



What is Education For?

An ADCS Position Statement

**The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd
Educational Achievement Policy Committee**

February 2014

Key principles for Directors of Children's Services

Our work as leaders in local authority children's services and as an Association can be characterised by three key statements. These statements underpin the basis of this piece of work, and inform the recommendations.

The roles of directors of children's services and lead members for children's services are enshrined in legislation and underpinned by statutory guidance, most recently revised in April 2013.¹

- **A world class education is a universal right for every child.**
- **Every child has the right to an education that meets their needs and enables them to develop into a successful adult.**
- **On behalf of their local authorities, Directors of Children's Services are legally, morally, and professionally responsible for the quality of the education for every child in their local area regardless of where they receive their schooling, and are democratically accountable to local people.**

¹ <https://education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00206029/statutory-guidance-for-childrens-services-chiefs>

Executive Summary

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS) is the national leadership organisation in England for directors and senior leaders of children's services.

This position statement articulates ADCS members' collective views on the current education system and their aspirations for the future. It considers the purpose of education and suggests the actions local authorities could take to ensure that their local education offer meets the changing needs of their children and young people, as well as the role of business, the community and the home in developing the local education offer. The paper concludes by offering recommendations for the future, which we hope will be discussed and debated within local authorities.

Our work, collectively as ADCS and as individual senior leaders in local authorities, is underpinned by two fundamental beliefs. Firstly, that a world class education is a universal right for every child and that within that universal right each learner should be given the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Secondly, that the child and their community are at the centre of everything we do.

Every director of children's services has a moral and democratic responsibility for the quality of education in their local area, their influence is wider than those powers delivered to them by statute. Local authorities have a key role in ensuring every child achieves high quality outcomes regardless of their background or the context in which they grow up in.

This paper builds on the construct that "education" can be delivered at any age, in any setting, and that "education" should not be confused with "schooling". It is the role of local authorities to commission and quality assure the 'education offer' based on the principles of equity of access and fairness. Whilst local authorities do not control schools, they have the responsibility to know the providers in their local area and assure that their local provision is of the highest quality. Education is, can and should be delivered in a wide variety of settings. Schools have operated outside of local authority control long before the statutory position of Director of Children's Services was created in 2004, and as a result the Association does not favour one school setting over another. The reality of education provision in England is that it is delivered by a diverse range of providers including maintained schools, church schools as well as schools provided by the voluntary and private sectors.

Education, as opposed to schooling, also takes place informally within the community at all ages, from birth through to adulthood. We must also remember the crucial, most obvious place that education takes place; within the home, provided by parents and care givers, utilising a child's natural curiosity and desire to make sense of their world from the moment of birth. The local authority has a role in enhancing this informal learning, and filling the deficit when informal learning at home, especially during the early years, has not resulted in sufficient progress to provide a firm foundation for school learning, for example the Early Years Foundation Stage

(EYFS) learning and development goals including the development of speech and language, personal, social and emotional development and physical development.²

In the same way as child safeguarding and protection, education is everybody's business. This paper seeks to explore the complex relationship between the home, community, schools, business and the economy as well as recognise the opportunity to influence the future success of children and young people through their right to being healthy and well.

Since the ADCS launched its "What is Education For?" debate, the Association of School and College Leadership³ has launched "The Great Debate" and the National Association of Head teachers has launched a "Commission on Assessment"⁴ both of which explore similar themes. ADCS will pro-actively engage with both of these initiatives with the aim of bringing a local authority perspective to the debates.

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/249995/Early_years_foundation_stage_profile_handbook_2014.pdf

³ www.greateducationdebate.org.uk

⁴ <http://www.naht.org.uk/welcome/news-and-media/key-topics/assessment/naht-commission-on-assessment/>

Purpose of education

Education is the right of every child, and is a universal basic right funded by the state. The majority of schools in England are maintained schools, with 3000 academies and free schools, funded directly by central government, operating as of May 2013⁵. Directors of children's services are responsible for the quality of education received by every child regardless of where they receive that education.

