence of academy schools and has partly defined the school system in England for the past few decades. It is right that all schools should strive to secure the best outcomes for their pupils, however, this sense of competition between

individual schools has been intensified due to a shifting accountability system focussed now almost entirely on judging schools on the academic attainment of pupils.

Both the early years and further education (FE) sectors have suffered due to an absence of a long-term strategy and adequate funding. Each sector is critical to improving social mobility, both in the vital early years and in post-16 education where young people can pursue a range of skills development and qualifications that suit their strengths. The government must recognise the importance of these sectors and regard them as an investment, not a burden. The FE sector in particular plays a key role in supporting young people who may have not engaged well with the academic focus of the school curriculum and prefer more hands on, vocational routes.

However, we are now seeing more children and young people who are less engaged with the education system. This is reflected in the rising number of school exclusions, a significant increase in levels of persistent absenteeism and a year-on-year increase in the number of children who are electively home educated (EHE). The Government must do more to provide opportunities to engage with this cohort of young people by offering a wide range of training options and qualifications through better resourcing of FE settings. The government's decision to remove funding for a number of qualifications for 16-19 year olds will only serve to disengage more young people from education and training. Our education system must serve all children and young people and not just those able to engage with a narrow academic focus.

There is a clear need to articulate what the Government's vision for the education system is and how it can best support all children and young people. Significant churn at the national level, including five holders of the role of Secretary of State for Education since the 2022 Schools White Paper was published, means that there is not a clear and consistent direction with the present national arrangements for education, further exacerbating the lack of

local coherence across the country. Now is the time to ask ourselves, what is education for and how does it meet the needs of children and young people today?

Context

The school system in England is complex having undergone radical reforms over many years. The Academies Act 2010 accelerated the rise in the number of academies and trusts, largely within the secondary school sector. The Government has variously expressed a commitment to achieving a fully academised school system, a promise that was outlined in the 2016 White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* and more recently in the 2022 White Paper *Opportunity for All,* which set the ambitious target of achieving full academisation by 2030. A number of the reforms set out in the 2022 White Paper required legislation, however, the Secretary of State for Education confirmed in December 2022 that the associated Schools Bill would not progress through Parliament.

Therefore, the viability or longevity of what is set out in the White Paper remains unclear. The Government has since reiterated its ambition for a fully academised system (House of Commons, 2023) and has outlined its commitment to "some aspects of the Bill", yet it has not outlined how it will resolve the myriad issues that resulted in the Bill being withdrawn.

In the meantime the system remains complex and fragmented. There is now a far greater emphasis on parental selection of school as a mechanism for school improvement. While this has existed for a number of decades, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS, 2022) has found that children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to attend the lowest performing schools and make slower educational progress than their more affluent peers, thus widening the attainment gap. This is an inevitable consequence of a system predicated on parental preference. A slim majority of schools are still maintained by LAs and a substantial number of academies remain in single or small trusts. There has been an uneven rate of academisation across different regions and it

has slowed in recent years with government interventions in underperforming schools applied inconsistently across the country. This has resulted in a confused system with various lines of accountability and competing priorities whilst new types of school, including free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges have been introduced over the past decade. The Government's *Academies Regulatory and Commissioning Review* (DfE, 2023) has recently attempted to resolve some of these issues by outlining a more coherent system, in collaboration with LAs, schools, parents and carers, with a greater focus on inclusivity. However, this can only be achieved by moving away from an approach predicated on fragmentation and competition to one of integration and system wide strategy based on place.

The recent Schools White Paper also included a commitment to consult on a new backstop power for LAs to direct trusts to admit children 'as a final safety net', something that was welcomed by ADCS members, particularly in relation to in-year admissions. If LAs were given this power, it would provide some of the levers needed to help ensure the system works for all children and young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and children in care. Without these powers, it is not clear how meaningful change will be achieved. Indeed, the vision set out in the 2023 SEND and alternative provision (AP) improvement plan relies, in part, on an inclusive education system where schools, regardless of type, are incentivised to support all children who would benefit from remaining in mainstream education.

A coherent, overarching long-term vision and strategy for the education system is urgently needed. This must clearly outline how to achieve a system that seeks to support all children and young people in a truly inclusive education system whilst recognising the importance of place and the strong link between education settings, communities and LAs as leaders of place. There are a number of key reform programmes currently in progress across SEND and children's social care. A common thread running through each of these

is the need for the system to join up to meet the holistic needs of children and young people. Each part of the system must be equipped to provide children with the best and most appropriate support whilst easing pressure on other services.

The lasting effects of the pandemic on children's development and educational outcomes will be felt for many years to come. For some children and families, the social contract with schools was damaged by lockdowns and the disruption from enduring social distancing measures, for others poor mental health and wellbeing are the concern. Children sacrificed months of their learning during partial school closures and we are now seeing some of the impact, however, many teachers report being unable to access mental health services or other relevant support to help address this. A long-term vision and strategy must include a plan for post-pandemic education recovery with adequate funding to reflect its ambition. This should take a holistic view of the experiences of children and young people including their mental health and wellbeing challenges.

A vision for the education system

What is education for?
Research and experience clearly shows that the early years present the best opportunity to close the attainment gap, yet the government has not targeted investment at the most vulnerable children and families where the biggest impact would be clearly seen. Despite ongoing national investment in the sector, its focus is primarily on childcare to support parents and carers to return to work or increase their working hours rather than early education and improving children's outcomes. Only by targeting funding towards the most socially and economically disadvantaged can we effect generational change. The early years workforce plays a vital role here, particularly in closing the attainment gap, the development and growth of this workforce must be a priority for government.

The Government's flagship 30-hours 'free' childcare policy for

working parents of three and four-year old children effectively excludes those children with parents who are not in employment or who are in insecure work, however, individuals who earn up to £100,000 per annum can benefit from this offer. The funding attached to the 'free' childcare offer is insufficient to meet actual costs, with many settings levying additional charges and costs to make up the shortfall. The recently announced extension of free childcare will exacerbate this picture further, leading to more closures, unless government addresses this fundamental issue. ADCS believes the unique ability of the early years sector to close the attainment gap must be at the heart of designing and implementing any future reforms.

Schools sit at the heart of our communities, they are not just places where children and young people develop academically, but socially and emotionally too. The national curriculum of the day should prepare young people to successfully transition from adolescence to adulthood. Children and young people are less likely to achieve good outcomes, or continue with further learning or training, if they are detached from the education process. A growing number of learners do not see a narrow, academic curriculum as relevant to their lives, now or in the future, leaving them at a higher risk of not engaging with further studies or training. Not only does this alienate individuals from the education system, but there are also national impacts and consequences regarding the country's future economy in terms of earnings and unemployment figures. This is even more concerning in the context of school attendance not returning to pre-pandemic levels and the number of children who are persistently absent continuing to rise. There is a strong correlation between poor attendance and children who have a social worker, live in poverty or have additional needs. The reasons for this must be explored, not just through the lens of the pandemic but also with an understanding of the systemic issues that act as barriers to attendance. For example, there is a clear link between what is offered in the national curriculum and achieving a more inclusive education system, but the lack

of emphasis in the curriculum on enrichment learning, the arts or the loss of vocational subjects runs counter to achieving this aim. For some learners, vocational routes offer the best opportunity for study and development, yet they remain chronically undervalued and underfunded. The government's decision to remove funding for qualifications at Level 3 and below that overlap with the new T Levels, whilst also 'streamlining' the number of qualifications at Level 2 and below, is adversely impacting disadvantaged students who will not have access to courses that suit their strengths, learning style or preferences.

Consequently, for some young people progression to Level 3 will not be possible. ADCS members are concerned that T Levels alone will not meet the learning needs of all young people wanting to progress into further education, particularly those who would benefit from a more flexible pathway that a T Level cannot offer; the study and assessment model does not suit all learners' needs and abilities. The Government must recognise the value of qualifications at Level 3 and below that allow many young people to remain in education, achieve a recognised qualification and gain valuable skills to work in sectors that face severe recruitment and retention challenges. ADCS would welcome a greater national focus on, and investment in, the early years and FE sectors to harness their ability to improve social mobility and close the attainment and skills gap.

Education is about more than just the acquisition of qualifications, it should also prepare children and young people for the future to become active citizens. The purpose of education therefore needs to be re-considered so that it is inclusive of all learners and incentivises schools to keep children in mainstream education where it is in their best interests and enables all children, whatever their ability or background, to realise their ambitions. The diversity of a school population, including cultural and social diversity, should be both celebrated and harnessed by leaders. Learners should be encouraged to use their creative skills, be

intellectually curious and socially and morally responsible by taking an active, positive role in their local community. Schools should foster a culture of 'belonging' so that children see school as a safe place in which they are free to thrive.

This requires a curriculum that empowers all students to develop into confident adults by appealing to all types of learners from every background, including those with SEND or those eligible for free school meals. Sadly, too many children feel detached from the curriculum; research published by Edge Foundation (2023) found that for nearly half of young people aged 15-16, secondary school is not an enjoyable or meaningful experience, but is rather something they feel they need to 'get through' because of its bearing on their futures. However, in some areas local partnerships are leading the way in offering a more enriching curriculum. The Camden learning pledge is one such example where an enrichment offer is seen "as a right for every child, not just for those whose families can afford it." The Department for Education (DfE) should develop a coherent, longterm and appropriately funded vision and strategy for a 21st century education system for schools, early years and FE settings in consultation with key stakeholders, one which recognises the importance of place, the role of the LA, prioritises equality of access and the interests of vulnerable learners.

A coherent and defined role for each actor in the school system

There is a need for greater clarity that brings coherence to a system that includes many organisations and actors who have oversight of schools. These organisations include the DfE, LAs, Ofsted, MATs and church dioceses. The Public Accounts Committee (2018) concluded that such arrangements are "fragmented and incoherent, leading to inefficiency for government and confusion for schools." This creates confusion across the system and inevitably results in competing priorities across different types of schools. It creates little room or incentive for schools to become inclusive environments that have a greater connection to

their local community. We need to move away from the premise of the 2010 education reforms, which sought to disrupt the status quo and fragment the system by design with the entrance of new actors. When the disrupters are in the majority, they become the system, and can no longer be true to their original purpose.

ADCS has previously called for a common accountability framework for all schools to facilitate a culture of openness and trust against a backdrop of increased competition along with unambiguous guidance on the role of key actors in the system (ADCS, 2018). This ambition remains and is arguably more urgent today. The system must therefore be reshaped and codified with a strong link to place and the networks that exist in local areas. This will help incentivise inclusive behaviours, leading to a reduction in school exclusions and greater access to school places for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The role of the LA is key here, but so too is the role of national government. The DfE Regions Groups should play a greater role in this space and adopt a priority focus on tackling and minimising exclusions, in partnership with LAs, who hold responsibility for children excluded from school, to find local resolutions. This should take a holistic view of the education system, including the role of the inspectorate, to ensure all are working towards improving children's outcomes.

