



Local freedom or central control?

Why councils have an important role to play in local education

Foreword by Dame Margaret Eaton

Councils don't run schools and haven't done for many years. What local government does is make sure there are enough school places for all the children who need them. It makes sure the admissions process operates fairly so that every child gets a chance to go to a good local school, and oversees the distribution of funding in a cost-effective way. Councils provide support for all children with special educational needs and are also the champions of children in care.

I am pleased to say that the new Education Secretary, Michael Gove, has made it clear to us that he sees councils continuing to play a strong, strategic role in the schools system. Councils' top priority is to make sure that the same high standards of education are offered to all students, whether they are taught in a community school or an academy.

There is concern across the country that a boom in academies could lead to inequalities developing in education, for example if the pool of money left behind for councils to provide special educational needs support or to educate excluded children is drastically reduced. Councils are aware of the risk and are getting involved at an early stage to make sure that this is not the case.

In a system which makes it easier for new schools to open up and encourages a wider range of providers it is more, not less, important that there is good local oversight of the education system. Creating new schools will have a direct impact on the existing

schools in an area, with a clear financial cost if extra places are provided. There will also be impacts on nearby homes and businesses and the local road system.

There is a choice to be made over how the expansion of school provision can be effectively managed. That choice is between centralised administration, using national quangos and inspectorates such as the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) and Ofsted, or by making use of existing local knowledge, allowing councils with a local democratic mandate to work in partnership with schools.

Expanding school choice for parents and pupils is something that councils support, but this does not mean that schools can just be left alone without someone keeping an eye on their performance. Councils are the local public sector body perfectly placed to challenge schools to drive up standards, and are offering to do much more than the system currently allows, to work with schools and encourage improvement across the board.

Local government has a valuable role to play in spotting potential problems in schools before they become serious. Councils are also keen to get involved with an issue which is of great personal concern to me, that of improving standards in the high number of perfectly adequate schools which are coasting rather than striving for excellence.



Michael Gove has asked councils for their own ideas about how they can help schools get better. This report sets out our proposals for a new role for councils in commissioning excellent educational provision for local children and young people.

Although much of the recent education debate has focused on ‘freeing schools from local authority control’, the real story is that as council control has steadily diminished, interference from the centre has massively increased. In the last decade no fewer than 1,000 separate pieces of legislation affecting schools have been passed. Our research also shows that head teachers and governors of maintained schools face an overwhelming burden of central regulation, with new governors expected to digest almost 5,000 pages of central guidance.

We are anxious to work with the new government to radically reduce the burden

of central regulation on schools that has grown up over recent years. This will allow teachers and governors to focus on providing the best possible education for our children and young people. It will also make sure that scarce public resources are directed to the front line and not wasted on unnecessary bureaucracy. Councils are on the side of local parents and will work tirelessly to make all schools the very best they can be, to give children the start in life that they deserve.

Dame Margaret Eaton OBE

Chairman of the Local Government Association

Executive summary

Much of the recent education debate has been around ‘freeing schools from local authority control’. But commentators often overstate local government’s current role in relation to schools. Councils do not run schools, they advise and support them. Even where councils own school land and buildings and employ the staff, local management of schools, introduced in 1988, means that school governors and head teachers run schools.

However, councils do have a wider range of statutory duties to protect the welfare of all children in their area, including a duty to promote “the fulfillment by every child concerned of his educational potential”¹. So under current legislation, they have a vital role in making sure the local education system produces the right outcomes for local children.

The Local Government Association supports the expansion of the education and training choices available to local parents and learners. But we believe that local authorities offer a better way of managing the expansion in the number and type of providers than a central government department or a quango, such as the Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA), which currently funds and oversees the performance of academies.

We propose a new role for councils, as local commissioners of education provision in their areas. If the range and diversity of providers

is to increase, there needs to be systems in place to make sure that public money is allocated fairly and efficiently and that sufficient places are available to meet local need. In times of financial stringency it will be all the more important to avoid creating surplus capacity with its attendant costs. To use the language of the market, a regulator is needed to make sure that competition is fair and maximises efficiency; to facilitate the development of new provision; and to manage market failure and act as a provider of last resort. We believe this regulation role can only be effectively done locally and that councils are uniquely qualified to take it on.

