

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

2 June 2010

By email to: Sec-of-STATE-Diary.PS@education.gsi.gov.uk

Loughton-Diary.PS@education.gsi.gov.uk

Cc: Tom Jeffery, Lesley Longstone, Jon Coles, Olivia McLeod, Fiona Boardman

Dear Secretary of State,

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS) is the Leadership organisation in England for Directors of Children's Services (DCSs). We welcome the new Ministerial team at the Department for Education (DfE) and in this brief paper hope to reiterate our commitment to working positively with the new government to achieve our shared aspirations for improving the lives of children in England.

We have outlined below some of the main areas where our priorities intersect with those outlined in the Coalition Agreement. We do so in the belief that we can play a significant role in achieving the new government's stated policy objectives.

1. School Improvement and Raising Educational Attainment

1.1. We recognise and understand the primacy for the government of improving educational outcomes for all children, and how this has been signalled by the change of name for the new department, albeit retaining the same policy footprint. The government has also signalled its determination very quickly to introduce a wider variety of providers in the school sector, to rapidly increase the number of Academies, and to encourage parents and other groups to establish 'Free Schools' to add to the diversity of provision. This obviously signals an acceleration of the change over time in the role of the local authority, as the main provider of school places, and also potentially to its accountability for raising standards and in the range of services it provides to schools.

1.2. Our priority will be to ensure a secure, stable and well ordered implementation of these policies and the transition of governance and provenance of schools in a way that upholds the best interests of all children in the state school sector, regardless of school providers.

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Many of us are already experienced commissioners of school places, and believe we can help to ensure that the government's wish for greater innovation and diversity among providers also avoids any destabilising effect on existing schools, and with it the risk that gains for some pupils and schools are at the expense of others.

- 1.3. Local authorities currently hold a statutory role in relation to school improvement and raising standards. ADCS welcomes the letter (of 26 May) sent by, the Secretary of State to Lead Members for Children's Services which specifically asks whether there is more government can do to support local authorities having a strong strategic role in educational excellence. We would welcome discussions with the DfE on establishing with greater clarity the role of local authorities in driving up standards, and its intervention where schools are not delivering for the children, young people and communities they serve.

- 1.4. We also believe local authorities to be uniquely placed to ensure fair admissions and exclusion policies as well as long term strategic planning to ensure sufficient places that offer quality and value for money. We believe the new government's desire for a simpler, more responsive and deregulated market for school providers brings with it an even greater need for local strategic planning and co-ordination to avoid waste and allow diversity to flourish. We recognise this will be within a different statutory framework aimed at incentivising parents and other providers. As local commissioners, DCSs have a strategic overview of local needs and in planning for a diversity of provision including Academies, Free schools, Community Schools, Faith Schools, FE and VIth Form Colleges.

- 1.5. Local authorities also provide and / or commission a range of support services to schools, children, young people and parents through social enterprise, traded and extended services for schools, play and children's centres, youth services and a range of other support services. The imperative to reduce public expenditure will change the way most of these services are delivered (where they are delivered at all). ADCS is keen to work closely with government to ensure that inevitable changes to the way schools and local authorities are funded as a result of increases in Academies and new providers do not have the unintended consequence of rendering valued support services unviable and thereby removing the choice from new providers to purchase them.

- 1.6. Local authorities are also the provider and commissioner of services to the most vulnerable children in their areas, including excluded pupils, looked after children, children and young people with special needs and those on the edge of the criminal justice system. This is a very important role, and we are keen to explore with government how new policies such as the pupil premium can be used as a lever to

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improving the educational attainment of disadvantaged pupils. This would also reduce barriers to learning and contribute to offsetting poverty.