Just under half of mainstream schools are now academy trusts and are accountable to the Secretary of State via their DfE Regional Director (previously Regional Schools Commissioner), who are in turn advised by their Advisory Board (previously Head Teacher Board). The Academies regulatory and commissioning review has sought to address some of the inconsistencies in the system, however, it is unclear as to how its ambitions will be realised without a system that incentivises inclusive practices, or without giving LAs sufficient powers to intervene in individual academy schools when performance concerns arise. The review sought to better define trust strength by including 'inclusive leadership' as one of the five pillars of trust strength. This is a

positive shift in focus from government, but it must be backed by meaningful action. The importance of effective governance is important too and there is a central role for school governors and trustees in promoting an inclusive environment.

To date, government has not put in place strong, formal processes to enable academy trusts to be held to account. Whilst this may be a function of the DfE Regional Directors, given the size of each geographical footprint, they do not have the same level of local knowledge as an LA, which will be aware of emerging problems much earlier. In practice, LAs can find that there is a lack of alignment between their role and that of a Regional Director, such as when an LA challenges a school for a lack of inclusive practice. ADCS would welcome a stronger role for LAs to improve transparency and address practical arrangements to tackle academic, financial and inclusion- related concerns in individual schools, regardless of status or designation. Responsibility for holding academy schools to account, which trusts should join an LA area and which schools should join different trusts should be held by place-based partnerships which have a far greater understanding of local need. The nature of these partnerships is explored in detail later in this paper.

Opportunity for All outlined a clear role for each actor in the system, including a strengthened role for LAs. The principles set out in the recent White Paper are the right ones for the future system and must be revisited, particularly those aiming to create 'a stronger and fairer school system', by setting clear definitions of the role of each actor and aligning these to statutory responsibilities that already exist. This would help to clarify LA powers as leaders of place while not deterring from the need for individual academy schools and MATs to show leadership in their local communities. ADCS is clear that all schools should be required to accurately reflect their local population and therefore accept a representative proportion of pupils from all backgrounds locally, including children in care, those eligible for free school meals and those

with special educational needs.

If LAs were reinvested with the necessary powers that allow them to better fulfil their existing responsibilities, these would need to be met with the appropriate funding to allow the LA to deliver an effective, place-based school system in line with its sufficiency duties and local intelligence. LAs have seen overall funding fall by half in real terms since the beginning of austerity and more councils are now facing bankruptcy as a direct consequence, leading to limited staff capacity. Despite the role of LAs in education being eroded over the past decade, their understanding of local context and the needs of their communities is unparalleled. Over half of academy schools are either single academy trusts (SAT) or part of a MAT that has fewer than 10 schools (FFT Education data lab, 2022) meaning they will likely not benefit from being part of a strong family of schools in the same way that a maintained school or a school within a large MAT would, particularly where schools are located across multiple LA areas. The local intelligence held by the LA should be harnessed to better support these schools and help achieve a truly joined-up system. Capacity must be re-built to allow LAs to perform this important function.

A school accountability system that values and promotes inclusivity

The current high stakes accountability regime prioritises academic attainment over the acquisition of the softer skills valued by employers e.g. communication, problem solving and team work. The introduction of the EBacc at secondary level does not suit all learners, particularly those who benefit from studying more vocational subjects or who have additional learning needs. The introduction of Progress 8 measures for secondary schools has exacerbated this issue with evidence finding that it adversely impacts disadvantaged students (EPI, 2017). Despite the government's stated intention for Progress 8 to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, reductions in the number of non-EBacc subjects taught in schools continue to be seen (NFER, 2018). The high stakes nature of the

accountability system puts pressure on schools to focus on a set of measures that are not necessarily in all pupils' best interests.

Ofsted's education inspection framework, introduced in 2019, sought to stop practices that marginalise disadvantaged or vulnerable learners such as children in care, those eligible for free school meals or with special educational needs, yet schools continue to be incentivised to focus on exam results. However, the consequences of the current inspection framework are disproportionate and have a significant role in the workforce sufficiency challenges faced by schools and LAs. It is important to note that the regulatory framework that Ofsted operates within is set by the DfE. The system needs to re-think what the purpose of inspection is, so it has a positive impact at a system level while also being grounded in improving outcomes for children and young people and empowering the workforce. The DfE should seek to remove all barriers that prevent schools from creating an inclusive environment for children and young people. This should include reform of the school accountability system in its entirety, shifting away from the current focus on academic attainment and taking into account the broader purpose of education.

There needs to be a re-balancing of the system in favour of inclusion if we are to see meaningful, lasting reform. School exclusions continue to rise, most noticeably since the pandemic and the number of children who are EHE has increased by more than a third since before the pandemic (DfE, 2023 and ADCS 2021). ADCS continues to call on government to establish a national register of children not in school, something that was outlined in the 2022 Schools White Paper. The rate of exclusions is concerning and it is not clear how Ofsted will help to reverse this trend. Inclusion profiles should be developed for consideration as part of future school inspection frameworks to ensure schools are held to account for how accurately they reflect their local child population and therefore meet the needs of their local community.

The principles set out in the most recent Schools White Paper offered a vehicle to deliver this change. It rightly highlighted the need for collaboration between LAs and MATs and outlined more clearly defined roles for each actor in the system, with backstop powers for LAs to admit a child to a school. These proposals would help to create a school system that better meets the needs of all learners. ADCS members want a system that is driven by the principles of inclusivity, focusing on the needs of children and young people, to enable them to attend the most appropriate setting, as close to their home and community as possible, delivered through effective partnership working. A place-based approach to policy is key here and there are many positive examples across the country of successful partnership arrangements. Formalising such partnerships within the legislative vehicle of a collaborative standard would strengthen accountabilities and, as a consequence, create better experiences and outcomes for children and young people. There is recent precedent in legislating to limit competitive practice between bodies, the Health and Care Act 2022 seeks to move the NHS away from a system that has both winners and losers towards collaborative delivery and meeting common objectives. DfE should introduce a collaborative standard for academy trusts requiring trusts to work constructively with each other, LAs and the wider public and third sectors in the best interests of all children.

This is even more pertinent if the proposals set out in the *SEND and AP Improvement Plan* are to be achieved. Since the passing of the Children and Families Act 2014, there has been a significant move away from inclusion in mainstream schools at the same time as an over reliance on independent specialist provision and an unprecedented increase in requests for education, health and care plans (EHCP) as a means for accessing support. The introduction of backstop powers for LAs to direct academy schools to admit children would be some mitigation, however, this would only ever be used as a last resort; the influence of LAs as partners in place should be the key lever in encouraging all schools to play their

role in an inclusive education system. Removing disincentives in the system alone will not improve outcomes for children with additional needs in mainstream education. Schools must be appropriately funded and staff given the required training to ensure children receive the right support in the right place that meets their needs.

School admissions and fair access for all

Widespread reforms over the past decade have created plethora admissions authorities, each setting their own admission criteria. Coupled with an accountability system that incentivises schools to prioritise academic attainment and league table success, disadvantaged children can end up marginalised from mainstream education. Recent research on school admissions in England found that approximately 90% of schools today have the power to set their own admissions arrangements (University of Bristol, 2023). Individual admissions authorities are able to use flexibilities within the School admissions code to game their intake. Whilst the majority of schools do not seek to take advantage of these arrangements, the accountability framework can drive this behaviour. ADCS believes a wholescale review of admissions guidance and processes are required. The emphasis should always be on fairness for children, parents, and carers rather than the convenience or institutional advantage of schools. The DfE should reinstate LA powers to coordinate in-year admissions in respect of all local schools and give LAs backstop powers to compel any state-funded school to admit a child, where there is space to do so. Positioning the admissions authority above an individual school level offers greater transparency and efficiency.

Education settings rooted in place

The role of the LA

Schools, early years settings and colleges are all central to their communities. As leaders of place, LAs have a unique role; they have a democratic legitimacy in ensuring accountability

for schools to both parents and to the local community. Indeed, where parents have concerns about their child's place of learning, they will often turn to local politicians who will work with the LA to seek solutions. The Director of Children's Services (DCS) acts as a clear and unambiguous line of professional accountability for children's outcomes in a local area, including their learning outcomes, and as such, work in partnership with headteachers, governors, principals and MATs, to promote educational excellence, take rapid and decisive action in relation to poor performance and promote high standards. DfE guidance (2013) on the statutory responsibilities of the DCS and Lead Member for Children's Services includes responsibility to ensure access to high quality education provision for all disabled children and those with additional learning needs, including alternative provision, as well as ensuring fair access to schools.

As leaders of place, there needs to be a clearly defined and resourced role for LAs to help ensure the system works collaboratively. The role of the DCS as a systems leader, as well as a champion and advocate, is vital in shaping the system that delivers for children and their families. The LA performs an essential function in co-ordinating the family of schools across place, regardless of governance arrangements. This has become increasingly recognised amongst all schools, having recently been illustrated during the pandemic when the need for leadership and clear lines of communication to all partners was critical. There are also a number of issues in the system that cannot be easily solved by MATs and the LA role is key here, for example, the challenges faced by smaller individual schools or those in rural areas that cannot benefit from the same economies of scale as those that are part of a large MAT. Such schools can find themselves unable to join a MAT or identify a sponsor and are subsequently unable to make important future planning decisions. Similarly, 'orphan schools' that are unable to find another academy sponsor due to performance or financial concerns are the inevitable consequence of a system that is built on competition between schools. An evaluation of 'stuck' schools (Ofsted, 2020) called

for greater joint working between LAs, government and schools themselves to support improvement. Individual schools may lack the capacity to drive improvement themselves but LAs have the expertise and local knowledge to step in when needed, however, funding for this purpose has been removed. Where a MAT has failed and/or walked away from one or more of its schools and a suitable sponsor is being sought, the school's leadership team and governing body should have the opportunity to consider returning to the LA family of schools. Whilst the detail of this process must be worked through, particularly if financial mismanagement at MAT level has occurred, the interests and outcomes of learners must be at the forefront of decisions at all times. Indeed, there should be a level playing field in the system that is based on the best interests of children.

The 2022 Schools White Paper supported the ADCS view that LAs have a key role as champions for children and young people. As such, ADCS urges government to take action here. Whilst the sufficiency duty for school places sits with the LA, they do not have the power to compel a state funded academy school to admit a child. This is of particular concern for children with additional needs or children in care where LAs have specific responsibilities, these groups are more likely to be excluded and LAs are not empowered to act. The government should legislate to give LAs meaningful powers of direction over admissions / exclusions covering all state funded schools in relation to excluded pupils, pupils with EHCPs and children in care in the spirit of the Timpson review of school exclusions (DfE, 2018). Individual schools must also be held to account when they are not acting in the best interest of all learners. ADCS agrees with the recommendation set out in the Timpson review for schools to be responsible for the education of pupils after they have been permanently excluded, including the commissioning of AP and retaining accountability for their educational outcomes, including those who become EHE.