The model of commissioning we propose would be similar to that recently given to councils in commissioning education for 16-19 year olds. Councils would have a light touch relationship with all providers and would commission the best provision to meet the needs of young people. However, the 16-19 transfer and the abolition of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) was accompanied by new national bureaucracy, including a funding agency, the YPLA, employing 440 people and costing taxpayers £45 million. We would want to retain the current streamlined method for schools funding – the dedicated schools grant - which channels public money effectively to schools via local councils, without the need for an intermediate funding body.

We would also like to work with the government to free up all schools from

¹ Education and Inspections Act 2006, section 1



the massive burden of central regulation that has grown up in recent years as local accountability has been replaced by top-down central direction. It cannot be right that new governors are expected to familiarise themselves with thousands of pages of regulations from Whitehall to perform their role effectively. We think that this culture of top-down direction needs to be replaced by light-touch and common-sense oversight of local schools and colleges by councils.

The Local Government Association believes that any new proposals relating to schools or education policy should be underpinned by the following principles:

- **The education system cannot be run from the centre.** Councils, as directly elected bodies, are uniquely qualified to perform the role of commissioner of education and training provision in their local area. Local government offers a better way of driving improvement and making difficult decisions, such as deciding to close a failing school, than through

Ministers in Whitehall or officials in national or regional quangos as they have a closer understanding of the needs and ambitions of local parents and learners.

- In a demand-led system with a diversity of providers, a local agency is needed to **make sure that the system can cope effectively with demographic changes and is not wasteful of scarce public resources, paying for an excess of surplus places.** In a competitive system there is also a risk that the life chances of individual learners will be blighted as competition between providers leads to the closure of some schools and colleges. Change is upsetting and disruptive for children and families, and local authorities currently manage the risk this has for educational attainment. Struggling schools with a surplus of places need additional support such as top-up funding and recruitment incentives to attract teachers so that, for example, year 11 students can successfully complete their GCSEs. Councils need to carry out this role to

make sure that change is managed in a way that minimises the impact on the learning opportunities of children and young people.

- In a demand-led system a local agency is needed to make sure that providers **offer a range of options that meet the choices and ambitions of local parents and children and the needs of local employers.** Councils have recently been given the role of commissioning education and training to support the choices of 16–19 year olds and the needs of local employers from a range of autonomous providers, including school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, academies, FE colleges and independent providers. Councils should be given a similar role in commissioning local schools to make sure that there are sufficient places and a range of options to meet the needs of all children and young people in an area.
- **The education system must ensure that a place is available for every local child.** A system with a wide range of learning providers, each with their own policies for admissions and exclusions, runs the risk that some children will not qualify for a place in a local school or will not be able to find a place at a local school following exclusion. Councils need to retain a role in making sure that schools admission and exclusion policies are fair, and fairly operated, and deliver a place for all local children and young people.
- The goal of **improving educational outcomes for all pupils cannot just be left to competition between education providers.** Giving councils a stronger role in monitoring and intervention will allow them to constantly challenge all providers to improve their performance and make sure that all local young people are able to fulfil their ambitions. The best councils

already provide support and challenge to local schools to help them to improve and this positive support role needs to be retained. Inspection is needed to provide a safety net, but councils can build ongoing relationships with education providers to keep up the challenge to improve and identify problems before they become serious.

- **Education cannot be delivered in isolation from the wider range of local public services used by children and young people,** many of them currently commissioned by councils. Schools and colleges provide an effective and efficient way of delivering services that meet the wider needs of children and young people and are strong partners in the local children's trust. If the role of local authorities as commissioners is recognised and strengthened, the children's services budget could be more efficiently used by delivering a wider range of services through schools. Educational attainment does not just rely on the quality of teaching. Other support is needed, such as for children who are looked after by the local authority or who care for relatives.

“Good schools are underpinned not damaged by civic commitment and civic pride.”

Simon Jenkins, Guardian, 27 May 2010²

² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/may/27/michael-gove-free-schools-admissions-policy>



“I want to help local authorities to continue to be powerful champions of educational excellence. As we develop our plans for the future, I would like them to have a strong strategic role working with schools to drive up standards, supporting schools who want to work together to share expertise and promoting the spread of innovation to the benefit of all. I want local authorities to be shaping the vision for their local area and empowered to drive improvement.”

