

DfES Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners and the 2004 Spending Review

Summary

This briefing summarises the Department for Education and Skills' five year strategy paper (Cm 6272) presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State on 8 July. It also includes relevant elements of the DfES part of the 2004 Spending Review (Cm 6237) presented to Parliament on 12 July.

The documents can be downloaded from www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/5yearstrategy/ and www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending_review/spend_sr04/spend_sr04_index.cfm

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The information in this policy briefing applies to England only but the issues raised may be of a wider interest to our subscribers

You are encouraged to circulate this policy briefing to anyone in your authority who may find it useful, including headteachers and school governors.

Background

The Government is producing a range of five year plans (strategies) from its major Departments. Presenting the DfES's strategy to Parliament, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills said, "Five key principles of reform will underpin our drive for a step change in children's services, education and training: first, greater personalisation and choice, with children, parents and learners centre stage; secondly, opening up services to new and different providers; thirdly, freedom and independence for front-line headteachers and managers, with more secure streamlined funding arrangements; fourthly, a major commitment to staff development, with very high-quality support and training; and fifthly, partnerships with parents, employers, local authorities and voluntary organisations to maximise the life chances of children, young people and adults." The paper runs to 48,000 words over more than 100 pages.

The 2004 Spending Review describes the Government's spending plans for the period from 2004-05 to 2007-08, including its plans for funding the proposals described in the five year strategy. The 'headline' ingredients are:

- Total spending on education in England will be £12 billion higher in 2007-08 than in 2004-05, an average growth rate of 4.4 per cent per year in real terms.
- Education spending will rise to 5.6 per cent of GDP by 2007-08 from 5.4 per cent in 2004-05.
- Capital investment in education will rise from £5 billion in 2004-05 to £7 billion a year in 2007-08.
- Efficiency gains worth at least 2.5 per cent of the DfES's 2004-05 baseline will be made each year over the Spending Review period, releasing additional resources for the front line.

The Secretary of State concludes his Foreword to the strategy document by saying, "And all of this depends...on a radically reshaped system for delivering education and children's services, and in particular a reshaped role for Local Government and for my Department, moving away from direction towards an enabling and empowering role. It depends on freedom for those at the front line to personalise services and to improve them. And it depends on Ministers like me holding our nerve and being able to resist the lure of the next initiative in favour of a system that drives its own improvement more and more."

The Document (key points)

References to the Spending Review (Chapter 7 on DfES spending) are shown alongside the relevant section in italics.

Introduction

After rehearsing the Government's successes so far, and comparing UK education performance at various stages to OECD averages, the introduction points out that "the UK's key weakness is the low participation of 16-19 year olds in education and training (the UK participation rate for 17 year olds is ranked 27th out of 30 countries). In turn this reinforces the historic skills deficit in the adult workforce with the latest comparisons showing we are 18th out of 30 countries in the proportion of adults with level 2 skills (the equivalent of 5 good GCSEs)."

It goes on to spell out the extent to which "socio-economic group is a stronger predictor of attainment than early ability", and that "The gap between the best and worst performers in our system actually widens as they go through education; and it is both significantly wider and more closely related to socio-economic status in this country than elsewhere."

It continues: "We also fail our most disadvantaged children and young people – those in public care, those with complex family lives, and those most at risk of drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and involvement in criminal activity. Internationally, our rate of child poverty is still high, as are the rates of worklessness in one-parent families, the rate of teenage pregnancy, and the level of poor diet among children. The links between poor health, disadvantage and low educational outcomes are stark.

"But as well as failing those with disadvantages, our system also performs less well than it should for the middle group. In international comparisons, our top performers help pull up our averages and mask the fact that the middle group – on some reckonings, as much as 40 percent of the population – are not so successful. This large group has also traditionally not had a great deal of attention focused on it. But it is one of the causes of underperformance in secondary schools which then feeds into our poor staying-on rates after 16."

This is the analysis which underpins the document.