Education settings at the heart of their community

Education is best delivered in a locality via genuine partnership, with all actors working in concert to ensure that every child and young person receives a good education. This interconnectivity was particularly visible during the pandemic where there was a reaffirmation of the strong partnerships that exist between LAs, schools and other educations settings. The LA has unique oversight over the whole system, beyond just education, including employment opportunities and skills gaps. There is a clear need for the LA to be at the centre of all educational decisions that concern the local area.

More recently, schools, LAs and academy trusts have benefitted from renewed local partnership working through strong collaboration and driven by a shared moral purpose. A growing body of evidence suggests that this approach improves outcomes for those children and young people who are increasingly marginalised by the current high stakes accountability system. A recent study on place-based school partnerships found that local context is a crucial factor in addressing social justice within education and wider society. The study concludes that area or place-based partnerships should be led locally, underpinned by a clear purpose and inclusive of all education settings within the local area (University of Manchester, 2023). It is vital that schools and other education settings are able to adapt to their local context, meet the needs of all children in their community and work as part of a wider system to ensure vulnerable children are not left behind. This is most effective when local leaders work together to tackle system level issues that affect more than one school, however, moves towards greater centralisation of services by the DfE has restricted the ability of local areas to develop or realise the full potential of these partnerships. A report from the Centre for Education and Youth concluded that "the DfE's drive towards greater centralisation, and the hollowing out of the LA role over decades, have left a system with groups of schools isolated from one another and from the local people and organisations who are involved in supporting young people" (Bart et al, 2023). The DfE should explore setting a national approach to

place-based partnerships by producing guidance which sets out the expectations and functions accordingly. Functions of partnerships should include holding the system to account, incorporating those functions currently held by the DfE Regions Group to hold academy schools to account, deciding which academy trusts should operate in an LA area and which schools should join different trusts.

The Government's previous target of all schools being part of, or in the process of joining, a MAT by 2030 was wholly unrealistic based on current rates of conversion and local, regional and national capacity to support conversion. However, it remains committed to a trust led system. ADCS members believe the government must articulate a positive vision for all schools to join a trust that is strongly linked to place and the unique context of the individual school. Local knowledge is key here. Without legislation as a means to achieve a trust-led model, the government must create the conditions for maintained schools and SATs to want to join a MAT. The current model for academisation is largely a deficit model driven by negative Ofsted inspection outcomes or financial difficulty. For schools rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding', there is little incentive to move into new governance arrangements. The government's own research (DfE, 2021) found that the majority of maintained schools and SATs were not considering converting to academy status. The research also identified concerns about the requirement to take on a new "homogenous identity" consistent across all schools in the same MAT. The benefits of being part of a family of schools, across the same local area, must be recognised by government. Such arrangements should be clearly defined, rooted in place and centre on meeting the needs of the community. Strong, local leadership is essential to foster lasting relationships with all types of education providers, a role best suited to the LA which holds the relevant statutory duties. However, the system should not rely solely upon the strength of local relationships, it should be backed by legislation so that the legal and structural relationship between schools and the LA is consistent across the country.

The publication of trust development statements for LAs in education investment areas (EIA) include a welcome focus on local context, but the level of meaningful engagement with individual LAs in their development has been varied and in some cases lacking. The DfE notes that "high-quality academy trusts are the key vehicle for improving educational outcomes for children", however, there are not enough high-performing MATs available to fulfil this function for all schools. Even where a MAT is classed as high-performing, this does not necessarily mean it is the best fit for a school, as each has its own unique context. ADCS would therefore welcome a revisiting of the proposal, as outlined in Schools White Paper, for the creation of LA MATs.

Sustainable finances with an equitable distribution of resources
The education system has experienced over a decade of austerity leading to real-term budget cuts across early years settings, schools and FE settings. Although the DfE's schools budget was protected from year-on-year reductions in public funding to an extent, the overall quantum of funding allocated to schools is insufficient. In autumn 2022, the government announced an additional £2.3billion for schools in each of the next two years to bring funding back in line with 2010 levels. However, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) found that with no net growth in spending per pupil over the preceding 14 years, this still represented a historically large squeeze on school resources, particularly in light of rising energy costs and inflation (IFS, 2022). This has impacted on the numbers of teaching assistants and pastoral staff as well as equipment budgets, leading to a greater reliance on parents, local businesses and fundraising efforts to provide even basic classroom resources, including stationery and textbooks. As a consequence, schools have less capacity to support learners with additional needs who require more support in the classroom and who are thus less likely to remain in mainstream education. This is a false economy and not in children's best interests.

Funding for the early years sector has increased significantly in recent years, but this investment is not being used to best effect. It is poorly targeted and spread too thin, resulting in the closure of some providers and putting many more at risk. The financial challenges many providers faced were further compounded by the impact of the pandemic. The number of registered early years providers fell significantly between August 2021 and August 2022, with an overall decrease of 5,400 providers, the largest fall since 2015/16 (Ofsted, 2023). This has been exacerbated by a recruitment and retention crisis in the sector which is vulnerable to external pressures; research shows the prices faced by early years providers increased more quickly than those faced by households or the economy as a whole (IFS, 2022).

LAs have long played a central role in school improvement, supporting schools irrespective of governance arrangements, including smaller individual schools that cannot benefit from the economies of scale that those in a large MAT would benefit from. However, LAs have had their budgets cut in half since 2010, and dedicated funding has been removed including the withdrawal of the £600 million Education Services Grant in 2017, which supported inclusion and extracurricular activities, and more recently the LA School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant. This presents a significant concern, particularly as schools and pupils recover from the lasting impacts of the pandemic. LAs played a key role in supporting all schools during that period and have been successful more generally in school improvement by developing partnership models across all schools to support performance and intervene where necessary. However, many now have very limited capacity to support schools before problems become entrenched. Despite the reduction in funding, LAs still hold the same number of statutory duties, leaving them in an impossible position.

With the Government seeking to increase the number of academy schools, including forcing 'coasting schools' with

successive 'Requires Improvement' Ofsted ratings to join a MAT, there are inevitable associated costs which are borne by LAs, such as any accumulated financial deficits of maintained schools that convert to become an academy. There are also administrative and legal costs for LAs, however, the Schools causing concern statutory guidance stipulates that LAs "cannot charge for the costs associated with the conversion." Given that the definition of a 'coasting school' now includes a larger number of schools, this represents a significant cost pressure for LAs. ADCS is clear that where a maintained school is forced to academise, the LA should not bear the costs of this process or carry any accumulated financial deficits. This represents yet another example of there not being a level playing field in the current system.

Capital funding and sufficiency of school places
The Government must commit to significant and sustainable capital spending to address the decline in buildings across the education sector. Between 2009 and 2022, DfE capital spending declined by nearly 50 per cent in real terms, with the condition of a growing number of school buildings presenting 'significant risk' according to the Department's latest annual report (DfE, 2022). Across other education establishments, including early years settings, DfE capital spending in 2021/2022 was the lowest amount recorded since 2009/10 (House of Commons Library, 2023). A coherent capital plan, that benefits all schools and all learners is urgently required as a growing number of schools are falling into a state of poor repair and/or are becoming increasingly overcrowded. This has been brought into sharp focus more recently with the emergence of the risks associated with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) and the disruption being seen in schools and classrooms across the country.

In the 2021 Spending Review, the government announced £2.6 billion for high needs capital funding until 2024/25. While this investment is welcome, LAs continue to experience significant delays in the approval and build of

special free schools. The current process is too long, resulting in increasing numbers of children travelling further to access education and a growing reliance on independent and non-maintained special schools, with higher associated costs including home to school transport. Each of these factors are highlighted in the National safeguarding practice review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex needs in residential settings phase 2 report (National Panel, 2023). ADCS believes LAs should be given both the permission and resources to open and run their own special schools to ensure local need is met along with sufficiency duties.

DfE estimates suggest that between 2021/22 and 2026/27, there will be a decline of no more than 1% per year in primary aged pupils. At the same time, the forecast number of secondary school pupils is rising by approximately 2% per year on average, with the picture varying greatly across the country. This presents unique challenges for schools and LAs that are either trying to meet rising demand or falling pupil rolls. Although the impact on secondary schools is lagged behind primaries, the number of pupils in state funded primaries is set to fall by almost a fifth by 2032 (NFER, 2023). Despite LAs having a statutory duty for pupil place planning, they have limited powers of intervention in academy schools regarding reducing pupil rolls and potential closure of schools. As DfE seeks to move further towards full academisation, it is vital that LAs are given the powers that allow them to fulfil their statutory responsibilities. Effective place planning from LAs will be key to ensuring the local school system reflects local need.

Recommendations

This paper sets out a number of challenges in the education system, at an individual learner level in terms of the curriculum and attendance, at a school and local level, at a regional and national level, including funding, capital investment and long-term strategic direction. ADCS members have made a number of recommendations to improve this picture going forward:

1)   The DfE should develop a coherent, long-term and appropriately funded vision and strategy for a 21st century education system for schools, early years and FE settings in consultation with key stakeholders, one which recognises the importance of place, the role of the LA, prioritises equality of access and the interests of vulnerable learners.

2)   The DfE should seek to remove all barriers that prevent schools from creating an inclusive environment for children and young people. This should include reform of the school accountability system in its entirety, shifting away from the current focus on academic attainment and taking into account the broader purpose of education.

3)   Ofsted should expand its focus on inclusion by introducing an inclusion profile as part of future school inspection frameworks to ensure schools accurately reflect their local child population and therefore meet the needs of their local community.

4)   The DfE should explore setting a national approach to place-based partnerships by producing guidance which sets out the expectations and functions accordingly. Functions of partnerships should include holding the system to account, incorporating those functions currently held by the DfE Regions Group to hold academy schools to account, deciding which academy trusts should operate in an LA area and which schools should join different trusts.

5)   The DfE should re-visit and revise the 2022 Schools White Paper with a view to implementing the following:
•   Reinstate LA powers to co-ordinate in-year admissions in respect of all schools
•   LA backstop powers to compel all state-funded schools to admit a child. This should include meaningful powers of direction over admissions / exclusions covering all state funded schools in relation to excluded pupils, pupils with EHCPs and children in care.

• Introduce a collaborative standard for academy trusts requiring trusts to work constructively with each other, LAs and the wider public and third sectors in the best interests of all children.

• Establish a national register of children not in school.