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education in a letter to Lead Members for Children’s Services, 26 May 2010³

³ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/publications/documents/laeImportantmessagefromthesecretaryofstate/>

The current council role in education

Commentators often overstate local government's current role in relation to schools and education. Our role is to:

- ensure that every child has a suitable education and plan maintained school places
- make sure that admissions processes are fair and that parents have a right of appeal
- monitor standards and challenge and intervene where a maintained school is failing
- in partnership with schools, allocate the dedicated schools grant, which is ring-fenced for education
- commission education and training provision for young people aged 16-19 and, for those with a disability, aged up to 25
- make sure that young people aged 10-17 in custody receive a proper education and continue with it on release
- employ experts to provide additional support and challenge to schools
- develop and oversee the overall capital and infrastructure development programme, including the closure of schools where they are no longer needed, or opening new schools where there is a need
- assist schools in the management of buildings and resources and procurement
- promote good nutritional standards and the

take up of free school meals, and support breakfast and after-school clubs

- encourage parental and community involvement, for example by supporting governors and governors' associations
- promote collaborative working between schools and the use of peer review, and
- foster links between schools and the local community, including local business and further and higher education institutions.

Within this framework, maintained schools are locally managed and largely autonomous; they employ and manage staff, decide how to apply the national salary frameworks, and make their own decisions about how to organise themselves. Academies are not maintained by local authorities and the newly-established education quango, the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) has been given responsibility for funding and supporting academies.

Councils also are under statutory duties to secure good outcomes for local children and young people, including duties to protect the welfare of children in their area, and a duty to promote "the fulfillment by every child concerned of his educational potential". They are champions for children and learners and take the lead in building partnerships in an area and influencing decisions beyond their statutory remit to ensure that local areas prosper. They work with schools to combat child poverty. They commission the provision

of a wide range of services to children and young people including:

- safeguarding
- children's health
- youth offending
- integrated youth support
- early years provision
- education and business links, and
- information, advice and guidance to young people.

Following the recent transfer of responsibility for commissioning education and training for 16-19 year olds, councils are now the lead agency in commissioning and providing services for all children and young people aged 0-19 (and up to the age of 25 where they have a learning difficulty assessment).

The schools money 'kept back' by local councils

School funding has emerged as a key issue in the debate about the proposed rapid expansion in the number of academies. Giving academy head teachers control of the 10 per cent of schools' money retained centrally by councils is seen as a key advantage of academy status.

The reality is that:

- almost 90 per cent of funding for schools goes, via the local council, directly to schools
- the remainder is allocated back for spending on services in schools following consultation with schools through the local schools forum
- around 20 per cent of this 'central spending' goes straight to private, voluntary or independent nurseries
- the majority of the rest (60 per cent) is used to provide services for pupils with special educational needs, and those who are excluded from mainstream education.

The Local Government Association is seeking assurances from the government that following expansion of the number of academies this funding for pupils with the greatest needs will be distributed in a way that it does not unfairly benefit academies over maintained schools.

A new council role in local education

The Local Government Association proposes a new role for councils, as local commissioners of education provision in their areas. In a system with an increasingly diverse range of providers, we want local councils to be given the powers to act as an effective ‘regulator’ of services to children and young people in their area. This includes schools, as they are frontline services embedded in the heart of local communities.

This can be achieved by giving councils a role in commissioning education and training provision in their area. Local authorities would act on behalf of parents and learners and would not be involved in the day-to-day management of institutions.

This commissioning role of a local authority will be to:

- ensure that all children and young people have a school or college place that meets their needs and ambitions
- make sure that there is diversity in the types of school available to deliver real choices to local parents
- encourage schools and learning providers to work together in commissioning other services that support children and help them achieve their full potential
- make sure that public money is spent efficiently and effectively
- challenge and support schools to ensure ongoing improvement

- manage changes in the system to minimise any detrimental impact on learners.

Local councils have recently taken on a commissioning role for 16-19 education (see below) and we would like this extended to cover all local education provision. However, the 16-19 transfer was accompanied by the creation of an extensive national bureaucracy, including a funding agency, the YPLA, employing 440 people and costing taxpayers £45 million. We would want the new council commissioning role to retain the current streamlined dedicated schools grant model, which channels public money effectively to schools via local councils, without the need for an intermediate funding body.

The 16-19 commissioning role for councils shows how a council-commissioned local education system could work

For post-16 education, the council operates as a commissioner, required to be 'provider neutral' and to commission the best provision to meet the needs of young people.

Councils will have a light touch relationship with all providers. There are closer formal relationships with schools and sixth form colleges but, nonetheless, councils will not be engaging in day-to-day management; they will be taking a strategic role in planning and commissioning what young people need.

