

The White Paper: *Educational Excellence Everywhere*

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

A Introduction

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents more than 18,500 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million young people in more than 90 per cent of the secondary and tertiary phases, and in an increasing proportion of the primary phase. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.
- 2 ASCL welcomes government's commitment to a school-led, self-improving system. We are pleased to see that Michael Barber and Joel Klein are quoted: 'You can mandate adequacy, but you cannot mandate greatness; it has to be unleashed.' This is the central premise of ASCL's Blueprint - our White Paper.
- 3 We would like to set out our top three issues here.

Compulsory academisation

- 4 We are pleased that the Secretary of State has responded to the concerns voiced in our letter to her of 25 April and made adjustments to her proposals about compulsory academisation for all schools. The original proposal was out-of-kilter with a school-led system.

The supply of teachers and leaders

- 5 ASCL remains extremely concerned about the crisis in the supply of teachers and leaders. Without sufficient, high-quality teachers and leaders, the system will fail. There are some sound proposals in the White Paper to get more teachers and leaders into the system, but these plans do not go far enough or fast enough. Action to better incentivise and promote the teaching profession is urgently required. There is a pressing need for a strategy which draws together, and adds to, the individual ideas suggested in the White Paper.

Year 7 resits

- 6 We share the government's concerns about pupils who have not reached a threshold by the end of primary school to enable them to access the curriculum. We agree that there is more work to do. But this is a professional practice issue – not a matter for government. We therefore totally oppose the concept of 'resits' in Year 7. Schools are already held to account for the progress pupils make between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.

7 Our remarks are organised in sections as follows:

- A Introduction**
- B Great teachers**
- C Great leaders**
- D A school-led system with every school an academy**
- E School-led improvement**
- F A world-leading curriculum**
- G Accountability**
- H Resources**
- I Conclusion**

B Great teachers

8 We agree with the government that the quality of teaching is more important to pupil outcomes than anything else a school can control, so it is essential that the education system recruits, educates, develops and retains the best possible teachers.

9 We support the following proposals which align with ASCL's blueprint:

- By 2020, a self-improving school-led system is in control and the teaching profession takes its rightful place alongside other learned professions – generating innovative, evidence-based practice and setting the highest standards of practice and professional development.
- Reform of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) to better design and deliver targeted recruitment incentives, campaigns and opportunities that attract sufficient new entrants to the profession, including those who are looking to return to the classroom.
- Strengthening school-led and university teacher education by increasing the rigour of content with a greater focus on subject knowledge and evidence-based practice.
- The implementation of a clear framework for initial teacher education core content based on the recommendations of the independent working group.
- That schools are increasingly taking the lead for high-quality professional development – supported and led by the national network of teaching schools – and the new standard for teachers' professional development.
- The proposed expansion of the role and remit of the Education Endowment Foundation in improving and spreading the evidence of what works in education.
- Support for the establishment of an independent College of Teaching and increase in teachers' access to high-quality evidence including through a new, peer-reviewed British education journal.

10 The government's recognition that there is a national problem in teacher supply is most welcome. We are not convinced that the Department for Education has fully accepted the level and seriousness of this as yet. The White Paper acknowledges that teacher recruitment is more difficult as the economy grows stronger. For these reasons, ASCL offers to work with government to develop a long-term strategic plan to recruit a well-qualified sustainable workforce. We urge government to encourage NCTL to implement this strategic plan.

11 We welcome the continued focus on professionalism in teaching and the role of school leaders in accrediting those new to the profession. We look forward to being involved and consulted on this as the Department for Education works on detailed proposals.

- 12 A model of initial teacher education which enables those entering the profession to increase their depth of knowledge and pedagogical expertise over three years would encourage a broader learning experience and a wider involvement in school life. However, this will only achieve its aims if properly funded. We seek further clarification on how this proposal will be contextualised as part of initial teacher education and the award of QTS, and we look forward to being consulted.
- 13 We seek clarity on the implications of this proposal for the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) relating to qualified/unqualified pay scales and the Burgundy Book related to teachers' conditions of service. A stable national teaching force requires the retention of a national benchmark for teachers' pay and conditions of service.

