



Future Management of Schools

The UNISON Scotland response to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee call for evidence on Future Management of Schools

July 2010

Introduction

UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence on the *future management of schools*. We have over 160,000 members in Scotland and the majority work in the public sector. Education in Scotland is delivered by a whole team of people, not just teachers. Examples include classroom assistants, library staff, technicians, admin and clerical staff and nursery nurses. UNISON Scotland represents the majority of these vital education staff. Our members are also tax payers and parents who therefore have a unique view of education as both providers and users.

Principles

UNISON Scotland is committed to the modern comprehensive principle rooted in our belief in a decent society. Every child should have a genuinely equal chance of the best education in their local school. We believe that the system where local authorities manage education provision provides an appropriate balance between local democratic control and economies of scale for capital spending, the procurement of goods and the provision of support services to schools e.g. social work and educational psychologists. Parents can take up the opportunity to be involved in their children's education via Parent Councils which are also supported by local authorities who provide ongoing training and development to members. The current system has a national set of terms of conditions for staff. Our experience shows us that moving staff out of local authorities leads to a reduction in wages and conditions for staff. Low paid women in particular suffer. Culture and Sport Glasgow is currently trying to do just this.

The committee's interest in the management of schools appears to have been prompted by the Conservative's interest in Sweden's so called Free Schools, the Scottish Government's failure to deliver its class size promise and by recent briefing by CPPR¹ which indicated that Scotland's educational attainment has flat lined since devolution while the other UK nations have improved. UNISON believes that we should strive for continuous improvement in all public services but reorganisation distracts attention away from delivery. Changing the management of schools will focus attention and resources on internal structures rather than pupils. It takes up to four years for the process of change to work through and start to make a difference. This is a huge proportion of any child's school career.

Structures

The management of schools should be based on what you want schools to achieve. UNISON firmly believes that comprehensive education provides the best route to achieve the aims of high educational attainment for all

¹ CPPR: Scottish Government Budget Options Briefing Series No1 Spending on School Education October 2009

pupils, reduced inequality and social cohesion. The Conservatives are looking to a different model because they are not committed to these principles and they are looking to make massive cuts in public spending. We believe that children's economic status should not determine their educational achievement. We want all children to reach their full potential. We therefore look to Finland instead of Sweden where they combine the highest levels of attainment in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and have "high and consistent performance standards across the entire education system"². It is important to note though that Finnish success in world education rankings is not just about their school's model. It is a country that values social cohesiveness, Finns pay relatively high taxes which provide the money for high quality services which all contribute to the well being of their children.

UNISON also believes that it crucial to the success of schools and our society that schools have a wide social mix of pupils. This is in itself a good thing as promotes social cohesion through allowing children to mix with others from a range of social and ethnic backgrounds. It also means that children whose parents do not support their education can get the benefits of the involvement of other parents who often bring a range of skills to schools in terms of fundraising, campaigning/organising and contacts. UNISON believes that local authority control makes it more likely that parents choose schools for their children rather than schools choosing the pupils.

There is no evidence that Scottish parents are calling for a radical overhaul of schools management. Few opt out of local authority schools. There is little evidence that parents want to take the money and set up their own schools. What they want an excellent local school. The same is true in England a recent survey by UNISON and NASUWT showed only 5% of the public support schools being run by parents; with only 4% in favour of schools being run by private companies.

Swedish Free Schools:

The Conservatives favour strategies which take public money and give it to private companies. The free school model fits into to their privatisation agenda. But fifteen years after they were introduced Swedes are concerned that their schools are slipping down league tables. Not only is their education performance falling it is also slipping back on measures of social mobility and equity.

"the Swedish authorities own research has concluded that over the last 15 years since the free schools were introduced, the number of low performing pupils has increased in Sweden, while the high performing pupils have neither increased in numbers nor have they become more successful"³

² OECD Programme for International Student Assessment 2006 (PISA) Executive Summary page 4 2007

³ Mona Sahlin *Don't Trust the Conservative Education Policy- they want to implement our Swedish failures* Guardian 02.05.10

Even writers in the free market champion *The Economist* accept that it is *“Finland’s no-choice, teacher knows best version of schooling that beats the world. That poses challenges, both for my orthodox free market beliefs and for other countries desperate to both bottle the magic and explore it”*⁴ In Finland, like Scotland, most education institutions are maintained by local authorities or joint municipal boards.

