

Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
Westminster
London. SW1P 3BT

28 June 2010

By email to: Sec-of-STATE-Diary.PS@education.gsi.gov.uk
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Cc for information: Janet Grauberg, David Bell, Tom Jeffery, Lesley Longstone, Jon Coles, Olivia McLeod, Fiona Boardman

Dear Secretary of State,

Further to my letter of 2 June 2010, ADCS has had the opportunity to reflect on the coalition government's announcements over the last few weeks and would like to offer some suggestions and comments on the emerging DfE agenda. We do so in the spirit of wanting to help the government achieve its objectives for reform, and in the hope that school reform, in particular, can be done in partnership with local authorities rather than done "unto" them.

I understand that a White Paper is being drawn up which will provide detail regarding the role of the local authority and the reform of our schools system. I would like to take the opportunity to feed our ideas into the thinking for the White Paper and this letter will concentrate primarily on that, but will also briefly cover issues relating to sector-led improvement and areas linked to Prof. Eileen Munro's review of child protection.

White Paper on the Role of Local Authorities

In your letter to Lead Members dated 26.05.10 you refer to the importance of the local authority's strategic role in shaping the vision for their local area, being a champion for children, tackling inequalities and working in partnership to drive up standards for **all** children in **all** schools. We welcome this ambition and believe that **local authorities can evolve in more radical ways than the government has suggested** thus far to extend their strategic commissioning function, while the role of direct provider of school places (particularly secondary schools) and some other services will significantly reduce.

International research and our experience suggest that **an education system can only be effective for all children if there is some local body accountable for:**

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- an assurance of a **fair division of resources** between schools
- a plan for places that provides **sufficient school places and maximises choice**
- equitable local delivery of **national admissions guidelines**
- a process for **timely intervention where quality is not sufficiently high and for more formal intervention where schools are failing**
- **advocacy for children in greatest need** (special educational needs, LAC, excluded pupils and other disadvantaged groups) as well as **co-ordination of provision** for them
- support to facilitate **schools of all categories working in collaboration.**

Good local authorities, suitably empowered, are best placed to carry out that role.

It is clearly not the place of local authorities to control or manage schools, and nor do we. We would also suggest to you that if the government wishes the local authority to cease being a provider of secondary school places then it might be better to achieve that in a **quicker more managed transfer of all secondary schools to academy or trust status**, rather than a slow, financially perilous and potentially adversarial "drip drip" approach which is more likely to lead to a two tier, two speed secondary school sector, which nobody wants.

We strongly believe that if the **structural and organisational features and freedoms (including curricular freedoms)** are to be made available to academies and free schools, then they should be **available to all schools** - indeed we cannot see why they would not be if they are beneficial.

Parents and pupils should be able to express a preference for a local school secure in the knowledge that there is a strong quality assurance framework backed by democratic accountability which ensures sustained and sustainable improvement in educational outcomes, and **if local authorities are commissioners rather than providers of secondary places, then they will be better placed than a central government department to carry out that quality assurance role.**

Moving to a **purier commissioning role for local authorities** would build on the current model for commissioning places for 3 and 4 year olds and has the potential to clarify roles in respect of commissioning and provision of 16-19 education.

The **local authority will also have a vital role to play in managing the transition process from the current pattern of school provision to the new pattern across all phases of education**, particularly if there is a significant level of interest in the new models. ADCS can envisage a future where all schools, particularly secondary schools become academies.

The absence of direct dialogue with ADCS over school reform, the academies programme and the role of the local authority is likely to reduce the chances of secure, successful and timely implementation of new policies in those areas.

Sector-led Improvement

ADCS has previously proposed a model of **sector-led improvement based on peer assessment and peer support**. In order to be effective this model must be backed by robust use of data, evidence of what works and a commitment to sharing good practice.

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This is as relevant in school-to-school support (which has gained in currency and sophistication over the last few years, supported by agencies such as the National College) as it is to children's social care and indeed to services across the whole of local government.

In children's services the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO) has rapidly become a valued partner, developing tools and a body of validated practice that are proving useful to practitioners and managers alike.

ADCS is also working closely with I&DeA and LGA and other partners **to bring together the best elements from the current improvement support landscape into a unified framework**. At a time of severe financial constraint it is imperative that the sector takes charge of supporting the sector and learning from each other to secure enduring improvement.

Safeguarding and Social Work

ADCS warmly welcomes the establishment of Prof. Eileen Munro's review and its link to the work of Moira Gibb's Social Work Reform Board and I am personally a member of Eileen's reference group.

We believe there are **a multitude of opportunities to streamline processes** by removing barriers to good practice, freeing social workers and other professionals to regain their confidence and focus on keeping children safe and improving their longer term outcomes.

Examples include:

- **a streamlined approach to assessment**
- **scrapping Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) in their current form in favour of an appreciative enquiry approach** to case review that maximises learning (such as the SCIE model)
- much reduced guidance; in fact it would be enormously advantageous to have a **significantly simplified legislative, guidance and regulatory framework around all children's services**
- speeding up court processes (and **limiting the role of courts in care planning**) to reduce the delay in making plans for children and families. This should include the **dismantling of the role and purpose of Independent Social Workers**, which we believe would not only contribute to reducing delays in care proceedings but would also reduce costs.

ADCS is mindful of the urgency with which you view the need for change and our shared passion to improve educational outcomes and we hope to have the opportunity of a direct dialogue with you in the very near future. We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



Marion Davis
ADCS President

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