Education has the power to change lives. This paper recognises the relatively poor track record of children from disadvantaged⁶ backgrounds; those on free school meals; children in care and those taught in alternative provision settings, in achieving the "basic measure"⁷ of success as determined by the government – five A* - C grades including Maths and English at GCSE. The floor standard for schools is set at 40%⁸ of children achieving this basic measure of success but in some local authorities the gap between those children in disadvantaged groups achieving this standard and other students is getting wider.

Nationally, in 2012/13 40.9% of disadvantaged students achieved the basic measure of success compared to 67.8% of all other children⁹. Over 92,000¹⁰ disadvantaged children, including those on free school meals, in alternative provision or a pupil referral unit and those children with looked after status, did not achieve 5A*-C grades including English and Maths in 2012/13. As well as the chronic underachievement by pupils in this disadvantaged group at the end of Key Stage 4, there is also the wider issue of disengagement from education by pupils who on the face of results have achieved "success".

Research by NFER¹¹ shows that disengagement can take place amongst all students including those who are achieving the highest grades, and that there is a wider issue of whether education meets the needs of some children who, on the face of it achieve good outcomes and do not suffer from behavioural issues, special educational needs or learning difficulties. This paper briefly addresses what measures we can take to further engage those students whose experience of schooling could be further enhanced – but who are not necessarily a cause for concern in the current system.

In the current global economy, the lack of good GCSEs invariably means that these children and young people are less able to gain access to higher education, skills

⁵ Figure 3. Page 12.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/206382/Academies_Annual_Report_2011-12.pdf

⁶ Disadvantaged pupils are defined as those pupils known to be eligible for Free School Meals in any Spring, Autumn, Summer term, are taught in Alternative Provision or a Pupil Referral Unit or are looked after children.

⁷ Defined as 5A*-C grades including English and Maths at GCSE <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/parents-get-more-information-about-school-performance>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-and-equivalent-attainment-by-pupil-characteristics-2012-to-2013>
Published 23 January 2014

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-and-equivalent-attainment-by-pupil-characteristics-2012-to-2013>
Published 23 January 2014

¹⁰ 60.1% of 154,087 disadvantaged children did not achieve 5A*-C grades including English and maths in 2012/13 = 92,606

¹¹ *Engaging the disengaged*, NFER (2012) <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/ETDE01/ETDE01.pdf>

and training (including apprenticeships) and work. However, we contend that arbitrarily defined outcome measures alone must not be the sole rationale for ensuring access to world class educational opportunities. We do though, recognise that it is critically important that children gain qualifications to allow them to access not only the world of work, but also for them to access high skilled jobs as the number of low-skilled jobs are projected to continue to fall. A 2010 report by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education “*Skills supply and demand in Europe*”¹² showed that the number of low-skilled jobs in the UK is expected to fall by 51% while medium and high-skilled jobs will increase by 16% and 21% respectively by 2020.

Attaining qualifications is seen, by some, as the main purpose of education; the currency to be banked and traded for future success in jobs and life. We would argue that they are one measure of success in a child’s journey through the ‘school’ system. We believe that the true measure of success in any educational system must take into account the quality of adult life the young person goes onto achieve. It must take into account a person’s mental and physical wellbeing, their role in the community, their “soft” skills; self-esteem, ability to build secure and stable adult relationships, the ability to communicate effectively as well as wider issues such as employability. Indeed, the CBI argues that these softer skills are exactly those which employers value and consistently berate the current school system for not providing¹³.

Directors of children’s services have a duty to ensure that all local education providers deliver a good standard of education¹⁴ In carrying out their statutory leadership roles, DCSs need to challenge provision which they believe is inappropriate, they must ensure that each local provider offers a full range of academic and vocational options to meet the needs of all our children and young people; and do not become over-focused on one set of indicators. For some children a wide range of technical, vocational, practical as well as academic education may help them develop the skills for later life and the recent debate promoted by Lord Baker¹⁵ about the role of University Technical Colleges (UTCs) exemplifies this.

