



House of Commons
Education and Skills Committee

**Secondary Education:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Fifth Report of Session
2004–05**

**Third Special Report of Session 2005–
06**

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 28 November 2005*

The Education and Skills Committee

The Education and Skills Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Education and Skills and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

Mr Barry Sheerman MP (*Labour, Huddersfield*) (Chairman)

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP (*Labour, City of Durham*)

Mr David Chaytor MP (*Labour, Bury North*)

Mrs Nadine Dorries MP (*Conservative, Mid Bedfordshire*)

Jeff Ennis MP (*Labour, Barnsley East & Mexborough*)

Mr David Evennett MP (*Conservative, Bexleyheath and Crayford*)

Tim Farron MP (*Liberal Democrat, Westmorland and Lonsdale*)

Helen Jones MP (*Labour, Warrington North*)

Mr Gordon Marsden MP (*Labour, Blackpool South*)

Stephen Williams MP (*Liberal Democrat, Bristol West*)

Mr Rob Wilson MP (*Conservative, Reading East*)

Powers

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/education_and_skills_committee.cfm.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are David Lloyd (Clerk), Rhiannon Hollis, (Second Clerk), Libby Aston (Committee Specialist), Nerys Roberts (Committee Specialist), Lisa Wrobel (Committee Assistant), Sue Monaghan (Committee Assistant), Susan Ramsay (Committee Secretary) and John Kittle (Senior Officer Clerk).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Education and Skills Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6181; the Committee's email address is edskillscom@parliament.uk

Third Special Report

1. The Committee published its Fifth Report of Session 2004–05 (*Secondary Education*)¹ on 17 March 2005. The Government's response was received on 23 November 2005, and is published as Appendix 1 to this Report.

Appendix 1

Government's response to the Fifth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2004–05.

The Committee's conclusions and recommendations are in bold text. The Government's response is in plain text.

Diversity of Provision

Specialist Schools

Recommendation 1:

An Ofsted evaluation has found that specialist schools are performing better than other schools and that they have made significant improvements over the last three years.

The Government welcomed this Ofsted evaluation which recognises that specialist schools are now an established part of the system and the programme is acting as a catalyst for accelerated school improvement.

Ofsted concluded that, compared with other schools, specialist schools do well against a range of indicators; the quality of teaching in specialist schools is generally better than in non-specialist schools; the approach to inclusion has improved since the last report; there have been significant improvements in the community role of specialist schools; and the range and quality of provision has improved in these schools.

Identified weaknesses are being addressed with the input of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) and Youth Sports Trust.

Recommendations 2, 3 and 5

The effect of certified good management practices and of extra funding alone may account for better results regardless of whether a school has chosen to specialise in a particular subject area. We have not received any evidence to resolve this important question. Nor has there been any assessment of levels of achievement in schools before they were awarded specialist status and how that affects subsequent results.

1 Fifth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2004–05, Secondary Education, HC 86.

We do not accept the Government's assertion that it would be too difficult to measure the relative effect of the various factors involved in the Specialist School programme. We believe that it is important to determine whether the extra funding, the specialist focus or the designation process is responsible for the improvement in performance displayed by most specialist schools. We therefore reiterate our call for further research in this area, to ensure that the factors behind the improvement of specialist schools are fully understood.

If the Government's *Five Year Strategy* is implemented, the Specialist Schools programme will become the universal model for secondary education. We are therefore concerned that the reasons for the comparatively good performance displayed by many specialist schools are still not securely established. This seems to undermine the Government's commitment to evidence-based policy. Without being able to weigh the relative importance of the factors involved in the achievements of specialist schools, the Government cannot be assured that the roll out of this programme will have the desired results, or that the success of the current group of specialist schools will automatically be replicated elsewhere.

The Government can point to plenty of evidence that the Specialist Schools programme is raising standards.

- Qualitative study (commissioned by DfES) by Warwick University on 18 specialist schools published on 25 November 2004.
- GCSE results: 2005 results show that specialist schools continue to outperform non-specialists on their GCSE results—58.8% of specialist schools achieved 5+ A*–C GCSEs compared to 47.1% of non-specialist schools.
- The KS2–4 value-added measure in 2004 was 991.9 in specialist schools compared to 979.7 in non-specialists
- Specialist schools have a broadly similar profile to the average maintained secondary school in many respects—for example, 31% of specialist schools are in areas of deprivation compared to 34% of all schools; and 15.3% of specialist school pupils are of ethnic origin other than white British, compared to a national average of 15.8%. There is evidence that specialist schools add particular value in disadvantaged contexts: they secure especially good outcomes compared to non-specialists in bands of schools with higher Free School Meals incidence.

The PAC in their 19th report noted that, “Adjusted performance measures also show that specialist schools, faith schools, Beacon schools and single sex schools do better than average. The strengths of these schools, such as a strong set of values and ethos, should be identified by the Department and promoted across the school sector.”

One of the main findings of Ofsted's second evaluation of specialist schools was that being a specialist school makes a difference. They attributed the key factors contributing to a climate of improvement to be: working to declared targets; dynamic leadership by key players; a renewed sense of purpose; the willingness to be a pathfinder; targeted use of funding and being part of an optimistic network of like-minded schools.

The Government continues to believe it would be a mistake to delay extension of the Specialist Schools programme while formal evaluations are completed which can take years. It also continues to believe it to be very difficult, without a control group, to identify causal links where schools may be participating in several school improvement programmes all with similar aims and where, like the Specialist Schools programme, there are a collection of factors at work.

So, whilst remaining confident that the programme does contribute towards school improvement we are keen to learn as much as possible from differential levels of performance within it; for example, why schools which have been in the programme longest seem to perform best and whether there are differences in performance between subject specialisms.

Recommendation 4:

Our evidence suggests that schools in less affluent areas continue to experience difficulties in raising the funds necessary to attain specialist status and we urge the Government to monitor this issue closely.

The Government regards the requirement to raise sponsorship as a critical component of the Specialist Schools programme. It helps schools build links with businesses on curriculum and school management; contributes to the income for the specialist school's capital project, and unites the school around effort to attain specialist status. As set out in Chapter 2 of the White Paper, *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils*, specialist schools have drawn enormous energy, drive and expertise from the contribution of sponsors in developing their individual character and ethos.

However, we accept that some schools, despite best endeavours, have been unable to raise the full £50,000. In those cases, the Partnership Fund exists to provide support.

The Government monitors applications closely and each of the four 6 monthly rounds, beginning in July 2003, has resulted in offers—averaging £25k—to over 300 schools. Requests for access have dropped in each of the 6 monthly rounds since July 2003 from 193 to 66.

Recommendation 6:

There is an inherent conflict between the former Secretary of State's stated aspiration that children should attend their local school and the way in which the specialist schools model is often presented by Ministers as an expansion of choice for parents.

The Government sees no conflict. Within 2 years we will have a fully specialist school system, where every school which wishes to and which meets the standard will have at least one specialism. Particularly in urban areas, this will offer greater choice so that parents can choose a school which suits their child's strengths and interests. Specialist schools raise improvement in their own schools, but there is also increasing evidence of collaborative working to share expertise in their specialism across schools. The development of second and vocational specialisms, with reference to the pattern of provision already available in

each area, is further extending choice. We want every school to improve, so parents have a choice amongst good, local schools with different specialisms.

Recommendation 7:

In its public pronouncements, the Government sometimes seems confused about the kind of diversity it wishes to promote in secondary education. In its *Five Year Strategy*, it states that the personalisation of the curriculum will be an important objective. This objective need not necessarily be associated with the existence of different types of school. The Government must therefore demonstrate how diversity in types of school will contribute to its aims of diversity within schools.

The Government's ultimate objective is education tailored to the individual needs and aptitudes of young people. It believes that the Specialist Schools programme is showing how excellence built from a specialism can raise standards across a school, not just in the specialist subject. Furthermore, the increasingly diverse range of centres of excellence across schools is increasing the availability and understanding of high quality provision available to the benefit, not just of pupils able to access it directly, but to schools in specialist networks, federations and Education Improvement Partnerships (EIPs) who can share expertise. Increasingly, schools are collaborating not only amongst themselves, but with a range of other providers, for example FE colleges and work-based training providers, to offer greater flexibility and choice in the 14–19 curriculum. Evidence from the 14–19 pathfinders programme shows, in particular, that specialist schools have increasingly become integrated into the 14–19 agenda with their facilities and expertise being made available to widen curricular opportunities for students in other schools.

As stated in Chapter Two of the White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils*, at least 500 of our most successful specialist schools will have the opportunity to take on a more significant role leading the local system.

Academies

Recommendations 8–12:

We recognise that secondary education has failed in some inner city areas and we understand the temptation to believe that Academies are the solution. Yet £5 billion is a lot of money to commit to one programme. The Government could have limited the number of Academies to 30 or 50 and carried out an assessment of their effectiveness before expanding the programme so significantly. Whilst we welcome the Government's desire to invest resources in areas of educational underachievement, we consider that the rapid expansion of the Academy policy comes at the expense of rigorous evaluation.