In this commissioning role, councils will:

- seek the best value for money to meet the needs of the area. Over-provision in the wrong place or courses that are not attracting learners are not sustainable
- ensure that all young people have the opportunity to access the education and training they need. Councils are committed to engaging all young people in learning up to 18 and to 25 for young people with a disability. To do this they will have to work with providers to commission education and training that is flexible and responsive to the needs of young people
- make sure that education and training is relevant for work and responds to employers' needs
- bring services together in the most efficient way. The most vulnerable young people need support beyond education and training, for example help with housing or their health, and the support of a mentor. Councils can bring together services around the young person and ensure transition into adulthood, especially for those requiring long-term support
- improve the careers advice that young people receive to help them make choices of education, training or employment
- work with providers to ensure stability in the system. Some small third sector providers make a crucial contribution in supporting vulnerable young people into learning. If their funding is suddenly cut, they may have to close for good. Equally it is in no one's interests for a large college, catering for thousands of learners to fail.

The Local Government Group support to councils in commissioning services for children and young people

The Local Government Group has provided a range of support to children's services lead members and officers in partnership with the government-sponsored Commissioning Support Programme (CSP). In 2009/10, a series of regional workshops were organised and delivered for lead members for children's services. These workshops covered the basics of effective commissioning and encouraged debate about the commissioning process through the use of children's services and school scenarios.

This year, the CSP and Local Government Improvement and Development will work together to offer support to all the regional children's services lead member networks. A national event will complete the programme on 1 September 2010 and will cover joint commissioning with PCTs, joint children and adults commissioning and commissioning for efficiencies. The CSP has worked with every children's trust in England through their regional commissioning leads to help the trusts develop their commissioning skills. Most recently, the CSP has developed an efficiency model which will help children's services and children's trusts use effective commissioning to drive out costs and reconfigure services. The efficiency model can be viewed at <http://www.Commissioningsupport.Org.Uk/about-our-programme/efficiency-and-outcomes.Aspx>





The education system cannot be run from the centre

Much of the recent education debate has been focused on ‘freeing schools from local authority control’, but councils have very limited direct control over schools. The real story is that as council control has steadily diminished, control from the centre has massively increased. The freedoms currently being offered to schools that opt to become academies are freedom from the **national** curriculum, the **national** system for setting teachers’ pay and the **national** inspection regime run by Ofsted. Local schools need to be freed from central, not local control.

The Local Government Association believes that freedom from excessive central control should be available to all schools. What is good for the best-performing schools will also be good for the rest. We are anxious to work with the new government to radically reduce the burden of central regulation on school governors and head teachers that has grown up over recent years. This will allow them to focus on providing the best possible education for our children and young people. It will also make sure that scarce public resources are directed to the front line and not wasted on unnecessary bureaucracy.

But there will clearly need to be some oversight of the way that local schools are performing and spending public money. There needs to be some kind of body to challenge schools to drive up standards and make sure that they work together effectively in an area to make sure that all local children and young people are able to fulfil their potential.

Central government cannot perform this role for more than 20,000 local schools. The pattern in recent years has been to reduce the council role and instead give these powers to national quangos and regulators such as Ofsted, the LSC and the YPLA. Trying to run things from the centre in this way has led to the top-down culture of excessive regulation and bureaucracy. Local knowledge and partnership has been replaced by a nationalised model of compliance with inspection and regulation.

We think that this culture of top-down direction needs to be replaced by light-touch and common-sense regulation by councils with local knowledge and democratic legitimacy. Councils, as directly elected bodies, are uniquely qualified to perform the role of commissioner of education and training in their local area. Local government offers a better way of driving improvement and making difficult decisions, such as deciding to close a failing school. They have a much better understanding of the characteristics of local communities and the needs and ambitions of local parents and learners than a national or regional quango can ever have.



The burden of central regulation and guidance for school governors and headteachers

Research for the Local Government Association has shown that in the last 10 years, more than 1,000 separate pieces of legislation affecting schools have been passed: that is a new piece of primary or secondary legislation every two school days over that period.

An indication of the burdens being placed on teachers and governors is also given by *A guide to the law for school governors*, which all new school governors receive. The guide itself stretches to 250 pages, but it also contains web links to the regulations and guidance which governors and teachers need to be familiar with. If all these links were followed, an extremely conscientious new governor would have to digest nearly 5,000 pages of central government regulation and guidance.