Early years

“Sure Start Children’s Centres are one-stop-shops for parents and children, offering early education and childcare, family support, health services, employment advice and specialist support on a single site, with easy access for parents and easy referral between services so that the provision is seamless. Ante- and post-natal care will be linked to Children’s Centres, and each family will be supported by a team of midwives and health visitors linked to the Centre. Children’s Centres will also provide outreach work to support those children and families who are unwilling or unable to access centre-based services.

“By March 2008, there will be a Children’s Centre reaching all children in the 20 per cent most deprived wards in England. But we want to go further than this and aim for a Children’s Centre in every community. 44 per cent of all children growing up in poverty do not live in recognised areas of deprivation; and we want all parents to be able to access the services they need in a joined-up way. Some Centres may be created by developing existing nursery schools, Sure Start programmes, Early Excellence Centres, family centres or other community facilities. Some may be located in schools or on school sites, and the eventual aim will be to have a Children’s Centre within easy reach of every parent. As well as the one-stop-shop Children’s Centres, Extended Schools – both primary and secondary – will increasingly act as hubs for community services, including children’s services.”

Additional resources of £769 million are confirmed for childcare and services for disadvantaged children by 2007-08 compared with 2004-05, enabling provision of 2,500 Children’s Centres by 2008. There will also be a pilot offering free part-time early education for 12,000 two year olds in disadvantaged areas.

Wherever possible, nursery education and childcare will be brought together into a single integrated offer for pre-school children – ‘educare’. Local Authorities, increasingly through Children’s Trusts, will be expected to work with providers to ensure flexibility of provision across the week, with an increase in the number of places offering ‘educare’ and more wrap-around childcare for parents from 8am to 6pm, 48 weeks a year, in primary schools, and with a single point of contact for parents to organise a package including the current number of free hours (generally 12.5 hours a week) and additional bought hours, using the childcare element of Working Tax Credit in many cases.

A further paper on ‘educare’ will be published in the Autumn.

Schools

The spending review confirms increases in funding for schools to deliver the objectives of the strategy, so that average funding per pupil will rise to at least £5,500 per pupil by 2007- 08, more than double the 1997 figure. (p.87)

Primary

“If parents and children are to have access to joined up services, then many more schools need to develop extended services, including childcare...all primary schools should work closely with parents, seeing them as true partners in the education of their children.” A model is being developed for 8am to 6pm, 48 weeks a year childcare in primary schools, with the aim that it will be offered in 1,000 primary schools by 2008, with places for 50,000 children. It is intended to spread this offer over time to (or through) all primary schools and also to secondary schools.

Other developments include:

- A Pupil Achievement Tracker, showing detailed information on the progress of individual pupils, and on the performance of teachers.
- An increasing use by teachers of Assessment for Learning.
- Additional resources for primary schools with high levels of disadvantage (more than 35 per cent of pupils receiving free school meals).
- All primary schools connected to broadband by 2006, with increasing numbers of interactive white boards in use and ever better use of ICT.
- An increased range of opportunities: the Music Manifesto, working with local authority music services to give every child the chance to learn a musical instrument; two hours of high quality PE and sport each week for every child, some in the school day, some through sports clubs outside normal hours; all primary children having the chance to learn a foreign language by 2010, building on pilots in 19 LEAs.
- Pupil and parent views forming part of schools’ self evaluation as part of new School Profiles, also including performance data and contextual information.
- More extended schools offering study support, parenting support and referral to specialised support services and working via Children’s Trusts.
- Every school a healthy school, aiming to halt the growth in obesity in under-11s by 2010.
- The ‘New Relationship with Primary Schools’ (see TEN briefing 30/04).
- Encouragement of primary schools to work together in networks.

Secondary schools

The aim is to ensure that every parent can choose an excellent secondary for their child. The central proposal is for “independent specialist schools in place of the traditional comprehensive...We are not creating a new category of school – rather, giving more independence to all schools within a specialist system...Independence will be within a framework of fair admissions, full accountability and strong partnerships that drive improvement.”