The communities that will be served by Academies are particularly vulnerable and have suffered from many years of inadequate education provision. We welcome the Government's desire to invest in schools serving these communities. But the Government should ensure that the current programme of Academies is thoroughly evaluated, both in respect of the performance of individual academies and the impact of neighbouring schools, before embarking on a major expansion of an untested model.

We fail to understand why the DfES is putting such substantial resources into Academies when it has not produced the evidence on which to base the expansion of this programme. We recommend that the Department publish its existing evaluation of Academies, making clear the limitations of the research due to the small number of schools involved.

We welcome the success of Academies which have raised educational standards in areas of historical underachievement. However, we observe that other Academy schools seem not to have produced results compared to the school that was previously on their site.

As the Government continually repeats, the development of the Academies programme is still in its early stages. As yet, the evidence for and against the initiative is primarily anecdotal. What evidence there is paints a mixed picture. Despite the paucity of evidence, the Government is enthusiastically pushing forward with the programme and with new Academies. We caution against this approach and urge the DfES to monitor carefully the performance of Academies and adjust its policies accordingly. In particular, the Government should consistently measure the proportion of pupils entitled to Free School Meals and the number of exclusions in Academies.

Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils confirms a clear position for Academies—tackling the acute challenges in areas of real and historical underachievement. The alternative to not pressing ahead with the Academies programme in these schools is to allow children to continue to be failed by the education system.

Academies are already achieving significant success in raising standards, improving pupils' behaviour and attendance and in attracting applications. Although it is still early days for the programme, there have already been some encouraging results. The most recent annual report from the PwC evaluation, published in full in June this year, found that:

- 87% of parents are satisfied with the quality of education provided to their child at the Academy. 80% stated that the Academy was the school of choice for their children
- 8 out of 10 pupils said that “teachers at the Academy really believe that all pupils can achieve” and similar numbers of staff surveyed said “staff at this Academy believe that all pupils can achieve regardless of their social background”
- 94% of parents feel “the principal is really interested in how our children learn at the Academy“
- 97% of staff think that their principal “really believes that this Academy can make a difference to pupils’ learning whatever their family background”
- 82% of staff think that the sponsor’s resources have had a positive impact on pupils’ learning.

The PwC evaluation concludes that Academies are beginning to make solid progress in raising educational standards. Academies are popular with parents and pupils and invariably receive far more applications than their predecessor schools, and some are already heavily oversubscribed. Pupil attendance is increasing.

In 2003, their first year, the average 5+ A*-C GCSE results in the three open Academies was 24%, compared to an average of 16% in their predecessor schools in 2002.

In 2004 the Academy schools achieved close to 30% 5+ A*-Cs. This included improvements at Capital City Academy, Brent, from 14% to 29% and of 26% to 33% at the City Academy, Bristol.

In 2005, of the 14 Academies taking GCSEs, 10 saw rises on what they had achieved in 2004 and 12 had achieved results greater than that of the predecessor schools which they replaced. The average increase in results per Academy from 2004-2005 was 6.6%, and the average result across all Academies was 36.4%.

We recognise that a small number of Academies are taking longer to resolve the longstanding issues that affected their predecessor schools. In all these cases, our first concern is of course for the students and to ensure that they are provided with a good quality education. Everything we do must be measured against that objective. My officials are in very regular contact with the Academies concerned, working closely with sponsors and other sources of support, to implement robust packages of further intensive intervention and ensure that progress is made.

Academies are located in areas of deprivation, tackling deep-seated problems, similar to all schools in similar circumstances. Academies are continuing to serve disadvantaged communities, as demonstrated by the proportion of pupils entitled to Free School Meals. The national average in recent years is constant at 14% (of pupils eligible for Free School Meals); for Academies the average is 37%. We do monitor the fact that Academies are continuing to serve children in deprived areas in terms of investment in new schools. Of the 2004 Year 7 pupil intake to Academies, 33% were entitled to Free School Meals; this rose to 37% of the intake in 2005.

Academies are established in disadvantaged areas where generations of pupils have been denied a good education. Some Academies have often inherited a large number of challenging pupils, and some have been excluded. We maintain that Heads should have the power to exclude seriously disruptive pupils.

However, these schools are working hard on behaviour issues with the result that behaviour is improving. The number of exclusions has fallen in many Academies compared with that of their predecessor school or schools.

The Manchester Academy has reduced exclusions in its first year by more than 80%: there were 272 days of fixed term exclusions in the last year of the predecessor school (Ducie High School), compared to 50 days in the Academy in 2004.

At the City Academy, Bristol, exclusions in the summer term 2004 were down by 80% on the previous year at the predecessor school.

Recommendation 13:

The Government should monitor the effect of Academies on neighbouring schools in terms of funding (including the creation of surplus places at neighbouring schools) and

staffing (e.g. the loss of well-qualified teachers at one school to a nearby Academy with a sixth form).

The five-year independent PwC evaluation of the Academies programme is examining the effect on neighbouring schools. The PwC publishes an evaluation report each year with its interim findings on the effect of the Academies programme; the most recent report found that *“Initial indications are that attainment in the main secondary schools whose primary feeder schools overlap with those of the Academies has not been adversely affected by the presence of the new Academies. In fact, all the main overlapping intake schools of the Academies that opened in 2002 are making significant progress in terms of pupil attainment, with increases in performance at GCSE at or above the rate of national improvement.”*

Recommendation 14:

We agree that the participation of an enthusiastic and committed private sponsor might benefit a school. But once again, the DfES does not seem to have set up a rigorous enough structure to evaluate the effects of sponsorship. It might be prudent to establish a small number of Academies without sponsors so that the effect of sponsorship can be properly monitored and tested, or to examine the role of sponsorship in different characters in CTCs. The Department should also consider allowing donors to sponsor schools which are not Academies on the same basis, in order to measure the effectiveness of sponsorship even more accurately.

The role of the sponsor is key to the Academies programme. Sponsors bring successful external experience, perspective and challenge. They also bring personal commitment, energy, drive and ambition. The recent PwC evaluation found “strong confidence in the role of sponsors”, with 78% of staff agreeing that the sponsor brings expertise that would not otherwise be available to the Academy, and 82% of staff agreeing that the sponsor’s resources had a positive impact on pupils’ learning.

Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils describes how the Government will, through the introduction of Trust Schools, now enable and encourage external partners to develop deeper relationships with all schools, not just Academies. All schools will be able to acquire the support of a charitable Trust, formed by a business, faith group, successful local school or a local voluntary, community or parent group. Trusts will not be expected to make a financial contribution: they will support schools by appointing governors. Where a Trust is formed by a large organisation it might offer schools access to facilities and management expertise; and where it supports several schools a Trust could enable the group to develop a common ethos and identity, and collaborate in developing innovative approaches and sharing best practice.

The Rhetoric of Diversity

Recommendation 15:

Despite the Government’s proclaimed attachment to evidence-based policy, expensive schemes seem to be rolled out before being adequately tested and evaluated compared to other less expensive alternatives.

The Government believes in offering diversity and choice across the school system. It will continue to conduct evaluations of our major programmes and use these to inform future policy making.

The Academies programme, for example, is being evaluated through an independent five year longitudinal study, by PwC, which reports on progress on an annual basis. But the Government does not agree it should wait five years for the final outcomes of the study. Children in deprived areas with no access to a good school get only one chance in life and it is wrong to deny them access to the radical break with the past which Academies represent. The Academies programme is building on the experiences of the CTC programme and the Government will be taking on board the lessons from PwC's evaluation as the programme develops.

Pupil Achievement

Measuring and raising achievement

Recommendation 16 and 18:

We welcome the use of value-added measurements, which are a useful addition to the range of data available to parents judging the quality of a school.

The debate surrounding the merits of the grammar school system is longstanding, but cannot be clarified without a method of performance management that all parties agree is fair.

The Department is in the process of developing a more sophisticated value added methodology, known as contextual value added (CVA). In addition to prior attainment, CVA will take account of other factors that have been observed to impact on performance but which are outside a school's control, such as gender, ethnicity, Special Educational Needs (SEN) status and levels of pupil mobility and deprivation. This will further enhance the data available to parents and the public.

The Committee noted that grammar schools sometimes feel disadvantaged by the policy of capping performance at 8 GCSEs in the value added measure. CVA will still cap at 8 GCSEs as the Government does not feel it would be appropriate to offer an incentive to accumulate more qualifications than are educationally valuable: schools have supported this approach when consulted in the past. But CVA does allow it to measure school effectiveness more realistically and therefore more fairly. By taking account of a much broader range of factors—including pupil-level information and information relating to the prior attainment of the rest of the cohort within the school (average prior attainment and spread of prior attainment)—it is better able to 'level the playing field' and more accurately reflect the impact each school makes with reference to the particular circumstances of its intake.

The Government publishes separately each school's total (uncapped) average point score.

Recommendation 17:

Struggling schools should not be allowed to lag behind, when their peers are managing to add value.

Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils (Chapter 2) describes how the Government is committed to the speedy replacement of fundamentally weak schools by new schools. The new Ofsted inspection regime will be more frequent, shorter and incisive. A 'satisfactory' grading will not be awarded where a school is found to have any elements of unsatisfactory performance, with inadequate schools receiving an improvement notice, or where there are severe problems, being placed in Special Measures.

This is in addition to much relevant work already underway. For example:

- The Secondary Performance Project has involved 474 schools over a period of two years to raise standards at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The schools were identified on the basis of contextual value added analysis of the 2003 data. All of the schools had results between 30% and 70% at GCSE but contextual value added analysis showed them to be in the bottom 25% in terms of value added at both key stages. The schools were also not benefiting from support from Excellence in Cities (EiC) or Leadership Improvement Grant (LIG). Progress has been impressive and the rate of improvement at GCSE has been nearly twice as much as for maintained schools nationally.
- A Secondary Intensive Support Programme Pilot has been launched this term and is setting out to raise standards in low-attaining secondary schools in 15 LEAs, and to build capacity in order to sustain improvement. The target group of schools are those who have remained at a low level of attainment for some time. Many may have moved closer to, or even above, KS3 and KS4 floor targets at some stage, but have been unable to sustain this improvement. The pilot is being co-ordinated by the Secondary National Strategy.

Recommendation 19:

National GCSE targets do not themselves produce improvements. Practical measures are needed to produce the rise in standards that the Government desires.

2005 has seen the eighth successive year of sustained improvement in the percentage of pupils gaining 5 A*-C at GCSE. There has been a 2 percentage point improvement between 2004 and 2005—the biggest improvement for a decade. There has also been a further large drop in the number of schools below the floor targets. While national targets may not produce improvements by themselves the Government believes they have a very significant contribution to make in conditioning the approach to, and focus of, school improvement.

Practical measures in place include:

- The encouragement of schools to look at data, at school-, subject- and pupil-level, to identify where progress is slower than it should be and to plan effectively to meet the needs of all their pupils. Differences between subjects for the same pupils in the

same school can be considerable. Identifying these variations and providing subject heads with the tools to tackle them and ensure pupils have clear and appropriate individual targets can make a real impact.

- Providing additional support to schools that need it if they are to achieve the best for all their pupils. School Improvement Partners (SIPs) will play an important role in stimulating schools to identify that support. The Secondary National Strategy (formerly the Key Stage 3 National Strategy) already provides a range of resources to address underperformance as well as low attainment. We expect the new and extended National Strategy to improve the quality of teaching and learning in KS4, and yield further improvements at GCSE.
- The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust has programmes and materials which support school improvement and will form part of the menu of support which schools can draw on.

A further practical measure which can contribute to a rise in standards is collaboration between schools. Initiatives such as Excellence in Cities (EiC) and Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG) have demonstrated the potential impact in terms of developing networks for CPD, for cross-collaborative pupil tracking for study support and revision sessions and to develop 14–19 Curriculum Pathways. The prospectus on Education Improvement Partnerships sets out a framework for collaboration between groups of schools and other providers. It sets out the principles underpinning effective collaboration for school improvement and better service delivery and gives practical examples of a range of functions currently being delivered by partnerships.

Recommendation 20:

Some secondary schools may only have 15% of pupils in the top 50% ability range when they enter school. They can hardly be described as comprehensive. It seems unreasonable to expect 25% of the pupils in these schools to achieve five GCSEs at grades A*–C by 2006.

The number of schools below the GCSE floor targets continues to fall: the figures for schools below 20% 5 A*–C falling from 381 in 1997 to 71 in 2004. In addition, many schools with pupils from the most socially disadvantaged backgrounds already achieve well above 25% 5 A*–C.

The Secondary National Strategy will continue to assist such schools in raising pupil achievement at the age of both 14 and 16, by helping teachers give careful attention to pupils' individual learning needs, enabling them to set challenging targets for them linked to high-quality assessment, and by offering tools to teachers to make lessons pacy, challenging and enjoyable.

Data shows that some secondary schools, those that add most value, significantly improve on pupil expectations which have been based on their Key Stage 2 outcomes. According to matched pupil-level data in 2004, about 9% of the pupils who entered secondary school in 1999 below expected levels (i.e. Level 3) in English, mathematics and science progressed on to get 5 A*–C GCSEs or equivalents. Reaching the expected level in only English at age 11, more than doubles a pupil's chances of gaining 5 A*–C. So it is not unreasonable to expect

all schools to ensure that at least 25% of their pupils achieve 5 A*–C, particularly when there has been considerable support provided by the National Strategies to raise the attainment of low attaining pupils.

We said in the White Paper ‘14–19 Education and Skills’ that we would introduce a new indicator for reporting in the Achievement and Attainment Tables which shows the proportion of young people who have achieved 5 or more A*–C GCSEs and equivalent including English and mathematics. This change is being piloted this year with a view to full inclusion in the Tables for 2006 results, alongside the existing 5 A*–C GCSEs (or equivalent) measure. We recognise that this raises the bar on schools’ performance but believe it is right to continue to push for even higher standards in the basics.

Our proposals on personalisation in the White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils* are underpinned by a strong focus on supporting schools to ensure every child masters the basics in English and mathematics. They include providing every school, via the National Strategies, with support and best practice guidance on tailoring teaching, including through the deployment of leading teachers, expert in supporting pupils who have fallen behind.

Recommendation 21:

Instead of concentrating so much energy on the setting of targets which fail to recognise the nature of a school’s intake, we recommend that the Government focus attention on factors more likely to raise achievement.

1. The Target-Setting Process

- Targets continue to play an essential part in the Government’s commitment to raising educational standards. Since 1998, schools and local authorities have set targets for pupils’ performance which have provided a powerful stimulus for the improvements in educational standards demonstrated in that time. Teachers and pupils are to be congratulated for the commitment they have shown to making progress towards meeting the ambitious national targets that we have set.
- During a series of conferences in 2003, Ministers met head teachers and listened to their concerns over the way in which local targets were set. As a result, the Government has now moved to a fundamentally better system where schools and local authorities can set targets that give them ownership of those goals. As a result of the work we have done in building a New Relationship with Schools, over time an individual School Improvement Partner will work with the school’s leadership in every school to ensure that targets are realistic and achievable, based on high expectations for the progress that individual pupils can make and aligned with the school’s circumstances, giving staff ownership of the school’s goals so as to help them focus on the areas for improvement.
- Schools have welcomed the changes made to the target-setting arrangements over the last two years. The annual target-setting process now starts with schools setting targets for their pupils based on prior attainment and the progress that should be aspired to by each child. Building on the progress made previously, schools have

maintained high expectations for their children and it is clear that there is no loss of ambition on their part.

- The process now decouples local targets from very ambitious national targets. The revision to instil a bottom-up target-setting process is evidence that the nature of a school's intake is fully recognised. It is at the heart of the targets being set and is testament to the improvements we have seen in both primary and secondary education.
- The Government believes it is vitally important that schools have targets which they believe in—which are stretching but achievable and which are owned and signed up to by everyone in the school. Empowering schools to set challenging but appropriate targets for their individual pupils will help ensure that, across the country as a whole, pupils are attaining the expected level of achievement for their age.

2. Weaknesses in Key Stage 3

- The Key Stage 3 Strategy was specifically established to address the issues of pupil progress in that phase and has seen substantial successes. While its remit has been extended, it remains focused on further improving progress and attainment in Key Stage 3.
- Since its introduction in 2001, the Key Stage 3 National Strategy has done much to raise achievement and to emphasise the importance of the early years of secondary education. Key Stage 3 test results show the significant improvements that have been made by 14-year-olds over recent years; English and maths results have risen year on year for the last four years and now 74% of pupils achieve the expected level in both English and maths. In maths, more than half of pupils (53%) now achieve higher than their expected level. Evidence from Ofsted also shows that the Strategy is having a positive impact in the classroom and is contributing significantly to the rise in attainment at KS3.
- The Government remains committed to the principles and approaches of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy and have extended them to form the Secondary National Strategy to cover the full 11–16 age range. It will continue to raise pupil achievement by helping schools and teachers give careful attention to pupils' individual learning needs, enabling them to set challenging targets linked to high-quality assessment, and offering tools to teachers to make lessons pacy, challenging and enjoyable.

3. The transfer from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, where gains in achievement can be lost.

- In its *Five Year Strategy*, the Department stated its commitment to improving transfer arrangements between primary and secondary schools and a number of key initiatives are already under way to support schools in this. The Secondary National Strategy is supporting curricular continuity through the use of transition units to be shared by primary and secondary schools, as well as improving guidance for senior leaders exemplifying effective practice in curriculum subjects.

There is also a focus on transfer issues through a number of projects that the Strategy is undertaking, including work with underperforming pupils as well as the consideration being given to innovative and flexible curricular structures to ensure that schools can assist those that need it most.