2. Reducing Waste and Bureaucracy

- 2.1. We recognise and welcome the steps already announced by government to reduce the number, size and scope of NDPBs/quangos, and the commitment in the Coalition Agreement to lift the burden of regulation on schools and local government, while bringing a narrower and sharper focus to inspection. We support the review of the size and role of Government Offices, and would argue that to significantly reduce the performance monitoring that they and Strategic Health Authorities carry out would reduce duplication and remove waste. Similarly we would like to see an end to universal improvement support (Field Forces) to local authorities and schools in order to free up the market to allow both to purchase the support they need to improve outcomes.
- 2.2. ADCS contends that sector led improvement and peer support models are more cost effective and that there is emerging evidence to suggest a double benefit – improvement for those giving and receiving support and challenge. We would therefore like to see further development of sector-led improvement, challenge and support models like C4EO and some of the leadership programmes supported by the National College.

3. Re-shaping Inspection and Regulation

- 3.1. We support the government's commitment to reform the inspection system. We believe the centrally directed 'compliance culture' with its focus on measuring process rather than outcomes has sometimes led to resources being directed at managing for inspection compliance rather than the things that will necessarily lead to the best outcomes for children. We can no longer afford this centrally or locally. We would like to see inspection which is fit for purpose, in that it is:
- Outcomes focussed and evidence informed
 - Lighter on detailed regulation
 - Less obsessed with process
 - Capable of supporting local variation and innovation
 - Less driven by compliance , more by organisational learning
 - More partnership focussed
 - More proportionate and therefore cheaper.

This would release precious resources of professional time to be directed where it can have the most impact on children's lives.

- 3.2. We believe there now exists an over regulation, prescription and bureaucratic burden in relation to many aspects of Children's Social

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Care, particularly Child Protection and Looked After Children. There are many examples in the revised 'Working Together' guidance, in the framing of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) role, fostering and adoption regulation, national standards for children's homes and child protection regulation. We seek significant reduction in such regulation, with a greater focus on quality and outcomes and less on compliance with processes.

3.3. ADCS welcomes the appointment of Prof. Eileen Munro by the government to work on simplifying procedures, reducing costs and increasing effectiveness across the system of Children's Social Care. We are keen to join Professor Munro and contribute to this work.

3.4. There are many issues relating to inspection and OFSTED about which we would welcome further dialogue, and which would help to triangulate the relationship between inspection, learning and improvement, and reconnect the process of inspection to judgements of quality.

4. Strengthening Families, Communities and Resilience

4.1. It is the government's aspiration to enhance the ability of families and communities to prevent or resolve their own problems. It is increasingly the focus of children's services to find ways of developing the social capital in communities and resilience in families as the main route to improving outcomes for children and reducing dependency on public services. To this end we are prioritising forms of family support we know to be empowering and effective - early intervention via Sure Start Children's Centre programmes and targeted family intervention schemes.

4.2. Reductions in public spending will require us to make tough choices on early intervention and prevention with families with a premium on evidence of what works, and on services accessed through universal settings such as schools to reduce costs. There is the potential, however, for a better rationalisation of support to families, an enhancement of their sense of their own responsibility and a better connection with support in their local community, thereby strengthening both at reduced public cost. Again, we view this as a fruitful area for further dialogue.

5. Improving Integration and Public Value in Public Services

5.1. A number of us have experience of 'Total Place' pilots or similar schemes aimed at reducing the regulatory and financial barriers between all public sector services to a community. We are convinced that done in the right way, lateral integration across and between the public sector has the potential to deliver significant improvements in value for money and performance.

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5.2. Many local authorities have already achieved some degree of functional integration with PCT provider services for community children's health services and joint commissioning for a wide range of other health services. The maturation of Children's Trust arrangements and other formal multiagency partnerships have highlighted the potential for more integrated working to reduce duplication and waste, to maximise resources and promote coherence across the public sector.

5.3. There is an imperative to increase the public value of the services we offer and reduce the burden on the public purse. We have more experience than most in local government and the public sector of the power of effective integration to do this and are keen to explore this further with the government.

Conclusion

This is by no means an exhaustive list of where our priorities connect with government policy. We would welcome further detailed and continuing dialogue on how we can be involved in developing and implementing the government's objectives at local level.

I look forward to hearing from you.
Yours sincerely



Marion Davis, ADCS President

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