Other key points:

- Guaranteed three-year budgets for every school (this includes primary schools), geared to pupil numbers, linked to a minimum per pupil increase each year for every school. A new dedicated Schools Budget will be aligned with the school year, with funding from local authorities increased by more than six per cent in 2005-06 and planned increases at least as great in the two following years. A consultation exercise in the Autumn will address how the minimum guarantee should operate for 2006-07 and beyond, “particularly on the level at which it should be set to strike the right balance between stability and the effective targeting of resources”. There will be transitional protection where authorities have spent more than their formula allocation (formerly SSA) in the past, and no authority will receive less funding for education than it currently spends. Schools funding be ring-fenced, but will still be delivered through local authorities, which “will retain an important and necessary role in reflecting local needs and circumstances”.

The Spending Review has announced three year funding for local authorities as well from 2006-07.

- It is intended that every secondary school which is up to standards will be a specialist school by 2008, with every community having “one or more specialist schools offering choice and excellence to parents and children alike”. On ‘re-designation’ (every four years), if successful, specialist schools will be able to add a second specialism, with additional funding, provided that the benefits are shared with other schools and the community. Particularly successful schools will be offered extra roles and additional freedoms, for example as training schools or leading schools, supporting improvement in other local schools. Successful specialist schools without sixth forms will be able to teach 16-18 year olds in their

specialism through partnership arrangements, or open their own sixth form, with a presumption in favour of their being able to do so in areas with little sixth form provision or overall low participation or attainment.

- All schools – except those which are failing – will be able to become foundation schools by a simple vote of their governing body, taking on ownership of their land and buildings and employment of their staff, and possibly ‘improving’ their governing body by, for example, including sponsor governors (from a business, faith or charitable sponsor), and possibly the establishment of charitable trusts able to appoint the majority of the governing body.
- A fast-track process will be introduced to speed up the expansion of popular schools, so that it takes less than 12 weeks (unless there is an appeal), reinforcing the existing presumption that such proposals should be agreed in all but exceptional circumstances.
- The leaders and governors of successful schools, including independent schools, are encouraged to establish new schools in response to parental demand.
- The ‘New Relationship with Schools’ (see TEN briefing 30/04) will streamline accountability procedures.
- The Academies programme is to be expanded to provide for 200 to be open or in the pipe-line by 2010 in areas with inadequate existing secondary schools; 60 are expected to be in London. Local authorities are required to consider Academies and other options for new schools in their proposals under the Building Schools for the Future programme (see TEN briefing 11/03); new schools must be subject to competition, making it easier for new promoters, including parents’ groups, to open schools. Local authorities will be expected to close failing schools without delay.
- Foundation Partnerships will build on existing collaborative arrangements to enable groups of high-performing specialist schools to take on wider responsibilities – such as school improvement across the group, the 14-19 curriculum offer, teacher training, provision for excluded pupils, SEN assessment and provision – with funding devolved directly to the partnerships from local authorities. Further proposals will be published later this year.
- The Local Authority role in education is to be ‘modernised’. “The best Local Authorities have long provided inspirational educational leadership and innovation in their localities, commanding the confidence of parents and schools alike. But some Local Authorities have been too defensive