- The Common Transfer File and the ‘Key to Success’ scheme have both helped to improve the transfer of pupil data between schools and encouraged schools to work more collaboratively with their partner schools and local authorities. The Strategy’s ‘Assessment for Learning’ programme helps schools identify pupils’ learning needs, plan appropriate support and monitor pupil progression.
- The Department is keen to encourage schools and local authorities to continue taking responsibility for planning and implementing local transfer initiatives successfully. Schools are encouraged to co-ordinate plans with their partner schools and local authority, working through the School Improvement Partners. It is also our intention to make tools available for schools to assess their own effectiveness of transfer arrangements across a range of areas and direct them to appropriate support to improve their practices further.
- We restated our commitment to the development of strong policies on transition in the White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils*. The document highlights the critical importance of sharing pupil information between schools, ensuring continuity in curriculum, teaching and learning, behaviour policies and the full engagement of parents. The Primary and Secondary National Strategies will be helping schools to assess the impact of work to date in this area and to identify sources of further support.

4. The association between poverty and underachievement, currently being addressed through the Government’s reform of children’s services and initiatives such as extended schools.

- The Government seeks to raise standards for all and particularly those from the most economically deprived backgrounds where educational aspirations are often low. This objective is being addressed in the following ways:
 - The setting of targets is designed to improve outcomes for all pupils and, like the “extended school” initiative, ties into the whole philosophy behind the Government’s *Every Child Matters* (ECM) Green Paper (September 2003). The main objectives of *ECM* are to ensure that children stay safe, are healthy, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing. Schools have a crucial role to play—located at the heart of the community, they are the most likely bases for the co-location of services.
 - Directors of Children’s Services are now charged with ensuring that partnerships are in place between health, social care and education so that children with the greatest needs can be better supported.
 - The National Strategy has increasingly focused support on those schools that are underachieving or low attaining. This approach has seen a significant fall in the number of schools below floor target at KS3 over recent years, with schools

with large numbers of pupils who are eligible for Free School Meal showing the greatest improvements. We will continue to target support towards those schools that need it most, as well as strengthening support for underachieving groups of pupils. As Chapter 3 of *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils* makes clear, the National Strategy is also ensuring that all schools focus on improving English and maths—a prerequisite to overcoming economic and social disadvantage.

- Many schools are already offering extended services and have demonstrated many benefits, including improved attainment, attendance and behaviour for pupils and a positive impact on parental involvement. Extended schools can also support social regeneration and economic well-being through bringing together different sectors of the community and through enabling greater access to key community services and facilities. To support schools in setting up and embedding their services, the Government has committed considerable additional funding. This is being made available through local authorities—£160m has already been invested over the period 2003–04 to 2005–06 to support the development of extended schools. A further £680m will be provided from 2006–2008.

5. School leadership, which has been identified in Ofsted’s Annual Report as an important factor affecting a school’s results.

- The Government agrees that effective leadership is key to transforming the school workforce and raising the attainment of pupils. It is a key component of the *Five Year Strategy*. That is why we have invested in the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), the key agent for transforming the quality of leadership in schools.
- The NCSL’s next phase of work will build on its achievements so far to ensure its future programmes are closely tailored to meet the needs of future school leaders. This work will draw on the key messages from school leaders, gathered at a series of successful NCSL conferences over recent months.
- School leadership is a focus of the work being undertaken by the Secondary National Strategy and this includes extensive support for school leadership teams and for subject leaders. It is a central focus of the pilot Secondary Intensifying Support Programme being established with 60 schools in 15 local authorities and designed to raise attainment in schools where progress is currently below average.

International comparisons

Recommendations 22 and 23

The Committee has serious misgivings about the use of figures from international comparison surveys in some documents and the misleading conclusions that have been drawn when the conditions and limitations of these tests have not been respected.

The data supplied by international educational comparisons is both of interest and of use in the formulation of education policy. Nevertheless, individual studies always have their limitations and cannot alone form a sound basis on which to build the

foundations of a publicly funded school system. We regret that the Government has sometimes placed too much emphasis on the results of individual studies and has not treated them with sufficient crucial distance.

The Department believes that international comparisons of pupil attainment, such as the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the various IEA studies, notably TIMSS and PIRLS, can offer unique and valuable insights into how the outcomes of our education system compare with those of other countries. The Department recognises the limitations of individual studies and fully appreciates the need to treat their findings with the necessary caution. The Department is committed to broadening the evidence base on which sound policy decisions must be made.

Recommendation 24:

We are concerned that England was not able to be included in the most recent PISA results, even though the response rate was similar to that of the previous survey. The responsibility for this omission must lie with the DfES. We expect the Government's measures to prevent this from happening again to be secure: it would be unacceptable if this problem were to be repeated at the next round of PISA in 2006.

In responding to comments on the omission of data for England from the PISA 2003 report, it is appropriate here to set out the rules of the PISA study, to enable a better appreciation of the difficulties which the Department and its contractor faced in 2003 and to understand the measures the Department is putting in place to address participation rates in 2006.

School and pupil participation in PISA in England is on a purely voluntary basis. However, interested schools cannot volunteer themselves for participation, nor can the Department's contractor for PISA simply approach schools at random with an invitation to participate. In order to achieve a sample of schools that reflects the national picture as closely as possible, a main sample of (around 180) schools is drawn by the international PISA sampling referee from a database of all schools in England which have pupils of the relevant age. Schools in this sample are known as 'first choice' schools. Only these schools, in the first instance, can be approached by the Department's contractor and invited to participate.

By the rules of the study, each country must achieve an 85% school participation rate. However, if insufficient 'first choice' schools agree to participate, the study organisers allow countries to approach replacement schools to make up the numbers. These replacement schools are specially selected to mirror the characteristics of each of the 'first choice' schools in the main sample, so, every 'first choice' school has a 'shadow' school which is as close as possible to it in terms of size, pupil in-take, location etc. If even the shadow school refuses to participate, then there is scope to approach one further specified reserve school. Beyond that, however, countries cannot approach further schools to try to make up the numbers. In addition, if a country needs to use shadow schools, the response rate criteria become even more stringent. By the end of PISA 2003, the target school response the Department's contractor needed to aim for was 96%. To put this figure into perspective, an analysis of school surveys conducted in the UK over the past ten years reveals that only 2

out of 74 have achieved a response rate of 85% or above, and these were considerably less burdensome to administer than PISA.

PISA is by no means an insignificant undertaking for schools and the Department does not underestimate the additional workload that participation involves. Schools must provide the contractor with a sample of pupils across two year groups (Years 10 and 11), seek the co-operation of those pupils and their parents, find space within their timetables for the half a day's testing that PISA requires and complete a background questionnaire that requires some degree of reflection. Set against other competing demands on schools' time, including requests for co-operation in research projects emanating from other quarters, it is unsurprising that there is some resistance within schools to undertake a non-core activity that, on the face of it, has no direct benefit for them.

A further detraction for schools was the timing of the study. Within the rules of PISA 2003, testing had to take place within a six-week test window falling between March and July 2003. Given that after Easter, Year 11 pupils in the study would be fully engaged in GCSE examinations, this limited the possibility of testing in England to four weeks in March and the first two weeks of April. This coincides with GCSE preparation and a key reason that schools gave for declining to participate was their reluctance to disrupt their Year 11 pupils at this time. Administration of the study in schools was further complicated by having to test pupils over two year groups (Years 10 and 11) as the PISA study is an age-based rather than grade-based study. This meant disruption to a number of classrooms, especially in larger schools.

The Department take very seriously the need to ensure that sufficient numbers of schools and pupils participate in PISA 2006. In January 2005 we launched a mini-survey of countries which participated in PISA 2003, to find out about their approaches to securing an adequate response rate. We received 28 replies, a response rate of 88%. This mini-survey showed us that a significant number of participating countries either make school participation compulsory or else this is *de facto*, as schools are put in the position of not feeling able to refuse. In fact, the USA did even worse than England in terms of school-level response, but was included in the internationally comparable results because it achieved the threshold level for student response. In light of the significant effort involved at school-level in participation, we are not convinced that making participation compulsory would be appropriate.

However, we also commissioned a study in this country into the main barriers to participation and how to address them. Discussions with head teachers and the professional teaching associations and unions are also informing our strategy for tackling this problem.

The key aspects of the plan we are developing are:

- a) a carefully managed communication strategy to raise the profile and relevance of PISA amongst schools, in partnership with teacher and head teacher unions and other partners;
- b) moving the PISA tests from spring to autumn 2006 to avoid the exam season (we have successfully secured agreement for this change from the PISA Consortium). A by-product of moving the test window is that only pupils in Year 11 will need to be

sampled. The use of pupils from a single year group rather than two, as with past PISA studies, will considerably simplify the process for schools;

- c) making PISA more relevant to individual schools by offering bespoke feedback on their PISA performance, both in terms of their score and more qualitative data on areas such as pupils attitudes;
- d) recognising school and pupil participation and the additional work this involves with a monetary payment for schools to spend as they choose arranging a conference style event for PISA schools to discuss the findings;
- e) ensuring that all contact with schools is professional and unambiguous, and that the whole process is made as straightforward and un-bureaucratic as possible.

