

Opportunity Agenda

Policy Green Paper No. 1

Raising the bar, closing the gap

An action plan for schools to raise standards, create more good school places and make opportunity more equal



Giving people more
opportunity and power
over their lives

Making families
stronger and society
more responsible

Making Britain
safer and
greener



Conservatives
It's time for change

Opportunity Agenda:

Giving people more opportunity
and power over their lives

Contents

Foreword by David Cameron.....	page 1
The new world of freedom.....	pages 2–3
Old politics isn't working.....	pages 4–5
Change required: public policy in the post-bureaucratic age.....	pages 6–7
Our Opportunity Agenda	page 8

Our school reform plan: summary.....	page 9
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Our school reform plan in detail

Overview.....	pages 10–16
Immediate action driving urgent improvement: summary.....	page 17
The supply-side revolution: summary.....	page 18
A revolution in opportunity for the next generation.....	page 19

1. Immediate action driving urgent improvement

1.1 Tackling discipline, preventing failure.....	pages 20–27
1.2 Learning to read, reading to learn.....	pages 28–30
1.3 Comprehensively Excellent.....	pages 31–32
1.4 Set for success.....	pages 32–33
1.5 Restoring accountability.....	pages 33–35

2. The supply-side revolution

2.1 More good schools.....	pages 36–40
2.2 Pupil Premium.....	pages 41–42
2.3 Responsible operation of New Academies.....	pages 43–44
2.4 Smaller schools.....	pages 44–45
2.5 Dismantling the barriers.....	pages 45–48



At our Party Conference in Blackpool we set out our vision of the Britain we want to see: a country where people have more opportunity and power over their lives; where families are stronger and society is more responsible; a Britain which is safer and greener.

In the months ahead, we will start to set out in detail the policies that will make a reality of this vision. Building on the work of our Policy Review and led by our shadow ministerial teams, a series of Policy Green Papers will show how the next Conservative Government will lead the long-term change Britain needs.

Our Policy Green Papers will focus on the key areas where we believe radical reform is required. As part of our **Responsibility Agenda** we will publish plans for welfare reform and strengthening families. Our **Security Agenda** will include plans for prison reform and tackling climate change. Today, we publish the first Policy Green Paper in our **Opportunity Agenda**: an action plan for making opportunity more equal in our country by raising school standards and increasing the number of good school places.

Michael Gove and his team have developed a bold strategy for school reform that stands in stark contrast to the top-down centralisation and endless short-term tricks that characterise Labour's efforts and explain their failure. After all the promises Labour have made and all the money they've spent, Britain today is a country where it is harder, not easier, for children to achieve their potential. During Labour's ten years in office, social mobility has stalled and we have fallen down the international league tables for educational achievement. That is both socially unjust and economically inefficient – an unforgivable betrayal of our children's future.

This document explains how we will do better, and how our plans for school reform are part of our broader agenda for giving people more opportunity and power over their lives, so that everyone has the chance to make the most of the extraordinary possibilities of the twenty-first century.

20th November 2007

The new world of freedom

Rising aspirations

We live in a new world of freedom, where the opportunities to make something of your life, to fulfil your ambitions and to provide a better future for your family are greater than ever. Fifty years ago, who would have thought that up to half our young people would be entering higher education, when only three per cent went to university? ¹

Today's world is one where people demand more power and control over their own lives. A world where people's horizons are broader and their ambitions are greater. And a world where people expect to make more and more decisions for themselves. This is a world in which aspirations are rising fast.

The possibility of more control

In every aspect of our lives where the state is not involved, these rising aspirations are matched by increasing choice and power. We are no longer bound by the traditional constraints of place, class and institution.

It is now possible to control so many aspects of our lives: from the essential to the everyday – from financial services that are tailored to our needs to trainers that are customised to our tastes. We can be our own music producer, publisher, or travel agent.

The democratisation of information – primarily through technology – has revolutionised the way we act and interact. Individuals have direct control over what they want to know and when they know it. Information technology means that we can access our bank accounts online twenty-four hours a day; more and more media content is user-driven, and specialist interests can be pursued at the click of a button.

1. HERO, www.hero.ac.uk/uk/inside_he/archives/2001/roll_up_for_enrolment723.cfm <http://www.hero.ac.uk/uk/inside_he/archives/2001/roll_up_for_enrolment723.cfm>



The post-bureaucratic age

Yet the way we are governed is stuck in the past, in a bureaucratic age where power is held by a distant and technocratic elite. This view of government is based on an old-fashioned idea that wise men in Whitehall have a monopoly of information and capability, and an old-fashioned culture of conformity and knowing your place. It views citizens as supplicants, dependent on the state to determine the shape of their lives. And it shuts out the least advantaged in our society from participating in the opportunities available to others.

But it is no longer true that the state has all the information and all the capability. Technology has put the facts, and the power to use them, at the disposal of everyone. We are entering a new era of personal responsibility, choice and local control. People power replacing state power. Democracy replacing bureaucracy. This is the post-bureaucratic age.

Our approach

Conservatives have always believed that if you trust people, they will tend to do the right thing. That if you give people more responsibility, they will behave more responsibly. That if you give people more power and control over their lives, they will make better decisions than those the state would make on their behalf.

This does not mean *no* role for the state. Whilst we must be aware of the limitations of government, we should never be limited in our aspirations for government: to protect our security; to guarantee the provision of high quality, efficient public services, and to work tirelessly for social justice and a responsible society.

But politicians should stop pretending they can fix every problem, and start trusting people, families, businesses, communities and all the myriad institutions of civil society more. We believe in social responsibility, not state control. That there is such a thing as society, it's just not the same thing as the state. This is the right approach for the post-bureaucratic age, and the right way to help people meet their aspirations in the new world of freedom.

Old politics isn't working

Labour are stuck in the past

Under Gordon Brown, the Labour Government is moving even further towards “we know best” top-down centralisation. This is hardly surprising, since Gordon Brown is himself the architect of the target culture that symbolises and underpins Labour’s system of state control. Gordon Brown places his faith in the state, believing that it should take upon itself ever greater responsibility and moral authority. According to this outdated ideology, it is the state and its multiplicity of agencies and quangos that will make us better, wiser and happier citizens.

The balance of power has shifted toward the state

As a result, Britain today is one of the most centralised countries in the democratic world. Within our public services, the government exerts an all-encompassing top-down control of what happens – in our schools, hospitals, and public spaces. Over the past ten years individuals have been progressively stripped of their autonomy. We have little say over decisions that affect our lives – from how our money is spent, to what schools our children go to, or whether our local playground becomes a site for executive flats.

Apathy and disengagement

There is a direct connection between Labour’s approach to politics and the high levels of apathy and disengagement we are seeing in Britain today. When power is a one-way street, when people are not trusted to run their own lives or their own communities, it is hardly surprising that they lose interest. Why trust government if it doesn’t trust you? Why bother getting involved if your involvement makes no difference? People wonder what their money has been spent on when they open their council tax bill; why their grandmother has had her nursing home closed down after living there for ten years; how to get their child into the only good school in town. Top-down state control saps us of our instinct to make the best of ourselves: we are left feeling powerless in the face of declining standards and failing public services.



The dependency machine

Labour's prescriptive tendencies and micro-management limit people's power and potential. Their approach to Government suppresses individual and collective endeavour and prevents people from taking advantage of the possibilities of the new world of freedom.

Too many parents have had their power to choose a better education for their children blocked. As a result, hundreds of thousands of young people leave school without the skills they need to succeed, languishing on benefits instead of forging a future for themselves. People are being denied the opportunity to get on the housing ladder, so they can provide a stable future for their families. We have too little say about how our communities are run and how they look.

The perverse effect of this approach is that it fails precisely on the one measure on which Labour placed such emphasis: fairness. Socially mobility is lower today than ten years ago. There are fewer first-time buyers than at any time since 1981. Your chances of starting a business if you come from a disadvantaged background are falling, not rising.² Society is becoming more unequal and more polarised.

Government needs to catch up

All this flies in the face of the expectations of the new post-bureaucratic age. No wonder people are losing their faith in the positive power of government. Government, politics and public services need to catch up with the new world. Labour's uninspiring old politics, with its obsessive reliance on state control, is not working.

Our vision is to lead Britain into an entirely new era in public policy, where the role of government is to be an engine of independence. It is a liberal Conservative vision of government helping people to be all they can be, to shape their own destiny, and where the message is clear: you can get it if you really want it.

2. The number of VAT registrations per 10,000 people has fallen since 2003 in the 20% most deprived areas: <http://stats.berr.gov.uk/ed/vat/20002005MostDeprivedAreas.xls>

Change required: public policy in the post-bureaucratic age

Real empowerment is already working

We need fundamental change in the way we are governed. Not fake empowerment through citizens' juries, but real empowerment through the transfer of power and control from the state to citizen. Our ambition is a transformation in public policy to return power to the people.

The post-bureaucratic age and the politics of social responsibility are far more than neat political theories. They are new ways of looking at people's daily experience of the state and of public services, and how responsibility should be divided between government and citizens. They call for new mechanisms and structures in our civic life: ones that recognise the natural networks and associations that are forming in our communities.

