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Pocket Watch – Who would do what under Labour’s school plans?

Introduction

Deciding how best to oversee a diversified school system which at the last count had 3600+ Academies, 174 Free Schools and 17 UTCs has not been easy for Labour. Earlier forays into parent-led Academies for instance had not been well received so it was perhaps no surprise that the Party should turn to David Blunkett, the architect of its last great structural make-over in the shape of the learning and skills system, for some solutions. His **report** which was published last week after nearly a year of review and consideration suggested that he had lost none of his touch: 40 recommendations, a blistering amount of details and some trademark touches, 'kitemarks,' 'incubation zones,' 'Fair Access Protocols' and so on.

The thrust is towards the re-incarnation of the Challenge model, a managed scheme focused on raising standards, rooted in local determinism, applied successfully under the last Labour administration and currently being adopted in Wales. In many ways however, the Blunkett blueprint with its local Commissioners and Boards mirror those of the Government with its Regional Commissioners and Head teacher Boards but with the aim as Shadow Secretary Tristram Hunt who backed the report said, of "*introducing new and robust local oversight of all schools*" rather than what he called the divisive 'sink or swim' version of the 'Gove' model.

The starting point for the Blunkett review seems to have been twofold: a stronger local emphasis on raising standards and a simplification of what was described as the current 'Kafkaesque' model of the school system. On that basis some proposals such as allowing schools more freedom to move between collaborative arrangements, enabling Ofsted to inspect Academy chains and schools generally to acquire more freedoms, may be welcome. But a lot of the fine print remains indistinct, the position of a number of other stakeholders remains unclear and the temptation to over manage is never very far away.

Headline proposals

- The creation of independent Directors of School Standards to help drive standards. A statutory appointment, potentially 80 in number, '*light touch with minimal bureaucracy*' and with intervention, planning and commissioning responsibilities. Supported by a local Education Panel
- The development of a Community Trust model where small, rural and non-Academy primary schools could work together with shared professional development services
- The creation of Education Incubation Zones providing opportunities for local schools to come together for limited periods of time and work on innovative teaching and learning, new technology and other forms of best practice
- Schools of all types to be under a duty to collaborate and to enjoy similar freedoms over matters like the curriculum, structure of the school day/week and the purchasing of services. A review to be held to clarify and simplify the current legal status of different institutions and schools to publish their accounts online
- Greater freedom for schools to move between academy chains, trusts and partnerships with this to be based on principles drawn up following a review by the incoming Secretary of State. 5 year partnership contracts recommended
- Open competition procedures for the creation of new schools. These could include proposals from trusts, chains and parent groups dissatisfied with current arrangements
- Providers of substantial support services not currently subject to Ofsted inspection required to meet kite-marking criteria to ensure consistency and quality

- Support for teachers to be properly qualified, for a review of the effectiveness of the pupil premium and for the re-building of a careers system incorporating LEP brokerage
- School Admissions Code to be strengthened by removing options for opt-outs, better arrangements for in-year admissions and greater clarification on post-16 options
- Ofsted to inspect chains and trusts and to review different partnership models
- The conflation of the National College and Teaching Agency to be reversed, the National College to be set up as an independent body and a new College of Teaching to be set up
- A new Curriculum Advisory Group to be set up to advise the Secretary of State on best international practice and curriculum innovation

Who would do what under Labour's new school system?

- Directors of School Standards (DSS)
 - Appointed on 5 year renewable contracts, independent but to work closely with Directors of Children's Services and others on strategic direction and standards
 - Oversee the commissioning of new schools and places, broker partnerships
 - Facilitate support in such areas as SEN, careers, post-16 progression
 - Able to intervene in schools on the basis of Ofsted data or parental request
 - Accountable through the presentation of an annual report
- Local Authorities
 - Duty to work with DSS(s) on encouraging collaboration and access
 - Act as the 'voice or advocate' for pupils and parents with a duty to inform when things go wrong
 - Continued responsibility for planning places and for ensuring options post-16
 - Potential to scrutinise post-16 provision particularly for NEETs
- Schools
 - Expected to collaborate but free to move between arrangements
 - Able to enjoy similar freedoms subject to inspection and consultation
 - Required to publish accounts including costs of contracts over £10,000
- School governors
 - To be given more training, support and data access
 - Consideration to be given to paid time off
- Parents
 - Able to apply to set up new schools and to propose interventions 'in extremis'
 - The development of PTAs to be encouraged
- Office of Schools Commissioner
 - Role to be revised and strengthened as part of new DSS relationship
- Ofsted
 - Authorised to inspect academy chains
 - Encouraged to inspect LA services more frequently
- Ofqual
 - Role to be clarified in the light of greater curriculum freedoms



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Labour plans for school system reform May 2014