School Admissions

Recommendation 25:

Despite the Government's apparent commitment to parental choice in admissions to secondary school, we are concerned that the balance of power is slipping away from parents choosing schools for their children towards schools as admissions authorities choosing the children they wish to admit.

Parents are entitled to express a preference for whatever schools they want their children to attend and that preference must be met if there are places available. Where schools are oversubscribed there must be some mechanism for deciding which children should have priority. The Government thinks this is best decided locally, through consultation with the local authority and other local schools. Admission authorities are not allowed by law to introduce new selection, except in one limited circumstance. If those consulted think the arrangements do not support the interests of local parents and children, they can object to the Schools Adjudicator. Having more schools with responsibility for setting their own arrangements does not alter these basic requirements. Chapter 3 of *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils* makes it clear that schools should have fair admissions and decide how to offer places to a wide range of applicants.

Oversubscription criteria

Recommendation 26:

We are not convinced that simply strengthening admissions guidance will eradicate the use of unacceptable oversubscription criteria.

The Government will include in the Code of Practice a list of acceptable oversubscription criteria and this will further encourage those with concerns about unfair criteria to make their objections to the Schools Adjudicator. The Government believes that the Code is strong enough to provide guidance on good practice. As set out in the White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils*, we will be providing best practice guidance for promoters of new schools to assist them in designing admission arrangements consistent with the Code of Practice. This guidance will not replace the Code, but will offer new schools additional information and support.

Partial Selection

Recommendation 27:

Partial selection introduced or increased since 1997–98 is unlawful, not a matter for “local discussion”. The DfES need to act to ensure that the facts are available when objections to partial selection are raised. Without this action, objections cannot be properly investigated by the schools adjudicator.

The Government agrees that it would be unlawful for a school to introduce new selection of that type, or to try to increase the proportion of pupils it selects. However, the Department did not collect information when schools introduced partial selection and does not routinely collect data on schools continuing to use it. After consulting Local Authorities we are aware of 32 schools which operate pre-existing partial selection.

Responsibility for demonstrating that a school, prior to 1997, had arrangements that selected on the basis of academic ability, rests with the admission authority. The onus is on the admission authority to prove that the use of partial selection is entitled to continue, rather than on the Department to prove that it is not. If the admission authority cannot prove that the partial selection it wishes to use is allowed, then it would be illegal and should not continue.

Aptitude tests

Recommendation 28:

The Committee is disappointed that the Government has not acted to withdraw the facility for specialist schools to select a proportion of their intake. If the Government does not wish to withdraw this facility, it should publish evidence to show that pupils selected in this manner perform better than their peers in other schools and also achieve more highly than pupils in their school who were not selected by aptitude.

The Government has no plans to extend the use of aptitude selection, but does not think it should be removed from the arrangements of those schools that use it. The Government does not agree with the Committee’s underlying assumption that the only purpose of admitting pupils under this criteria is because they will perform better than their peers and achieve more highly than other pupils in the school. As Chapter 3 of *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils* indicates, the Government will continue to allow schools that wish to do so to give priority for up to 10% of their total places to pupils with particular aptitudes for some subjects. This option should be available to schools as part of their approach to developing their specialist ethos.

Structured discussions and interview

Recommendation 29:

We urge the DfES to ensure that all CTCs are brought within coordinated admissions arrangements as soon as possible.

The Department is in discussion with the CTCs about changing to Academy status, and some have already done so. Under their funding agreements, Academies are required to take part in co-ordinated admission arrangements. CTCs have been encouraged to do so, but it is not possible to require them to do so without amending their funding agreements. There would be little point in doing this while they consider changing their status.

Grammar school ballots

Recommendation 30:

The current arrangements for grammar school ballots demonstrate that the Government is not prepared to give all local parents a genuine opportunity to express an opinion on the kind of schools they want their children to attend. The present system does not work. It should therefore be withdrawn and replaced with new arrangements. The Government should consider commissioning a specialised study to determine more appropriate ballot arrangements.

The Government does not agree with the conclusion of the Committee but will give consideration to its proposal for a specialised study into the matter.

Recommendation 31:

For some time, the current Government has largely managed to sidestep the issue of selection. This strategy has helped it to avoid the political consequences of endorsing either grammar school or comprehensive education. It is of little help to parents with a genuine wish to change the admissions arrangements in their area. Whilst this issue does not currently have a high profile nationally, falling rolls mean that in selective areas, an increasing proportion of children are being selected by grammar schools, who choose a fixed number of pupils each year. This must eventually have consequences for education in selective areas, which national Government will no longer be able to ignore.

The Government does not support selective education and does not want to see it extended in terms of the number of places offered. The Government's aim is to improve standards in all schools so that all children have an equal opportunity to develop and fulfil their potential. It wants all schools to offer good quality education so that the choice parents have to make is between good schools. This applies equally to schools in selective areas.

The Government notes the views of the Committee about falling rolls in selective areas. Local authorities already have the power to publish proposals for reorganising their schools to deal with falling rolls, and these powers extend to grammar schools. Chapter 3 of *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils* makes it clear that the Government does not want to see a return to the 11 plus.

School admissions Code of Practice

Recommendation 32:

The Committee is firmly of the opinion that the School Admissions Code of Practice should be given more legal force.

The Government believes that the Code is strong enough to provide admission authorities with guidance on good practice, which needs to be flexible enough to respond to local circumstances. Admission authorities must have regard to the Code in their decision-making process. They must comply with the law and have regard to the advice of their local Admission Forum. The Government believes that this, backed by the role of the School Adjudicators, is strong enough to prevent admission authorities adopting poor practice.

Recommendation 33:

Our evidence demonstrates that the Government cannot rely on objections being brought every time admissions authorities adopt unfair oversubscription criteria. The question therefore is whether the Schools Adjudicator should have the power to investigate admissions arrangements on his or her own initiative.

The role of the Adjudicators is to resolve disputes where agreement cannot be reached locally. The Government does not believe that the Adjudicators should have the power to intervene in matters where arrangements have been agreed locally. Consideration will, however, be given to extending the powers of the Adjudicators so that when objections are referred, they are able to consider all aspects of the admission arrangements and not just the specific objection.

Appeals

Recommendation 34:

We urge the DfES to press ahead with work to monitor the cost of admissions appeals. This work would enable us to put a price on the failures of the current admissions system.

The Government agrees that there may be value in identifying the costs of the appeals process as part of ensuring that admission authorities have arrangements which reflect good practice and provide value for money.

Recommendation 35:

In oversubscribed schools, the satisfaction of one person's choice necessarily denies that of another. What is being sought is the satisfaction of parental preference. Open, clear and fair arrangements to determine the order in which parental preference will be met is the best way of achieving that aim. Our inquiry has focused on the legal, regulatory and administrative arrangements for school admissions. However, these are second to the overriding necessity to ensure that all schools are good enough. All parents want a place in a 'good school' for their child, although they apply different criteria when judging a school's value. In circumstances where a number of schools are perceived by parents to be of comparable standards, parents may prefer a particular school for reasons of ethos, specialism or location for example, but may be reasonably happy if their first preference is not met. In contrast, where schools are perceived to be of very different standing, competition for places at the better schools can be fierce. We recommend that further options for the creation of more places in 'good' schools should be explored.

The Government agrees with this recommendation. Substantial provision has been made available to enable good and popular schools to expand. The decision to make proposals to expand is for the school itself to make and we have improved the statutory process to speed up the timetable, and to reinforce further the presumption on School Organisation Committees to approve such proposals. Schools wishing to expand may also bid for capital funding of £400k (£500k for schools with sixth forms) to support this expansion.

The Government is also committed to providing capital funding more generally to improve schools. Research shows that improved buildings can lead to improved pupil performance. To support this, there is central Government support for capital investment in school buildings of £17 billion in total over the three years 2005–06 to 2007–08, including PFI credits. The Building Schools for the Future programme, introduced in 2003, aims to renew all secondary schools in England in ten to fifteen waves starting from 2005–06, subject to future public spending decisions. Over £6.5 billion has been allocated from 2005–06 to 2007–08 in the first three waves of the programme. *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils* makes it clear that parents deserve a better choice of good schools and support in making that choice.

Teacher Retention and Recruitment

Pupil behaviour: teaching in challenging schools

Recommendation 36 and 37:

Poor behaviour holds down standards, causes some parents to choose schools outside their localities and some good teachers to leave the profession. Improving pupil behaviour requires swift action in schools. We welcome the Secretary of State's public commitment to improving behaviour and we shall monitor with interest the outcomes of her new initiatives.

There is a range of disruptive behaviour. At the most extreme, the most suitable form of provision will be a Pupil Referral Unit. Pupils exhibiting lower levels of disruptive behaviour are in a different category. We are concerned that the Government has not yet put in place robust systems either to encourage or ensure collaboration between schools in this area, or to deal with the issue of poor behaviour in other ways.