This new attitude is in evidence all over the world, with people coming together in collective and voluntary activity, displaying a sense of pride and ownership in their communities and in their own lives. The mechanisms needed to deliver it must be open, dynamic and flexible, responding to the particular and vibrant nature of modern life – global in outlook and yet local in experience. We have access to the whole world through transport and communications, yet we remain vitally fixed in our local communities, through our schools, hospitals and community services.

Within this context, devolving power from the state to citizen is not only more feasible than ever, it becomes a logical evolution in the democratic process. This is not some impossible dream. It is already happening in many parts of the world, leading to better outcomes, more responsibility and a better quality of life.

Empowerment through shared information

Democratising access to information is shifting power back to the individual. For example, crime mapping in the USA combines daily records of every crime committed in a neighbourhood with Google Maps, helping people to hold their local police force to account, to get money spent where it is needed, and even to inform their choices about where to live.



Similarly, the US administration is giving its citizens the power to become auditors of their own government. The Federal Funding Transparency and Accountability Act will mean that taxpayers can track every dollar spent on their behalf, and hence press for efficiency and value for money from their elected representatives.

In this way, freedom of information previously controlled by the state alone is giving people the opportunity and power to influence local decision making, and to take a more active role in the responsible expenditure of their taxes.

Empowerment through choice

Opening up access to information is one mechanism to shift power to the people. Another is introducing choice and flexibility through decentralisation.

Fifteen years ago, the Swedish government introduced choice into the national school system, with great success. Money follows the pupil so that parents can send their child to any school of their choosing. And in the Netherlands, a quorum of parents can set up a new school to meet local needs if they are dissatisfied with what is currently on offer. As a result, educational standards in these countries are among the highest in the world.

Our Opportunity Agenda

These are just glimpses of the potential for transforming the way we are governed, bringing it into line with the values and possibilities of the post-bureaucratic age. The modern Conservative **Opportunity Agenda** is designed to apply this approach to seven key areas of public policy where we believe change – and radical reform – is required.

Our Opportunity Agenda

We will embark on an ambitious programme of reform, shifting power from the state to individuals and civic institutions in order to open up the new world of freedom to everyone.

- 1. Schools.** Raising the bar, closing the gap. An action plan for schools to raise standards, create more good school places and make opportunity more equal.
- 2. Skills.** We will remove the bureaucracy that is suffocating our colleges, put students and employers in the driving seat so training matches the needs of the market, and introduce real apprenticeships with true, on-the-job-training.
- 3. Housing.** We will help as many people as possible realise their aspiration to home ownership and encourage greater mobility upwards from social housing – with measures including the abolition of Stamp Duty for nine out of ten first-time buyers, the abolition of Inheritance Tax for all but millionaires, and the expansion of Community Land Trusts and shared equity schemes.
- 4. Localisation.** We will introduce a radical programme of decentralisation and deregulation to give communities more say over how they are run, including the removal of central controls over local government, Mayors for our great cities, local referenda on excessive Council Tax rises, and the abolition of costly and unaccountable regional assemblies.
- 5. Enterprise.** To succeed in an increasingly competitive world, Britain's businesses need to be lightly regulated so they can set up and operate easily and efficiently. We will reduce business tax rates by simplifying business taxes, fight Labour's Capital Gains Tax rise, and introduce regulatory budgets for all government departments.
- 6. Pensions.** Labour have undermined our pensions system, trapping millions of pensioners on means-tested benefits. We will raise the basic state pension and work to create new forms of private pension, re-establishing trust and the habit of saving.
- 7. Disability.** Too often disabled people are forced to put up with care that suits neither their needs nor preferences. We will simplify access to benefits and move towards a system where disabled people can make their own choices about how the money is spent.

Our school reform plan: summary

1. Immediate action driving urgent improvement

Improve discipline and behaviour in schools, shifting the balance of power in the classroom back in favour of the teacher.

Get every child who is capable of doing so reading by the age of six, so that every minute in the classroom thereafter is productive.

Reform the testing regime in primary schools to reduce bureaucracy and focus on every pupil's real needs.

Deliver more teaching by ability which stretches the strongest and nurtures the weakest.

Reform the schools inspection procedure to ensure there is tougher, more effective and more searching scrutiny of under-performance.

Champion excellence in the comprehensive sector by evangelising for the best professional practice in the state system, and more generously rewarding those who deliver for the poorest.

2. The supply-side revolution

Provide over 220,000 new school places. That would meet the demand from every parent who lost their appeal for their first choice school in our most deprived boroughs.

Allow educational charities, philanthropists, livery companies, existing school federations, not for profit trusts, co operatives and groups of parents to set up new schools in the state sector and access equivalent public funding to existing state schools.

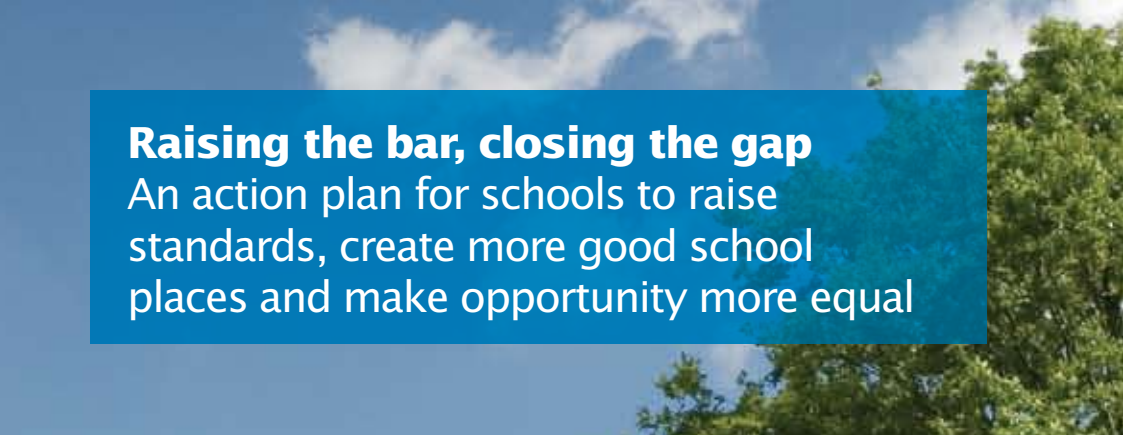
Ensure funding for deprivation goes direct to the pupils most in need rather than being diverted by bureaucracies.

Divert more resources to pupils who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring they get the earliest possible opportunity to choose the best schools and enjoy the best teaching.

Make it easier to establish the extended schooling (from summer schools through Saturday schooling to homework clubs and breakfast clubs) which drives up achievement, especially among the poorest.

Remove those obstacles in terms of centralised bureaucracy, local authority restrictions and planning rules - which prevent new schools being established.

Allow smaller schools and more intimate learning environments to be established to respond to parental demands.



Raising the bar, closing the gap

An action plan for schools to raise standards, create more good school places and make opportunity more equal

Conservative education policy is driven by a moral imperative – the need to make the most of every individual talent. We believe in raising the bar for achievement in Britain, helping every child to acquire a more comprehensive array of skills and providing them with the knowledge to become authors of their own life stories.

We believe that ensuring every child has an excellent education is the principal role the state can play in making opportunity more equal. We plan to raise the standards of the worst-performing schools so they can catch up with the best. We will reverse the trend in Britain's schools which has those from disadvantaged backgrounds falling further and further behind with each year that passes. We will ensure those whom the state has failed most badly are given fresh hope by making our state education system excellent for all. And we will ensure that coasting schools face searching new scrutiny to guarantee improved standards for everyone.

Our education reform plan, outlined in these pages, is driven by our commitment to social justice – a society made more equal by dispersing opportunity both more widely, and more fairly. We believe that education is the most powerful means by which individuals can be given the opportunity to shape their own futures. And we think there is a moral duty to secure change as quickly as possible before the gap between the fortunate and the forgotten grows wider.

A vision of education driven by a passion for social justice will make the defeat of ignorance its central mission. We believe that each new generation has a right to be introduced to the best our civilisation has produced, to encounter the best which has been thought and written, to be given equal access to the knowledge which liberates. We reject the principle that academic excellence should be rationed to a few and embrace the challenge of spreading knowledge more widely than ever before.



A rounded education

Any country's education policy will be framed by the context of that nation's history and it is vital that every generation is given the chance to take pride in our country's past. So we will, shortly, publish plans to give the narrative of British history a more compelling and more central role in the life of our schools.

Any system of schooling should always try to put adventure into learning and it is vital that our children are given the chance to take risks, push boundaries and test themselves outside their comfort zone. So we will, shortly, publish plans to make it easier for children to enjoy out-of-classroom learning.

Any education should involve developing the knowledge and skills to appreciate art and culture, as well as offering the opportunity for creative talents to be nurtured. So we will, shortly, outline how more young people can be given the opportunity to develop their own musical and artistic talents as well as enjoying more, properly structured, access to the nation's centres of cultural excellence.

All these virtues are vital, and they all help define what is desirable in education – preparing young people to take their place as confident, rounded, adults in a dynamic and changing society.

