



House of Commons
Education and Skills Committee

**Sustainable Schools:
Are we building
schools for the future?:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Seventh Report of
Session 2006–07**

**Sixth Special Report of Session
2006–07**

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The Education and Skills Committee

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Sixth Special Report

The Committee published its Seventh Report of Session 2006–07 (*Sustainable Schools: Are we building schools for the future?*) on 9 August 2007.¹ The Government’s response was received on 8 October 2007, and is published as Appendix 1 to this Report.

Appendix 1

Government’s response to the Seventh Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07

The Committee’s conclusions and recommendations are in bold text. The Government’s response is in plain text.

1. We welcome the report of the Education and Skills Committee, *Sustainable Schools: Are we building schools for the future?* We are very pleased that the Select Committee acknowledges the scale and scope of Building Schools for the Future (BSF), and that it welcomes the Government’s ambitions.

2. The Government remains committed to its long-term aims to modernise all secondary schools and at least half of all primary schools. We believe the reasons are self-evident, primarily, that pupils and teachers deserve good facilities to work in. There is a clear link from good facilities to better chances of a good education, and from there to better life chances and better national economic performance. This is why the Government has made the unprecedented commitment to the nation’s pupils, and why we need all involved—pupils, schools, local authorities, architects and construction firms, civil servants and parliamentarians—to make it work. It is not just rhetoric to say that this is a once-in-a-generation chance, and we are determined to grasp it.

3. We welcome the Committee’s advice that it is more important to take the time to get BSF right. Local planning and preparation is indeed crucial and we have already placed more emphasis on readiness in BSF. We are undertaking a review of the management of future waves of BSF later in the year and will feed in this and the strong recommendation that the initial “visioning” phase should be lengthened. At the moment we believe the key is to elongate the pre-engagement period. We address this argument, and respond in detail to the rest of the report’s conclusion and recommendations below.

Procurement problems

Recommendation 4: The participation of teachers, other school staff and pupils in the planning process is vital to the success of school redevelopment projects, and this needs to be acknowledged by all those involved. As the comments collected by Teachers’ TV show, those working in schools have a clear understanding of what is needed in a

¹ Seventh Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07, *Sustainable Schools: Are we building schools for the future?*, HC 140–I and II.

building to create a positive learning environment. Involving them in the earliest stages may require time, but will help to develop robust plans which will contribute to the success of the process.

We agree that the early engagement of the whole school community is an important part of the development process. We strongly encourage what is now common practice for key stakeholders, including school staff and pupils, to work collaboratively to develop a building brief. A lot has now been put in place to inform and empower stakeholders to participate fully in the design process, including work which we support financially undertaken by the National College for School Leadership, the British Council for School Environments and the Sorrel Foundation's Young Design Centre. All schools in BSF are required to develop a "school strategy for change" and we encourage local authorities to begin work on this with schools as early as possible.

Recommendation 5: There clearly have been problems with the authorities in the early waves of BSF, but the fact that the project has slipped from its early targets is not necessarily significant. What does matter is whether those authorities who have suffered delays have been able to resolve problems and come up with proposals that are robust and achievable, and whether lessons have been learned for those authorities coming into the process at later stages so there is no repetition of the same delays and difficulties.

We agree that lessons learned are key in ensuring that BSF runs efficiently and meets its objectives. One of the Department's key roles—through our delivery agency, Partnerships for Schools (PfS)—is to ensure that all partners delivering the programme share issues, risks and good practice to capture the lessons learned and constantly review and improve. This covers every aspect of the programme including improving processes, policy, and ways of working and the remits of delivery partners.

The Department and PfS liaise with all stakeholders to assess what can be improved. We support networking, the spread of good practice and put new BSF authorities in touch with others that have already gone through the process. We have recently introduced telephone surveys of stakeholders and the findings from these, together with information gathered at events and conferences etc. are informing the development of BSF.

We agree that more can be done. The concept of seconding a person from an authority which is yet to enter BSF to one that has been through is one that we intend to develop. We will continue to assess the engagement and performance of partners so that we constantly review what is being delivered and what more could be improved.

Learning the early lessons

Recommendation 6: The DCSF and Partnerships for Schools should develop as a priority a knowledge management and learning strategy to support authorities, schools, contractors, suppliers and others involved in BSF to share best practice and learning as the programme develops.