Kingston upon Thames: tackling truancy and persistent absence

Unauthorised and persistent absence from school can reflect a broad range of problems being experienced by the pupil. In order to effectively tackle truancy across a local area, councils and schools need to work together to develop an understanding of the underlying causes.

Councils have access to a valuable local knowledge base that can be used to analyse the causes of absence. Working with schools and other agencies, they can use this information to address the issues and re-engage pupils.

For the 2008-09 academic year, Kingston upon Thames was among the local authority areas with the lowest levels of unauthorised absence from school. The national rate of unauthorised absence was 1.05 per cent, while in Kingston the rate was 0.59 per cent.

Central to Kingston's success in tackling this problem is a robust system of local data collection and analysis. The council found that the centrally-collected data was often published too late to usefully inform local policy, so it set up its own data collection system. Information is gathered from schools every half term and analysed within two weeks.

This enables Kingston to swiftly identify the incidence of persistent absence and analyse the factors influencing it. For example, the research identified that a high proportion of absentees were from families entitled to free school meals. It also found that in 65 per cent of cases either the child or a parent had experienced mental health issues.

The council is using this evidence-based approach to develop strategies involving relevant local partners. It has stepped up efforts to narrow the achievement gap between families that receive free school meals and those that do not, and improving school attendance is an important part of this work.

Education welfare officers and school improvement partners are working more closely together, and membership of the school attendance panel now includes mental health experts. This approach has improved Kingston's school attendance figures and kept its rates of persistent absence among the lowest in the country.

For further information contact Dr Ming Zhang, strategic manager, Kingston upon Thames council: ming.zhang@rbk.kingston.gov.uk

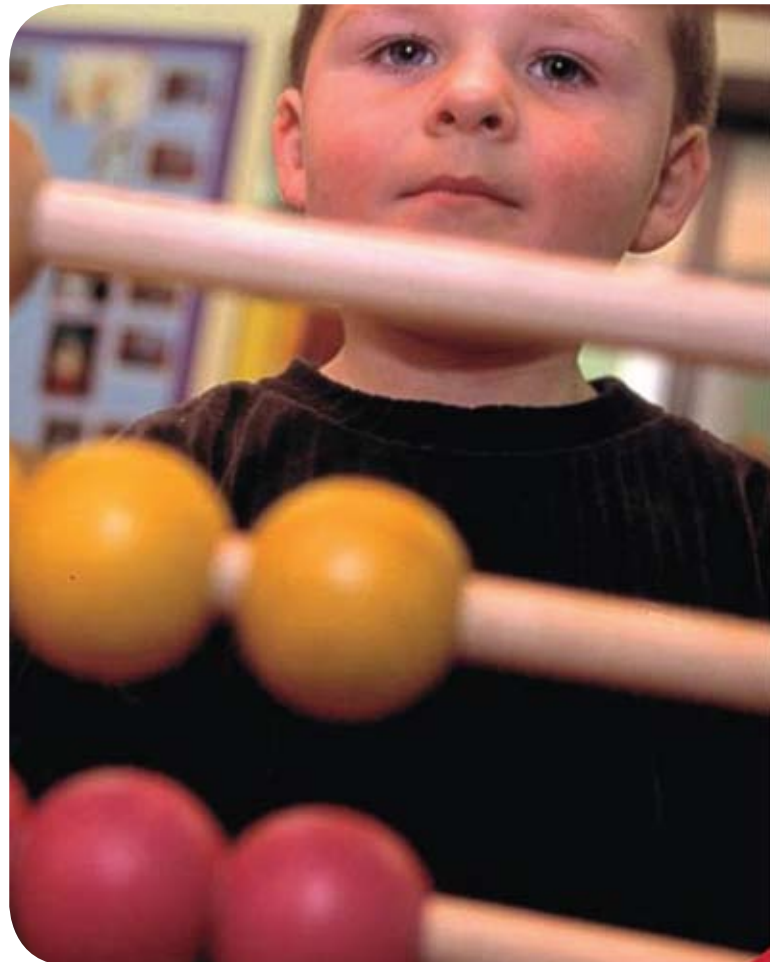


Local councils can make sure that public money is spent efficiently

In a demand-led system with a diversity of providers, a local agency is needed to make sure that the system can support the choices of pupils and parents; cope effectively with population shifts and demographic changes; and is not wasteful of scarce public resources, paying for an excess of surplus places. Although population data is available at a national level, the London Councils example below shows that local knowledge about the interaction of different local pressures is vital to make sure that provision matches local demand.