The failure to adapt

But most vital of all is ensuring that education gives young people the knowledge and skills required to take control of their own futures at a time when global change is placing an ever higher premium on intellectual capital.

Globalisation is bringing huge benefits, not least the opening of new cultures and nations to the promise of freedom. For those nations equipped to adapt globalisation also promises the chance to extend wealth and opportunity to more citizens. Countries, and individuals, who are highly-skilled will benefit hugely as more and more opportunities open up for their talents to be used. But those nations and individuals without high levels of skills will lose out, as jobs and opportunities increasingly move elsewhere.

Britain is not where it must be if we are to make opportunity in our country more equal. While our finest universities are some of the most impressive educational institutions in the world, and our strongest schools work daily miracles, we live in a country where the gap between those who perform best, and those left behind, is growing wider. This is not just a reproach to our vision of a more socially just Britain, it also constitutes a massive waste of talent which could be harnessed in the interests of all. Whether young people follow an academic or vocational pathway, indeed whatever course they follow, they deserve a secure grounding in the skills and knowledge necessary to secure the maximum opportunity for themselves.

The level of educational under-performance in Britain is, despite welcome extra spending, still deeply worrying. 40 per cent of children left primary school this year having failed to reach the accepted minimum standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.³ For sixteen-year-olds the expected minimum standard is five good passes at GCSE, including Maths and English. This year fewer than half of school children managed to clear that hurdle.⁴

Making poverty of aspiration history

Behind these alarming figures lies an even deeper problem – the poor level of educational attainment achieved by the most disadvantaged in our society. Fewer than twenty per cent of children eligible for free school meals secure five good GCSE passes including Maths and English. While the number of young people going on to university approaches 50 per cent, and we hope it will go higher still, the number of students from families in the poorest 25 per cent who go to university remains stubbornly low. Fewer than one fifth of children from that background can expect to go to university.

The stubborn, and unacceptable, linkage between disadvantage and educational under-performance is reinforced by academic analysis of what happens in our school system. Schools should exist to reverse inequality, to advance social mobility, to give individuals of talent, whatever their background, the chance to shine. But that isn't happening under the current system.

Across the country, children who are born with high cognitive abilities, but who come from poor socio-economic backgrounds, are overtaken in recorded levels of achievement at primary school by children of weaker cognitive ability who come from higher socio-economic brackets.⁵

As these children pass through the educational system the attainment gap widens. When compared to their peers, the performance of both boys and girls eligible for free school meals progressively worsens at every stage it is measured. By the time they reach Key Stage Four, poorer pupils are performing at a level around 40 per cent below their contemporaries.

The picture of disadvantage which blights our education system looks even darker when one considers how poorly-performing schools are concentrated in areas of greater poverty. 30 per cent of those schools classed by Ofsted as in special measures are found in the poorest ten per cent of local authority areas.

Deprivation is also linked to a greater incidence of special educational needs among children. Any parent of a child with special needs will know that they require extra care and resources to achieve their potential, and Conservatives

5. Leon Feinstein, 'Inequality in the Early Cognitive Development of British Children in the 1970 Cohort' *Economica* (2003) 70, 73-97, pp.85-86.



are committed to providing a better deal for all children with special needs. It is striking, however, that pupils who are eligible for free school meals are twice as likely as their peers to be on the special educational needs register, and there is a significantly higher incidence of children being categorised as suffering from Moderate Learning Difficulties, or Behavioural, Emotional and Social difficulties, if they come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Yet it doesn't have to be this way. There is no iron law which means that deprivation is destiny and a child born in circumstances of disadvantage must always expect to fall behind his richer peers. And even if there were such a law Conservatives would wish to repeal it. Not least because it is by the application of Conservative principles that we can best overcome entrenched disadvantage.



Conservative policies for progressive ends

In Britain today there are brilliant schools generating superb academic results for children from backgrounds of deep disadvantage. Mossbourne Community Academy in Hackney has secured exemplary performances for its pupils in every external test of performance, even though its pupils come from one of the most deprived catchment areas in Britain and the school intake has a significantly higher number of pupils than average – even for its area – on the special needs register or eligible for free school meals. Mossbourne and other schools – many of them also new Academies – which have succeeded in areas of real disadvantage have done so by embracing teaching methods which have been stigmatised as “traditional” but which deliver genuinely progressive outcomes – they help young people transcend their background to achieve more than they dared imagine.

And there is strong empirical evidence that it is precisely the embrace of teaching methods once derided as stuffily conservative which gives children from poorer backgrounds a better start in life. In America, an educational initiative called “Project Follow Through” charted the progress of over 75,000 children from poorer families from 1967 to 1995. The best results were achieved by those children taught using traditional methods, including learning to read using phonics, being regularly tested to ensure that knowledge had been absorbed before moving to the next level – and being held to account for every incident of bad behaviour. America’s KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) schools apply a similar philosophy, with high academic expectations of their broadly black and Hispanic intake, a strict approach to behaviour management which instantly penalises poor discipline, and hugely impressive results.

In Britain, the experience of both Clackmannanshire and West Dunbartonshire – the latter a particularly disadvantaged area – shows that near-universal literacy can be achieved if tried and tested teaching methods are deployed, in defiance of modish establishment wisdom. Teaching reading using synthetic phonics, which had been stigmatised for years by the educational establishment, helped all children read more quickly and comprehensively and helped those from poorer backgrounds most of all, closing the attainment gap which had existed before.



The teaching methods, and emphasis on high standards of behaviour, which characterise these successful models and which help the disadvantaged most are also, we believe, just what parents want. We believe no-one is more interested in securing a better future for children than their parents. And generations of parents have been frustrated by a bureaucratic establishment which has preferred to pioneer its theories and advance its ideologies in our classrooms rather than give parents what they want – traditional, successful, tried and tested approaches to teaching, underpinned by an emphasis on proper discipline.

So we will open up the system to provide all parents with the sort of choice currently only the rich enjoy. The country that provides the closest model for what we wish to do is Sweden. Over the past fifteen years, Sweden has introduced a new system that has allowed the creation of many new high quality state schools that are independent from political control. All parents have the power to take their child out of a state school and apply to a new independent state school. The money that went to the failing state school is transferred to the new independent school. All the new independent schools are free. They are not allowed to be selective.

The results? Hundreds of new schools have been started. Thousands of children have been saved from failing schools and given a chance in life. In particular, thousands of children from the poorest areas have been able to escape failing state schools. And, crucially, standards have risen across all state schools because failing state schools have been forced to reform. These are the basic dynamics we will introduce into the British school system.

And there is evidence already that what has worked in Sweden can work here. The creation of new Academy schools in Hackney, one of the London boroughs with the most troubled educational history, has shown what new providers of education can do to raise standards for all. New schools, outside local authority control, have deployed both managerial innovation and traditional teaching to generate superb results and attract new pupils. Their success has acted as a goad, spur and encouragement to their neighbouring maintained schools and a rising tide has lifted all. Hackney has risen from sixteenth to fifth in the (value-added) educational rankings of London boroughs.

Immediate action driving urgent improvement: summary

This Green Paper outlines how we can begin to close the gap between the poorest and the wealthiest in the education system and tackle the scandal of educational under-achievement by decisively shifting power out of the hands of a failed establishment and giving more control to parents.

In Section 1 we will outline how we can take immediate action to address the under-performance which blights the whole nation's future.

We set out a series of proposals to:

- Improve discipline and behaviour in schools, shifting the balance of power in the classroom back in favour of the teacher.
- Get every child who is capable of doing so reading by the age of six, so that every minute in the classroom thereafter is productive.
- Reform the testing regime in primary schools to reduce bureaucracy and focus on every pupil's real needs.
- Deliver more teaching by ability which stretches the strongest and nurtures the weakest.
- Reform the inspection procedure to ensure there is tougher, more effective and more searching scrutiny of under-performance.
- Champion excellence in the comprehensive sector by evangelising for the best professional practice in the state system, and more generously rewarding those who deliver for the poorest.

The supply-side revolution: summary

These urgent changes can be introduced by a new government in its first days in office. But as well as driving improvement across the state system, a Conservative Government will also institute a long-term programme to increase the number of good school places within the state system, decisively shifting the balance of power in education away from the establishment and in favour of parents. This paper is not about the amount of money spent on education – important though that is – but about how that money is spent.

In Section 2 we outline how, building on existing legislation, we can significantly increase the number of good school places available to parents.

We set out a series of proposals to:

- Provide over 220,000 new school places. That would meet the demand from every parent who lost their appeal for their first choice school in our most deprived boroughs.
- Allow educational charities, philanthropists, livery companies, existing school federations, not-for-profit trusts, co-operatives and groups of parents to set up new schools in the state sector and access equivalent public funding to existing state schools.
- Ensure funding for deprivation goes direct to the pupils most in need rather than being diverted by bureaucracies.
- Divert more resources to pupils who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring they get the earliest possible opportunity to choose the best schools and enjoy the best teaching.
- Make it easier to establish the extended schooling (from summer schools through Saturday schooling to homework clubs and breakfast clubs) which drives up achievement, especially among the poorest.
- Remove those obstacles – in terms of centralised bureaucracy, local authority restrictions and planning rules – which prevent new schools being established.
- Allow smaller schools and more intimate learning environments to be established to respond to parental demands.