The Government shares the Committee's wish to see improving behaviour in schools and since the autumn of last year has been developing and intensifying its efforts on school behaviour, building on the materials and support which have already been injected into the system. The main thrust of this has been to focus support on those schools which need it most and to provide a framework within which schools can take on greater responsibility for managing behaviour themselves, working in partnership with each other.

Since the Secretary of State told secondary head teachers on 1 February about her expectation that all secondary schools would be working together in collaboration by September 2007, work has been underway to deliver this.

A joint project was set up with the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU) to flesh out what "working together in collaboration" means and to provide assurance that the delivery challenge would be met. Working with practitioners from schools and local authorities, the

Department has developed the outcomes expected for partnerships and design principles for their set-up and operation. These have been communicated to local authorities, which were invited by Ministers to take part in “pathfinder” partnerships to start in January 2006. As of 30 September, at least 270 secondary schools will be working together in 37 partnerships across 18 local authorities from next January.

Further work is needed to convince sceptics that pooling funding, responsibility and expertise at a local level is the best way forward but the Government believes persuasion and sharing success is more likely to be effective than using a legislative framework.

The Government also established the Practitioners’ Group on School Behaviour and Discipline, under Sir Alan Steer, to provide advice on how to embed effective practice in promoting good behaviour across all schools, on whether any additional powers were needed to support head teachers in this area. The Group reported on 21 October and the Government immediately accepted a number of key recommendations and committed itself to discussing all the recommendations with its Stakeholder Group, comprising the leaders of the professional associations and other key stakeholders. The Government’s position on behaviour in schools is set out more fully in Chapter 7 of *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils*.

Recommendations 38 and 39:

The Committee has heard from a number of organisations offering training for teachers who wish to work in challenging schools. Many of these programmes are excellent, but they are still not sufficiently widely available, particularly outside London. We still consider that these various schemes should be consolidated into a central, specialised training programme.

We urge the DfES to give further thought to training structures both to assist those currently teaching in challenging schools and to encourage more teachers to consider teaching in these schools.

The Government shares the Committee’s wish to see good quality and effective training programmes that will both encourage and equip teachers to teach in challenging schools and is pursuing several ways of achieving this.

There is a large number of existing initiatives in initial teacher training (ITT), continuing professional development (CPD) and in training the wider workforce that relate directly to the needs of challenging schools. These include supporting training in Diversity and English as an Additional Language, Behaviour and Citizenship. The Training and Development Agency (TDA) is also looking at the international context, including Centre X and other models of system-wide approaches to teacher training in challenging schools, and has begun a review of the standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) that will consider whether there should be specific standards relating to schools facing challenging circumstances.

The Government agrees that there should be a sharp focus in all of the routes to QTS to meet the needs of challenging schools. It is clear that there is already some excellent practice in training to meet the needs of schools facing challenging circumstances that has been developed in the context of each of the routes. The TDA will make it a priority to

research and identify these and to codify the characteristics of effective training to work in schools in challenging environments. It will then ensure that all trainers have access to this material to support them in developing their own training in response to local circumstances. Teaching in challenging circumstances is usually seen in the context of schools where behaviour is a significant issue and where teachers are working with children and young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, but there are of course other, broader, definitions of schools in challenging circumstances which include isolated rural schools and those in areas of low educational attainment and aspirations. These, too, may require differentiated approaches to teachers' training and development.

Head teachers' advice has been that preparing to teach in challenging schools depends on the progression from ITT, through induction and into CPD. This can best be modelled by working with schools that have developed innovative practice and will act as pathfinders for the system. The TDA is currently scoping this as a project, has identified mainstream partnerships in Nottingham and Wolverhampton and will include the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) in the model. Ofsted will carry out a survey inspection of Teach First in 2006 with a specific focus on the school-based elements of the training, much of which takes place in challenging schools.

Teachers on the Fast Track scheme for early headship are expected to work in at least two contrasting schools before they leave the programme and are strongly encouraged to take a position in a challenging school. Fast Track is currently working with the London Challenge to recruit Fast Track teachers to some of London's most challenging schools.

The Committee's recommendation on offering modules within the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) is in line with current thinking. The Department is keen to ensure personalised training for head teachers to ensure they are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to face leadership challenges in various settings — including schools in serious weaknesses, academies, federations and integrated Children's Centres.

The Department has asked the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) to explore how their leadership development curriculum, which includes NPQH, may be modularised to provide a varied menu of modules, from which participants may choose, depending on individual development needs. As an initial step, the NCSL is currently modularising the Access stage of the programme—and is developing the Personalised Learning Leadership Programme (PLLP) to be piloted early next year. At the core of the PLLP programme will be the opportunity for participants to assess their needs, skills and context in relation to their schools. They will then access relevant training suited to their needs, from a varied menu of training modules.

The NCSL is also developing a model of school leadership in challenging urban environments, which identifies nine competences associated with successful school leaders who work in such settings. Although this is not only aimed at London leaders, London Challenge has funded an NCSL pilot to measure how well the competences can be applied in selecting and developing school leaders who might be aspiring head teachers or already in post.

London Challenge works closely with a group of secondary schools facing the greatest challenges in breaking the link between social deprivation and low educational attainment. Support for these schools is tailored to their particular needs and is directed by an experienced education adviser appointed to work with the school. Support takes many forms, including support for leadership. London Challenge also funds NCSL, working with the Institute of Education, the Specialist Schools Trust, Centre for British Teachers and the Hay Group, to provide additional leadership support and development for leaders of London schools at all levels. These activities are being pursued to respond to the particular challenges of London, but they may in many cases be translatable to other urban settings—in the same way that Teach First began in London but is being extended to other cities.

Recommendation 40:

We consider that financial incentives should be in place to attract good teachers to work in challenging schools and to reward them for their work.

The Government agrees that teachers working in challenging circumstances and making an important contribution towards pupil achievement should be suitably rewarded; this was reflected in the pay reforms set out in our *Five Year Strategy*, and in Chapter 8 of *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils*. This proposes that the greatest rewards should go to those teachers contributing most; with the performance management arrangements providing the evidence to assess the contributions individuals have made to teaching and learning and to take into account the context in which those contributions were made.

The current provisions of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document do already make available to employers a number of flexibilities designed to achieve this; the existing recruitment and retention incentives and benefits arrangements give schools and local authorities complete flexibility to award payments and other benefits to attract and retain teachers, the conditions for which may be set at either school or LA level.

Further, in March 2005, the Secretary of State invited the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) to make recommendations about the extent to which particular factors should be taken into account in determining career and pay progression; for example, prior successful experience in challenging classroom roles and in challenging schools.

In joint evidence submitted to the STRB in May 2005, the Rewards and Incentives Group (RIG)² has recommended that there should be scope for teachers who make a significant contribution to teaching and learning in a more challenging context to progress more quickly than the standard provisions allow. In RIG's view, the current provisions already provide the basis for accelerated pay progression and for head teachers and governing bodies to reward significant contributions to school improvement in more challenging contexts. For example, this could be where a contribution has enabled a school to tackle effectively significant concerns about under-achievement or enabled it to make significant improvements in pupil attainment or behaviour.

2 RIG was established in January 2004 to build on the successes of workforce reform that have been achieved through social partnership. Its membership is the same as for the Workforce Agreement and its role is to agree changes to the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document and other guidance, to monitor the impact of changes to the pay system, take forward the New Professionalism agenda and to simplify the pay documentation wherever possible.

Remodelling the workforce: falling rolls and an ageing profession

Recommendation 41:

We welcome the Government's commitment to developing alternative routes into teaching. This will be particularly important over the coming years as more experienced teachers retire from the profession. We note the success of projects such as Teach First and the Graduate Teacher Programme, but we also take this opportunity to reiterate our recommendation that the quality of training in these programmes should be closely monitored to ensure that trainees have access to a range of school experiences.

The Government shares the Committee's determination that the quality of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) should remain high, whether it is by traditional routes or via alternative provision; a programme of monitoring and evaluation is already in hand.

Ofsted are currently in the second year of the full inspection of all GTP provision as a precursor to the full accreditation of the existing Designated Recommending Bodies (DRBs).³ Of the 46 DRBs inspected in 2003-04, 36 were either recommended for accreditation or recommended after specific recommendations were met. The TDA operates a support programme to enable GTP providers to understand the characteristics of good ITT and how best to achieve this in a wholly school-based context. The support programme has been based on evidence gathered through analysis of the Newly Qualified Teacher survey and through piloting different approaches.

The Government particularly welcomes the Committee's endorsement of the Teach First programme, to which the Government is committed. It has announced plans to extend this programme to Manchester next year and to four further cities in 2007-08.

The first cohort of Teach First trainees who began their programme in July 2003 have now completed their final term in schools. The TDA met with Ofsted in May 2005 to agree the protocols for the inspection of Teach First provision in the context of the broader memorandum of agreement between Ofsted and the TDA. The agreed approach will begin with the premise that there is no reason to doubt the quality of the centre-based training programme delivered by Canterbury Christ Church University College, an established high quality provider of ITT.

