

Pocket Watch: What does the Academies Commission Report tell us?

2013/6

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Introduction

"It is increasingly clear that Academy status alone is not a panacea for improvement"

The relentless rise of Academies continues. Last month, in a notably tight Funding Statement, the Chancellor was able to 'reward' Michael Gove with nearly £1bn to help with development of Academies and other schools and last week, the DfE confirmed that over 2,600 schools are now operating as Academies with a further 500 waiting in the wings. All this from a standing start in May 2010 of just over 200. But do they work, are they a force for good, do they provide for pupils of all abilities, is there local accountability, these and other questions have been levelled at Academies ever since the first ones opened a decade ago. Now the [Academies Commission](#) has taken a deep look at how the model should develop in the future coming up with a number of recommendations including those on access, accountability and standards

Report context

The Commission, which was set up by the RSA and the Pearson Think Tank and supported by CfBT and the Co-operative, was keen to avoid some of the old why questions and concentrate more on the what and how as in: *'how can improvement and attainment best be secured within an academised system?'* Taking extensive evidence over a 9-month period, it therefore set its deliberations around a number of key forward looking issues. Concluding that the Academy concept had been through three stages of development, the early Blair model of using sponsors to help to 'rescue' failing schools, the later extended Labour model and the almost unrestricted Coalition model, the Commission came up with a number of recommendations for what they called a 'Mark IV' model

Headline messages

Most of the recommendations flow from the three *'imperatives'* identified by the Commission as the basis for developing the Academies programme. These include first *'a forensic focus on teaching and learning'* building on the current shift towards greater school-led improvement so that ultimately the words *'Academy'* and *'improvement'* become interchangeable. Requiring converter Academies to deliver on collaboration and school support and setting up a Royal College of Teachers are just two possible ways forward. Second, demonstrating fairness and accessibility to all by for example requiring that Academies publish socio-economic data on who applies and who gets in and backing this up with an independent appeals system. Third, ensuring clear lines of accountability to parents, partners and the wider community through a range of reporting mechanisms and through greater transparency over sponsorship criteria

Some of the recommendations

- *'The Government should support academisation with a detailed implementation plan linked to accelerated school improvement'*
- *'Ofsted should only judge school leadership outstanding if there's clear evidence of contribution to system-wide improvement'*
- *"The DfE should require all schools and Academies to publish data on applications and acceptances of school places in relation to free school meals"*
- *'Local Authorities should embrace a new role in education as champions of children and should report annually to the Secretary of State on the quality of local provision'*
- *'The DfE should ensure that governors in Academy schools include a focus on wider system improvement as much as on other duties'*
- *'The DfE should ensure that the selection of sponsors is open, fair and rigorous and supported by clear criteria'*
- *'The DfE should take steps to hold converter Academies to account for any commitments made to support improvement in other schools'*

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