6) The DfE Regions Group should adopt a priority focus on tackling and minimising exclusions, in partnership with LAs, who hold responsibility for children excluded from school, to find local resolutions.

7) The DfE to take forward the recommendation in the Timpson review of school exclusions for all schools to be responsible for the education of pupils after they have been permanently excluded, including the commissioning of AP where a child needs it, and retaining accountability for their educational outcomes, including those who become EHE.

8) The DfE should create the conditions for a level playing field for LAs and MATs where a school is academised, including:

• Where a MAT has failed and/or walked away from one or more of its schools and a suitable sponsor is being sought, the school's leadership team and governing body should have the opportunity to consider returning to the LA family of schools.

• Where a maintained school is forced to academise, the LA should not bear the costs of this process or carry any accumulated financial deficits.

• The proposal for the creation of LA MATs, as per the Schools White Paper, should be revisited.

9) LAs should be given both the permission and resources to open and run their own special schools to ensure local need is met along with sufficiency duties.

10) A greater national focus on, and investment in, the early years and FE sectors to harness their ability to improve

social mobility and close the attainment and skills gap.

11)   The Government should create a long-term plan for post pandemic education recovery with adequate funding to reflect its ambition. This should take a holistic view of the experiences of children and young people including their mental health and wellbeing challenges.

Fleur Sexton

Rethinking alternative provision

By Fleur Sexton
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Abstract: *The Exclusion is often the start of a life-changing and poor experience of education. For many, it leads to prison. Those excluded or suspended from school are often drawn from the most disadvantaged, as identified by the Timpson Report. Pupils with autism in England are nearly three times as likely to be suspended than their neurotypical peers.*

Other groups over-represented by exclusion are those with SEND. Children and young people in state-place funded alternative provision have identified special educational needs (SEN) [2], and it (AP) is increasingly being used to supplement local SEND systems. The increasing number of exclusions fuelled by the lack of appropriate SEND provision is pushing AP to crisis point. It's time to redress the balance, and AI can provide part of the solution.

AP should be like a semi-permeable membrane with some pupils passing from school to AP and back – support for those who need it, when they need it – and not as a last ditch attempt which probably signals they are coming to the end of their school career.

Key words: Exclusion, prison, autism, SEND, AP, AI

Exclusion from school is often life-changing, signalling the end of a child or young person's chance to receive the education that is their right, and the start of a bleak future. Those excluded from school, have just a 4% chance at achieving a pass in English and maths GCSEs, with 50% 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET) post-16. We can change this trajectory by successfully addressing these

pupil's needs in alternative provision (AP) and ensuring that the most disadvantaged in our education system, receive the support they need.

Exclusion is often referred to as 'the pipeline to prison', the statistics from prison inmates are undeniable: 42% of prisoners were expelled or permanently excluded from school, 59% truanted, and around 47% of those entering prison had no school qualifications. The prison service is already at breaking point. Providing children and young people with the 'right support, right place, right time', is not just an ethical response, it makes sound financial sense. Let's invest in young people's education now, rather than their incarceration later in life.

A recent study by the FFT Education Data Lab (September 2023) [1] re-affirmed the continuing legacy of exclusion and suspension for the most disadvantaged - previously identified in the Timpson Report (2019). [2] Statistics from the Department for Education (DfE) School Census 2020/21, show an exclusion rate of 0.53% for boys eligible for free school meals (FSM), with special educational needs (SEN) and/or social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, from Black Caribbean, mixed white and Black Caribbean, Gypsy Roma, or White Irish Traveller families – ten times that of their peers (0.05%). And although the rates were lower for girls, the relative difference between the groups was more pronounced: 0.29% and 0.01% respectively. With this data taken from lockdown years, the risks from the last school year are expected to be higher.

According to the census, there are over 160,000 autistic pupils in schools across England. 70% are in mainstream school, with the remaining in specialist education, home educated or alarmingly - out of education altogether. Pupils with autism in England are nearly three times as likely to be suspended than their neurotypical peers. '82% of children and young people in state-place funded alternative provision have identified special educational needs (SEN) [2], and it (AP) is increasingly being used to supplement local SEND systems…' UK Government 'SEND and

AP Improvement Plan' (March 2023). [3]

The increasing number of exclusions fuelled by the lack of appropriate SEND provision is pushing AP to crisis point. Some pupils on waiting lists for AP placements have access to online lessons or tutors, others are simply at home and not receiving an education. In oversubscribed AP settings, class sizes have had to be increased to accommodate demand, raising the pupil:teacher ratio, and decreasing the levels of support individuals receive. Other unregulated settings provide questionable educational advantage to attendees.

It's time to redress the balance, and AI can provide part of the solution. The first challenge for teachers in AP is to engage these children and young people back into learning. If the content of the curriculum used holds no relevance for a child already struggling to learn, the task becomes even more difficult. As adults we rarely engage with subjects that do not hold our interest – but often expect children to do so.

Using context that pupils recognise and relate to - making learning integral to the real world and more specifically, to their reality - provides a way in. A persuasive essay about school uniforms may fire the debate for a successful learner, but it is probably not going to be a hot topic for a child struggling with a chaotic or dysfunctional home life. If that child is dealing with high levels of adversity – being a carer for a relative, keeping the household going, dealing with pressure to join local gangs, being coerced into couriering drugs and weapons around the neighbourhood – school uniform does not hold sway. It has little to do with their life.

Asking the group about the subjects they feel strongly about, or responding to local news stories from their neighbourhoods, and using these to create tasks, will provide a more enticing hook to pique their interest. After all, in many situations, the subject of a task is just the 'hanger' for the skills they need to learn – in this case, the elements of creating a persuasive piece, communicating perspectives and points of view.

Using AI, teachers have the capacity to provide this

individualised content and personalised instruction, and timely, positive, affirming feedback, supporting learners by addressing their needs and 'scaffolding' their learning through adaptive teaching.

If the learner is having difficulty grasping a concept – especially an abstract one - AI can quickly produce several relevant analogies to help illustrate and explain. It can also be used to develop interactive learning modules, so the learner has more control and ownership over their learning. When engaged with their learning, pupils begin to build skills, increasing their confidence and commitment.

Identifying and discussing these skills and attitudes towards learning, with the pupil reflecting on how they learn and the ways they learn best, also gives them more agency and autonomy, thinking metacognitively.

Gaps in learning are often the cause of confusion, misunderstandings and misconceptions. If a child has been absent from school they may miss crucial concepts that form the building blocks to more complex ideas later in their school career. Without providing the foundations by filling in these gaps and unravelling the misconceptions, new learning may literally be impossible for them to understand, increasing frustration and feelings of failure. AI can help identify those gaps, and provide support with building understanding.

AI is by no means a replacement for teachers or teaching assistants. It is purely additional support, that, coupled with approaches that promote engagement with learning, can support these disadvantaged and often vulnerable children and young people, enabling them to access an education previously denied them. AI in AP settings can help make this a reality, rapidly developing bespoke curriculum with engaging content, tailored to individual needs to give these young learners the greatest chance of success.

Pupils entering AP usually have a negative self-image of themselves. The inability to cope in mainstream settings and identifying with the labels - 'disruptive', 'disrespectful', 'naughty' or 'boisterous' - consistently reaffirms their 'failure'. Rebuilding their identity as a learner is difficult. Successful AP

needs to help them recognise their strengths, increase their confidence in their abilities, and support them while they develop their skills and achieve success.

Personal reflection can be a slow, and at times challenging process, however, holding up that 'mirror' and identifying the positive traits a child or young person has, can create a pathway to an improved self-image. Looking at their whole experience rather than just their school career is crucial. For instance, playing football every Saturday, shows they have commitment and can work within a team. They may not have recognised the maths they have mastered while shopping and paying the bills as a carer, or as a stand-in for an absent parent. The patience and care they have shown to their siblings or family members may have gone unnoticed as just part of their everyday life. Highlighting these positives and changing their perception of themselves from failing to finding success, and developing a positive self-image, is just as important as any academics.

We need to view a pupil attending AP through a different lens - a personal perspective and not one that compares them to others. For instance, if a pupil who has been a long-term absentee or excluded from school, manages to attend AP for 20% of the time, when they only have the capacity to give that 20%, then we need to view that as them having actually given 100%. We need the flexibility to view the world through their eyes, and take them from where they are at that moment.

One target of the UK Government's SEND Improvement Plan is to, '…create a three-tier alternative provision system, focusing on targeted early support within mainstream school, time-limited intensive placements in an alternative provision setting, and longer-term placements to support return to mainstream or a sustainable post-16 destination…'

AP should be like a semi-permeable membrane with some pupils passing from school to AP and back – support for those who need it, when they need it – and not as a last ditch attempt which probably signals they are coming to the end of

their school career. Incorporating AP within school settings, where possible, is an effective way to provide this support, and keep the pupils separate but still contained within a familiar environment. For some pupils a different location may be the preferred or in some cases necessary solution, but for others, staying within the vicinity of school means they do not have to cope with additional change. They are still in their neighbourhood - with no long expensive daily taxi rides - and they can still socialise with their friends outside school.

It also means that their return back into school can be handled more easily, especially if there is flexibility with the transition, with AP staff still able to give reassurance and back-up through the process.

However long the placement in an AP setting, the relationships with teachers is usually much stronger due to the ratio of teaching staff to pupils, the consistency in approach and the journey the child or young person has been through. In larger classes of 25-30 pupils, these kinds of relationships are, on the whole, impossible to develop. In mainstream settings there is a lot of movement between classes, teaching styles are very different, and there are so many more other pupils to contend with.

'Persistent disruptive behaviour' is the most commonly cited reason for temporary or permanent exclusion from mainstream education. Pupils often with unmet or undiagnosed SEN or SEMH needs, find themselves unable to cope in a mainstream environment, which impacts their mental health and personal wellbeing, and their ability to engage in a positive way with the curriculum and the challenges of school routine. A multitude of factors all adding to their feelings of frustration and failure.

The stresses experienced by children and young people growing up now, have been exacerbated by the turmoil created during lockdown. Absence rates in 2021/2022 increased to 7.6%, up from 5% pre-pandemic, of which 2.1% were unauthorised. Persistent absence has doubled to 22.5%. The increase in absence echoes the increase in children experiencing issues with mental health and wellbeing. Each

time a child or young person is absent from school, their education is impacted and gaps in their learning widen.

It's time to ask ourselves – are we providing an education that children and young people want to engage with, one which promotes life-long learning? Or is it a self-perpetuating, punitive antiquated system, traditionally stacked against those who face the greatest challenges, one that accepts academic 'failure' as part of the equation.

