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**Ensuring less privileged pupils  
benefit from the Government's  
school reforms**

**August 2010**

## Introduction

The Coalition Government has stated that one of its key aims is to improve social mobility<sup>1</sup>. Reforms to increase school autonomy are intended to improve the overall performance of schools, and the educational opportunities for less privileged pupils in particular, reducing the stark attainment gap that still persists between poorer pupils and those from better-off backgrounds. Yet there are also some concerns that the moves to increase school autonomy - through academies or free schools - will lead to further social segregation among schools and hinder social mobility<sup>2</sup>.

The Sutton Trust believes that there needs to be a series of checks, balances and incentives in the school system to ensure that the current reforms benefit all pupils, not just those from privileged homes. This note details some initial proposals for what these essential components of a 'high autonomy high equity' school system should be. They cover four main inter-connecting policy areas: school admissions; the use of the pupil premium; measures to hold schools to account; and the roles of Local Authorities.

These proposals have been developed following discussions with a number of education experts, leading researchers, and head-teachers, and have been submitted to Government as it prepares its forthcoming White Paper on schools due in the Autumn<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In their foreword to the Coalition's 'programme for government', the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister say that they 'want a Britain where social mobility is unlocked; where everyone, regardless of background, has the chance to rise as high as their talents and ambition allow them'. See: [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg\\_coalition.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg_coalition.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> We do not summarise the research evidence on this issue here, but there are conflicting views about the extent to which increased school autonomy has increased social segregation in countries such as the US and Sweden (and the extent to which this evidence also applies to England's school system). Some research also suggests that increased social segregation leads to lower social mobility.

<sup>3</sup> The Trust will also be responding to the Government's consultation on the pupil premium. See: <http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=consultationDetails&consultationId=1723&external=no&menu=1>

## Ensuring fair and equitable admissions: the 'fair access' school package

The issue of how schools admit children promises to remain a contentious issue for the foreseeable future, despite reforms to increase the supply of schools. We believe that the use of the pupil premium, measures to hold schools to account, and the actions of Local Authorities can all play a role in ensuring fair and equitable admissions. But within the new schools landscape, the Trust has identified three main goals for admissions specifically:

- i. Permitting schools that have an explicit mission to serve disadvantaged pupils to give preference to pupils from low income homes in their admissions criteria;
- ii. Encouraging those schools which currently do not take in many poorer pupils (despite being sited in areas of deprivation) to do so;
- iii. Making it more likely that disadvantaged children access high-performing schools in their area, by boosting applications and increasing the likelihood of admissions.

In terms of the first aim (i) the Trust supports a simple amendment to the existing Admissions Code to allow schools to give priority in the admissions round to low income children, in the same way as children in care are given preference. In terms of aims (ii) and (iii), the Trust believes a system which ties progressive admissions policies to financial and moral incentives in schools has the potential to work. Schools could also do more work to overcome the perception among poorer families that some schools 'are not for the likes of them.' We propose that:

- *All schools are automatically signed-up to a 'fair access' package – but which Governing bodies can opt out of, if they wish.*
- *Only schools which remain signed up to the package ('Fair Access Schools') should be entitled to receive pupil premium funding - either the whole premium or a significant 'second tier' beyond the basic amount.*
- *Fair Access Schools should be expected (rather than permitted) to give priority in the admissions round to low income children - possibly up to a certain threshold, say the average level in the community in which they are sited<sup>4</sup>. They should also be expected to adopt ballots in conjunction with other criteria to decide places when oversubscribed.*
- *Fair Access Schools rated as outstanding by Ofsted should also agree that low income children in their vicinity are automatically entered into the application process for the school, i.e. poorer students apply by default and must positively reject the school if they wish to put another school as their first choice. These schools would also be expected to work with neighbouring schools to help improve outcomes for low income pupils.*

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<sup>4</sup> If a school wanted to give priority beyond this threshold they would, of course, be allowed to do so.

## Spending the pupil premium effectively

The allocation to schools of a pupil premium for disadvantaged pupils is intended to create a strong incentive for them to enrol and improve the relative and absolute outcomes of children who may lack the home support of their more privileged peers. But the key to its success will also be how the pupil premium is actually spent by schools. We propose:

- *To have an impact, the pupil premium needs to be significant, of the order of 3,000 pounds per pupil - ie 50% more than average funding per pupil. The premium should be allocated in relation to all pupils who have at some point been eligible for Free School Meals.*
- *The Sutton Trust with others<sup>5</sup> should commission a project to develop a tool-kit for schools providing clear, succinct and accessible advice on how the premium might be best spent to improve the outcomes for less privileged pupils.*

This would be based on a combination of research evidence on what works, outlining the most cost-effective strategies for improving outcomes, but also first hand knowledge of good practice from schools that have successfully narrowed attainment gaps. The advice would encompass for example the recruitment and use of financial incentives of teachers, the use of non-teaching staff, the extension of school hours, engagement with parents, and the use of one-to-one or small group tuition schemes.