A relevant and high quality curriculum offer already exists in some of our best schools and settings, they are the ones with a broad and balanced curriculum designed to promote the talent, aptitude and ability of all children, from the very able to those with complex needs; institutions that prepare all students for further academic study, for training in a specialist area or for work and ensure their students make a successful transition. The best schools and settings deliver a wider

¹² Published in 2010 - http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3052_en.pdf

¹³ Published in 2012 - http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/1845483/cbi_education_report_191112.pdf

¹⁴ Education Act (1996) S.13A

¹⁵ Sir John Cass Foundation Lecture at the Cass Business School, October 2013 cited in The Independent: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/michael-gove-criticised-by-lord-baker-for-policies-based-on-his-own-educational-experience-8902485.html>

education offer beyond that of the statutory duty; one that focuses on the mental, academic and physical wellbeing of their local population.

A model for the future

This debate has been prompted by the desire of DCSs, who have, along with the lead member, statutory responsibility in their locality to create a meaningful, high quality education offer that is also designed to promote safety and wellbeing and ensure that all children, young people and adults are able to maximise their potential. To that end ADCS members are seeking to articulate what education is for, in a civilised and post-industrial society. We will be guided by the defining outcome measure: how well do our children turn out as adults?

We hope to stimulate discussion about the nature of education; its role and value in a post-industrial society and how best to deliver it, to influence the development of “content” not just get pulled into the debate about structures. The reality of the current education landscape means that this will not be easy; DCSs work across a highly differentiated system, influencing but without control, as custodians of an eco-system, not controllers of a closed system. Many of the ways of delivering education and learning are out of their direct control, but are within their spheres of influence. For example, local authorities might work with businesses to develop apprenticeship places, with the Fire Service to deliver fire safety lessons, with Alcohol Concern to deliver alcohol and substance misuse strategies or health to influence pre-natal healthy child education to parents.

Education and its role and purpose provoke debate and is very much politically contested. The legislative base is constantly shifting. Between 1988 and 2011 alone there were in excess of 27 pieces of legislation directly related to schools or education, with more changes through other pieces of primary legislation, secondary legislation or through changes to regulations where the education system was not the primary focus.

Our discussions as an organisation have considered a wide range of issues surrounding education, qualifications, structures, curricula, extra-curricular activities, entitlements and the needs of local and national economies. From our discussions, it is clear that there is no desire to impose a national model of delivery or structure of education on local authorities outside of the structures that already exist. ADCS members are keen to engage in a professional, expert debate about what could and should be delivered by a local authority and the mechanism for doing that.

There is no single model of education in either Europe or the rest of the world that members could look to, although the Finnish education system was held in high esteem by many. We recognise that the challenges facing the Finnish system – with its largely homogenous population of 5.4million people¹⁶ and a relatively high tax

¹⁶ Statistics Finland (2013), “Finland's preliminary population figure 5,445,883 at the end of September”. Accessed online at https://www.stat.fi/til/vamuu/2013/09/vamuu_2013_09_2013-10-22_tie_001_en.html

rate – are very different to those facing the English system. There are other nations within Europe and in the wider world that are deemed to be more successful at preparing their young people for adulthood than England based on PISA and other international measures. Measured by a variety of indicators, whether it is by qualifications, average earnings, healthy life expectancy or social mobility, England is not the best in the world, yet there is no single action that will rapidly transform the current system to make it the best.

Current situation

Every child's experience of education will be different; some children flourish in the current system, and that should not be forgotten. Our role is to help all children reach their potential, whatever that potential maybe. For some young people education and school provides a safe environment in which to grow and develop, where stable relationships and friendships can be established, and where they can learn and be nurtured and supported. Yet for other children the education system does not provide the opportunities that they need to become competent adults. We expect all young people to want to meet stretching targets, particularly in the core subjects, but our discussions suggest that it is time to re-evaluate what we consider as a success. There is no question qualifications should play a part in that equation, but we want to re-examine the balance between qualifications and quality of life to judge whether success on qualifications alone is an appropriate response to 11 years (and from 2015 – 13 years) of formal education, and which ignores the individuals value, worth and contribution to their community and society. Further the establishment of targets for institutions should not impact negatively upon any children, most especially the most deprived in our society.