In a competitive system there is also a risk that the life chances of individual learners will be blighted as competition between providers leads to the closure of some schools and colleges. Learners find mobility and change difficult and local authorities currently manage the risk this has for educational attainment.

Struggling schools with a surplus of places need to be able to use additional funding to attract teachers so that, for example, year 11 students can complete their GCSEs. Councils currently play an important role in managing the transitions as some schools decline and others grow in popularity and this role needs to be retained if competition between providers is to increase.



London: lobbying for extra funding to cope with a ‘baby boom’

Councils have a critical role in assessing local need for school places and commissioning appropriate provision. They can identify demographic change at an early stage, factor this into the school system and lobby for extra resources where necessary.

In 2009, councils around the country won emergency government funding for additional reception class places. Around half of this money was earmarked for London, where the shortage of primary places was particularly severe.

At a national level, the birth rate rose by 16.8 per cent between 2001 and 2007. In London the figure was 20.5 per cent, and individual boroughs saw a birth rate rise of as much as 40 per cent. This trend placed huge pressure on the primary school system, but councils were able to factor rising birth rates into their planning.

The problem was exacerbated by the recession in a way that only became apparent at a local level. Firstly, fewer children were being enrolled in private schools, and going into the state system instead. Secondly, the housing market crash meant that far fewer young families were moving away from London (and other urban areas) as their children approached school age.

By 2009, many primary schools had been left with little or no capacity to take on new pupils. London Councils, which represents the city’s 33 councils, collected data on capacity pressures and predicted that London faced a reception place shortfall of more than 18,000 by 2014 and 50,000 by 2018. It launched a ‘do the maths’ campaign to draw attention to the problem and lobby for extra funding.

In December 2009, the government announced £300 million of emergency funding, enough for an extra 15,000 primary places. Almost half of this funding is being shared between 17 London boroughs.

London Councils welcomed the extra money, saying it would relieve some of the immediate pressure. They are now lobbying for extra funding to provide enough places as the ‘baby boomers’ work their way up through the school system.

For further information contact Caroline Dawes, head of children’s services, London Councils: caroline.dawes@londoncouncils.gov.uk

Councils can work with schools to join up public services for young people

Councils have a wide range of statutory duties to protect the welfare of all children in their area and to make sure that service providers work together to achieve good outcomes for local children. Schools and colleges are vital partners in children's trusts and local schools provide an effective and efficient way of delivering services that meet the wider needs of children and young people.

Education cannot be delivered in isolation from the wider range of local public services used by children and young people, many of them currently commissioned by councils. Educational attainment does not just rely on the quality of teaching. Other support is needed, such as for children who are looked after by the local authority or who care for relatives.

If the role of local authorities as commissioners of local education is recognised and combined with their wider commissioning role, the children's services budget could be more efficiently used by delivering a wider range of services through schools.



Staffordshire: a school-based 'one stop shop' for young people

Staffordshire county council runs an award-winning extended schools initiative in the town of Leek.

Leek High Specialist Technology School hosts 'Room 21', a multi-agency one-stop-shop for young people. It provides a safe environment for children and families to access support from learning mentors, health professionals, parent support workers, the police, youth offending team, Connexions and others.

About half of the pupils come from a single urban ward in north-east Leek with high levels of deprivation and low levels of aspiration. The other half comes from a large rural area.

Room 21 is a popular resource. Between September 2008 and December 2009 there were more than 4,000 individual visits. Services on offer include one-to-one counselling and support, small group discussions and mentoring, restorative justice conferences, study sessions and multi-agency meetings.

The project came about through joint working between Staffordshire County Council, local partners and the school. Since it began there has been an improvement in behaviour and attendance and a reduction in the number of 16 to 19-year-olds not in education, employment or training.

Room 21 won the extended school award at the 2009 *Children and Young People Now* awards. The panel of young people judging the award said it was "a simple but very effective idea that brings a range of services together and has had impressive results."

Judy Samuel, head teacher when the project began, says: "From the start it was both a place where students could call in to talk and an opportunity for colleagues from different agencies to work together." Current head teacher John Spencer adds: "Our vision remains the same – to raise standards and achievement by supporting our students in overcoming barriers to learning."

