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## Pocket Watch – Unravelling the Education Bill

### Introduction

Mindful of the Prime Minister's word at his first Cabinet meeting that they shouldn't "waste a minute," Depts have moved swiftly to publish a number of the Bills that were listed in last week's Queen's Speech. The **Education and Adoption Bill** has attracted particular interest; here's a quick summary of what's involved

### What does the Bill say?

Apart from a brief section on Local Authority adoption functions, most of this Bill is aimed at what are termed: 'schools causing concern.' In simple terms, the Bill creates a new category of school, the so-called 'coasting' school and gives the Secretary of State new powers to deal with them by amending, generally in favour of the Education Secretary, the existing powers of intervention and conversion originally set out in the Education and Inspections Act of 2006 and the Academies Act of 2010 respectively. It means a school could be directed to convert, "be required to take all reasonable steps to ensure this" and to do this within a set timescale

### Why is the government introducing this Bill?

Three reasons. First because it can; it was in the manifesto, the Party now has a mandate and believes it has a duty as part of the 'good life' promised in the election to ensure "all families have the security of knowing your children are getting a great education." Second, because as the Prime Minister said earlier this year, the government is determined to tackle what it sees as 'mediocrity' in the school system and believes that "turbo-charging the academy programme" is the way to deal with it. And third, because it wants to remove what it feels have been 'roadblocks' to system reform whether it's been professional opposition and/or local authority tardiness, hence the concentrating of powers in the hands of the Secretary of State and the use of the word "force" in the accompanying DfE press notice

### What have been the reactions?

The press notice cited a number of supporters from leading academy sponsors but there's also been widespread criticism as well. The main criticisms are as follows. First, the concentration of powers in the hands of the Secretary of State, sections 4-11 of the Bill for instance are riddled with new powers over local authorities, governing bodies and schools in general; the TES provides a helpful **summary** of these. Second, the continuing failure to define just what a 'coasting' school is, section 1 doesn't help much and for the moment it's pretty much left to the Education Secretary to determine. Third, as many have pointed out, the case for academies has yet to be proven; to quote Brian Lightman, 'academisation is not in itself a magic wand' and conversion, let alone a rushed one may not work for everyone. And fourth, will this new punitive approach work? As the BBC's Chris Cook **argued**: "I'm not clear that you will get more from pushing schools harder;" many agree

### What happens next?

The Bill receives a Second Reading in two weeks when some of the general principles will be discussed; further consultation will be undertaken this summer. Potentially 200+ schools a year over the next five years could come within scope creating up to 1000 more academies

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