The survey inspection will begin in July 2006 and will set out to answer the question: 'What value does Teach First add to our existing range of ITT provision?' The Ofsted survey will focus on the specific preparation of Teach First trainees to teach in schools facing challenging circumstances. It will address the quality of mentoring in school contexts that may be more difficult for beginner teachers than is usual. It will also look into issues of recruitment to ascertain the extent to which the scheme is attracting people into the profession who might not have otherwise considered teaching. It will be able to offer conclusions about retention in the profession of this group of graduates who have not committed themselves to teaching beyond the two years of the programme. The outcomes

³ Designated Recommending Bodies (DRBs) are responsible for recruiting candidates and assessing and approving applications for places on the Graduate Teacher programme, Registered Teacher Programme and the Overseas Trained Teacher Programme. The TDA gives the DRBs an annual allocation of places and they are responsible for designing and delivering the training programmes. Most are partnerships of bodies such as schools, local authorities and accredited ITT providers.

of this survey will inform future planning for Teach First in London, as well as the roll-out to other cities starting in Manchester in 2006.

Recommendation 42:

The Government’s strategy for raising achievement in secondary education will require significant teaching resources in order to be effective. It is still not clear to us where these resources will come from. We therefore consider that any increase in capacity that may arise from falling rolls should be exploited to its potential to improve attainment. This could be achieved by greater personalisation of the curriculum and more individual attention.

The radical reform programme set out in the White Paper: *14–19 Education and Skills* will be implemented over the next decade to engage and motivate more young people to achieve, to meet individual needs and to raise participation to 90% at age 17. Nationally, the numbers of 14–19-year-olds are still rising, but will fall from 2008, and by 2012 will be below current levels. There are considerable regional variations—numbers in the North-East are already falling, whereas those in the South-West will not fall back to mid-2003 levels until 2015. However, if the Government succeeds in its aim of raising participation beyond age 16 to the levels targeted, this will broadly balance out the overall falls in the population aged 14–19.

The Government does intend that surplus teaching capacity will be used to contribute towards personalisation in secondary schools to support 14–19-year-olds and younger children. Some examples of how this capacity will help with personalisation and will include teachers:

- acting as academic mentors/tutors to provide extra one-to-one tuition or small group support to low attaining, minority ethnic, extremely able and SEN pupils;
- supporting the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school by developing and promoting new approaches to managing pupils’ learning and welfare e.g. liaising with the primary schools to share data/information, assisting with planning an appropriate curriculum and reducing the number of teacher contacts for pupils in Year 7;
- enriching the curriculum by offering clubs and wider opportunities beyond the classroom; and
- liaising with parents to ensure they are engaged with their child's education.

Beyond the headroom created by falling rolls, teachers will also have more time to spend on personalisation because of recent workforce reforms. From September 2005, the Government is freeing up teaching capacity by ensuring that teachers do not spend their valuable time invigilating external exams—an activity that does not allow for any teaching activity and which does not need to be done by teachers. Time previously spent on invigilation will now be able to be put to much better use. In addition, since September 2004, there have been set limits on the amount of cover that teachers can be asked to provide and, from September 2005, all teachers have guaranteed time, within the normal school day specifically for planning, preparation and assessment. These reforms will give

teachers the time to ensure that their lessons are tailored to the needs of every individual child.

It is vital not to underestimate the importance of the role support staff can play in secondary schools, for example by working to support individual pupils or small groups. The number of support staff in secondary schools has increased dramatically over recent years—the biggest rise being in the number of teaching assistants from 7,820 in 1997 to 29,980 in 2005.

The Government has also responded to the need to support maths and science teaching in secondary schools by initiating an innovative and ambitious programme to enable every secondary school in England to recruit at least one maths and science specialist Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA). The TDA is currently piloting the training and development of these specialist support staff and we expect a full national roll-out of recruitment and training to begin in September 2006.

The Government's *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*

Admissions

Recommendations 43 and 44:

The proposal for all schools to become foundation schools, and hence their own admissions authorities, potentially brings into being up to 3,000 new admissions authorities who can set their own admissions criteria. It is difficult to see how this large increase in the number of admissions authorities will make the admissions process smoother and clearer for parents. On the contrary, it is likely to make co-ordination between the different authorities more difficult and add to the complexities parents already face in negotiating the admissions system.

We fear that an admissions “free-for-all” is indeed a risk in a system where all schools can become foundation schools through a single meeting of their governing body. The risk is even greater if the Government does not take our advice, expressed above, on strengthening the Schools Admissions Code of Practice and granting the Schools Adjudicator investigative powers. Without these changes, the Government can have no assurance that the collaboration and co-operation it hopes for will be realised and a system of fair admissions will remain an aspiration rather than a reality.

The Government does not accept that the creation of new foundation schools will create additional problems for parents in understanding and negotiating the admissions system, or lead to an admissions free-for-all. While the governing bodies of foundation schools may set their own admission arrangements, they are covered by the same requirements as other maintained schools. Foundation schools are also required to work with their local authorities to coordinate admissions in the normal admissions round.

Regulations were introduced on 1 August 2005 to make it easier for community and voluntary controlled secondary schools to change category to foundation. The Department is currently considering the responses to its recent consultation on proposals to extend the streamlined route to primary schools.

Partnership

Recommendation 45:

The idea of schools working together to share expertise and hard to teach pupils is attractive, but we consider that the Secretary of State may be underestimating the challenges involved in realising this vision.

The recognition that collaboration is a crucial element to the successful delivery of improved outcomes for young people is not new. There is a long history of schools and other partners working together effectively to improve the delivery of services and raise educational standards within communities.

The Government does, however, appreciate the work involved in setting up and establishing effective partnerships which is why it is learning from and building on effective, successful partnership working that is already in existence, for example: Excellence in Cities, Leadership Incentive Grant and Federation partnerships. The Education Improvement Partnership website⁴ contains examples of partnership working, model protocols and agreements between schools and other institutions that schools looking to work together can adapt to meet their own requirements.

Schools involved in collaboration are convinced of the value of partnership working and the contribution that it makes to achieving higher attainment. The MORI Teachers' Omnibus research study conducted for the Innovation Unit reports that over 70% of teachers surveyed agreed that collaboration with other schools leads to improvement in children's learning.

The ultimate outcome should be effective, strong, self-confident schools, rigorously reviewing their own performance and choosing to work together where that will improve pupil experience. The benefits of successful collaboration include: extending the offer to young people beyond what is available within the school; sharing the benefits of the best heads, teachers and professionals; building a shared commitment for all young people in the community; and the scope for efficiency gains.

Recommendation 46:

The Government needs to decide whether Foundation Partnerships are a preferred route or are generally optional.

Collaboration is most effective between partners who want to be engaged, rather than those who are forced to participate. Education Improvement Partnerships (the new name for Foundation Partnerships) are not intended to replace or marginalise existing partnerships. Instead, they offer a way to streamline and build upon these arrangements within the context of a New Relationship with Schools. There will be greater freedom to fashion what works locally rather than a requirement to collaborate on a range of separately defined models of national partnership.

4 www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/si/educationimprovementpartnerships.

Recommendation 47:

In a system where all secondary schools are independent foundation schools, it is difficult to see how oversubscribed schools will be made to admit children mid-year, particularly when they can point to the fact that they are already ‘full’.

If all schools within a reasonable distance of a child’s home address are full, the Local Authority may direct admission to any foundation or voluntary aided school using section 96 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. Schools which are directed have the right of appeal to the Secretary of State, who may confirm the direction or name another school to admit the child.

Recommendation 48:

The *Five Year Strategy* does not explain whether Foundation Partnerships, or other collegiate systems, will publish aggregated examination results or whether funding or re-designation of partnerships will be dependent on proven results in all schools within the partnership. Without these mechanisms, it will be all too easy for ineffective partnerships to be formed or for schools to be partners in name only.

Collaboration should be employed to deliver particular functions where joint action gets a better result than acting as individual institutions. Each institution needs to be clear what the partnership dividend is for them and the partnership needs to be clear that there is a positive impact on standards. Work is ongoing on a range of reporting/monitoring methods:

- Through the performance tables, the commitment made to formal reporting in performance tables of results by individual schools within a federation.
- Further work on reporting measures which partnerships could use to assess their effectiveness at narrowing the attainment gap between schools and particular groups of pupils.
- The EIC model of partnership self and peer review in and between partnerships: we plan to work further on this model to develop a toolkit for any partnership to use to assess collaborative delivery of any function.

The Government envisages that local authorities will delegate both functions and funding to EIPs, who will take responsibility for a range of functions, and be collectively accountable for delivery. Where this happens, the Government is recommending that all members of the partnership agree a service level agreement (SLA) which could set out target outcomes and performance measures—exactly how this is done will be a local decision. Outcomes and performance measures will be set out in the SLA, as will accountability structures.

Local Authorities

Recommendations 49 and 50

We welcome the proposal for guaranteed three year budgets for all schools. This Committee and many others have long called for the schools' funding mechanism to be reformed in this way. It will offer more stability and predictability for schools and allow them to plan their spending more efficiently.