Room 21 demonstrates effective partnership working between the council, schools and other agencies. Staffordshire uses a network of 50 community and learning partnerships to develop and deliver integrated children's services. Each involves multi-agency work within schools and community venues to deliver a wide range of services to children and families.

For further information contact Paul Woodcock, head of extended schools, Staffordshire County Council: paul.woodcock@staffordshire.gov.uk

A local agency is needed to make sure that local parents and pupils have a wide range of choice

In a demand-led system a local agency is needed to make sure that providers offer a range of options that meet the choices and ambitions of local parents and children and the needs of local employers. Councils have recently been given the role in commissioning education and training to support the choices of 16–19 year olds from a range of autonomous providers, including school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, academies, FE colleges and independent providers.

Councils should be given a similar role in commissioning local schools and colleges to make sure that there are sufficient places and the right range of options to meet the needs of all children and young people in an area. This will include specialist provision to support the needs of particular groups, such as children from chaotic families and young people at risk of disengaging from education and training in their later teens. Because of their wider responsibilities for the welfare of children, councils are uniquely placed to work with other agencies locally to identify and support the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people.



Wolverhampton: flexible learning routes for challenging pupils

Councils have an important role in bringing local partners together to offer joined-up and engaging educational opportunities for all. This approach can be useful in targeting vulnerable young people at risk of disengagement from learning.

In Wolverhampton there is a long-standing culture of providing additional and appropriate learning routes for young people identified as unlikely to achieve five GCSEs or go on to education, training or work. The Raising Enjoyment and Achievement programme (REAch) began in 2006 with the aim of providing opportunities to achieve through appropriate experiences that would motivate, excite and engage these young people.

REAch has involved the city council, schools, local employers, training providers and voluntary sector organisations working together. Each pupil has a personalised learning pathway, selected through guided choice, designed to help them progress through key stage four and on to positive progression routes.

Pupils spend two days a week working towards flexible qualifications that provide vocational experience and develop their personal effectiveness skills. The development of the Qualifications and Credit Framework has enabled a broad range of qualifications to be offered. For the rest of the week, pupils work towards GCSEs and other core curriculum and functional skills. Timetables across the city are co-ordinated to ensure that all pupils can access the same learning opportunities.

REAch has been delivered with the help of a broad range of local partners. Students have experienced opportunities such as touring a football stadium, visiting an animal sanctuary, visiting the police and fire services, experiencing nursery nursing and learning about different industries.

REAch has been an important part of Wolverhampton City Council's work to narrow gaps in educational achievement. Evidence suggests that participation has had a positive impact on students' self-esteem, attitude to learning, achievement and aspiration.

Experience and evaluation from the programme is now being used to develop the city's broader foundation learning offer, ensuring that all learners have access to appropriate and engaging learning opportunities that enable them to achieve their full potential.

For further information contact Caroline Erskine, 14-19 education manager, Wolverhampton City Council: caroline.erskine@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Local councils are needed to make sure that every local child has a place in a good local school

The local education system needs to make sure that a place is available for every local child. A system with a wide range of learning providers, each with their own policies for admissions and exclusions, runs the risk that some children will not qualify for a place in a local school or will not be able to find a place at a local school following exclusion. Councils need to retain a role in making sure that schools admission and exclusion policies are fair, and fairly operated, and deliver a place for all local children and young people.



Derbyshire: better management of school exclusions

Being excluded from school will affect individual young people in different ways. For most, exclusion will be a difficult experience for them and their parents. However, some young people, who are so disaffected by schooling that they do not want to take part, will see exclusion as a reward.

Local authorities have a duty to ensure that every child and young person attends school. Through short-stay schools (formerly known as pupil referral units), councils provide for young people who have been excluded.

It is in nobody's interest that young people remain in short-stay schools for long. The cost of a place is considerably higher than in a mainstream school, and any rise in the number of young people in short-stay provision reduces the funding available to other schools.

Derbyshire County Council has supported the development of a number of partnerships of secondary schools. Among the initiatives these partnerships operate is a 'managed moves' system where youngsters at risk of exclusion are moved from one school to another, providing a new setting in which they have the chance to transform their attitude to learning away from peer pressure.

This system was initially developed six years ago with a group of schools called the 'Peak 11'. Since then, it has successfully reduced the number of excluded pupils to such an extent that the local short-stay school is now an integrated part of Peak 11 provision, taking pupils who are not excluded as well as those who are.