or ineffective in the face of low educational standards and high parental dissatisfaction. We expect Local Authorities to champion the interests of parents and pupils in their localities, particularly where radical change is needed to ensure that every parent has a choice of a good school and no pupil is failed by a poor education. At all levels – under-fives, primary, secondary and post-16 – Local Authorities should recast themselves as the commissioner and quality assurer of educational services, not the direct supplier, a role which enables them to promote the interests of parents and pupils far more confidently and powerfully than the old days of the Local Authority as direct manager of the local schools and colleges. We will make faster progress where Authorities have enthusiastically set an educational vision, worked with employers, further education colleges, headteachers, parents, community leaders and others to get behind the vision, and have then supported and helped their schools to work independently to bring it about. For this, their partnership work with providers of children’s services, local Learning and Skills Councils, employers and others with a contribution to make will be critical.” It will also remain open for authorities to spend more on education locally than the national allocation. “Rather than necessarily being the providers of school improvement themselves, we see Local Authorities helping to build up strong independent schools and networks of schools which can drive their own improvement. Through the school improvement partners, they will have an important role in holding schools to account, and retain the lead responsibility to intervene where schools are seriously underperforming.” Where authorities’ performance is judged by Ofsted to be unsatisfactory, the Government will consider intervention, with the possibility of others being invited to compete to take on their role, wholly or partially; this might be another authority, a Foundation Partnership or a private company.

Personalisation and choice in the secondary years

A number of remaining challenges are identified, including:

- Difficulties over transition from primary to secondary.
- Children of all abilities failing to reach their potential.
- Insufficient variety and choice in the curriculum and in opportunities outside the school day.
- Poor attendance and bad and disruptive behaviour.

- Inadequate involvement of parents in support of children's learning, and the failure of some schools to work closely with parents or to see themselves as a community resource.

Amongst proposals to tackle these issues are:

- Co-ordinated admission arrangements; better transfer of information from primary to secondary schools; better approaches to managing pupils' learning and welfare when moving to secondary schools, such as 'schools within schools' and 'house' systems.
- Development of the Key Stage 3 strategy into a Secondary Strategy, covering the whole 11-16 stage.
- Better support for poorly served groups, such as gifted and talented students, low achieving minority ethnic groups and pupils with special educational needs.
- A transformation in outcomes for looked after children and young people over the next five years.
- Better use of ICT to support personalised learning.
- More subject-specific support, with the appointment of Chief Advisers for all key subjects.
- A richer secondary curriculum, both within and beyond the classroom, with a significant extension of sporting opportunities.
- A more rigorous approach to improving behaviour and attendance, including: an expectation that all schools will have a uniform, clear rules and codes of conduct, and subscribe to the anti-bullying charter; regard to absolute levels of attendance, not just 'unauthorised' absence; support for removal by headteachers of anyone behaving aggressively; support for teachers against false allegations (with proposals published later this year); a firmer approach to disruptive pupils, including more use of Parenting Contracts and, where necessary, of sanctions against parents who fail to take their responsibilities seriously.
- Groups of schools and colleges, including Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and special schools, will be expected to take collective responsibility for the education of pupils in their area through clear agreements, reached through Admission Forums, which will set out procedures for allocating hard to place pupils, so that no school is expected to take an unmanageable number of disruptive pupils, and arrangements for collaboration to meet the needs of each locality.

It is hoped that every secondary school will become an extended school, offering study support and a wide range of activities before and after school, widespread community use of the school's facilities, and family learning. There will be 240 'full service' extended schools by 2006, offering a very wide range of co-located services.

Investment in the workforce includes proposed changes to teacher appraisals (to be subject to consultation before a submission to the School Teachers' Review Body); better training and development opportunities; the launch, in early 2005, of a digital Teachers' TV channel; continuation of the workforce reform programme; strengthening of the role of the National College for School Leadership.

14-19 education and training

The main developments in this area await the report of the independent group chaired by Mike Tomlinson, the former Chief Inspector. Some changes are indicated, however, including the recognition and encouragement of early achievement of qualifications, for example by counting early AS-levels and other level 3 qualifications in performance tables for 16 year-olds; an extension of vocational options across all schools; the re-launched Apprenticeship programme; closer involvement of employers; and a new, integrated youth offer. There will be a Green Paper on Youth published in the autumn, involving work across a number of government departments and the involvement of young people and parents. There will also be improvements for young people leaving care, including full compliance with the Children (Leaving Care) Act. It is expected that young people should be able to access provision they want without travelling unreasonable distances, and Education Maintenance Allowances will be fully introduced for 16 year-olds from September 2004.