Young people will, today and in the future, not leave school and enter into one job that they will stay in for life. It therefore becomes vitally important that our education offer supports and reflects this to allow children to develop the ability to be able to learn new skills as the world around them changes and to equip them to seize opportunities that are presented to them. The skills required to be an effective life-long learner are critical to enable them to continuously engage with training and development throughout their lives.

The needs of business including the local, regional, national, sector and global economies must also be taken into account. The establishment of University Technical Colleges is allowing for the development of highly specialised colleges - such as a focus on creative industries in Salford; marine and environmental engineering in Newhaven or engineering in Staffordshire - and this may be a means of developing local or regional curricula in the future.

The Department for Education invests an ever-diminishing amount into research to explore what works or does not work in education. In 2010-11 the Department for Education spent £27m in real terms on research and development for policy

support¹⁷ contrasted with £38m in the 2007-2008 financial year. Local systems do not sufficiently use the available evidence, and neither does central government. By furthering research into what works, and does not work in education, we can begin to move the services around that we provide dependent upon the impact they have. Current systems are based on evolution, primarily designed to deliver a skilled workforce for the industrial era. In part, this reflects where schools are located; in areas where they always have been, and many children follow their parents into the same educational institution. We accept the current financial situation has meant constraints in all areas of funding however, the current systems make insufficient use of evidence to assess the impact of initiatives on the lives of the children that they seek to help. We need our education system to be built on evidence-based research methods and pedagogy that we know works¹⁸. We would like to see the further exploration of the use of research in education¹⁹ as one way of exploring what is effective in education. How limited resources can be used effectively and efficiently must also be explored further to ensure that scarce public resources are spent well. As Dr. Ben Goldacre argues in his paper commissioned by the DfE,²⁰ it would be unthinkable for a new drug or treatment regime to be used unless rigorously trialled and validated before being accepted as a legitimate treatment for patients. So why do we think it's acceptable in education?

Multi-agency working?

Success at school and the relative benefits later in life have recently been highlighted by the World Health Organisation (WHO)²¹. After analysing the impact of youth unemployment, the WHO concluded that the issue was a potential “public health time bomb waiting to explode”. They found that being unemployed had immediate health consequences including increased risk of suicide and depression, whilst unemployment in the longer term increased the risk of stroke, heart disease and cancer. As such the education and development of our children into successful adults is both an economic and health imperative.

In a time where multi-agency working and integration is thought of as the holy grail of working behaviours across children and adults social care, the separation of education from the wider health, social care and employment agenda is at odds with the wider policy driver of integration. The inclusion of education partners on local Health and Wellbeing Boards is one way to address this gap, the role of the DCS is vital in bringing together partners to develop the role of education in delivering improved outcomes for young people. The education setting is already a vital

¹⁷ Table 2.2 (DCSF): https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34721/12-499-set-statistics-2012.xls

¹⁸ <http://www.bera.ac.uk/resources/dfe-review-evidence-education>

¹⁹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62529/TLA-1906126.pdf

²⁰ Dr. Ben Goldacre, ‘Building Evidence into Education’ 2013, accessed on line at <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/b/ben%20goldacre%20paper.pdf>

²¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-24745612>

gateway for delivering the children's public health agenda including vaccinations, sex and relationship education, drugs and alcohol education and anti-obesity initiatives. The wider use of the school setting by other professionals as well as teachers, offers a unique opportunity to reach children and families in a way that traditional hospital or GP services do not. In the same way that children's centres have expanded the reach of local authority early help services, schools could be used to reach more families who would otherwise have a difficulty or be unwilling to access health services elsewhere. Some successful schools already deliver health provisions, such as speech and language therapy or child and adult mental health services (CAMHS) through the school setting, not delivered by teachers, but delivered by health professions, using the school building as a hub in the local community. It is interesting to note that the local school was often the hub of the local community in the last century, and remains so in some rural settings and in many developing countries where schooling is still in its first stages of development.

