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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 16 September 2016



(Welcome to Policy Eye, a weekly service from Policy Watch offering a regular round up of UK education headlines and stories from over the previous 7 days.)

The week summed up

The grammar school saga has rumbled on this week. It's the Lydian stone of education and it shows.

On Monday, a low-key Education Secretary launched the promised Green Paper with a Statement in the House of Commons followed by a lengthy debate which saw a number of leading education lights including Michael Gove, Nicky Morgan, Tristram Hunt and Barry Sheerman pitch in with various entreaties. On Wednesday, she re-appeared again, this time to answer questions from the Education Committee about her role and responsibilities where surprise, surprise, the issue of grammar schools surfaced again while in between, the wires have literally been overheating with the volume of condemnatory comments. As Number 10's former education adviser Rachel Wolf put it: "This is a perilous moment for school reform."

The government's case, set out in a Green Paper so hastily put together that the consultation questions hadn't even been numbered, is that too many children, 1.25m to be precise, don't have access to good schools so we need to provide more, 'good' schools by encouraging selective schools to expand, independent schools and universities to pitch in and help with sponsorships and partnerships, and remove restrictions on faith schools. The whole exercise is about extending opportunity and improving social mobility...who could argue with that?

Most people it seems. Here for example is the FT's Janan Ganesh dismantling the argument that it would enhance social mobility: "no chess grandmaster can out think an upper middle class couple trying to rig life for its spawn." Others have piled in, albeit less vividly. The Institute for Fiscal Studies, Education Databank and Full Fact for instance, all have highlighted the negative impact of selection on other schools and social groups, others have written from personal experience. Schools Week has Green Paper specials this week, the Education Policy Institute issues its report on grammar schools next week and with consultation open until December, the debate is likely to see the season out.

It hasn't all been about grammar schools. Two other notables this week include FE Week's campaign to rethink some of the proposed apprenticeship funding rates which brought a full house down to Parliament this week. And secondly, the OECD's annual hefty report on member country education systems, a rich albeit intensive source of intriguing data. Both are referenced below.

Finally this week, best wishes to all those families loading up the family wagon for the start of a new university year. The ritual of what used to be known as 'Volvo Day,' the day when eager parents loaded up the car boot and headed off down the motorway to disgorge variously fresh-faced offspring at the university gates, is perhaps not what it was but is still an important moment for many. Good luck to all.



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Top headlines this week

- ‘MPs set to hear grammar school plans.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Teachers don’t take us seriously, say pupils.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Greening U-turn on plans to drop parent governors from academy trusts.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Grammar schools benefit rich, says OECD.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Secondary school learning slump can last 3 years.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [School reform Statement](#). The Education Secretary launched the government’s Green Paper on school system reform with an initial statement to MPs that was followed by lengthy debate
- [In front of the Committee](#). The Education Secretary appeared before the Education Committee to talk about her role and responsibilities and announced among other things that her focus would be on teacher recruitment and retention and ‘struggling’ schools, that she remained committed to school funding reform, wanted a debate on grammar schools and would reverse the proposal to drop parent governors from academy trusts
- [Education at a Glance](#). The OECD’s latest back breaking analysis of education systems across OECD member countries highlighted a number of features of UK education including bigger primary classes, smaller secondary classes, younger teachers, large numbers of international students at F/HE level, high levels of student debt and above average levels of investment in education
- [The Spending Challenge](#). The Institute for Government published a Paper looking at ways in which the May government could cut spending while maintaining quality, citing prioritization, consolidation and engagement as key factors
- [Fighting for the Northern Powerhouse](#). Former Chancellor George Osborne confirmed that he was setting up a new organization to continue to promote the Northern Powerhouse
- [The great divide](#). Oxfam called on the government and big business to help close the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ as it published a report showing that Britain is one of the most unequal countries in the world with the richest 1% owning more than 20 x the wealth of the poorest fifth
- [What’s it all for?’](#) Mary Beard, Professor of Classics at Cambridge University, offered her thoughts on the purpose and quality of education in a presentation to the Education Committee’s Inquiry into the matter

HE

- [If the worst happens](#). The government set out its initial thoughts on what protections students should be entitled to expect from the forthcoming Office for Students in the event of a possible course or institutional closure, loss of a member of staff or other change in circumstance
- [Movers and shakers](#). Wonkhe published its 2016 Power list of the top 50 people in the world of UKHE with Theresa May as No 1 and Angela Merkel at No 2 signaling the importance of the changing political and international context over the last few months



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- **TEF Panel.** Hefce announced the names of Panel Members who will help determine the assessment outcomes of Year Two of the Teaching Excellence Framework

FE/Skills

- **Apprenticeship matters.** Mark Dawe, chief exec of the Association of Employment and Learning providers (AELP) provided a useful summary in FE Week of some of the issues around latest apprenticeship developments
- **Save Our Apprenticeships.** FE Week secured a meeting in Parliament and Question to the PM as it launched a campaign to rethink some of the funding rates due in from next year which could see 16-18 funding badly hit
- **Vocational education and careers.** In her first appearance before the Education Committee, the Education Secretary confirmed that further details on the Skills Plan would be published, the Institute for Apprenticeships was under development and the Careers Strategy was being reviewed by the new Skills Minister
- **English and maths ITT.** The DfE published details of bursaries and support for initial teacher training (ITT) of English and maths teachers 2016/17
- **Festival of Learning Awards 2016.** The Learning and Work Institute hosted the latest annual awards for adult and community learning initiatives which included projects such as Leicester City Football Club's local employability scheme along with some of the most inspiring tutors and employers of the year