Adult skills

The National Skills Strategy, published last July, sets out in detail the Government's plans in this sector, including new Sector Skills Councils; increasing numbers of Trade Union Learning Representatives; and a growing number of Centres of Vocational Excellence. The idea of a Further Education Academy (similar to Academies in the schools sector) is being explored. The number of adults with better basic skills, including English as a second or other language, continues to expand; a new entitlement to Level 2 skills, backed by a new grant of up to £30 per week, is being introduced in the North East and South East, and will hopefully be rolled out nationally from 2006-06. From

August 2005, any FE provider with unsatisfactory provision (grade 4 or 5 at inspection) will be under notice to improve or risk withdrawal of their funding; and a new single Quality Improvement Board is being established. As elsewhere, there is also an emphasis on workforce development, and leadership.

Higher Education

The Higher Education White Paper set out the strategy for HE, including more 'choice and voice' for students, wider participation, a new funding system, additional funding to improve research capacity, a Higher Education Innovation Fund to strengthen links with business and the community, proposals for Lifelong Learning Networks linking area and regional providers with sector skills councils and Regional Development Agencies.

Managing the transformation

The DfES will also undergo a major reform, and a reduction of some 1,460 staff (31 per cent) by 2008. It will be less involved in direct management and focus more on supporting Ministers in providing strategic leadership in the system – through the continuing practice of recruiting from outside the Civil Service, close partnership working with a variety of agencies and bodies at national, regional and local levels. It is intended to reduce administration costs across the Department, Non-Departmental Public Bodies and Ofsted by 15 per cent.

The document concludes by welcoming comments and suggestions on the way forward for learners and children.

Conclusion and comments from TEN

Overall, this strategy paper is an attempt to pull together what many have perceived as some hitherto quite disjointed strands of policy; it contains relatively little that is actually new. Backed by a significant further rise in expenditure, there is certainly the prospect of accelerated improvements in outcomes – but there are a number of issues where the document is conspicuously short on detail, and (as has been indicated in the summary) a number of further papers and consultations are signalled for later in the year.

The Government appears to maintain a conviction that there is a 'magic bullet' to be found somewhere in the private sector to resolve the persistent problems of the secondary school system. Likewise, that if only headteachers were given their freedom, improvement would accelerate briskly. Whilst better partnerships

undoubtedly assist improvements (in both directions), and effective school leadership is certainly a key to success, there is very flimsy evidence to support the strength of either conviction. Indeed, the evidence suggests that re-writing the local authority role in the manner proposed carries some risk, for last year's annual report of the Chief Inspector said:

“School improvement is now the most consistently satisfactory area of LEA work, something that was certainly not true a few years ago. Many factors influence the standards pupils achieve; the pupils themselves and the circumstances in which they live, the quality of teaching provided by the school, the support of parents and the community and the policies pursued by central government are amongst them. However, as last year, rapidly improving management of school improvement services, allied to a clearer definition of their role, was a major factor in bringing about the improvement noted.”

There are a number of other concerns around the proposals in the paper, particularly those for the future of the school/local authority system, mostly around the secondary sector (chapter 4):

- A number of assertions are made, without explanation or evidence, which suggest the document is disproportionately informed by the views of a particular group of schools, eg:
 - “Our best schools already have many of the characteristics we want for every school...” (para 4); which schools are ‘our best’, and on what basis?
 - “Many successful schools believe they lack the independence they need to succeed...” (para 6); which schools again, and what independence do they lack – and are they successful or not?
 - “...schools are too constrained when it comes to building a strong and dynamic governing body...” (para 6). Who says so? (We have not long had a review of governance, and now have a broad but flexible ‘stakeholder’ model which has evolved over time.)
- One of the more startling ingredients of the paper is the proposal to extend the guaranteed per pupil increase in funding every year for every school. The paper (para 12) says the promised consultation will be particularly “on the level at which it should be set to strike the right balance between stability and the effective targeting of resources”; the reality is that *any* level of guaranteed increase for *all* greatly inhibits the possibility of re-aligning formulae better to address disadvantage on the

scale that might be needed to break the link between socio-economic group and attainment.