The wider use of the school setting would also give greater access for some of our more disadvantaged families, not just children, to preventative health, and wider educational initiatives such as healthy eating, pro-exercise, awareness raising campaigns for certain types of cancers. Schools are a setting that parents and some grand-parents come into contact with almost every day, they have relationships with families that often a GP will not have. Co-location of services, especially in rural communities where access to services can be limited through geography alone, is one way of breaking this barrier in gaining access to whole families.

The role of business and the wider community

The education system has, over time, been criticised by the business sector for not producing enough potential employees with the relevant skills suitable for the workforce. A 2013 survey published by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI)²² showed that 55% of businesses surveyed believed that school leavers lack the right work experience and key attributes that set them up for success, including self-management (54%), problem solving (41%) and attitude to work (35%). The CBI emphasised the need for students to be well-rounded individuals as well as stretched academically whilst at school. One particular government scheme, in conjunction with employers and schools is aiming to tackle this issue. "Employers and Education Taskforce" created in 2009, the Taskforce is an alliance of the main teaching bodies, as well as employer representative bodies.

The Taskforce aims to bring children and young people into contact with businesses and professions that they would not usually come into contact with, with the aim of raising aspirations and ambitions. Its successful "Speakers for Schools" has seen a number of high profile figures speak in schools about their career path, to showcase the possibilities for different career options to children who otherwise may have

²² http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/2119176/education_and_skills_survey_2013.pdf

followed a more traditional, low-skilled route. Research shows a positive correlation between the number of contacts between a child and employers including careers talks, speeches, visits and more formal work experience, and their future earnings. As such, exposure to different professions is a relatively cost-effective intervention if delivered in conjunction with local and regional businesses. Local public sector employers also have a positive role to play in bringing opportunities for work experience to their local children and young people. The volume of opportunities for work experience in the public sector in some areas will outweigh those in the private sector due to the local employment demographic. Local authorities in conjunction with other statutory partners and local businesses should develop a meaningful work experience and careers service to maximise their collective potential. Whilst local authority led, businesses also have a role to play in developing what the local education offer must be. They must engage with schools and local authorities to develop and shape a well-rounded education offer including providing evidence of what skills and knowledge they need their future employees to have. There is a persuasive economic rationale for the business community to help shape education, particularly those that are creating jobs.

Building and developing links to allow students, regardless of their age, perceived ability or which school they attend, to access appropriate work experience and exposure to employers that maybe outside of the traditional background of their area has the potential to both raise aspirations of those children and help them become successful adults in the future.

Is our education system effective based on the evidence?

As a nation we need to acknowledge that our approach to education does not work for some children, which is not to be pessimistic about the beneficial impact that education has for the majority. As systems leaders and professionals in the field, local authorities should review the way they interact with their local schools. Whilst many local authorities are securing a well-rounded education offer delivered by maintained schools as well as academies and free schools, there are still some that are not.

Current approaches to school improvement and engagement with schools are different in each local authority and are not helped by the recent financial constraints and the central government's changing agenda for the role of local authority in school improvement. However, the latest Ofsted framework, for inspecting the role of the local authority in school improvement, reminds us that local authorities do still have a statutory duty to secure and quality assure the 'educational offer' in schools and that therefore can, does and should have a role in school improvement. This was reinforced by HMCI Sir Michael Wilshaw, in a speech to Policy Exchange in

February 2013²³ where he stated that “local authorities still have a vital role in driving school improvement – they are statutorily obliged to ensure good provision for all children in their areas, no matter what sort of school they go to” – this disparity between the messages coming from the regulator and those coming from central government as to the role of the local authority in schools has created turbulence in the system and we would suggest that this has impacted upon the ability of some local authorities to manage the change from provider of large school improvement teams to commissioner focussing on quality assurance and demand. This has, in some instances, led to a disparate and disconnected system with regard to school improvement.