UNISON’s experience of academies in England and the loosening of local authority control in general make us very concerned about moving in that direction. The new government’s plans for academies are even worse. They want to take away the schools that are doing well under the LA control. Academies do not raise attainment any faster than maintained community schools – ⁵*“There is insufficient evidence to show that academies are a model for school improvement”* The academies programme has created a new centralised bureaucracy to provide the advice and support previously provided by the local authorities. The current 203 academies are supported by 70 civil servants. This moves schools further from their communities

It is easy to see why heads may be tempted by the carrot of keeping the 10% of funding that currently sits with local authorities in England and Wales. Schools though then have to buy in services from the local authority or an alternative provider. That money goes very quickly. Head teachers have to become procurement professionals sourcing materials, school meals and support such as educational psychologists. This can lead to reluctance by schools to take any pupils who may incur extra costs such as children with a disability. Schools in England are now employing HR and business managers because of the work involved in purchasing and staff recruitment. Savings to pay for this are being made through cutting other jobs or taking staff out of national pay agreements and pushing down the wage. Support staff bear the brunt of the wages cuts.

UNISON’s UK experience shows that ‘parent led’ schools are myth. They are a stalking horse for edu-business. SERCO, VT Education GEMS are running schools not parents. Funding through local authorities, far from being a drain on schools budgets, provides economies of scale for procuring goods and services and allows a pooling of the costs of those pupils who for a variety of reasons require extra spending. They are also able to manage the modernising of school buildings/building new schools. In Sweden the Free Schools far from being well funded modern establishments tend to be housed in old office blocks. They have little in the way of modern equipment, many don’t even have libraries. They have

⁴ *The Economist* Our Friends in the North 6th June 2008 www.economist.com

⁵ Price Waterhouse Coopers Academies 5th Annual Evaluation 2008 in Anastasia De Waal *Secrets of Academies Success* 2009 page 68
202www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/secrets_success_academies.pdf.

greater numbers of unqualified teachers.⁶ They cannot be the solution shrinking budgets.

The coalition government's plans to turn outstanding schools into academies are not about improvement. If schools are outstanding under local authority control why do they need to move away from it? Public services are caught in a Catch 22: If they are bad then the answer is to privatise and where they are good then the call is again to privatise. This is an ideological agenda rather than one based on evidence of what works

Democracy

Parents should have a significant say in their children's education. In Scotland they can already do this via parent councils. They also have the opportunity to go to the local authority if they are unhappy with the school or head teacher. They have the opportunity to appeal to both elected members and staff. The local authority can also ensure that the voices of all parents are heard rather than just a well organised and funded minority.

While there is a great deal of discussion about "freeing up" head teachers it is also important that they too are managed appropriately. Head teachers have stolen school funds; they have failed to support teachers under severe stress leading in extreme cases to high profile assaults. They too need management and support. Changing the current systems of school management would also have implications for the ongoing changes to Scotland's scrutiny regime.

The current financial crisis is not a great advert for freeing up anything.

Effective policies

The OECD policy priorities to improve educational attainment are

- Emphasise teacher quality over teacher quantity
- Ensure teachers have the best skills by making entry more flexible and making the criteria for selection more rigorous.
- Ensuring strong leadership within schools
- Continual development of teacher's skills

It was also indicated that for those children who were struggling, home visits, social workers in schools and more educational psychologists may be more effective ways to improve their outcomes. These can be accessed cost effectively via the local authority. Glasgow City Council found "nurture classes" to be effective. These give focused attention, including their social and emotional needs, to those who are struggling. There is also evidence that improved intervention in the pre-school years works well. Focusing on the training and development of all school staff will raise the standards in schools. Good terms and conditions will attract good people to roles.

⁶ Mona Sahlin Don't trust the Conservative education policy- they want to implement our Swedish failures Guardian 02.05.10

Conclusion

Dogma driven strategies to bring in the private sector or to reorganise management structures will waste time and money. If Scotland is to continue to improve its education standards then we must keep the best from our current system and look at what works elsewhere. The emphasis should be on getting the best people working in a range of roles to support children's development and ensuring that they have ongoing training and development to drive improvement.

Matt Smith, Scottish Secretary

UNISON Scotland
UNISON House
14, West Campbell Street,
Glasgow G2 6RX

Telephone 0845 355 0845