- The proposal for second specialisms for specialist schools must be accompanied by a strategic approach to the pattern of provision in an area, and the offer this presents for local students; this but is clearly an issue for LEAs – falling precisely into the role of championing the interests of parents and pupils. And despite the assertion that all specialist schools have “strong links with the community”, this was in fact found to be a significant weakness in Ofsted’s only review of specialist provision so far.
- Whilst there are benefits in effectively offering all schools a level playing field so far as category is concerned, it is unfortunate that the model chosen incorporates the least accountable model of governance and obliges authorities to hand over vast amounts of property – but it remains to be seen whether schools find the offer attractive (few have chosen to change category so far, and the process isn’t very cumbersome).
- Whilst making explicitly clear that ‘independence’ will not extend to introducing any selection by ability, there is no acknowledgement that by increasing the number of foundation schools possibly five-fold there will inevitably be a significant increase in partial selection by aptitude – and many view the distinction as largely semantic.
- Aspects of the proposed ‘new relationship with schools’ are inadequate, particularly the idea that headteachers will in future be accountable primarily to/through other headteachers (see TEN briefing 30/04). The case study authority in the document, Knowsley, has a ‘co-leadership’ approach in which sharing the function of school improvement between headteachers and LEA officers/advisers is actually a *key* feature – which the paper fails to acknowledge adequately.
- The proposal to expand the Academy programme four-fold in the absence of any significant evidence about the effectiveness of the initiative most starkly illustrates the policy is being made. The Department has commissioned an evaluation of the programme, which is due to be published in 2007; there are already concerns about the escalating costs of what some see as ‘vanity’ projects; several of the twelve present academies have already experienced major problems; it is too early to assess the impact of academies on other, possibly also disadvantaged, schools in their areas. At the very least, there needs to be a serious and ‘adult’ discussion about the Academy programme and

its implications in place of the current approach – in which authorities are being subjected to undue pressure.

- As TEN has observed before, Building Schools for the Future (BSF) is an exciting and ambitious programme which all must hope meets its objective (see TEN publication *Creating new schools*). It is already clear that there is a funding gap problem over the long-term revenue payments generated by the PFI-based finance model; how this will interact with schools acquiring foundation status and assuming responsibility for their own assets remains to be seen. And the expanded Academy programme could impact on the funding for other schools under BSF in some areas.
- Most aspects of the proposal for Foundation Partnerships are already possible, without any very high degree of take-up. The paper describes a process which, where it is taking place, is doing so as the result of discussion and painstaking effort, and then seeks to impose it as a universal model with little apparent understanding of what is involved in establishing such relationships successfully.
- There is a real tension on a number of issues (and this is not new) between the Government's declared intention to achieve particular objectives, particularly around inclusion/children's services issue, and its reluctance to compromise the independence it wants for schools and the autonomy demanded by some headteachers. In light of the proposals in this strategy, the current refusal to include schools in the list of bodies under a duty to co-operate in partnership arrangements to improve the well-being of children in the Children Bill seems increasingly unsustainable. And the proposals for a collective approach to excluded, disruptive and other hard-to-place pupils, while welcome in principle, do not go far enough. It is quite appropriate to *require* publicly funded schools to meet social as well as educational objectives.

There is obviously a lot to discuss over the coming months in the process of turning the strategy described into reality. Some of the proposals will change in the process. It is slightly ludicrous to produce a strategy with the degree of emphasis this has on collaboration and partnership through a process of very limited prior discussion (though some groups appear to have had far more access to decision makers than others) followed by top-down imposition. Avoiding some of the potential pitfalls arising from the proposals will require the Department itself to adopt the partnership approach itself which it advocates for others.

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