- *Academies and free schools should declare how they intend to deploy the extra resources from the premium to improve the outcomes of disadvantaged children in their funding agreements.*

We also believe that a potential role for Local Authorities could be to monitor the use of the pupil premium in schools.

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<sup>5</sup> The Sutton Trust is currently negotiating a research project to produce such a 'toolkit' for schools. This will: summarise the relative effect size (perhaps presented in terms of average months of growth) of a range of strategies that schools could choose to spend their Pupil Premium on; describe any factors (eg ages, types of school or pupil, features of the implementation) that are known or seem likely to mediate the effectiveness of each strategy; estimate costs and cost-effectiveness for each strategy; provide pointers and links to further information about each.

## Holding schools to account

Current performance measures for schools need to be reformed to provide better incentives to genuinely improve the attainment of all children, both poor and privileged, and to offer parents clear, meaningful and robust information on the quality of schooling on offer. We believe that the basket of published measures to be used to monitor the performance of schools should include<sup>6</sup>:

- *A measure showing the extent to which schools are narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils, both in terms of final examination grades, and progress made by children during their schooling.*

An absolute attainment measure would detail the average points score at GCSE level<sup>7</sup> for children eligible for Free School Meals at any stage during secondary school<sup>8</sup>. This could be compared with the equivalent score for other children at the school, but also with the results of FSM children at other schools. A second measure would show the progress from end of primary school to GCSE level for FSM children<sup>9</sup>, compared with the equivalent data for other children. Both indicators would be computed separately for academic and vocational qualifications.

- *A measure showing the extent to which schools are enrolling disadvantaged pupils in comparison with the social make-up of their locality*

This measure could exploit the rich data now available to compare the backgrounds of pupils at the school with other children in their localities. The simplest measure would compare the proportion of FSM children at the school with the proportion of FSM pupils across the localities.

- *A measure documenting the destinations of pupils after leaving school, whether they enter higher education, apprenticeships or the workplace*

The Sutton Trust plans to publish Higher Education destinations data for every secondary school in England, including the proportion of school pupils entering HE and the proportion of pupils entering elite universities, over a three year period.

- *Continued failure by schools to narrow attainment gaps or enrol low income pupils to reflect the social make-up of their localities should trigger Ofsted inspections, with ultimate sanctions for poor performance such as closure clearly outlined*

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<sup>6</sup> Such measures are by definition historical – but could be set alongside schools plans to either maintain their position or to improve performance.

<sup>7</sup> A simple overall score could be created in which higher GCSE grades are assigned higher points scores.

<sup>8</sup> While there are limitations to Free Schools Measure, using an 'ever FSM' is a more comprehensive and robust measure of deprivation.

<sup>9</sup> Some care would need to be taken with small numbers of pupils in calculating these measures - published figures could also include the numbers of pupils they relate to.

## **Local Authorities as 'children's champions'**

- *Local Authorities should be recast as 'children's champions' and consolidate their role as education commissioners - alongside their statutory roles*
- *A primary role should be to provide parents and children with accessible, publicly available, authoritative and useful information on secondary schools*

Parents need easily digested information on secondary schools (as well as primary schools, colleges, early years schemes and special needs provision), which could be based on the range of new published measures. This information should detail the outcomes for children in the Local Authority area - relating to state schools attended within, but also outside, the Authority<sup>10</sup>. An annual published document could play a key role in publicly holding schools to account.

- *A number of key annual performance measures should also be published for all children living in the Local Authority*

We believe that these should include area wide attainment and progress gaps between children on Free School Meals and other children, and post school destination data (including HE destinations) - relating to schools, whether inside or outside the Local Authority.

- *Local Authorities should consolidate their role as education commissioners, working with providers to ensure there is adequate school provision in the area*

This might involve the commissioning of new schools; or working with local parents who want to establish a new school; or ensuring children receive alternative education if a school is failing.

- *LAs should work with education providers to ensure that 'free schools' are established primarily in disadvantaged localities; and where existing schools want to expand pupil places, priority should be given to disadvantaged pupils*
- *LAs should coordinate school admissions, advise schools on fair admissions approaches, and ensure that parents understand school admissions criteria*
- *LAs should monitor the use of the pupil premium in schools, using funding agreements for new or academy schools which should include statements on how they intend to use the pupil premium to improve the achievement of less privileged children,*

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<sup>10</sup> As providers of education LAs tend to publish information only on schools in the LA.