A revolution in opportunity for the next generation

Our proposals are an action plan for improvement. We hope to refine and reform them in the light of consultation with parents and professionals. And today's proposals are only the first chapter in our education story. In succeeding months we will have more to say about:

- delivering a maths, science and modern languages curriculum for the 21st century;
- monitoring and raising examination standards;
- improving vocational education to command the respect of employers and win the support of students and equipping universities for an age of greater global competition.

But what this Green Paper unequivocally confirms is our determination to make tackling under-achievement in our schools our central priority. Every proposal in this paper is driven by our mission to make opportunity more equal and every policy we adopt will be designed to spread knowledge, and opportunity, more widely in our society.

1. Immediate action driving urgent improvement

Action must be taken to improve the education on offer in schools now. We cannot and must not wait. In some parts of our country, particularly those parts of our inner cities where there is concentrated and multiple deprivation, a spiral of social dysfunction traps pupils and their families.

Educational attainment is an extremely important part of this phenomenon. As the Conservative Social Justice Policy Group has pointed out, 73 per cent of young offenders describe their academic attainments as nil; 32 per cent of young people who have been excluded from school have been involved in drug dealing; children who have experienced family breakdown are 75 per cent more likely to suffer educational failure than other children; schools where a high proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals are 2.7 times more likely than other schools to be considered underperforming by Ofsted; and children from disadvantaged backgrounds are five times more likely to fail academically compared with their peers.⁶

This section sets out how we can begin immediately to tackle the problems of educational failure in the classroom – by restoring discipline, eliminating reading failure, and evaluating and spreading the practices of our best schools so that they reach every child in the country.

1.1 Tackling discipline, preventing failure

Poor pupil behaviour is the most serious problem preventing teachers doing the job they love. Classrooms in which students are disruptive are environments in which no-one can learn. Pupils who feel they can defy teachers with impunity subvert the calm order which is needed for schools to function effectively. But in many of Britain's classrooms students are not learning, nor allowing others to learn. Instead they are openly transgressing the boundaries which define good behaviour. It demonstrates not just a lack of respect for learning itself, but for others within the school community, and teachers have to be given the tools to tackle this issue at root. The balance has to shift back in the classroom, in favour of the teacher.

6. Social Justice Policy Group, *Breakdown Britain* (2006).

7. www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000682/SFR38-2006.pdf

8. www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000756/SFR362007_LAtablesv1_1.xls Table 1.7

9. Hansard, 4 June 2007.



Poor discipline and high truancy rates are problems that face every school, disrupting both teachers and pupils. One in every five boys between the ages of thirteen and fourteen is suspended from school,⁷ and truancy is at its highest rate for over ten years. Over 10.6 million school sessions are missed due to unauthorized absence and over 200,000 secondary school pupils play truant at least one day of every week.⁸

Unless the problem of poor discipline is addressed then even the best and most inspiring teachers will find it difficult to help students fulfil their potential. And unless we can improve levels of discipline, we will not be able to win the confidence of many parents who currently lack confidence in the state system. We will take every step possible to empower heads and teachers to set, and police, firm boundaries.

We are acutely aware that conditions are often most difficult for those who most need the opportunity a calm and orderly environment can provide. The worst problems of discipline and truancy tend to be concentrated in the most deprived areas of England. Last year, there were 1,587 schools where over ten per cent of the school population was excluded. In 192 schools over 30 per cent of pupils were given exclusions.⁹ The rate of exclusion for violence against an adult is ten times higher in the ten per cent most deprived areas compared with the ten per cent least deprived and nearly 35 times higher for violence against a pupil.¹⁰ It is a similar situation with truancy: seven per cent of pupils make up 60 per cent of all cases of truancy: a third of these pupils are from deprived backgrounds.

If a pupil is excluded or truant from school then a course is often set for their life in which educational failure is followed, inevitably, by a life without opportunity. Only thirteen per cent of persistent truants secure five good GCSEs and one quarter will gain no qualifications whatsoever.¹¹ Nearly one in three pupils who are excluded from school are not in education, employment or training by age eighteen.¹² And 42 per cent of young offenders sentenced in courts have been excluded from school.¹³ We must do more to tackle the problems of poor discipline and high rates of truancy if the opportunities of education are to be open to all.

10. 210 exclusions in the least deprived areas in 2004/5, compared to 7,250 in the most deprived areas. Hansard 26 March 2007; Column 1296W.

11. DfES, *Youth Cohort Study: Activities and Experiences of 18 Year Olds*, 2006

12. www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000695/SFR47-2006.pdf

13. *Mispent Youth*, Audit Commission



1.1.2 Clear boundaries, instant sanctions

The best approach to tackling poor discipline is to ensure that problems with the potential to escalate are dealt with immediately and that clear boundaries are set so that pupils recognise the absolute authority of teachers within the school. Sanctions against pupils who step outside these boundaries need to be instantly and consistently applied, ensuring that every pupil recognises the consequences of their actions.

We want to help all schools to adopt and implement the practices and approaches to discipline and behaviour used in the best performing schools, particularly those in difficult areas or with challenging intakes.

Schools that have successful behavioural records often have similar policies:

- dedicated staff whose main role is to enforce good behaviour;
- swift and timely sanctions applied when rules are broken;
- boundaries clearly drawn and an escalating scale of sanctions for those who transgress;
- dedicated rooms for those who have to be taken out of class for discipline reasons.

Our Comprehensively Excellent campaign has helped identify some of the behaviour policies which characterise the best-performing comprehensives. They go beyond what might be called these tight disciplinary rules to embrace other policies which contribute to an ordered and purposeful ethos, such as uniform requirements and insisting that pupils stand up when visitors enter the classroom.

We believe Ofsted should report on, monitor and encourage the spread of such best practice. Those common factors which work in the best schools will be identified, systematically, in the manner of our Comprehensively Excellent campaign and Ofsted will report on those schools which have poor behaviour but have failed to adopt techniques that have worked in similar schools.



We believe the state should play its part in helping teachers instill a greater sense of responsibility amongst pupils. That means empowering those teachers who wish to take a more properly assertive approach to discipline in the classroom. Schools should demonstrate the positive aspects of co-operating with and working within the set bounds of rules established by their school. We believe that well behaved pupils should be rewarded for their good behaviour and commended for behaving responsibly.

We therefore suggest that there should be clearer reward schemes for good behaviour in schools. We believe schools can benefit from establishing 'credit' and 'debit' schemes, setting out clear rewards for good behaviour and performance (a 'credit') and clear sanctions and punishments for bad behaviour (a 'debit').

The weekly record of credits and debits could be shared with parents, so that families are given a regular update on their child's behavioural record.

The accumulation of credits at the end of every term, off-set by the number of debits, might then be recognised with specific rewards, and students who fall below a certain level would face the loss of certain defined privileges. We would provide logistical and financial support for the establishment of systems within any school which wished to adopt this or similar schemes to inspire good behaviour.

We will also legislate to give teachers the confidence to ban from the classroom mobile phones and other devices which can disrupt the learning environment. Many schools already insist that mobile phones are surrendered at the beginning of the school day. We will amend legislation to ensure that teachers can insist that phones be handed in without fear of having their authority challenged.



1.1.3 Automatic right to exclude

Effective discipline policies depend on the availability and credibility of the ultimate deterrent – the threat of expulsion from the school. Yet head teachers frequently express their frustration that they have no such ultimate deterrent, as excluding pupils on a permanent basis carries with it serious difficulties. The right of appeal to an independent appeals panel administered by the local authority can be expensive, time consuming and stressful for the head teacher. One in four appeals is won by the appellant and half of these children return to their original school.¹⁴

Some of these successful appellants have been excluded for extremely serious offences. One boy who was excluded from a Manchester school for carrying a knife was allowed to return, in defiance of the headmaster's wishes. One boy in a Northamptonshire school, excluded this year for repeated violent attacks, has now won his appeal, prompting the entire board of governors of that school to resign. When persistent or violent offenders win in this way we are all losers as the legitimate upholders of order see their authority undermined.

Given the difficulties which exist, many heads are increasingly reluctant to use permanent exclusions and will do so only in extreme circumstances. The number of permanent exclusions in mainstream schools has dropped from 11,700 in 1997/98 to 8,960 in 2005/06.¹⁵ Potentially disruptive students know heads are increasingly reluctant to use the sanction of permanent exclusion and so feel freer to cause trouble.

That is one of the reasons why the number of suspensions (fixed period exclusions) has risen, in secondary schools alone, from 288,040 in 2003/04 to 343,840 in 2005/06.¹⁶ Pupils are increasingly being suspended more than once in a single year. This year (2005/06), 189,890 secondary school pupils accounted for the 343,840 fixed period exclusions.¹⁷ The number of pupils being suspended more than five times in the previous year has risen in one year alone from 9,000 to 11,300, and 440 pupils were suspended ten or more times in a single year.¹⁸

14. www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000733/SFR21-2007.pdf Table 9.