In some areas the devolution of the youth contract to city regions has had an impressive impact upon the opportunities provided to young people outside of school. Local authorities on a regional basis help to bring employers, students, apprentices and schools together to maximise their offer.

Current progression routes for children remain linear; with the accepted measure of success being the number of A*-C grades at GCSE and yet many of our children still do not meet this criterion for success. The current systems of assessment by qualification alone means that over two-thirds of disadvantaged children and nearly 80% pupils with identified SEN are currently deemed a failure by the government’s basic measure of success.

There needs to be further exploration of how students progress through their schooling, and the measure of success at the end of it. The raising of the participation age in 2013 and again in 2015 provides us with a new challenge; students will now be free to enter FE settings from the age of 14 and it is unclear what role the new UTC provision will have in providing meaningful school places. Students will also be able to do “traineeships” outside of traditional settings, all of which offer different routes to potential success. This new diversity of provision provides an additional opportunity but also challenge to the local authority and how it engages with the 14 – 19 agenda.

²³ <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/modevents/item/sir-michael-wilshaw-creating-a-step-change-in-school-accountability-equipping-parents-and-governors-with-the-information-needed-to-assess-school-performance>

Conclusions

‘Education’ is not simply ‘schooling’. A more eclectic and cohesive, partnership approach is required whether that is via children’s centres, midwives, General Practitioners, from the charity sector or within the community. There must be a greater, formal recognition of the role these partners play in delivering aspects of the education offer. By assessing the value of our education system through qualifications alone, we lose sight of the richness of the work that is happening in communities. Developing skills in our children including resilience, emotional intelligence, confidence and wider thinking skills would prepare children for the world of work as adults, and allow them to become healthy, productive adults. Providing them with qualifications alone is simply not enough. Importantly the statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the director of children’s services demands that “the safety and the educational, social and emotional needs of children and young people are central to the local vision”²⁴ – that is all children in the local area. Fair access is also a crucial part of the statutory guidance; “work with local communities to stimulate and support a diversity of school, early years and 16-19 provision that meets local needs”, a further move to a more diverse level of provision could improve outcomes for a wide range of children.

ADCS members remain open minded about how we achieve this broader vision of education for the 21st century. In the past 20 years alone we have seen the needs of our children change influenced by technology and society. We must equip our children to develop the skills to re-imagine solutions to the challenges we face in the modern world. Responding to the needs and challenges of each and every child is one of society’s most complex issues, whether it is in education, health, housing, child protection or safeguarding. Every child is different, as is their context and situation – and our responsibility for them does not end once they enter adulthood.

In some areas the question surrounding what the role of the local authority is in education is very neatly answered, with some local authorities having a very well rounded, whole family approach to education that transcends the boundaries of the school gate. In a time of diminishing resources, the tendency is to focus on child safeguarding and protection, allowing the education system to evolve and change in a fragmented way with academies and free schools developing their own offer and operating in an autonomous fashion. Yet by working in partnership with schools, police, health, justice, fire, voluntary, private and third sector, we are more powerful than the sum of our parts. With the school budget receiving protection from central government, the proportion of public spending they receive increases. With this increased proportionality comes increased responsibility for what they deliver. As

²⁴<https://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/210313versionstat%20guidance%20roles%20dcms%20mcs%20v2%2026%20sept.pdf>

systems leaders we should be ensuring that all partners are aware of their responsibilities to educate and to help schools engage with the wider community to enhance their offer and a local sense of shared responsibility can be developed. We are clear that education, like child safeguarding and protection, is everybody's business. We have an opportunity in the establishment of Health and Wellbeing Boards to seize the initiative and through them commission differently, on a whole population level; so that, with our local partners, interventions and education can be viewed across a lifetime, rather than solely with qualifications in mind. The further engagement of partners in delivering education and skills, to ensure that children have the wider skills discussed in this paper, could have a long term impact across a wide range of services such as diminished demand on health, welfare or the justice system.