According to the Department for Education (DfE) 'All children are entitled to receive a world-class education that allows them to reach their potential and live a fulfilled life, regardless of their background', but with ever increasing numbers of pupils suspended, and temporarily or permanently excluded, the onus is now on AP to try and make it happen. With AI, adaptive learning and metacognitive approaches, we've got a solution that can really deliver progress and impact, and give them the real life chances they deserve; a pathway towards educational and social equity for these disadvantaged young people.

Foot notes

[1] Timpson Review of School Exclusion (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[2] *Risk factors of permanent exclusion* - FFT Education Datalab

[3] Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Invisible disabilities in education and employment

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Abstract: *The Exclusion is often the start of a life-changing*

Key words: Invisible disabilities, mental health, neurodivergences, SEND.

More than 1 in 5 UK adults are disabled. Disabilities that are not immediately obvious are known as 'invisible disabilities', such as mental health conditions, neurodivergences and energylimiting conditions. Those with invisible disabilities may face challenges due to a lack of awareness and difficulty accessing support and services. It is estimated that 70-80% of disabilities are invisible.

Strategies aimed at increasing access and inclusion for adults with invisible disabilities in employment, and in higher and further education, could include: increasing awareness and understanding via training and reciprocal mentoring schemes; introducing 'passports' for transfer of adjustments to avoid repeated disclosure; inclusive design that considers sensory and informational barriers to access; maintaining online access to events and services post-pandemic; updating policy and guidance with examples of less recognised invisible disabilities; and promoting flexible working and learning arrangements.

The 2021 National Disability Strategy set out the actions the Government would take to improve the lives of disabled people, including making workplaces more inclusive and accessible. However, the High Court ruled in 2022 that the strategy was "unlawful due to inadequate consultation",

which the Government has sought permission to appeal. Fourteen policies in the strategy are currently paused.

Legislation, guidance and policy

The Equality Act 2010 protects and promotes the rights of people with invisible disabilities, although in many cases this depends on an individual disclosing their disability. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was ratified by the UK in 2009. The UN Committee's 2017 review stated there was "insufficient incorporation and uneven implementation" of the Convention in the UK, and the Government has since taken actions based on their recommendations.

Other areas of legislation and policy are relevant to people with invisible disabilities, such as the Mental Capacity Act 2005, Care Act 2015 and Autism Act 2009. Some are UK-wide, such as employment, whereas others differ between devolved nations, such as education, and health and social care services. Several Government schemes provide disabled people with support for adjustments in work and education, such as Access to Work (AtW), and the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).

The National Disability Strategy 2021

In July 2021, the National Disability Strategy set out the actions the Government said it would take to improve the lives of disabled people. Key actions include: making workplaces more inclusive and accessible; ensuring young people fulfil their potential; and, improving access to public services. In January 2022, the High Court ruled the strategy was "unlawful due to inadequate consultation", which the Government sought permission to appeal. Meanwhile, 14 policies in the strategy are paused. The strategy was informed by the 2021 UK National Disability Survey, which had around 15,000 responses from disabled people, carers and members of the public. Respondents suggested the survey should have asked about the experiences of people with invisible disabilities.

Attitudes and awareness

According to the 2021 National Disability Survey, lack of understanding and stigma from others creates consistent barriers in the lives of people with invisible disabilities. Research has found self-reported discrimination is higher among people with intellectual and sensory impairments than people with physical impairments. People with invisible disabilities also report facing criticism when trying to access facilities designed for disabled people.

The intersection of disability with other characteristics, such as race, can multiply experiences of discrimination. Those with invisible disabilities may also experience attitudes of disregard and disbelief because they defy stereotypes of what people perceive disability to look like. In a 2021 survey of people with energy-limiting conditions, 85% reported a lack of understanding and 65% reported disbelief of their impairment.

These experiences may negatively affect individuals' identity and self-esteem. Those with invisible disabilities have dilemmas over whether to disclose their disability, due to concerns about disbelief, stigma, or confidentiality. They may need to balance the potential risks of disclosure with the need for support.

Several existing campaigns have aimed to improve public awareness of invisible disabilities. As of 2020, the Cabinet Office Disability Unit has been working with the British Standards Institute to support their development of an Invisible Disability sign.

Higher and further education

Disabled people are less likely to attain qualifications in FE or HE, with lower attainment observed for some people with invisible disabilities. In 2021, the most common impairments reported by disabled students in FE and HE were cognitive or learning difficulties, particularly dyslexia, and mental health conditions.

Disabled students are less likely to progress to postgraduate education or highly skilled employment. HE and

FE providers have a duty to support disabled students, though data shows this support varies across institutions. In England, support for HE students is partly funded through the Disabled Students Premium (DSP) and the DSA, while the Education and Skills Funding Agency (EFSA) provides for FE students.

Communication and disclosure

Students with invisible disabilities are less likely to disclose their disability than those with physical disabilities (particularly on admission), or identify as disabled. Staff in HE are also less likely to disclose, particularly if they are later in their career.

Students and staff in HE report needing to repeat their issues and needs more frequently than those with a physical or visible disability. Students usually receive support from student disability services, which arrange adjustments based on Learning Support Plans (LSPs) in HE, or Education, Health and Care plans in FE (up to age 25). Student disability services in HE are broadly viewed as a positive resource. A 2022 survey of nearly 5,000 disabled students found those with invisible impairments felt less supported by their school or college than those with physical impairments.

Research has found some students with invisible disabilities perceive academic staff as reluctant or hesitant to make adjustments, including inflexibility in teaching styles, curriculum and mode of assessment. Some students also report feeling singled out by individual adjustments compared to with more universal strategies, such as 'lecture capture' (lecture recordings). A 2020-2021 survey of HE provider lecture capture policies, found that 33% were opt-in, 66% were opt-out, and 5% were compulsory (no opt-out).

Around 29% of students with a known disability access the DSA, with the Lord Holmes Review identifying administrative burden of assessments as a major barrier. Compared to students with physical or sensory impairments, students with mental health conditions, learning difficulties, or long-term health conditions are less satisfied with the support and adjustments they received from the DSA.

Research also suggests disabled staff face additional labour organising their own supports and adjustments.

Coordination

Disabled students and staff report poor coordination and communication between disability services and academic staff, as well as between different university departments. Research suggests university teaching staff have mostly positive attitudes towards inclusive teaching, but these may not translate into practice, with students reporting difficulty implementing their LSPs in classrooms.

Future challenges and opportunities

Removing societal barriers for people with invisible disabilities enables them to participate in civil life, including work and education, which would have social and economic benefits. Stakeholders advocate for a cross-governmental approach to broadly address ableist practices and structural inequalities in UK society.

They emphasise that the development and delivery of policy and services should involve people with invisible disabilities.

Built and online environments

Accessibility standards that address barriers in built and online environments may improve inclusion. Considerations from stakeholders include:

• Inclusive design: Ensuring architecture and design considers less recognised sensory and informational barriers experienced by disabled people could improve accessibility. The University of Warwick's creation of accessible sensory study rooms is an example of best practice highlighted by the Office for Students.

• Online access: Including online access to events and services as a standard in accessibility guidelines has been suggested, as well as considering digital accessibility standards

when designing all online content.

Structural
The structure of organisations, programmes, and policies can make it difficult for people with invisible disabilities to access the right support and services. Stakeholder suggestions include:

• Updated policies and guidance: Providing examples of less-recognised invisible disabilities in all relevant legislation, policy and guidance may improve awareness and remove barriers to accessing services and support.

• Flexible working and learning: Making flexible working the default, unless employers have a good reason not to, was widely supported in recent Government consultations. The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Bill 2022-2023 would give employees the right to request flexible working from day one, but does not make flexible working the 'default'. Stakeholders and academics indicate that making many different ways of learning and assessment available in FE and HE, such as compulsory lecture capture, could support the wider inclusion and wellbeing of all students.

• Non-physical adjustments: Including clear and detailed examples of nonphysical adjustments, such as additional work breaks, as well as temporary or periodic adjustments for fluctuating conditions, in guidance for assessors, educators and employers.

• Adjustment passports: Stakeholders, including the Disability Employment Charter, widely support the introduction of 'adjustment passports', which record an individual's impairments and/or adjustments, to make transitions smoother and reduce the burden of repeated disclosure. The Department for Work and Pensions' passport trial to transfer adjustments from university to employment settings is ongoing, as well as a passport trial for those on

supported internships, apprenticeships or traineeships. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service recommends extending passports across the whole spectrum of education.

Select Committee Reports

We continue our series of reviews of all parliamentary select committee reports on education, which we started in volume 25 beginning with January 2018.

Funding for Levelling Up, the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee, HC 744. 26 May 2023.

Education Recovery in Schools in England, House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, HC 998. 7 June 2023.

Diversity and Inclusion in STEM: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report, House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee, HC 1427. 16 June 2023.

Sexuality Education in Ulster. The House of Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, HL Paper 217. 23 June 2023.

Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance, the House of Commons Education Committee HC 54. 29 June 2023.

Attitudes Towards Women and Girls in Educational Settings, the House of Commons Select Committee on Women and Equalities, HC 331, Wednesday 5 July 2023.

Support for Childcare and the Early Years, the House of Commons Select Committee on Education, HC 969. 26 July 2023.

Appointment of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, House of Commons Select Committee on Education, HC 1800, 8 September 2023.

Funding for Levelling Up

Funding for Levelling Up, the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee sixth report of Session 2022/23, HC 744. Published by authority of the House of Commons on Friday 26 May 2023. https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/40145/documents/195720/default/

This select committee report is not about education, although education and skills provision is an integral part of the levelling up agenda. It is about the funding for levelling up in general. The success or failure of the Levelling Up policy will impact on education and skills. The Committee was critical of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on a number of counts, including the bidding process that the Department uses for most projects.

The Committee agreed with the DLUHC that the Government's flagship Levelling Up policy is a key local growth initiative which has the potential to transform the lives of people across the UK. The Government's Levelling Up White Paper (2022), published by the DLUHC, sets out the Government's objectives to reduce geographic, economic, social and health inequalities.

The Levelling Up policy, and the challenges it seeks to address, have been widely welcomed across the political spectrum. However, the Committee was critical of the method of delivering funding, the allocation process, and the extent to which different funds have been compatible with the needs of communities in the short and long-term. These are creating several obstacles for the policy's success.

The dearth of data available from the DLUHC is an area of serious concern. DLUHC has conceded that it does not have "sufficient data" in relation to Whitehall departmental expenditure on the full range of levelling up funds or on combined authority income or expenditure. The Committee

concluded that it "cannot understand how the DLUHC can make significant policy decisions either in relation to priority areas, funding allocations or the measurement of the success or failure of the Levelling Up policy in achieving its objectives if there is not adequate data to support these tasks."