15. Excluding special schools. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000733/SFR21-2007.pdf> Table 1.

16. www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000733/SFR21-2007.pdf Table 2.

17. www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000733/FixedExclusionsPupilsLARounded.xls

18. www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000662/SFR24-2006.pdf p.12.



This is neither in the interest of the pupil nor the rest of the class. While fixed period exclusions are a valuable sanction for teachers, if they are used repeatedly and in place of permanent exclusions, they can be both damaging for the pupil excluded and the rest of the class whose learning can be disrupted by persistent disruptive behaviour. Currently, over a million school days are lost through fixed period exclusions.¹⁹

Permanent exclusion offers a compelling alternative: the opportunity to tackle the cause of disruption at root – by placing the disruptive pupil in a setting more appropriate to his or her specific and often challenging needs.²⁰

In order to restore authority to schools and head teachers, we would therefore ensure that head teachers are given the right to exclude (expel) pupils without the right of appeal to an independent appeals panel administered by the local authority. The only appeal would be to the governing body of the school.

1.1.4 A second chance for the excluded

We believe that permanent exclusion from mainstream school should not prevent the excluded pupil from receiving a good education that will enable them to succeed in later life. Instead, exclusion should be regarded as a second chance, enabling the most challenged pupils to succeed in a learning environment best suited to their needs.

Excluded pupils currently may attend alternative education provided by Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Since 1997, the number of pupils attending PRUs has doubled to over 15,000. Described by Ofsted as ‘the least successful of all in ensuring the good progress of the pupils who attended’, few pupils in PRUs ever make it to take their GCSEs, let alone pass them. Of the 5,990 pupils in PRUs aged fifteen, only 57 per cent were entered for a GCSE, with twelve per cent achieving a grade above a C, and 47 per cent did not achieve any qualification whatsoever.²¹

19. In secondary schools alone, at least 1,159,160 school days are missed; <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000733/SFR21-2007.pdf> Table 5
20. 52% of pupils given fixed period exclusions have Special Educational Needs. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000733/SFR21-2007.pdf> Table 7.
21. www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000744/UPDATEDSFR30_2007_tables.xls Table 9; Ofsted, Annual Report 2005/6 p.64.



This is not acceptable. We therefore intend to reform Pupil Referral Units to ensure they adopt the best practice of those units that are graded by Ofsted as Outstanding, and the practice of special schools that cater for children with behavioural difficulties.

We will review the hours during which students attend PRUs to do all we can to ensure that pupils are in a supervised environment for more of the day.

We will review the salary structure and career path for those who teach and work in PRUs to see what can be done to attract, retain, incentivise and reward high-performing professionals.

We will work with those voluntary and third sector organisations with real experience in turning round the lives of some of our most problematic young people – organisations such as the Lighthouse Group in Bradford, Amelia Farm in Wales and Hill Holt Wood in Lincolnshire – to apply their insights to the process of turning round the lives of young people who have been in difficulties.

We will also pilot the delivery of ‘turnaround’ services from these exemplary third sector organisations in specific areas, so that schools have an option of either the PRU or a more intensive, volunteer-led, provider of education and training.

1.1.5 Parental responsibility

Schools and teachers can only achieve so much. Parental involvement in building better behaviour is vital.

An active parental role: monitoring homework, ensuring attendance at school and taking responsibility for behaviour, lays the foundation for educational success. For children with challenging needs, or those who are at risk of exclusion, parental involvement is particularly important in order to prevent disengagement and educational failure.



Parents need to feel that they have a stronger bond with their child's education and the school community. We want to help every parent be actively involved with their child's education, making it easier to work effectively with the school to provide the best opportunities.

We would therefore enable all schools to make home-school contracts legally enforceable. These Behaviour Contracts would set out the rights and obligations of parents, child and school, and assent to the terms of the Behaviour Contract would be a condition of admission to the school.

The Behaviour Contract would lay out the schools' behaviour policy, provide parents with a guide to what was expected of them, spell out the sanctions for infringements of rules and embody the school's ethos. It would allow heads and their teams to be clear with parents from the beginning what was expected of them, make parents fuller partners in the success of the school and allow new students to see that their membership of the school came with clear responsibilities from the beginning.

These measures will help to tackle the problem of disengagement and the failures that exclusion from school can bring. But they cannot address the causes. Poor behaviour and truancy from school overwhelmingly stem from a fundamental disengagement from education. And this disengagement begins at an early age: it starts when a child first begins to read.



1.2 Learning to read, reading to learn

There is no greater failure in education than the failure to learn to read. The foundation of every child's education is the ability to read fluently and effortlessly. We believe that by the second year of school a child should have learned to read so that the remaining years can be devoted to reading to learn. Yet, after seven years of primary education one in five children is still struggling with literacy, increasing to 40 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals.²² The knock-on effect of failing to master the basics has a severe impact on achievement at secondary school: only fourteen per cent of those not reaching Level 4 by age eleven achieve five good GCSEs five years later.²³

1.2.2 Eliminating illiteracy: synthetic phonics

Yet we have the means and the method to tackle reading failure effectively through synthetic phonics. Evidence has shown that children whose teaching is based on sight vocabulary have a one in four chance of failing, with boys much more likely to fail than girls. With phonics less than one in twenty have this risk, and boys do as well as girls. Synthetic phonics can help combat the difficulties faced by poorer pupils who do not grow up in a book-rich environment. The West Dunbartonshire Project has underlined how the traditional methods of teaching embodied in synthetic phonics can transform the chances of children from areas of real deprivation. West Dunbartonshire, the second most deprived local authority in Scotland, had a functional illiteracy level of twenty eight per cent in 1997. It was practically eliminated by 2006.²⁴

What can happen in one corner of Scotland can be made to happen across the UK. The Clackmannanshire study²⁵ and the National Reading Panel²⁶ in the US also provide high quality research evidence that synthetic phonics is the most effective method of teaching children to read. Following the Rose Review²⁷ which reported in March 2006, the Government appeared to accept the force of the case for phonics. Regulations were amended to incorporate the Rose recommendations. Schools were formally obliged to follow this new curriculum, but there is widespread evidence that implementation has been faulty.

22. www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000708/SFR04_2007Tables.xls.

23. www.nagty.ac.uk/about/media_room/gifted_and_talented/documents/social_mobility.doc

24. Tom Burkhard, *A world first for West Dunbartonshire: the elimination of reading failure* (CPS, 2006)



There is confusion in many primary schools about the basic principles of synthetic phonics, how it should be taught and the materials that need to be used. Ruth Miskin, a leading proponent of synthetic phonics, has reported that many schools believe they are using phonics but in reality continue to use a 'range of strategies'; an approach explicitly criticised by Rose. Ofsted also reports that, "In a number of schools insufficient emphasis on phonics and weaknesses in the teaching of phonic skills hinder pupils' progress in literacy."²⁸

In many schools the materials supplied are insufficient to teach phonics properly. As the contributors to Channel Four's recent 'Lost for Words' series demonstrated, there is still institutional resistance to phonics from figures within the educational establishment and even the teaching unions. The idea that phonics is a reactionary method of teaching reading which privileges dry learning over creativity continues to act as an impediment.

We want to eradicate the plague of reading failure in our schools. At the age of six, a child should have learned to read.

In order to achieve this, we will ensure that greater emphasis is given to training teachers in using the synthetic phonics approach, by ensuring that there are high quality teaching materials and books in every teacher training college and in every school, as well as reforming initial teacher training so that the next generation of primary school teachers is equipped to teach children to read in the most effective way.

We will also ask Ofsted to report on the extent to which individual schools are using the synthetic phonics method and the effectiveness of the school's approach to teaching children to read.

25. Accelerating Reading Attainment: The Effectiveness of Synthetic Phonics, Joyce E Watson and Rhona Johnston, School of Psychology, University of St Andrews

26. US National Reading Panel, "Teaching Children to Read"

27. Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading, Final Report, Jim Rose March 2006 DfES

28. Ofsted Annual Report 2006/7, para. 69



1.2.3 Reforming testing to concentrate on essentials

There should be no compromise on the urgency of giving every child the ability to decode language and then begin to benefit fully from teaching.

It is crucial for the sake of a child's future development that we are able to diagnose reading failure before a child reaches the age of seven. This should take the form of a test that examines whether pupils have mastered the skill of decoding words. The current Key Stage One tests serve little diagnostic purpose for evaluating this skill.

We will therefore consult with professional associations with regard to the Key Stage One test and its replacement with an externally administered short standardised reading test at the end of Year 1 (age six) to ensure that children have mastered the skill of decoding words. We would, however, be open to alternative suggestions about how assessment at the beginning of primary school could be used to help eradicate reading failure.

Reading is the keystone upon which attainment and opportunity must be founded. A systematic analysis of the evidence has underlined which tried and tested methods work when it comes to reading, and has revealed the way in which ideological fads have held our children back. What is true for reading is true in many other areas, and we will ensure that parents and professionals are empowered to secure higher standards by systematically gathering and disseminating evidence of best practice.



