

Self Government for Schools : a summary

Extending Local Management for LEA Schools

Developing the GM Programme

Choice, Diversity and Specialisation

The Future Role of LEAs

How to get copies of this summary

This is a summary of the White Paper "Self-Government for Schools" published on 25 June 1996.

The Government's main objective in education is to raise standards in schools. The National Curriculum, rigorous testing of pupils, better information for parents, and new school inspection arrangements are crucial to achieving this. But the way schools are organised, governed and funded also plays an essential part.

The proposals in the White Paper build on some key principles underlying the Government's recent reforms:

- Each school should take responsibility for achieving high standards, and should account for its performance to parents and the local community against the standards set by the National Curriculum. It should set targets for improvement and review its performance against them annually.
- Within that framework, schools should have as much freedom as possible to make their own decisions, spend their own budgets, and plan their own futures.
- Schools should use this freedom to build on their distinctive strengths, responding to the needs and wishes of local parents to provide more choice and diversity.
- That will give a better match between what schools offer and what parents want - which is a good education suited to their child's individual abilities, interests and needs.

More self-government for all schools is central to raising standards and extending diversity. Local management of local education authority (LEA) schools, and grant-maintained (GM) status for schools which want it, have already given schools far more independence. Schools value that, and have shown they can use it well. But there is room to do a lot more. Building on the progress made so far, the Government proposes a range of new measures which it would introduce once the necessary legislation was in place.

Extending Local Management for LEA Schools

Local Management of Schools (LMS) has given all LEA schools wide-ranging powers to manage their affairs, including deciding how to spend their budgets and selecting their own staff. It has been a great success. The Government proposes to extend this in several ways:

- By bringing new areas of school spending, particularly on school meals, within the overall budget total which LEAs must use to set individual budgets for schools. Spending on children with statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN) would be taken out of the total to ensure that their needs can still be individually met.
- By raising from 85% to 95% the percentage of that overall total which LEAs must delegate to schools. Combined with the proposal in here, this will bring an extra 1.3 billion within the formal delegation requirement,

equivalent to around 200 per pupil.

- By giving LEAs power, if they wish and in consultation with their schools, to delegate to schools other spending items which they may not delegate at present.
- By simplifying the legal framework for LMS, making it easier for LEAs to change their delegation schemes, while still providing robust safeguards to ensure that schools get their fair share of resources.

Developing the GM Programme

Grant-maintained status offers schools more freedom to run their own affairs. There are now over 1,100 GM schools, including many of the most successful and enterprising schools in the country. GM schools are achieving high standards and delivering what parents want.

The Government remains committed to the growth of the GM sector, seeing it as the best way of running schools where that is what parents choose. The Government wants GM schools to enjoy the greatest possible independence. So it proposes a range of new measures, including:

- To give GM schools more power to change what they do in response to local needs without having to get central approval. In future, GM schools would not normally need approval to open nursery classes or sixth-forms, to increase the number of places they have by up to 50%, or to offer boarding places. Existing funding controls would remain, and schools would have to consult locally before deciding to go ahead.
- To give GM schools the right to take on services which LEAs currently carry out for their pupils, including home-to-school transport and arranging support for special needs pupils as set out in the statements drawn up by LEAs.
- To strengthen the effectiveness and accountability of GM governing bodies. This might be done by identifying, within existing grants, funds for governor training and support; and by considering how parents could be given more say in selecting community governors when vacancies arise, in addition to their existing powers to elect parent governors.
- To reinforce safeguards against abuse in GM ballot campaigns by providing, if schools wish, a neutral "ballot observer" to monitor campaigns.

Choice, Diversity and Specialisation

Children have different abilities, aptitudes, interests and needs. These cannot all be fully met by a single type of school, at least at secondary level. The Government wants parents to be able to choose from a range of good schools of different types, matching what they want for their child with what a school offers. The choice should include schools which select by academic ability, so the most able children have the chance to achieve the best of which they are capable.

Independent schools, church schools and grammar schools have long offered choice for some parents. The Government has greatly expanded diversity through the Assisted Places Scheme, by setting up the 15 City Technology Colleges, and by giving all schools the opportunity to become grant-maintained. It has also encouraged schools to specialise in particular subjects such as technology and languages.

To extend choice and diversity, the Government proposes:

- To encourage existing schools to put forward proposals to become grammar schools, with governing bodies having a right of appeal where their LEA opposes the proposal; to encourage promoters of new GM grammar schools; and, as a matter of general policy, to look favourably on proposals for change which increase diversity in the local pattern of schools.
- To give the Funding Agency for Schools the power, wherever a new school is needed to meet a shortage of school places, to submit proposals for a new GM school - including a new GM grammar school - alongside any proposals from the LEA.
- To give all GM schools the power, if they wish, to select up to 50% of their pupils by general ability, or by ability or aptitude in particular subjects, without needing central approval.

- To give LEA Technology and Language Colleges the power, if they wish, to select up to 30% of their pupils by ability or aptitude in their specialist subjects without needing central approval, with governing bodies having a right of appeal where their LEA opposes using this power.
- To give other LEA schools the power, if they wish, to select up to 20% of their pupils by ability or aptitude without needing central approval.
- To require all school governing bodies to consider each year, in consultation with parents, whether to introduce an element of selection as a means of adding to the diversity of local schooling.
- To extend the Specialist Schools Programme to cover Sports Colleges and Arts Colleges; to set up more Technology and Language Colleges; and to help existing Technology and Language Colleges to keep developing their specialist subjects.
- To support the development of the existing state boarding schools, and promote public awareness of the opportunities they provide.

This pattern of diversity goes well beyond the outmoded division between grammar schools and secondary moderns. The aim is to encourage all schools to consider what special strengths they can develop to meet local needs, and so give more opportunities for young people to develop their varied talents to the full.

The Future Role of LEAs

The Government intends schools to have as much independence as possible. The role of local education authorities will be to provide services which schools cannot carry out for themselves, and to support schools in their efforts to raise standards.

LEAs' functions will continue to include:

- organising education outside schools (for example, units for pupils excluded from school);
- planning the supply of school places, enforcing school attendance, and considering complaints and appeals from parents;
- setting budgets and monitoring spending for LEA schools;
- organising services for individual pupils, such as transport and support for special needs;
- supplying support services such as training or personnel advice for schools to buy if they want them;
- co-ordinating networks and new initiatives between schools.

Responsibility for raising standards rests mainly with schools themselves. But the LEA has a role in helping schools, by providing advice and support services; by circulating performance data as a basis for each school to set its own targets for improvement; and by working with schools identified as failing or seriously weak.

LEAs need to carry out these functions efficiently and effectively. The Government intends that there should be better mechanisms for assuring the quality of what LEAs do, including through inspections by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). The Government will also consider how schools can be given a stronger say in the way LEAs carry out their tasks.

Further copies of this information in leaflet form are available from: Department for Education and Employment, Publications Centre, PO Box 6927, London E3 3NZ, Tel 0171 510 0150, Fax 0171 510 0196.

Copies of the White Paper "Self-Government for Schools" (CM 3315) are available from The Stationery Office Bookshops.

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