The White paper also commits DLUHC to reducing the requirements to access competitive bidding and simplifying the funding landscape. Despite these commitments, the Committee saw "limited evidence that any progress has been made on these two objectives to date. The evidence we received on competitive bidding has indicated the challenges associated with funding for levelling up is far greater than those outlined in the White Paper."

The Committee noted that local authority revenue funding has reduced significantly since 2010. Levelling up funds generally do not replace grant funding because first they are capital not revenue and; second, because they cover specific projects rather than necessarily covering the priorities of the local authorities. The Committee agreed that the Levelling Up Fund has held some merit in the funding of one-off projects across the country. "However, due to the questionable use of metrics in the first round and the additional metrics for success in the second, the management of this fund has ultimately contributed to diminished perceptions of trust and transparency. This mismanagement has left the Government open to criticisms that it has not made funding decisions based on need or, indeed merit.

The Committee observed that the Investment Zone policy was re-opened and re-framed after it was reported that over one hundred applications were submitted for the first iteration of the policy. This change in approach and re-framing of the original policy after submissions had been made, "speaks to a significant waste of local authorities' resources at a time when resources are finite. This departmental process brought about by 'ministerial changes in the weather' and a prescriptive approach in outlining areas that could bid for the latest policy, raises questions around the transparency of the process DLUHC is applying to such initiatives."

The Committee was also critical of the DLUHC for the way in which it interacted with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. "Throughout our inquiry the DLUHC has told us that it had consulted with the Devolved Governments on the creation, compatibility, and implementation of the levelling up funds including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. In contradiction to the DLUHC's evidence, the Devolved Governments said there had been a stark lack of meaningful consultation and engagement.

This lack of consultation is arguably supported by the apparent lack of compatibility most of these funds have in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Moreover, the lack of consideration for the circumstances in which the Executive and its officials in Northern Ireland operate is of even greater concern to us. There is an overwhelming sense that the DLUHC is unwilling to collaborate and adhere to devolved agreements in which the Governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales operate."

The Committee thought that ultimately, the Government was right to prioritise the Levelling Up policy, but "this laudable aim is unlikely to be successful given the Government's current approach to funding."

Funding the implementation of the Levelling Up policy was admitted to be complex and challenging. However, "DLUHC does not know which pots of money across Government contribute towards levelling up, nor does DLUHC appear to have oversight of how these objectives can be delivered strategically through departmental co-ordination. As a result, the Government's current approach is characterised by one-off short-term initiatives, and this will be insufficient if the geographic, economic, social and health inequalities are to be reduced and ultimately, overcome. To change this, the policy requires a long-term, substantive strategy and funding approach, things this policy currently lacks. Without such, Levelling Up risks joining the short-term Government growth initiatives which came before it."

Education recovery in schools in England

Education Recovery in Schools in England, House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, Fifty-Fifth Report of Session 2022–23. Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report, HNC 998.
Published on Wednesday 7 June 2023 by the House of Commons.
https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/127/public-accounts-committee/publications/

The Committee of Public Affairs (also known as the PAC, or Public Account Committee) said it had been alarming to hear that it may take a decade for the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others to return to what it had been prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Disadvantaged pupils had, on average, lower attainment than other pupils, and results from the Key Stage 1, 2 and 4 tests taken in 2022 had shown that the disadvantage gap had grown since the start of the pandemic.

The disadvantage gap index (a measure of the difference in attainment) at the end of primary school had been 3.23 in 2022, compared with 2.90 in 2018, which had reversed the progress that had been made to narrow the gap since 2012.

The Committee noted that the Department for Education (DfE) had said that every element of its recovery programme had been tilted towards disadvantage. It believed that it had a strong package of measures in place and it hoped to see the disadvantage gap narrowing again from summer 2023. However, the PAC stressed that the Department still expected it may take 10 years to return the disadvantage gap to the level it had been before the pandemic.

The Committee recommended that the DfE should publish a plan, building on good practice, to set out how it

would reduce the disadvantage gap as quickly as possible, and the expected trajectory. The PAC pointed out that while effective recovery relied on pupils being at school, absence was higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among disadvantaged pupils. It added that in the autumn and spring terms of 2021/22, the average absence rate for all pupils had been 7.4%, compared with 4.5% for the same terms before the pandemic in 2018/19, and for disadvantaged pupils, the rate had been 10.4% in 2021/22, compared with 7.2% in 2018/19.

The DfE had said that attendance rates were improving as levels of illness reduced, and it was trying to tackle pupil absence in several ways, including the Attendance Action Alliance which brought stakeholders together from across the school system. The PAC also noted that the DfE had insisted that responsibility for attendance must be shared between parents, schools and local authorities, and it was collecting better data, drawn directly from schools' systems, which it could look at in detail in real time, while providing data back to schools to allow them to benchmark themselves against other schools.

The Committee recommended that the DfE should develop a better understanding of why disadvantaged pupils had higher rates of absence than others and, in addition to its ongoing work on attendance, take targeted action to reduce absence rates among disadvantaged pupils.

National Tutoring Programme
The PAC said that it shared the Department's disappointment that 13% of schools had not taken up the National Tutoring Programme in 2021/22, as pupils at such schools would miss out on the benefits of subsidised tutoring. The Committee pointed out that take-up of the two centrally run National Tutoring Programme schemes had been below the Department's expectations, but the introduction of a school-led tutoring element had given schools more control and take-up had significantly been boosted. The Committee said that in 2021/22, 87% of schools in England had participated in

some form of tutoring under the National Tutoring Programme, but the Department had said that the fact that 13% of schools had not taken part had been the "biggest disappointment" of the recovery programme.

The PAC noted that the DfE had said that it had put a good deal of resource into persuading schools of the benefits of the National Tutoring Programme, and it had added that evaluation of the National Tutoring Programme would continue, to ensure that tutoring was delivering the best value for money, and it had committed to investigate how it could further develop longitudinal studies.

The Committee called on the Department to do more to understand why some schools were not taking part in the National Tutoring Programme and take more effective action to increase participation, informed by the evaluation of the first two years of the scheme.

The Committee was not confident that schools would be able to afford to provide tutoring on the scale required to support all the pupils who needed it once the Department had withdrawn its subsidy. It added that by the end of 2021/22, pupils had started 2.5 million courses under the National Tutoring Programme, and that the DfE had made funding of £594 million available to subsidise the cost of tutoring over that period. But the PAC pointed out that subsidy for tutoring under the National Tutoring Programme was reducing each year, and the result had been that the rate of subsidy would drop from 75% in 2020/21 to 25% in 2023/24.

The Committee added that after that, schools would have to cover the full cost of tutoring from other sources, such as pupil premium funding, when school budgets were already under significant pressure. The PAC pointed out that written evidence had shown that some schools were struggling to fund the cost of tutoring in 2022/23, when the Department was still providing a 60% subsidy.

The Committee said that while the Department wanted tutoring to become an integral part of the school system, without extra funding schools would find it difficult to

maintain tutoring on a comparable scale to that currently being provided. However, the Department had committed to model the impact of removing the subsidy on the affordability of tutoring for schools.

The Committee recommended that the Department should monitor how much tutoring was being provided, in 2022/23 and 2023/24 when it was providing a subsidy, and in subsequent years, and intervene if tutoring levels dropped significantly.

Tracking progress

The PAC stressed that the Department had no interim targets to track progress towards the 2030 attainment ambitions set out in the Schools White Paper, and the Department had not specified what it wanted to achieve from its interventions to support education recovery because it regarded them as part of its wider efforts to improve pupils' attainment.

The Committee said that in the March 2022 Schools White Paper, the Department had set ambitions for pupils' attainment, by 2030, in literacy and numeracy at the end of primary school and secondary school, but it had not yet set milestones to show progress towards such ambitions. The PAC pointed out that in the next couple of months, the Government planned to make its plans public for tracking progress made by primary school pupils. The Committee also noted that the Department had pointed to its Outcome Delivery Plan as the means by which it published the performance metrics that measure progress.
However, the PAC argued that the most recent Outcome Delivery Plan had been in July 2021, nearly two years ago, and the Department had not provided updated metrics since then.

The Committee recommended that the Department should set out measures of progress for the 2030 attainment targets (starting with the measures for primary pupils which it should publish by the 2023 summer parliamentary recess) and report progress against the measures to Parliament each year.

Chairman's comment

Dame Meg Hillier MP, chairman of the Committee, said: "The DfE does not seem to appreciate the pressures schools are under as they seek to help pupils catch up amid funding constraints, challenges in recruitment and retention for staff and growing mental health needs for pupils. It is therefore essential that Government reckons with the reality of the situation and publishes focused plans on reducing the disadvantage gap and absence rates. It must also bolster uptake of tuition, an essential programme at risk of withering on the vine as subsidies are sharply reduced.

"The consequences of a lost decade in progress narrowing the gap in attainment for disadvantaged children are immeasurable. Without swift action, the slow-motion catastrophe of the pandemic for children's education, and in particular for disadvantaged children, will continue to have far-reaching consequences for an entire generation."

Diversity and inclusion in STEM

Diversity and Inclusion in STEM: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report, House of Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Select Committee, Third Special Report of Session 2022–23. HC 1427. Published on Friday 16 June 2023 by the House of Commons. https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/40456/documents/197355/default/

The Science, Innovation and Technology Committee has urged the Government to adopt a more purposeful strategy to improve diversity and inclusion in STEM. On Friday, the Committee published the Government's response to its recent report which called for action to address underrepresentation of women and other groups in STEM.

In its response the Government said it is preparing a cross-Government action plan, led by the Department for Education, to "drive wider participation in STEM" and see "a more diverse range of people enter the science and technology workforce by 2030".

The chairman of the Committee, Greg Clark MP, has said that "without any specific commitments or timings this amounts to a plan to have a plan."

The Committee asked the Government to set out a plan to deliver the Prime Minister's maths to 18 ambition and to introduce a similar Core Science option to make it easier for students specialising in humanities to continue to learn more science after the age of 16.

The Government said a plan for the maths ambition will come "later this year" – the aim having first been announced in January this year. It also said there are "no plans" to set a similar target for science.

The Government did not fully engage with the Committee's conclusion that the current package to attract

maths and STEM teachers is not "anywhere near sufficient" to address the crisis in recruitment for physics and computer science teachers.

The Government claimed that it agrees with the ambition set out in the Committee's report that significant progress must still be made in terms of diversity and inclusion in STEM and is committed to continuing to take action to address these issues. The Government accepts (fully or in part) the majority of the Committee's recommendations.

Where the Government does not fully accept recommendations, the special report said that this was because there are existing or planned actions to improve outcomes.

Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, said: "The lack of diversity at all levels in science, technology, engineering and maths is a well recognised and longstanding problem. Our report called for urgent measures to reverse the comparative lack of students from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue STEM. It is disappointing the Government has not taken forward our recommendations, including to update the national curriculum with more diverse examples of notable scientists.