1.3 Comprehensively Excellent

School leadership is a crucial factor in ensuring the success of a school, yet of no less importance is the ethos that each individual school imparts to its pupils.

Our investigation into the top performing comprehensive schools revealed a number of practices in common that we believe, if replicated more widely, would significantly raise standards.

We have observed that the best performing schools tend to have similar, if not the same, best practices:

- Strict school uniform policies, with blazer, shirt and tie and with a zero-tolerance of incorrect or untidy dress.
- Extensive extra-curricular activities, which take place after school or in the lunch break.
- Around an hour for lunch (as opposed to 30 minutes in many weaker schools) – and generally they do not allow pupils to leave the school premises during the lunch break.
- A system of prefects and a head boy and head girl.
- The opportunity to highlight and publicly reward achievement, both academic and sporting.

Schools must have the freedom to choose which specific practices will best suit their school ethos, and schools which choose to innovate in any area and thereby improve outcomes should be applauded, and learnt from.

But those schools which shun best practice and also fail to deliver high standards should lose their alibis for failure. The publication, dissemination and highlighting of the features common to the best-performing state comprehensives allows parents, and others, to question those schools which fail to follow best practice and compels those schools to justify themselves.



Comprehensively Excellent is a Conservative Party campaign which is already empowering parents.²⁹ But we would wish to go much further in Government, providing the maximum amount of information on what makes schools succeed, in a systematic way. All available information on school performance would be made easily accessible on a single government platform.

1.4 Set for success

While every pupil must be given the opportunity of a good education, we also recognise that each pupil should be given the opportunity to learn in accordance with their particular aptitude and ability, so that the brightest pupils continue to be stretched at the same time as pupils who might be struggling are given extra support.

We believe that setting by ability is the only solution to achieving this ambition. Labour's 1997 manifesto acknowledged the importance of setting and implied that the amount of setting in schools would be increased significantly. This has not taken place. In 1997 37 per cent of academic lessons were set by ability, rising to just 40 per cent by 2006. In some subjects, such as history and geography, nearly three-quarters of lessons take place in mixed ability classes. Ofsted acts as the principal evaluator on the levels of setting in schools, yet from 2003-4 the distinction between streaming and setting was removed from Ofsted's data collection and instead data is recorded on whether the class was mixed ability or setted/streamed. This has made it more difficult to evaluate the level of setting taking place in schools.

Despite this, many secondary schools continue to operate with mixed-ability teaching. Evidence has shown that mixed ability classes are usually taught to just below the average of the class, thus boring the most able children and baffling the least able. This can often lead to disruption, truancy and disengagement. Far too many pupils are slipping backwards in the early years of secondary school. 65,100 pupils – one in ten – obtained the same score or worse in English tests at fourteen than they did at eleven. In maths, 18,000 were at the same position after three years of secondary school. Science, where

29. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/10/20/ngove220.xml



few lessons are set by ability, shows the worst results: 121,200 children, or one in five, who passed national curriculum tests in science aged 11 were at the same level or worse at 14.³⁰

Yet during these crucial years just 34 per cent of lessons are set by ability.³¹ We believe that the greater use of setting in this age group would benefit pupils who are struggling or falling behind. Research by Professor Jim Kulik from the University of Michigan demonstrates that there is little to be gained in teaching by ability if the curriculum remains the same for each ability group. If, however, an enhanced or accelerated curriculum is given to the more able groups there are huge increases in educational attainment overall. He also reports a rise in self-esteem, following setting, in the lower ability groups.³²

We believe that school children learn more effectively when taught with children of a similar ability. We also believe setting contributes to better behaviour. We will therefore alter guidance to Ofsted to ensure that schools – particularly those not performing at high levels – set all academic subjects by ability.

1.5 Restoring accountability

Ofsted's role in inspecting and monitoring examples of good practice, reading and teaching methods is crucial to raising standards in every school.

We are concerned, however, that the powers of inspection that Ofsted wield have been reduced in recent years. Previously, inspectors were usually informed about how classes were organised by means of pre-inspection documentation, discussion with headteachers or teachers' schemes of work or lesson plans. All full-time teachers were observed by inspectors. Since September 2005, however, the recording of class organisation has been based either on discussions with the headteacher or teacher by reference to the lesson plan at the time of observation. A much smaller number of lessons – and consequently teachers – are observed than would have been seen under the previous inspection framework.³³ These new 'light touch inspections' have been criticised by the Education and Skills committee, which is not "fully convinced of their effectiveness".

30. Conservative Party Research; reported Daily Telegraph 5th April 2007.

31. Hansard 8 October 2007 Column 418W.

32. Chen-Lin C. Kulik, James A. Kulik; Effects of Ability Grouping on Secondary School Students: A Meta-Analysis of Evaluation Findings; American Educational Research Journal, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Autumn, 1982), pp. 415-428

33. Hansard 8 October 2007 Column 414W.



We believe that a rigorous inspection framework must be maintained so that under-performing schools can be identified, at the same time as tackling previously good schools that might now be coasting or no longer performing at a high level. We will therefore ensure that Ofsted adopts a more rigorous and comprehensive inspection regime.

We will also extend the inspection powers of Ofsted further, so that inspections will be more detailed and last longer, and every teacher in every subject will be inspected during Ofsted's visit.

We will also consult on introducing lightning inspections to minimize the time taken up by in-school preparation and to secure a more accurate snapshot of teaching, with classroom inspections taking place un-announced, without the prior knowledge of the teacher.

We believe that Ofsted inspections, properly done, can help enormously in identifying weakness and helping set schools on the path to improvement. But we also see no reason why successful schools, which are attracting pupils, and which command strong examination performances, given their intake, should be burdened with the same inspection regime required by weaker schools. Therefore we will target even more of Ofsted's time and resources on the worst-performing schools, underlining our commitment to helping those most in need. And we will reduce the tempo of Ofsted inspections for those which are performing best. That, in itself, should be an incentive to improve standards.

These are all measures which we can introduce into the classroom immediately, having an instant effect upon the education of every child.

Our proposals are designed to make existing schools run better, through enforcing better standards of discipline and ensuring children are taught properly.



At a later date, we will set out our plans on the curriculum: how we can improve the teaching of maths and science, instill an appreciation of our national culture and nation's past, strengthen modern language teaching and uphold the integrity of examination standards by providing more robust benchmarks and deploying the expertise of those with the greatest interest in keeping standards rigorous.

We have set out how every pupil, regardless of background, can be given the opportunity to learn in the best learning environment tailored to their individual needs. Schools that have good discipline policies, a strong ethos, setting by ability, and which are properly accountable to the inspectorate will help to raise standards, allowing pupils to achieve the success they deserve.

But we must go further. If we are to ensure that every pupil has the opportunity to go to a good school of their choice, we must provide more good school places than are currently available. This means that we need to open more new schools, by allowing new entrants into the maintained sector and opening up the supply of more good new schools. Section 2 of this Green Paper sets out how we intend to achieve this.

2. The supply-side revolution

2.1 More good schools

The simple fact is that there are not enough good school places, especially in the most deprived parts of the country. As a result, we are condemning many children to a life of underachievement and deprivation.

A measure of the scale of the failure to provide enough places in good schools is the number of parents who appeal against the decision about their children's schooling made by their local authority and whose appeals fail. In 2005/06, 79,000 appeals were made against school place allocations. 58,000 of these failed, with those children ending up in schools which their parents would strongly have preferred them not to go to.³⁴

A measure of the extent to which this failure to meet demand for good school places is concentrated in deprived areas is that, of the 58,000 children refused a place in their preferred school at appeal, over 50 per cent – nearly 32,000 – were in the 25 per cent of local authorities with the highest levels of deprivation in England.³⁵

Our proposals will make it much easier for parents and others to establish good, new schools in these deprived areas. It will mean that there are at least enough new good schools to provide places for all those pupils in the most deprived areas who were denied admission to the school of their choice.

We will ensure the barriers are cleared away so there can be a significant increase in the number of new schools. And we will do everything we can to make it easier for the supply of good school places to increase. We will do so by radically building on existing Academy legislation to generate an environment in which many more good schools can be created – which we propose to call New Academies.

New Academies will be free, non-selective, and within the maintained system. They will typically be smaller than comparable, existing schools; they will be set up and run by existing educational providers, charities, trusts, voluntary



groups, philanthropists and co-operatives on behalf of parents and pupils; they will be not-for-profit organisations and they will compete with surrounding local authority schools, helping to exert pressure for higher standards in the surrounding schools.

We will build on the freedoms promised in the original Academies legislation as the basis for the New Academies. They will be independent of the local authority and will depend for their funding on the willingness of parents to send their children to them.

2.1.2 Recurrent funding

Recurrent funding for existing Academies comes from the Department for Children, Schools and Families in the form of the Dedicated Schools Grant. This is a per-pupil grant, which follows every pupil to the school that he or she attends.

The Dedicated Schools Grant for a pupil in a particular local authority is based on a funding formula which is intended to reflect the costs of educating pupils in that area. Because existing Academies are all secondary schools and because they are mostly located in local authorities where costs are assessed as being high, the average Academy revenue funding per pupil under the Dedicated Schools Grant system will be £5,966 in 2007/08.³⁶

We propose that recurrent funding for the New Academies should be provided on exactly the same basis – through the Dedicated Schools Grant.