Schools

- **Schools that work for everyone.** The government's Green consultation Paper on reform of the school system raised a few eyebrows with its claim in the title but was formally published this week containing 30 questions; it runs to 12 December 2016 with the government promising a response in spring 2017
- **Say no to grammar schools.** The Fair Education Alliance launched a petition against the creation of any new grammar schools but backing a wider drive for social mobility
- **The importance of research.** Schools Minister Nick Gibb highlighted the importance of research and some leading researchers, including the statutory nod to ED Hirsch, in helping shape the government's curriculum reforms in a speech to last weekend's ResearchEd Conference
- **Transitions at 14.** The IPPR think tank continued its work on 14-19 institutions with a leading conference and follow-up report
- **Academy sponsors.** The DfE published its latest listing of Academy sponsors with links to each RSC region
- **What's happening?** The government published updated timelines of potential planning information that might prove useful for schools and colleges
- **Progress 8.** The DfE released a further updated version of its Progress 8 guidance for 2016, 2017 and 2018 complete with a short explanatory video
- **Tipped for success.** Ann Magill, a head teacher in Woking, listed hundreds of brilliant tips to help improve nearly all aspects of school life in a blog on the SSAT website



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- **Sexism in schools.** The Women and Equalities Committee called for clearer national guidance, high-quality sex education and inspection monitoring as it published a report on sexual harassment and violence in schools
- **Call for nurse.** The Children's Commissioner published the results of a 'lightning review' of the role and responsibilities of school nurses and found many complaining that caseloads and paperwork were making it difficult for them to do their jobs
- **Championing the girls.** The children's charity Plan International UK called for the government to prioritize the needs of girls and appoint Girls' Rights Champions following its survey of girls' lives in the UK which found huge regional discrepancies in matters like girls' life expectancy, GCSE results, job prospects

Tweet(s) of the week

- "Why is it that no comp can ever help a selective or independent school? It's always them having to help comps" - @edujdw
- "Quentin Letts makes possibly the worst argument in history by saying kids can cope with 11+ rejection because they watch X-factor" - @Samfr
- "Best reason ever for not turning up for work experience: I'm still feeling ill from being airlifted from Everest Base Camp" @jessphillipsMP
- "People organizing conferences: asking to receive policy presentations three weeks before the event will guarantee out-of-date presentations" - @nickhillman

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- 'Just about managing.' A core target group for the Schools' Green Paper and defined as children of people on modest incomes who don't qualify for support through free school meals or the pupil premium, but who work hard, often struggle to get by and want the best for their children
- Scrumdiddlyumptious' One of a number of words created by Road Dahl and included in the OED as part of the centenary celebration of his birth

Quote(s) of the week

- "I know that my teachers made me the woman I am today" – the Prime Minister explains to readers of the Daily Mail why her school reforms are so important
- "If Theresa May was serious about helping those 'just managing,' she'd focus on BTECs not grammar schools" columnist Fraser Nelson tackles the social mobility argument
- "Congress asks the TUC with all the education unions and all stakeholders, including parents, to oppose any increase in academic selection" – The TUC issues an Emergency Motion at its Annual Congress
- "Some complicated two-tier entry taking into account socio-economic background will have MPs post-bags brimming with constituents complaining that their child was denied a place despite gaining a higher mark than another child" – Lib-Dem leader Tim Farron on how the fallout from school selection could end up in MPs' surgeries



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- “It seems taking a potshot at independent schools is well on the way to becoming an Olympic sport” – the former headmaster of Eton responds to the government’s proposals on school reform
- “I can be a clown at 9.00 am and a relationship counsellor at 10.00 am” - a teacher explains the many changes of character required in the daily life of a teacher

Number(s) of the week

- 74.5%. The latest (up to July) employment rate for the UK, the highest since records began in 1971, although average earnings slowed noticeably in the last quarter
- 0.6%. The latest inflation figure for up to August 2016, unchanged from the previous month but up slightly on the 2015 figure according to the Office for National Statistics
- 22 days. How long the average pay cheques last, leaving many people eking out the rest of the month, according to recent research in money digest
- 510. The number of pages in the OECD’s latest shelf bending survey of education stats across member countries
- 26,000. The number of jobs and apprenticeships expected to be created from the decision to give Hinkley Point C the go-ahead
- 48%. The provisional participation rate for UKHE in 2014/15, up 1.7% on the year before according to the latest official stats
- 1,112. The number of Independent Schools Council schools out of a total of 1,157 that already have partnership arrangements with state schools according to the Green Paper
- £50m a year. How much the government is pledging to help existing grammar schools expand according to the Green Paper
- 85%. How many respondents in a survey of 2,500 school leaders conducted by NAHT, ASCL and Teach First, agree that a test at age 11 cannot be insulated from non-academic factors such as parental income
- 28,000. How many people have been recruited to postgrad teacher training courses in England this year according to a response by the Schools Minister to a Question in Parliament
- £112m. The annual costs of Erasmus, the EU student exchange programme that enables students to spend a year abroad and which supporters are rallying to protect ahead of Brexit

What to look out for next week

- Parliament in recess for the Conference season until Monday October 10
- Lib-Dem Conference (Saturday - Tuesday)
- British Chambers of Commerce Business-Education Summit (Tuesday)
- Announcement of Labour leadership election result (next Saturday Sept 24)