We would appreciate some guidance from the Government on how local authorities will be able to act as strategic leaders when all schools are independent and receive guaranteed budgets that cannot be varied. In these circumstances, what levers will be available to local authorities to persuade schools to act differently?

The Government is pleased that the Committee recognises the benefits of multi-year budgets, and that it welcomes the stability and predictability they will bring, leading to more efficient use of resources in support of school improvement. The introduction of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is an essential precursor to the introduction of multi-year budgets because it will ensure that funding intended for schools reaches schools.

These developments do not, however, mean that local authorities will no longer have discretion over how their schools are funded. On the contrary, local authorities will have a key role to play in the new system: they will continue to be responsible for allocating funding between their schools, consulting their Schools Forums, as they do now. In addition, the new arrangements will see a number of decisions that are currently taken by the Secretary of State left to local discretion, to be decided by local authorities and their Schools Forums. Local authorities will also be free to top up the DSG from their own resources, should they choose to do so. So the new funding arrangements will not result in any lessening of local authorities' ability to act as strategic leaders of their education and children services' functions.

The new multi-year budgets will not be fixed after they have first been set, as the Committee has suggested. Budgets for future years will be updated as pupil numbers change; it will be for local discretion whether other data that determines school budgets should be updated too. We recognise that there is an important balance to be struck between stability and predictability on the one hand and responsiveness to changing circumstances on the other; the new arrangements are designed to enable local authorities to strike the appropriate balance in the light of local circumstances and in consultation with their Schools Forum.

Recommendation 51:

The Government should clarify whether local authorities are to be held accountable to the DfES or to those who elected them for the effective execution of their re-shaped 'strategic' functions.

The *Five Year Strategy* does not signal a change in the relative accountabilities of central and local government. Local authorities, through their elected members, will continue to be accountable for the services they commission or provide to the communities they serve.

The active involvement of citizens in decision-making, and of partner organisations in their areas, is an essential component.

Central Government Departments are accountable to Ministers, Parliament and the public for the implementation of policy. There will always be a balance to strike between ensuring consistent and high standards and local autonomy. In some key service areas there will be a need for a national framework of centrally driven policies, funding and regulation within which local government is responsible for improving outcomes for local people. But, equally, Ministers have made clear their support for the concept of “new localism”—not, of course, abdicating responsibility as national Government, but acting with a presumption of devolution of decision-making to the front line.

Chapter 9 of *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils* elaborates further on the new role for local authorities as commissioners of children’s services, including schools, in line with the position established in *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*. Local authorities will act as champions for children and for their parents, building services around their needs and delivering these services through a range of providers. The White Paper also gives local authorities a stronger role in tackling school underperformance and failure, with powers to act more swiftly and decisively.

The Department for Education and Skills

Recommendation 52:

We do not consider it desirable for the DfES to ‘micro-manage’ schools across the country. The duty of Local Education Authorities has been to manage the school system. Yet the new structure of independent foundation schools, free of Local Authority control and with guaranteed budgets set centrally, would appear to result in all schools ultimately reporting directly to the DfES.

The Government is not proposing to set school budgets centrally. It is proposing to introduce a ring-fenced grant, the Dedicated Schools Grant, to ensure that authorities cannot divert money intended for schools to other services—and it is also requiring local authorities to give schools their budgets for up to three years ahead. Neither of those proposals will lead to greater involvement by the Department in setting school budgets: local authorities will remain responsible for the distribution of funding between their schools according to local formulae.

Recommendation 53:

When implementing the *Five Year Strategy*, we recommend that the Government closely monitors the effects on standards of its changes to the distribution of responsibilities between local and central government.

The Government takes very seriously the need to monitor the effects on standards of the changes to the role of local authorities. There will always be a balance to strike between ensuring consistent and high standards and local autonomy. In some key service areas there will be a need for a national framework of centrally driven policies, funding and regulation within which local government is responsible for improving outcomes for local people. But, equally, Ministers have made clear their support for the concept of “new

localism”—not, of course, abdicating responsibility as national Government, but acting with a presumption of devolution of decision-making to the front line.

The White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils* sets out a better-defined role for local authorities as commissioners of children’s services, including schools, in line with the position established in *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*, acting as a champion for children and for their parents, building services around their needs and delivering these services through a range of providers. The White Paper also gives local authorities a stronger role in tackling school underperformance and failure, with powers to act more swiftly and decisively.

14–19 Education

Recommendation 54:

Evidence suggests that small sixth forms do not perform as well as larger institutions. We therefore recommend that the Government makes clear that proposals for new school sixth forms need to achieve a reasonable standard in terms of both quality and range of subject provision in order to have any chance of success. We are also seriously concerned that the Government should consider the effect on staffing if large numbers of new sixth forms are created, particularly in shortage subjects.

The Government is clear that new sixth form provision should be of the highest standard and should add to quality, choice and diversity of provision in their area. That is why the criteria for the new sixth form “presumption” and capital funding for new sixth form accommodation give priority to those that are making a significant contribution to the delivery of the new 14–19 curriculum and qualifications opportunities, in line with Chapter 2 of the *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils*.

It is unlikely that many school sixth forms will alone have the capacity to deliver the broad academic and vocational curriculum that will comprise the 14–19 entitlement. This, and the exercise of informed learner choice, will mean that institutions will need to deliver collaboratively, with each building on its strengths and delivering its expertise, including in shortage subjects, to its own and others’ registered learners. This should give all learners access to the highest quality provision in their chosen learning programmes and support reasonable class sizes for shortage subjects. It will also mean that provider success will be more related to how well its provision meets consumer demand—for subjects and quality—than the breadth of individual institutions’ offers.

Recommendation 55:

The funding gap between FE colleges and school sixth forms is hard to justify. We welcome the former Secretary of State’s commitment to moving towards a more unified framework for 14–19 education and we expect that this principle will be incorporated into the funding mechanisms now proposed.

The Government acknowledges that, despite the significant investment in FE and a narrowing of the difference between funding rates, there remains a funding gap between

school sixth forms and colleges. We have been clear that continuing progress on narrowing the gap will not be easy and will depend on the resources available. However, as signalled in the Minister of State for Schools and 14–19 Learning’s statement to the House of Commons on 21 July this year, we intend to explore the scope for addressing the technical anomalies between the school sixth form and further education funding systems. The Government aims to announce decisions on the way forward shortly.

School expansion

Recommendation 56:

The Government does not fully explain how “fast-track” expansion will circumvent the lengthy local planning process, or how long the process might take if an appeal is lodged. It needs to provide more information on this proposal.

The Government consulted on detailed proposals for the expansion of successful and popular schools last autumn. The consultation document set out a fast-track timetable for the publication and consideration of proposals. According to this timetable, the entire process would take less than twelve weeks (excluding the time required for consultation before the publication of proposals). If a school appealed against a decision by a SOC to reject its proposals, the proposals would pass to the Adjudicator to consider. The Adjudicator aims to decide proposals within six weeks of receiving the proposals and associated information from the SOC.

Recommendation 57:

We would be extremely interested to see evidence of existing successful examples of school expansion to justify the implementation of this proposal.

There are many examples of schools expanding which pre-date the recent measures by the Government to make the process easier. Since the introduction of local decision-making in 1999, proposals have been approved for over 120 secondary schools to expand.

Recommendation 58:

There is a danger that the proposal to allow popular schools to expand will lead to popularity being seen as the sole measure of quality. In the Government’s expressed view, a school which is over-subscribed must necessarily be a good school worthy of expansion.

The Department’s guidance to decision-makers makes clear that they should take into account a range of indicators when deciding whether to approve proposals by schools to expand. The guidance states that these indicators should include:

- (a) the school’s performance
 - in terms of absolute results in Key Stage assessments and public examinations
 - by comparison with other schools in similar circumstances (both in the same LA and other LAs)

- in terms of value added
 - in terms of improvement over time in Key Stage results and public examinations; and
- (b) the numbers of applications for places; and
- (c) other relevant evidence put forward by the school.

The Five Year Strategy: a new direction?

Recommendation 59:

We find it difficult to detect a coherent overarching strategy in the Government's proposals. The evidence provided to show that the large sums of money to be spent on the new arrangements will produce significant educational benefits is minimal. Whilst the Strategy offers some welcome changes, it also contains much that has not been properly thought through.

The *Five Year Strategy* makes clear the Government's purpose is to raise the quality of education, teaching and learning, to widen the range of choices which are available to every pupil and to ensure that every parent can choose an excellent secondary school for their child. It will build on achievements so far to:

- increase freedom and independence for schools;
- accelerate the pace of reform in teaching and learning, and
- extend choice and flexibility in the curriculum, particularly at 14–19

Underpinning each of these is sustained and rising investment in schools.

The *Five Year Strategy* also sets out the Government's continued commitment to the development of independent specialist schools in place of the traditional comprehensive—a decisive system-wide advance that is developed further in *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils*.