This will ensure that, like existing Academies, New Academies compete on level terms with other maintained schools in the same area.

New Academies will therefore depend for their current revenue entirely on their ability to attract pupils. New Academies will not be allowed to charge parents of pupils who attend them: like any other school in the maintained system they will have to rely on the Dedicated Schools Grant for their basic revenue funding.

36. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/hansrd/cm070903/text/07090420005809>



This means New Academies will not cause any increase in recurrent costs for the Exchequer or for local authorities. If pupils transfer from existing schools to New Academies, or enter New Academies instead of entering existing schools, their portion of the Dedicated Schools Grant will simply be transferred from one school to another.

2.1.3 Capital funding

The current Government's plan is to have opened 230 Academies by 2010.³⁷ We believe that displays a poverty of ambition.

We want to maximise the number of new schools and the range of organisations supplying new schools. We would like smaller not-for-profit organisations, as well as universities and wealthy charities, to respond to local need and parental dissatisfaction and be able to establish new schools. Ability to raise substantial sponsorship funds should not be a necessary qualifier.

For those organisations without capital reserves we propose that the capital costs of New Academies, like community schools, should be 100 per cent financed out of government funds.

New Academies would not be required to use government capital funds. They might, as is the case in many Charter Schools in America, form a business plan that requires only the recurrent funding in order to operate successfully. Alternatively, they might look to philanthropic sources for any capital requirements.

But for those who need it, state capital should be available. Currently the Government provides capital funding for academies through the Building Schools for the Future programme. But that money is allocated bureaucratically through the quango Partnership for Schools. Many existing Academy sponsors have found that operating through the BSF bureaucracy has significantly impeded the establishment of good new schools.

We propose that capital funding for New Academies should come through a



new fund, established by re-allocating the money available within the Building Schools for the Future programme. Instead of a bureaucratic method of allocating funds, money should be allocated more flexibly in response to need.

Would-be New Academies will be entitled to an allocation of the Fund according to their start-up needs. We will also consult with potential providers of New Academies to ensure that the funding of construction costs is reflective of building in some of the most densely built inner-city areas.

Any Building Schools for the Future funds that are already committed when a Conservative government takes office will be protected. The re-allocation of the Building Schools for the Future programme funds to create a New Academy Fund will operate only in relation to funds within the Building Schools for the Future programme which are not yet committed.

Since Building Schools for the Future programme budgets have not yet been set for the period beyond 2011, it is not possible at this stage to give a definitive view about the level of funding for capital investment in the New Academies. However, current funding levels give an indicative view.

The Building Schools for the Future budget is already set at £9.3 billion for the three years 2008-09 to 2010-11. Redirecting fifteen per cent of this would raise £1.4 billion. Assuming that the funding continues at 2010-11 levels, over nine years this fifteen per cent re-allocation from bureaucratic control to citizen choice would release around £4.5 billion for the building of New Academies.

The current capital spending per pupil to build an Academy is approximately £20,000. On the conservative assumption that this figure will persist (conservative because it ignores, for example, the potential for our proposed changes in planning laws and building regulations – set out on pages 47 and 48 – to reduce costs), this £4.5 billion would fund more than 220,000 places over nine years.



Table 1³⁸

	Total BSF Funds (£ m)	Allocation to New Academies (£ m)	Places Created
Year 1	£ 2,854	£ 428	20,985
Year 2	£ 2,960	£ 444	21,765
Year 3	£ 3,517	£ 528	25,860
Year 4	£ 3,500	£ 525	25,735
Year 5	£ 3,500	£ 525	25,735
Year 6	£ 3,500	£ 525	25,735
Year 7	£ 3,500	£ 525	25,735
Year 8	£ 3,500	£ 525	25,735
Year 9	£ 3,500	£ 525	25,735
		Total Places Created	223,022

These 220,000-plus new school places mean that there would be at least an additional 9,000 places for students entering primary school in Year 1 and an additional 23,000 places for students entering secondary school in Year 7.³⁹ That is enough to ensure that all of the 32,000 children currently appealing school places in the most deprived areas would have a good place.

38. Year 1 is taken as 2008-09. The Building Schools for the Future funds have been announced by the Government until Year 3 (2010-11). We have assumed that funding remains at the 2010-11 level for the remaining six years. The allocation to New Academies is 15% of total BSF funds for the entire period. We have used the Government's figure of £20,400 as the average capital cost per pupil to build an Academy. www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070724/text/70724w0029.htm#07072533001688.



These figures are a conservative estimate since they are based upon an assumption of £20,000 per pupil capital cost. However, the current regulations on the kind of buildings that Academies must occupy impose large financial burdens upon them and Academy buildings have therefore typically been very expensive. We will reform these regulations to allow a far wider variety of buildings to be used for schools, and we will reform the planning rules. These changes – outlined on pages 47 and 48 – will in time lead to significant reductions in the capital cost pressures. Furthermore, schools will also be able to establish themselves without capital from the state. The figure of 220,000 school places should therefore be seen as a conservative estimate of the minimum number of school places that the fund will allow. There is no maximum number.

2.2. Pupil Premium for pupils in disadvantaged areas

We believe that in order to ensure that any structural change within the school system serves the end of social justice, there should be dedicated extra spending for pupils who come from more disadvantaged homes.

The current government has already accepted the principle that children from deprived areas should attract more per capita funding than children from other areas. The DCSF takes area deprivation into account when calculating the Dedicated Schools Grant for each local authority. Distribution of the additional funding is then determined by the local authority according to a variety of formulae that differ from authority to authority.

We believe that this bureaucratic system is inadequate. It fails to identify the individual children most in need; it fails to ensure extra money reaches the pupils; and it fails to encourage good schools to admit the hardest to help children.

In the current system the poorest children, as defined by free schools meals, are under-represented in the best performing schools. According to research by the Sutton Trust, the overall proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at the

39. Of these 31,833 pupils appealed, 9,023 were at primary school level, and 22,810 were at secondary school level. To provide places would require 63,161 new primary school places across all years and 146,896 secondary places (assuming a sixth form staying on rate of 72%). This totals 210,057 places.



200 highest performing comprehensives is 5.6 per cent, compared to 11.5 per cent of children in the postcode sectors of the schools, and 14.3 per cent in secondary schools nationally.⁴⁰

We have proposed an explicit Pupil Premium to increase per capita funding for pupils from deprived backgrounds (recommended by the Conservative Public Services Improvement Policy Group). We believe that the Pupil Premium should attach to pupils directly. New Academies, like existing Academies and other schools within the maintained system, will thus be incentivised to seek out and accept pupils from more challenging backgrounds.

We recognise that many local authorities already do superb work in targeting disadvantage, focusing resources on children in real need and working with professionals to intervene at the earliest possible stage. We will continue to champion the good practice pioneered by local authorities such as Essex County Council in their Education Welfare Service.

But we believe the Pupil Premium constitutes a clear and decisive policy intervention which will generate even more effort and ingenuity in dealing with disadvantage. It will, we believe, be another factor which will lead those planning to establish New Academies to consider pioneering their set-up in areas of concentrated deprivation, where attracting more pupils will secure more resources.

More than that, the existence of the Pupil Premium can help schools in disadvantaged areas implement many of the policies which are proven to improve attainment levels for children from disadvantaged circumstances.

The pupil premium funding will make it easier to establish extended schooling (from summer schools through Saturday schooling to homework clubs and breakfast clubs) which drives up achievement, especially among the poorest.

Already successful Academies provide superb extended hours schooling and we believe that the Pupil Premium could also help drive the establishment of summer schools to bridge the gap between primary and secondary school.

40. The Social Composition of Top Comprehensive Schools: Rates of Eligibility for Free School Meals at the 200 Highest Performing Comprehensive Schools, The Sutton Trust, January 2006

41. At present, the Secretary of State enters into funding agreements with academies under Section 482(1) of the Education Act 1996 as modified by the Education Act 2002



2.3 Responsible operation of New Academies

2.3.1 Funding agreements

We propose that New Academies should – like existing Academies – have funding agreements with the Secretary of State.⁴¹

Under these funding agreements, the Secretary of State is provided with power to specify conditions in order to ensure that any new school established within the maintained system provides a proper and rounded education.

We envisage that these funding agreements will follow the pattern established with existing Academies, and act as a safeguard to ensure that New Academies provide the highest calibre education from the best possible providers.

2.3.2 Administration and curriculum

The freedom to innovate has been a crucial part of the success of the existing Academy programme. Until recently, Academies were free from the National Curriculum, allowing them flexibility to teach core subjects such as English and Maths as they wished. They could, for example, condense Key Stage Three learning in order to focus upon GCSE achievement. In July 2007, however, the Secretary of State removed this freedom from new Academies.⁴² We would wish to restore the freedom to depart from the National Curriculum not only to all planned Academies but also to New Academies.

The only constraints on New Academies, and indeed on existing Academies, should be the curriculum requirements which apply to independent schools.⁴³

42. Hansard 10 July; Column 1322: 'as with most existing academies, all new academies will follow in English, maths, science, and information and communications technology'.