The Government has said it is preparing a cross-Government action plan, but without any timings or commitments this amounts to a plan to have a plan. At some point action and representation at ministerial level will be needed. Without a clear strategy to increase diversity and inclusion in STEM it will be harder for the Government to achieve its ambition for science, innovation and technology to power the economy. We remain concerned and will continue to press the Government for action in this area."

Sexuality education in Ulster

Drawn to the special attention of the House: Draft Immigration and Nationality (Fees) (Amendment) Order 2023; Draft Pensions Dashboards (Amendment) Regulations 2023; Relationships and Sexuality Education (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2023; Includes information paragraphs on: One instrument related to COVID-19: Draft Business and Planning Act 2020 (Pavement Licences) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2023; Central Counterparties (Equivalence) (India) (Reserve Bank of India) Regulations 2023; Republic of Belarus (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations 2023, the House of Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, 44th report of Session 2022/23, HL Paper 217. 23 June 2023. https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/40569/docum ents/197837/default/

The Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee has issued a report criticising the lack of public consultation on relationships and sexuality education policy in Northern Ireland and suggests that the Government should postpone implementation. In its 44th report of Session 2022-23 the Committee comments on changes made by the Relationships and Sexuality Education (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 (the Regulations) and highlights issues regarding their implementation.

These Regulations make relationships and sexuality education, including prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, compulsory for children in key stages 3 and 4 (ages 11 to 16) in Northern Ireland (NI).

Background 1. This Order contains a number of provisions in relation to the fees that can be charged for immigration and nationality services (for example, visa applications). The most noteworthy changes are:

• Specifying certain new functions for which fees can be charged; most notably, applications for Electronic Travel Authorisations (ETAs), under which all passengers visiting or transiting through the UK who are not British or Irish and who do not currently need a visa will be required to obtain permission in advance and submit biometric information. ETAs are being phased in between November 2023 and the end of 2024.

• Increases to the maximum amounts ('maxima') that can be charged for certain applications. 2. In our 35th Report, in March 2023, we drew the instruments that introduced ETAs to the special attention of the House.1 We raised questions about the practical implementation of the system and criticised the Home Office for not providing any impact information in relation to ETAs. In May 2023, we sought further information at an evidence session with Lord Murray of Blidworth, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Migration and Borders

The Lords Committee raises several concerns including:

• The lack of a public consultation prior to the Regulations coming into effect. The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) told the Committee there was no legal requirement to conduct a consultation but that it had engaged with a range of stakeholders and statutory organisations. The report concludes that, given the controversial nature of this policy and the strong views expressed in submissions to the Committee (including from a range of religious denominations), a full public consultation would have been appropriate. The report also points out that other comparable policy changes, including when similar regulations were introduced in England, were subject to a public consultation before implementation.

• Timely implementation of the policy. While the Regulations were laid by the NIO, much of the detailed

implementation of the policy will fall to the Northern Ireland Department of Education (DE). The Committee expresses concern that some aspects of the policy underpinning the Regulations, including procedures to allow parents to withdraw their children from sexuality education, may not be fully developed by the policy implementation date of 1 January 2024. The Committee believes that this will be of considerable concern to parents in NI.

In conclusion, the report draws the Regulations to the attention of the House on the ground of a lack of public consultation and suggests that the House may wish to press the Minister to push back the implementation date of 1 January 2024 to allow a full consultation and to ensure the policy can be developed fully.

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick, Member of the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee said: "This policy is highly controversial and of interest to a wide range of interested parties. It has united communities from across the religious divide in Northern Ireland and they have expressed their considerable concern in submissions to the Committee. Given that, we believe that it was wrong not to hold a public consultation, especially when a consultation was conducted prior to a comparable policy change in England. A full public consultation can result in much improved policymaking and would also increase public confidence in a policy.

"One of the consequences of the legislation is that there is no guarantee that parents will be able to withdraw children from sexuality education from the implementation date of 1 January 2024. We have therefore suggested that the House may wish to press the minister to delay the implementation date to provide an opportunity for a full public consultation."

Careers education

Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance, the House of Commons Education Committee fourth report of Session 2022-23, HC 54. Published on 29 June 2023.

The system of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) has seen much change in recent years. Since responsibility for CEIAG was transferred to schools and colleges in 2012, the landscape has developed significantly, in particular with the introduction of the Gatsby benchmarks and the 2017 Careers Strategy.

We appear to have reached a point where the right framework is broadly in place, but there is a lack of an overarching strategy with stated outcomes. Schools and colleges are making progress towards meeting the Gatsby benchmarks, but are only meeting just over half of them on average. The Department should put in place an updated Careers Strategy which includes clear, measurable outcomes, and ensure that Ofsted is upholding a strong focus on CEIAG provision and the Gatsby benchmarks when inspecting schools.

The Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) is providing useful support to schools and colleges and we heard positive feedback on the impact of Careers Hubs and Careers Leaders. However, Careers Leaders do not always have the time and capacity to effectively fulfil their role, with almost half having less than a day a week allocated to the role. The Department should suggest an appropriate proportion of time that Careers Leaders should be given to fulfil their role and ensure that the CEC is collecting and publishing data on this. The lack of a high-quality, accessible website offering careers information and advice is also a key gap in the system of support available to young people. The National Careers Service (NCS) website is theoretically available to young people from the age of 13, but in practice is not targeted at or being used by them. Fewer than 10% of 18–19-year-olds had

used it in 2018 and, among a panel of young people who we spoke to as part of this inquiry, none had ever heard of or used it. The Department should either ensure that the NCS website has content appropriate and accessible to young people under 18 or create an alternative website for this group.

The Committee heard that there is a lack of coordination and alignment between the organisations providing careers support and services, which has resulted in duplication and confusion. We looked at the issue of whether the organisations should be merged into a single body, drawing on the recommendations made by Professor Sir John Holman in his work as Independent Strategic Adviser on Careers Guidance to the Department. While we do not think that creating a single, all-age body for CEIAG is the right step at this stage, we recommend that the Departent should bring the existing delivery bodies under a single strategic umbrella function, sharing a common strategic framework and coordinating local services.

The transfer of responsibility for CEIAG to schools and colleges has meant that funding for this has had to come out of their existing budgets, alongside the support offered by the CEC. This is causing significant disparities in provision between different schools and colleges, and one witness told us that schools are only spending on average £2 per pupil on careers. The Department's expenditure on CEIAG provision through the CEC also falls far short of what is needed: it is currently spending around £5,000 per school, in contrast to the estimated £38,000 to £76,000 needed to fully deliver the Gatsby benchmarks.

The Department should put in place a programme of one- off developmental funding to support schools to improve their CEIAG provision and include support for careers in the package available to schools in education investment areas. It should also pilot a programme of funding careers advisers directly through the CEC, rather than requiring schools and colleges to buy in support themselves.

Primary schools

Starting careers provision at an early age is essential in supporting children to learn about the world of work and develop high aspirations for their futures. We heard of some strong examples of schools doing this well, and programmes such as Primary Futures are playing a useful role in supporting schools to develop their provision.

The Department's recently announced pilot programme for primary schools is a positive step forward, but support should move away from small-scale pilot approaches and towards a universal approach to ensure that children across the country can benefit. The absence of any equivalent to the Gatsby benchmarks for primary level is also a concern; this is a gap that must be filled as soon as possible.

Careers in the curriculum

Embedding links to careers within the curriculum is an important way of exposing young people to a range of jobs and demonstrating the relevance of the subjects they study. There have been some notable improvements in this area in recent years, with 70% of schools and colleges fully achieving this benchmark in 2021/22, compared with 38% in 2018. Our panel of young people also reported examples of this being done to a high standard. However, this is not being done well across the board and is happening at a much higher rate in colleges than in schools.

There is a clear need to upskill teachers in careers provision to ensure that they feel confident in making links to relevant jobs in their subjects. 88% of teachers feel that their training did not prepare them to deliver careers information and guidance to students, and many teachers may not have experience of the world of work outside of teaching. The curriculum itself also does not contain explicit links to relevant careers, and this has not been included in the Department's recent work to develop model curricula. The Department must ensure that careers is incorporated into teacher training and provide teachers with opportunities to experience workplaces outside of teaching.

Employer links with schools

We are particularly concerned about gaps in access to high-quality work experience, especially for pupils living outside major cities and the south-east of England. Pupils are frequently being left to arrange work placements themselves with little or no support from the school: only 30% of year 13 pupils and 10% of those in key stage four report having taken part in work experience arranged through their school. Young people in small towns and rural areas have limited access to opportunities for work experience: virtual placements can play a key role in closing this gap, but should not be seen as the only option for these young people. Equally, it is critically important that efforts to expand work experience do not result in a "tick-box" approach to organising placements: work experience must be of high quality and tailored to pupils' needs and aspirations. The Department should develop a toolkit setting out what constitutes meaningful work experience and develop a national platform for work experience opportunities which includes virtual opportunities.

We heard that the administrative requirements around organising work experience placements can form a barrier to schools being able to offer them, particularly safeguarding requirements, and that there are "myths" around the administration that is needed. While it is essential to ensure that young people are kept safe while undertaking work experience, it must be made clear to schools and employers what they are and are not required to do. The Department should also consider whether any administrative requirements can be removed or lightened without compromising the safety and wellbeing of pupils.

A common theme in this inquiry was the bias towards academic over vocational and technical routes in careers advice and guidance. The introduction of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to give access to providers of vocational courses and apprenticeships, seems to have had some positive effects, but we heard many concerns about low levels of compliance and the lack of an accountability mechanism to enforce it. The new provider access legislation,

which came into force in January this year, should go some way towards addressing these issues. The Department must ensure that compliance is being properly monitored through a robust mechanism and that appropriate action is taken if schools fail to comply. We note that some progress appears to have been made in terms of Ofsted not awarding "outstanding" grades to schools not complying with the Baker Clause. This should now be extended to the new provider access legislation and applied consistently across all schools, and Ofsted must ensure that it is giving appropriate weight to vocational routes when looking at destinations data.

Supporting specific groups of pupils

We were concerned to hear that groups of pupils with the greatest need for high quality CEIAG provision are often the least likely to receive it, including disadvantaged pupils, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, those known to the care system, and young carers. Pupils eligible for free school meals are more likely to have received no information, advice or guidance, and schools in deprived areas are less likely to have access to specialist careers advisers. Disadvantaged pupils are less likely to have access to the contacts, information and opportunities available to their peers, and may as a result have lower aspirations for their futures. We also heard that pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds can face similar challenges in accessing CEIAG provision, along with pupils in care and those who are young carers, who face particular barriers to moving into employment. The Department and the CEC's approach to this issue is focused on a variety of small-scale programmes in local areas—while this is a sensible way of testing approaches, this risks creating a postcode lottery of support in the long term. The Department must evaluate the impact of these programmes and set out a timeline for them to be rolled out nationally.

Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) face additional barriers to entering the workplace and are particularly in need of tailored careers advice and guidance to support them to achieve their goals. However,

too often they are not receiving the support they need. We heard concerns about the lack of specialist careers advisers, low expertise among special educational needs co-ordinators, and a lack of flexible and accessible work placements. We welcome the Department's pilot to extend Supported Internships to pupils without an EHCP as announced in the Spring Budget and recommend that this should be rolled out to cover all areas of the country.

The transfer of responsibility for CEIAG to schools and colleges has created a clear gap in support for pupils not in mainstream education, most notably those who are home educated. With an estimated 86,200 children now being home educated, there is an urgent need to put in place a system of careers support for these young people so that they are not locked out of access to CEIAG provision. We also note that the Department has yet to deliver on its commitment to introduce a register of pupils not in school, along with a proposed duty on local authorities to provide support to home educating families; these must be implemented as soon as possible.

Attitudes towards girls in education

In recent years there has been a significant increase in awareness of sexual harassment and sexual violence against women and girls in educational settings. Thousands of children and young people have posted testimonials of their experiences on the Everyone's Invited website, while school teachers have voiced concerns about the toxic influence of social media and some of the purported 'influencers' who use it to broadcast misogyny to boys and young men.

Access to online pornography has left children and young people, especially boys and young men, with a misguided representation of women, men, and what sexual relationships look like. The Online Safety Bill presents an opportunity to regulate online pornography and to address issues such as boys cyberflashing hardcore pornographic images at girls, the Airdropping of nude images and other forms of sexual harassment. However, those responsible for the safety of girls in educational settings should not wait for the Bill to become law to tackle this behaviour.

The Committee welcome Ofsted's 2021 review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges. Ofsted should not hesitate to undertake a similar review in the future if its inspectors find a lack of progress has been made in tackling peer-on-peer abuse in schools. As part of their inspections Ofsted should also investigate the level of abuse experienced by female staff, at the hands of pupils, parents and other staff.

The teaching of relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) can help to keep children safe. It contributes to reducing relationship violence by helping children to recognise situations that are unhealthy, abusive or harmful, and by teaching children that they have a right to ask for and to get help. However, delivery of RSHE has been inconsistent. The Government must take steps to ensure that teachers and teachers in training have the funding and time they require to learn how to deliver RSHE effectively.

RSHE is compulsory in secondary schools up to the age of 16, however young people are required to remain in some form of education until they are 18. This leaves young people making their first steps in the adult world under-supported and less equipped to navigate potentially harmful and dangerous situations and keep themselves safe and healthy in relationships. RSHE should be extended to young people in post 16 educational settings.

The Government's review of RSHE must be evidence-led and include engagement with children, teachers, parents and specialist violence against women and girls (VAWG) organisations to ensure that any developments in policy support effectively the Government's commitment to tackling sexual harassment and violence in schools and colleges. As part of the review, the Government should develop a specific strategy for engaging with boys and young men in primary and secondary schools on the topics of sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

Women students experience high levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence, both on and off the university campus. We welcome the Office for Student's (OfS) commitment to survey its prevalence in the university sector which will help interventions to be better targeted. Evidence-based bystander intervention programmes should be made compulsory for all first-year students and the ability of universities to use non-disclosure agreements to silence victims of sexual harassment and violence must be banned
Conclusion

In conclusion, the Select Committee made 14

recommendations, the main ones of which were:

• MPs call for specific Government strategy for engaging with boys and young men in schools on topics of sexual harassment and gender-based violence as part of RHSE review

• Relationships and sex education should be made compulsory in post-16 educational settings

• Committee calls for sufficient funding and support for teachers to deliver safeguarding effectively as well as RSHE.

Support for childcare and early years

Support for Childcare and the Early Years, the House of Commons Select Committee on Education, fifth report of Session 2022/23. HC 969. 26 July 2023

Despite increasing Government investment over recent decades, the Early Childhood Education Care system (ECEC) in England is facing challenges of both affordability and availability. Early years providers are closing, unable to make ends meet against a background of rising costs and stagnant funding rates. Providers that remain face severe recruitment challenges and childminders have been leaving the profession at an alarming rate. Parents are struggling to meet rising childcare costs which make up an ever increasing proportion of families' net income. Whilst the majority of ECEC provision is good or outstanding, high staff turnover rates in formal settings affects young children who benefit from consistent relationships with adult carers.

The Government announced a funding package in the Spring Budget in March 2023 that will almost double Government annual expenditure on support for ECEC by 2025. The biggest change is the extension of the subsidised 30-hours entitlement from 3-and4-year-olds down to 9-month-olds. This is a welcome investment and demonstrates that the Government is listening to concerns about affordability and sustainability from parents and providers. However, this investment is much overdue and more will need to be done to address the structural problems in the ECEC system if the funding increases are to be implemented effectively. In particular, close attention should be paid to effective funding distribution. Settings in disadvantaged areas already struggle more than those in more affluent areas, yet we know that it is children from disadvantaged families that

can benefit the most from high-quality ECEC.

Underfunding of the early years entitlements has left providers unable to invest in development and straining to survive. It is imperative now that the Government is so significantly expanding its intervention in the childcare market, that they get the rate right for the entitlements they fund. We also recommend that all nurseries are exempted from business rates and zero-rated for Value Added Tax (VAT) in recognition of their role in delivering a public good and a key Government priority. This would help them to provide enough space for the children that they care for and allow them to invest more in development.

Staff are the lifeblood of any early years setting. Their role is vital in nurturing, educating and keeping children safe. The Government should explore the potential for greater parity with other educational providers, such as those in primary schools, in pay, career development and recognition. That is why we recommend that the Early Careers Framework is expanded to all staff in Ofsted-registered ECEC settings.

Increasing the number of subsidised childcare places should not come at the expense of quality. We are deeply concerned about plans to relax staff:child ratios from 1:4 two-year-olds to 1:5. Arguments from the Government that this brings England in line with the ratio requirements in Scotland and Europe fail to recognise the higher qualification levels in these ECEC systems that allow for more leniency in ratios without compromising quality. The impact of these changes should be closely monitored and reversed if quality is degraded. Simultaneously, more needs to be done to invest in developing a better qualified ECEC workforce. To support providers to develop their staff, we have also recommended the introduction of a Leadership Quality Fund, modelled on the recent Graduate Leaders Fund but broader, to help recruit, train and retain well-qualified early years professionals.

The number of children diagnosed with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has been rising in recent years. Since the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, the

number of children diagnosed with developmental delays and speech and language difficulties is concerning. It is vital that these children's needs are identified and supported as early as possible. Therefore, we recommend that SEND training should be mandatory for all staff and that sources of funding for additional SEND support must also be made easier and quicker for providers to access.

Childminders form a vital part of the ECEC market, offering unique flexibility for parents and personalised care for children. It is concerning to see this part of the market struggling even more than others from administrative burdens, low pay and often loneliness. We recommend several changes that could give childminders more flexibility to set up as a business, either individually or in collaboration with others.

The message we heard loud and clear from the 1,162 parents who wrote to us in this inquiry was that their trust in the ECEC system is low, although many spoke highly of individual providers and care staff. Many who need or want to return to work struggle to access affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare. A common theme was disillusionment in the Government's offer of 'free' hours, when they are not, in reality, free. We recommend that the 'free-hours' entitlements are renamed as 'funded' or 'subsidised' to reflect accurately the Government's offer.

We were surprised that the limitation on parents in training or education claiming funded childcare entitlements remains. This appears to contradict the Government's agenda in supporting lifelong learning. We recommend that this barrier is removed. This will give parents who need to retrain to re-enter the workforce or to secure more flexible work to accommodate their childcare needs equal access to support.

Parents also need more holistic support, including parenting advice, information about services, and a community that will support them in managing the complex early years of their child's life. We welcome the Government's pilot of Family Hub centres. These centres can and should play a vital role in developing parental trust and awareness in the

ECEC system. We recommend that these are expanded as soon as possible and secured with long-term funding.

We note that better support for parents who choose to stay at home with their children was not included in the Spring Budget announcements. While this topic is not directly in the scope of this inquiry, or within the remit of the Department for Education, it will be important for the Government to complement their focus on supporting working parents with a more family-centred policy approach to early years education that recognises the importance of the home learning environment on children's development and the value of the care that parents can provide at home. We recommend that the Government look at ways to support parents who choose to stay at home through changes to child benefits and parental leave allowances.

Government announcements in the Spring Budget indicate its willingness to better support this vital sector. To properly do so, these changes need to form part of a wider Early Years Strategy, encompassing supply side reforms, workforce development, and a considered focus on improving the quality of ECEC provision for children in all areas. Simply expanding the funded entitlements will not be enough. We recommend that the Government review and update its 2017 early years strategy.

Appointment of HMCI

Appointment of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, sixth report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Education, HC 1800, published on Friday 8 September 2023.

This is a short report. On the 19 July 2023, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon. Gillian Keegan, wrote to the Committee to say that Sir Martyn Oliver, currently CEO of Outwood Grange Academies Trust, had been chosen as the Government's preferred Candidate to take up the post of the His Majesty's Chief Inspector at OFSTED. The Committee was invited to hold a pre-appointment hearing with the Candidate.

The Committee interviewed Sir Martyn on the following:

• The role and powers of the His Majesty's Chief Inspector of OFSTED.

• The Candidate's priorities, if appointed.

• How his previous experiences have prepared him for this role.

• The challenges facing OFSTED today.

• The challenges facing the education sector today.

The Committee concluded that Sir Martyn Oliver was appointable for the post.

During his evidence to the Committee, Sir Martyn said that his three priorities for Ofsted were engaging in what he called "the big listen". He thought that there were three ins to Ofsted. He said: "The first is information. What is it that Ofsted thinks we need to know? What do we need to know

from you, from the sector, about the sector? Then there is insight—ascertaining from the sectors what they think that we need to know and to hear our replies. Then there is the input—the ultimate beneficiaries, the children and the parents."

Sir Martyn asked himself what do parents and children think about Ofsted? "What is the quality of information? How much faith do they put on the single-word judgment, for example, when you look at the report? It is amazing once you are nominated. Every time I drive around and I see those banners outside schools, I think to myself, "What will they do if it is not that one word?" I am not saying that they should not have that one word, I am asking, 'What will you do? How do we then safeguard? If you have 10 words, how do we safeguard?' I could say to you that every one of my schools has a good quality of education, but not every school is good. That worries me, so I would be interested to see from parents' point of view what they think because that is ultimately the beneficiary of our work."

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