Through these partnerships, the council is able to integrate its planning for admissions, behaviour support and 14-19 learning. Head teachers and other local partners say they value the council's role in providing leadership and sharing good practice.

Derbyshire's experience shows how schools can work together, with support from the county council, to take responsibility for the learning outcomes of all young people. The schools maintain their independence and their ability to make local decisions in the interests of their student population.

For further details contact Frances James, assistant director, children and family support, Derbyshire county council: frances.james@derbyshire.gov.uk

Councils are best placed to drive school improvement

The goal of improving educational outcomes for all pupils cannot just be left to competition between education providers. Giving councils a stronger role in monitoring and intervention will allow them to constantly challenge all providers to improve their performance and make sure that all local young people are able to fulfil their ambitions.

Councils are currently under a duty to promote “the fulfillment by every child concerned of his educational potential”. Councils already provide support and challenge to local schools to help them to improve and work together effectively as the case studies from Kingston, North Yorkshire and the City of York demonstrate.

However, success depends on building good partnerships and on willing cooperation by local schools. In a system with a greater range of more independent providers, who may see themselves as being in competition with each other, the role of councils in driving school improvement needs to be strengthened. We believe a local commissioning role for councils will provide a clearer basis for this relationship with local schools and give them a stronger hand in driving improvement.



North Yorkshire: linking primary schools through e-learning

Travelling teddy bears are providing primary school pupils in North Yorkshire with an insight into the lives of children from other areas, cultures and countries.

Nine primary schools are taking part in a pilot project led by North Yorkshire County Council, looking at how linking different schools together can help to improve community cohesion while developing children's skills.

Each bear spends time in its 'home' school working on a local area or 'our school' project. The bears then travel to link schools in the UK or abroad, and the pupils use e-learning technology to communicate and learn about each other's lives.

'Finlay' is based at Sessay C of E primary school, a small village school that made its first link with Long Meadows, a large multi-cultural school in Milton Keynes. Pupils have been learning about the similarities and differences between their daily lives and their surroundings by following Finlay's adventures.

Jo Mackle, head teacher at Sessay primary school, says: "The children have gained a greater awareness of the UK, where places are, and using online maps. They have learnt to upload photos, add to a blog and even online etiquette when talking to new people. We are very excited about sending Finlay to Kenya for the next step of his journey."

The teddy bears project uses the Fronter Learning Platform, which has been adopted by more than 300 North Yorkshire primary schools. The county council works closely with schools to help them develop and implement new ways of learning, particularly through the use of new technology.

Encouraging schools to adopt Fronter has been an important part of this strategy. It helps the council to play a co-ordinating role, linking schools together to extend the range of learning opportunities available to all pupils.

Case studies and resources generated by the teddy bears project will be made available to all North Yorkshire schools. The blog can be found at:

<http://shareit.yhgfl.net/northyorks/bears>

For further information contact Jon Farley, primary consultant, e-learning, North Yorkshire County Council: jon.farley@northyorks.gov.uk

City of York: innovation in school improvement

City of York council and local schools have developed a creative approach to school improvement. In 2007, this work won national recognition when the council became a Beacon authority for school improvement.

York's children and young people's plan states: "Every child and young person in York deserves the chance to reach their full potential and live their dreams. We will stretch the most able, support those who start at a disadvantage, and protect and nurture the most vulnerable."

The school improvement strategy is shaped by council officers and school leaders, and is updated regularly. There is a strong working relationship between schools, the council and other partners. Regular communication and consultation helps to ensure that policies are responsive to local needs.

Jill Hodges, assistant director for school improvement at City of York Council, says: "We recognise that relationships are as important as structures and systems in securing school improvement. There is a common understanding of what makes an effective school, and a shared response to the actions needed when a school is in difficulty."

Schools use self-evaluation and performance analysis to identify their needs and priorities. The council then provides a tailored package of support to help drive improvement. All schools have access to a range of support from skilled experts. There is a culture of peer support, and the strengths of every school are used to drive city-wide improvement and share best practice.

Through the children's trust, there is an emphasis on listening to children and young people themselves to help inform policy decisions. Pupil focus groups are one way in which pupils' views about their own learning and performance are listened to.

An important part of York's school improvement strategy is the involvement of professionals from a range of services. This includes staff from schools and the local authority along with specialist external consultants, the private, voluntary and independent sectors, colleges and training providers.

For further information contact Jill Hodges: jill.hodges@york.gov.uk



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- City of York: City of York Council

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