For some young people education, including schooling, is a rich experience, a balanced mix of activities that stimulate and engage them, that prepare them for the future, and get them ready and able to face an adult world. Yet for too many children, school simply becomes a holding pen until the age of 17, and until the age of 18 from 2015. If we continue to just keep children in education, without providing them with any tangible benefits, then we cannot bring about lasting change. Our discussions suggest it is time to question whether there are appropriate alternatives for children to better meet their needs if they are currently disengaged with education. Opportunities explicitly designed to encourage the self-esteem and self-confidence of children— promoting academic achievement and ability through a series of enhanced experiences outside of the school setting should not just be limited to those children who are excluded or not participating in full time education, by providing these opportunities early, the engagement of all children with education can be improved before the high level intervention takes place. By actively pursuing alternatives for children outside of special schools or pupil referral units, we would seek to provide them with alternative chances of success and avoid the need not only for the use of exclusions and suspensions but also for high level interventions during adulthood. By intervening early and re-designing the way we deliver education, we can meet the needs of more children in a more appropriate fashion. Simply churning out children after passing them through school will not break the cycle of deprivation. Some children are simply unsuited to the “factory model” education system that is currently in place and businesses consistently tell us that it does not equip them for the workforce.

The challenges associated with redesigning that model cannot be underestimated, but unless we do it, we will continue to sustain a system that is not meeting the needs of a significant proportion of our children and is not preparing them sufficiently for adulthood. One approach to re-designing education provision, based on our fundamental principle of putting children at the heart of everything we do, is to focus resources, both financial and human, on the holistic assessment of the needs of children that allows greater flexibility and freedom, leading in turn to flexible ‘learning pathways’ that suit the needs of the learner rather than the system, to ensure that

every child gets the best start in life, to ultimately reduce future pressures on the system including in the health service, social security system, police and criminal justice systems.

Recommendations

ADCS will be issuing the following recommendations in the form of an advice note to directors of children's services.

- 1. Review services for all learners:** Children's Trusts (or their local equivalent), as the statutory strategic partnership body required to commission services to improve outcomes for children, should review the spectrum of local services and pathways open to those children at risk of disengagement with education. Local solutions should be promoted which include:
 - A more fluid boundary between school, work and the community to allow for children's needs to be met on an individualised basis particularly in the context of the raising of the participation age.
 - Greater use of the business, religious and social communities to provide support, inspiration, guidance and mentoring to young people to raise aspirations on a local authority wide basis.
 - Alternative forms and patterns of education delivery for children for whom traditional delivery within mainstream school, special school or pupil referral units is not meeting their needs. These alternative forms may include input from wider statutory partners and the local community such as extended work experience, engagement with the third sector on outside of school projects such as volunteering.
- 2. Publish a cohesive local education offer:** Each local authority should publish a document including details of their local education offer inside and outside of the school setting for all children having consulted with children and young people, schools, employers, the voluntary and third sector in their local area. This document should also include clear guidance on the local admissions procedures, appeals procedures and the local authorities approach to monitoring schools' compliance with the national School Admissions Codes.
- 3. Engage with families to improve physical and mental health:** Health and Wellbeing Boards are responsible for the multi-agency commissioning of services and programmes to improve the health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families. Education settings provide unique opportunities to access and engage with families, in terms of physical settings and the relationships they have. Local authorities should ensure that there are effective mechanisms in place for Health and Wellbeing Boards to maximise the part that education partners can play in multi-agency strategies to improve the physical and mental health of children, young people and their families.
- 4. Ensure the best long term outcomes:** Local authorities, education providers and their partners should work together to help all children and young people

achieve the best possible long term outcomes such as getting a job or going into higher education, being able to make choices about housing, education, health and actively participating in society. Planning should start early and be an explicit part of conversations with children and their families as they move through education. Local authorities should facilitate the involvement of all partners in providing this support including engagement with employers, training providers, and health providers on a local authority or, in conjunction with other local authorities, on a sub-regional basis to enhance the local offer.



The Association of Directors of Children's Services
Educational Achievement Policy Committee

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