C Great leaders

- 14 ASCL welcomes the government's commitment to put more power into the hands of school and system leaders.
- 15 The following proposals align with ASCL's blueprint and policies:
- The commitment to work closely with the Foundation for Leadership in Education to develop a long-term strategy for leadership qualifications.
 - Convening an expert group to redesign voluntary, world-class, national, professional qualifications to prepare leaders more effectively for the full range of leadership roles in the new school system.
 - Proposals to develop flexible routes for returners, in particular women.
 - The commitment to support the creation of a Women in Education network to further support women with career progression by working with ASCL and the Leading Women's Alliance, chaired by ASCL.
- 16 We are pleased to see plans to introduce an 'improvement period' during which schools will not be inspected by Ofsted to allow the time and stability to put in place sustainable improvement. This is an important step in ensuring that leaders in struggling schools are given a period in which to embed improvement measures. Transforming a school does not happen overnight and this measure reflects that.
- 17 We look forward to being consulted about the future role of Ofsted, understanding that this will be reviewed with the upcoming appointment of the new HMCI.
- 18 High-quality governance is vital and governing boards need to be skills-based and focused on strategic functions. In general, we support the removal of restrictions around governors. Governors must have the skills to do the job, provide strong and robust challenge and meet standards in public life.
- 19 We note that the government will no longer require academy trusts to reserve places for elected parents on governing boards. We understand that this does not stop parents becoming or remaining governors. ASCL fully supports the expectation that schools should engage with their pupils' parents. It is important in a self-improving system for every school/trust to determine *how* its governance structure includes parents of pupils.

D A self-improving school-led system

- 20 We are pleased that the Secretary of State has responded to our concerns about compulsory academisation for all schools. We agree that teachers are most effective

when they work in great schools supported by great leaders. There are great academies, stand-alone and in multi-academy trusts, and great maintained schools.

- 21 Our concerns about compulsory academisation for all schools were never about the academy programme or indeed with the policy of groups of schools working together. Our blueprint states that there is a strong correlation between collaborative cultures and system success. We believe in continuous improvement through principled strategic partnerships. Schools operating in such partnerships are best placed to build capacity and address system-wide challenges.
- 22 Groups of schools have the potential to create the conditions for deep and sustainable partnerships that build professional capacity, collaborative learning and joint practice development, and have collective responsibility for pupils' outcomes.
- 23 However, academy reporting is currently an administrative and bureaucratic burden which is costly to operate and diverts resources away from children and young people. ASCL asks government and its agencies to consider a streamlining and reduction of bureaucratic burdens on academy trusts related to both conversion and financial reporting.
- 24 Under existing legislation, the role of regional schools commissioners (RSCs) has increased rapidly. Capacity in relation to both the RSC function and the Education Funding Agency (EFA) will need to be addressed.

E School-led improvement

- 25 We welcome the government's commitment to strengthening the infrastructure that supports all schools and their leaders to collaborate effectively.
- 26 The following proposals align with ASCL's blueprint and policies:
- Shifting responsibility for school improvement to schools and system leaders – teaching schools, National Leaders of Education and other designation system leaders – to spread best practice.
 - Shifting the criteria for designating National Leaders of Education to timely and accurate data rather than relying heavily on Ofsted judgements.
- 27 The focus on areas of poverty and significant deprivation is welcome and we would appreciate the opportunity to discuss possible solutions with the government.
- 28 ASCL urges the government to connect social policy and education policy in these areas and to draw on lessons learnt from existing successful programmes.

F A world-leading curriculum

- 29 ASCL agrees that every child deserves to leave education with the knowledge and skills that open access to the best possible opportunities in life. Education should prepare children for adult life by instilling the character traits that will help them succeed: being resilient and knowing how to persevere, how to bounce back if faced with failure and how to collaborate with others at work and in their personal lives.
- 30 However, as we said in our response to the consultation on implementing the Ebacc, in a school-led, self-improving system, a school's curriculum should be determined by school leaders and governors.

- 31 All schools need a challenging curriculum if all our students are to be able to compete globally. We need a curriculum that provides a firm foundation for all students, whatever their backgrounds, enabling them to succeed not just in modern Britain but in the modern world. This curriculum needs to be broad, balanced and motivational.
- 32 ASCL supports the principle of core academic subjects as being crucial to a young person's future and the equality of opportunity this offers. However, there has been a conflation between what is an appropriate core academic curriculum and the narrow range of subjects in the Ebacc. The proposed set of subjects set out in the Ebacc are important but not all are appropriate or relevant for all students. Following the reform of GCSEs there are other equally valid, rigorous and beneficial subjects that young people could study which would also improve life chances and maintain broad options post-16.
- 33 We agree with government that it is fundamentally important for all pupils in Year 7 to be able to access the curriculum. We share the government's concerns about pupils who have not reached a threshold by the end of primary school to enable them to do so. We agree that there is more work to do to ensure that these children receive the support to make rapid progress in their learning in order to be able to access the curriculum. But this is a professional practice issue – not a matter for government.
- 34 ASCL therefore totally opposes the concept of 'resits' in Year 7. Our concerns about the introduction of 'resit' tests include:
- The potential impact on children's mental well-being and perceptions of themselves at a vulnerable stage in their lives – i.e. the potential to reinforce a sense of failure by singling them out.
 - The potential to distort the Year 7 curriculum – for some of the most disadvantaged children in schools serving disadvantaged communities to be fed a narrow diet of a repeat Year 6 curriculum.
- 35 School leaders should decide the nature of internal assessment. Schools will be using testing in Year 7 for a range of reasons, including formative and diagnostic assessment. ASCL does not oppose tests and assessment per se, but we do strongly oppose the resit methodology for the reasons cited above.
- 36 ASCL supports the need for high-quality alternative provision which includes the most vulnerable students. However, we have concerns about the lack of clarity in the White Paper over accountability and providing rigorous and transparent systems to obtain and commission high-quality provision. There needs to be a rigorous process for moving young people from mainstream to alternative provision and a quality assurance mechanism for provision.