43. Prescribed under Section 157 of the Education Act 2002; http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14



In order to achieve this, we will scale down the barriers set down in school organisation regulations. ⁴⁴

Provided New Academies abide by the Admissions Code, ensure that the needs of pupils with special educational needs are taken into account, and levy no charge or fee in respect of admissions they will be free from burdensome regulation.

New Academies will have no powers to select beyond those available to existing maintained schools, where ten per cent of the intake can be selected on the basis of aptitude in a specialism.

2.4 Smaller schools

One of the most noticeable features in education over the past ten years is that schools have become much bigger. The number of secondary schools with over 1,000 pupils rose by 42 per cent (from 1,270 to 1,807 schools) between 1996/07 and 2004/05. Over the same period, the number of pupils being taught in schools with over 1,500 pupils also doubled from 261,000 to 536,000.⁴⁵

Although there are, of course, excellent large schools, on average, discipline is worse in larger schools.

Over 9 per cent of the school population of schools with more than 1,000 pupils suffer from exclusion compared with 3.7 per cent in smaller schools – and, whereas the number of permanent exclusions has decreased in smaller schools over recent years, the number of permanent exclusions in schools of over 1,000 pupils has risen.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, research in the USA has indicated that school size can have a considerable influence on student achievement, particularly for students of low socio-economic status. Cities like New York, Chicago and Philadelphia are moving towards small school models.⁴⁷ These cities are showing that educational opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds can be improved by

44. The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) (England) Regulations 2007 (schedule 3).

45. Public Services Improvement Group, *Restoring Pride in Our Public Services* (2007) pp.85-86.

46. Hansard, 19 February 2007, Column 455W

47. Raywid, M. (1997/98) *Small Schools: A Reform that Works*, in *Educational Leadership* Vol 55, No. 4, pp. 34-39; Klonsky, M. (1995) *Small schools: The numbers tell a story: A review of the research and current experiences* Chicago: Illinois University; Raywid, M. & Oshiyama, L. (2000) *Musings in the wake of Columbine: What can schools do?* Phi Delta Kappan, 81 (6), 444-449; Funk, P. & Bailey, J. (1999) *Small schools, big results: Nebraska high school completion and postsecondary enrolment rates by size of school district* Nebraska Alliance for Rural Education; Viadero, D. (2000) *Research on Chicago high schools finds benefits in smaller size* Education Week, 19 (42), 12-13; Cotton, K. (1996) *Affective and social benefits of small-scale schooling*; Rural School and Community Trust (March 2002) *Small Works: School Size, Poverty and Student Achievement*.



providing schools with which pupils find it easier to identify and in which heads and teachers find it easier to establish personal relationships with students.

Accordingly, we intend to require local authorities with existing, failing large schools to examine the possibility of dividing those schools into smaller, autonomous schools, using the facilities of existing campuses.

We also anticipate that, in many cases, New Academies will operate as smaller schools. The greater freedoms we envisage for new entrants, and the less onerous financial entry requirements, are likely to generate new schools in areas which would, before, have been considered unviable. And lower entry costs means it is easier to envisage a new school being viable with fewer pupils.

2.5 Dismantling the barriers

In order to promote New Academies, we recognise that a number of barriers will need to be removed. Some of these relate to the ability of the local authority (with which such schools will be competing directly) to place constraints on the formation of the new schools. Others relate to the ease with which parents and not-for-profit organisations can obtain the information and take the steps necessary to form a new school. Still more relate to difficulties that planning law and building regulations might place in the way of those wishing to found such schools.

2.5.1 Constraints on formation

At present, DCSF guidance puts pressure on local authorities not to establish new schools when there are surplus places in the local area.⁴⁸ Where local authority schools are failing to attract parents and where those parents are moving across local authority borders in order to seek better schooling elsewhere, large number of surplus places may arise. Present DCSF guidance effectively prevents this problem being addressed through the establishment of good new schools in the area that would provide superior schooling that is attractive to children and parents from that area. This is perverse.

48. See http://www.dfes.gov.uk/localauthorities/_documents/content/1007070011%20_KLOE%20-%20Tackling%20secondary%20surplus%20places.doc and <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/fallingschoolrolls/>



The existence of surplus places in a local authority area should not constitute any barrier to the creation of New Academies in that area. The correct response for a local authority faced with surplus places is either to set about improving its schools to the point where they can attract pupils, or to reduce the size of those schools with surplus places, or both. Preventing the creation of new, good and competing schools should not be available as a tool for local authorities wishing to evade their responsibilities.

We believe that regardless of surplus places, parents should have a right to establish New Academies in their local area in order to raise standards and provide their children with the education they deserve. We therefore propose that, by adapting existing powers granted under Section 10 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the Secretary of State should be able to enter into negotiations to provide a funding agreement for a New Academy where representations from a significant number of parents⁴⁹ of qualifying children are received and where a not-for-profit organisation makes proposals to establish a New Academy that will operate under the constraints identified in this Green Paper.⁵⁰

We propose that, before entering into such a funding agreement, the Secretary of State could consult the local authority, but representations from the local authority based on the effect of the new school on the number of surplus places should not be prejudicial to the establishment of a new school. With a Conservative Government we anticipate a legal presumption that any application from fit and proper persons who can demonstrate good intent should be accepted unless exceptional circumstances prevail.

2.5.2 Information and assistance

It is also important that parents and not-for-profit providers wishing to set up New Academies in a local authority area should have access to readily available information about the education service and schools offered in that area.

49. In the Netherlands, the minimum number of parents required to start a publicly funded school depends upon the size of the local municipality. In municipalities of less than 25,000 residents, just 50 parents are needed. The threshold is 125 in the largest areas. <http://www.reform.co.uk/filestore/pdf/School%20choice%20for%20all.pdf>

50. Under the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance) (England) Regulations 2007 (SI: 2007 No 1288), a local authority must hold a competition to create a new school under certain circumstances. Our proposals would not affect these regulations, which would operate in parallel with our proposed system for founding New Academies. Source: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolorg/data/guidance_Documents/New%20school%20competitions%20guide%20final%202007-10-30.doc



Under Section 12 of the Childcare Act 2006, local authorities are already under a duty to establish and maintain a service to provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents. This includes a duty to provide information about education services and schools.

We propose that – either through guidance or through legislation – this duty should be specified to include providing information and assistance to parents and not-for-profit organisations wishing to set up New Academies.

Currently there are also costs and other deterrents systemic within the bidding process that all too often put off potential providers from even beginning what is needed to set up a new school. We will ensure the provision of the best legal and compliance advice for those proposing to set up a New Academy.

2.5.3 Planning and building regulations

Another barrier to the establishment of New Academies is the present set of planning constraints. Providers are allowed to establish new schools only on land categorised as ‘D1’, which is land specifically reserved for community use.⁵¹ Such land is in increasingly short supply. Planning permission statistics from the Greater London area show that some 6,500 residential units have received planning permission on school-site D1 land in London alone.⁵² And national figures for change of use over recent years show that between 1995 and 2004 over 2,500 hectares of D1 public amenity land has been converted to private use⁵³ – enough land to provide schools for around 2,500,000 pupils across England.⁵⁴ Playing fields are protected by separate guidance and receive detailed protection from disposal.⁵⁵ But there is no similar protection for land formerly or currently occupied by schools or education establishments.

51. The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (statutory instrument no.764)

52. Greater London Authority figures.

53. ODPM, Land Use Change Survey 2007; LUCS-22A Table F1; <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/xls/528961>.

Based upon a gross annual average change from land for community services to residential use of 253 hectares.

54. Based on the average secondary school area as approx 1 hectare (DFES Building Bulletin 98: Briefing Framework for Secondary School projects, Figure C.2: 11-16 net and gross area and an estimate of 1,000 pupils per school.

55. Section 77 in the Schools standards and Framework Act 1998.



We therefore propose to consult on the proposal that D1 land might be protected by the same guidance that applies to playing fields, and that any proposals to build upon D1 land must be passed with the permission of the Secretary of State.

We also propose to consult on an alternative route, that local authorities are required to offer D1 land to educational organisations before it could then be sold to any other bidder.

We also propose that new schools, if they so wish, should be able to build or operate upon any land zoned for development outside of the D1 category. We propose to consult on the categories of land, other than D1, that could be used in this way and on the rules that should apply when planning permission is sought for the establishment of schools on that land.

We will also consult with local authorities to see what can be done to ensure New Academies are not burdened by those Section 106 obligations which, rightly, apply to new business developments.

Schools are also required to design and construct their school buildings according to a series of building regulations, in particular Building Bulletins 98 and 99.⁵⁶ These restrict the size, shape and design of schools and their learning environments. We are concerned that potential providers of New Academies might be restricted in their aspirations for building by these regulations.

While it is right that adequate regulations are established, we would allow providers the opportunity to make necessary exemptions upon the regulations after consultation with the Secretary of State.

56. www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/8104/H01254%20Building%20Bulletin%2098.pdf and http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/9422/BB99%20for%20web.pdf