G Accountability

- 37 It is right that a more autonomous system depends on a fair and effective accountability system.
- 38 The following proposals align with ASCL's blueprint and policies:
- The commitment to embed *existing* reforms to accountability, which focus on progress rather than attainment.
 - The commitment to reform Ofsted. We agree that school inspection should be focused on what is essential to make valid judgements about school effectiveness, looking at outcomes and judging areas which can be most effectively assessed through inspection.

- 39 The White Paper does not make a commitment to giving Ofsted the power to inspect trusts, but it does launch a new accountability framework for MAT performance.
- 40 The White Paper implies that the performance of academy trusts is best quantified by looking at individual academies within the trust. It further suggests that there is an opportunity to 'hide' weaker performance if this is not the case. We believe the opposite is true.
- 41 If Progress 8 is to be used as the headline indicator (and the White Paper indicates that progress is the main instrument for accountability), then it must be applied to the whole MAT, which needs to be considered an entity. This is because statistical significance, an essential component of Progress 8, is a function of the number of pupils involved in the measure.
- 42 An individual academy may have a relatively small number of pupils making its confidence interval quite wide. If its Progress 8 score is below zero, a wide confidence interval might 'rescue' it from being designated 'below average' by spanning zero.
- 43 However, when all the eligible pupils are considered as a whole, the larger number of pupils reduces the confidence interval. If the Progress 8 score for the trust is negative, the confidence interval will be small and hence may not disguise 'below average' performance. 'Hiding', of concern in the White Paper, is possible when the academies are considered separately, not when the MAT is considered as an entity.
- 44 There are other aspects of MAT performance which *are* related to individual academies, such as the success or otherwise of the MAT in raising the Ofsted judgement of its academies. Individual schools within a MAT should have a range of published data so that they are directly accountable to the communities they serve, but the performance of the MAT as such needs to be judged on aggregate data.
- 45 Ofsted should be given the power to inspect MATs.

H Resources

- 46 We agree that no pupil should be disadvantaged because their school receives less funding than a school with similar costs and pupils. ASCL has campaigned for a national fair funding formula for many years. However, this alone will not address the severe financial situation faced by schools and colleges as a result of rising costs and frozen budgets. Significantly more investment is needed.
- 47 Our response to the national funding formula consultation makes clear that a successful education system is fundamental to the performance, growth and productivity of any country. Education funding represents investment in economic growth and should reflect the expectations of our global positioning in future years. Expenditure on the education system should not be regarded as a cost but as an investment to secure the economic and social well-being of our country.
- 48 It is our view that the principles that should underpin the national formula are:
- The overall national education budget should be set such that all schools and colleges can be funded at a level that enables them to provide an outstanding quality of education for their pupils.
 - The distribution of the national education budget to educational institutions should be sufficient, sustainable and equitable.

- An individual school or college budget allocation should be transparent and predictable to enable effective strategic financial planning by schools.
- A national funding formula should take into account the needs of educational institutions and their pupils. This should not be predicated on the historical way in which funding is allocated.
- A reformed funding formula is not about creating winners and losers – it is about sufficiency and establishing an equitable base level of funding.

49 Albeit no longer the intention of government to bring forward legislation to require all schools to become academies, the costs of academy conversions are significant for those schools wishing to convert. For example, there are costs on the accounting side and the increased level of financial responsibility is likely to require enhanced staffing. The processes of conversion and reporting need streamlining to make them more efficient.

50 As much additional money as possible needs to be used to level up funding, especially as there is a real-terms decrease in funding over the lifetime of the government with policies such as the removal of the education services grant (ESG), while there are significant real-terms increases in costs.

I Conclusion

51 I hope that this is of value to you as you take forward the reforms set out in the White Paper. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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 Association of School and College Leaders
 9 May 2016