It is part of PfS' remit to ensure that lessons learned are disseminated and used and they recognise this as a key strand of their work. The lessons learned from the earlier waves are

vital in moving forward with the rest of BSF, and there are a range of activities underway to ensure this happens, both at project level and feeding up to programme level.

PfS' communications strategy identifies lessons learned as a key target and they have identified a senior member of their management team to be responsible for this area of work. Initiatives include:

- the establishment of a local government Chief Executives Advisory Group;
- the National Learning Network—a network of local government BSF lead contacts that enables the symbiotic exchange of information between local authorities and PfS;
- lessons learned pages on the PfS website to disseminate to the BSF local authority community;
- forums and networking groups to gather feedback and hear the views of local authorities and private partners about what is going well, what is not, and what else can be done to support them;
- an annual stakeholder satisfaction survey to assess stakeholders perceptions of BSF to inform performance;
- briefing days to disseminate best practice; and
- guidance which provides examples of good design, helping authorities and schools to see how transformational visions are turned into reality.

In addition, 4ps has launched regional BSF network groups across the country for authorities in current and future waves of the programme.

Whilst there have been efforts to consolidate existing BSF ICT guidance across PfS, Becta and DCSE, more can be done to capture ICT lessons. This will be further developed with PfS and other delivery partners as the programme develops.

The Department has commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to conduct an independent evaluation of the impact of BSF on pupil achievement, and this includes early lessons which can be learned. We aim to publish the first annual report from this research later this year.

Recommendation 7: There is a strong argument that on the basis of cost and time savings some of the choices on these nuts and bolts issues could be restricted. PfS have made some progress on this with, for example, guidance on the general principles for design of toilet blocks. There needs to be a discussion about how to build on this kind of initiative to make the most of the market position of Building Schools for the Future on a whole range of procurement issues.

As part of the Standard Specifications, Layouts and Dimensions programme, the Department is drawing on industry best practice to develop standardised solutions for a range of building elements that we expect to be adopted in BSF. In addition to toilet blocks, these include partitions, floor finishes, sprinkler installations, lighting, doors, stairs, roof

coverings, classroom dimensions, relocatable classrooms, windows and mechanical installations.

By helping to avoid “reinventing the wheel” in every project, design standardisation could play an important role in securing cost and time efficiencies from BSF. It will also enable a shift towards more off-site construction, which should improve health and safety performance, reduce waste and deliver more sustainable solutions without compromising design quality. The Department is working with Pfs, other government departments and the private sector to determine the scope for increasing the amount of off-site procurement that can be delivered, not just through BSF, but through all school capital programmes.

Recommendation 8: We ask the DCSF to respond to the criticism of procurement of ICT, and to set out its plans for ensuring that ICT procurement within BSF does enable technological development to be properly taken into account.

The appropriateness of the Local Education Partnership (LEP) procurement approach for the effective delivery of transformational ICT is currently topical at both departmental and market levels. Pfs have commissioned an independent review, supported by Becta, to assess BSF procurement approaches, including ICT procurement. This review is scheduled to report later in the year.

Our plans already ensure that technological development is built into ICT procurement. ICT aspects of procurement are based upon the ICT output specification, which has been developed by the Department and Pfs, with Becta, and is driven by the need for transformational education. An authority does not go to market to procure specific technology, but to procure the educational output required to deliver the eStrategy. The market provider will determine which technological solution is most appropriate to deliver the change required.

We agree that “the procurement must be structured in such a way to take advantage of technological development” and “ensuring that there is provision within contract for technology to be renewed”. All local authorities must gain formal departmental approval for their ‘refresh strategy’. As most LEP ICT managed service contracts break after 5 years, refresh is typically built early into the contract.

Additionally, the revision to the ICT output specification, the ICT contract and the ICT payment mechanism over the past year have all focused on ensuring that developments in technology can be incorporated and that there are ways of funding equipment refresh after four or five years. Pfs continue to emphasise to authorities that all ICT investment does not have to be made at once at the beginning of the contract.

Recommendation 9: There is a very strong argument that the initial ‘visioning’ phase should be lengthened. All authorities in the waves so far announced should already be addressing the issue of what they want of their schools. The difficulties faced by the earliest waves of authorities in coping with deadlines suggest that this would be time well spent.

We agree it is important to take time to get the visioning right, and we encourage local authorities to begin the visioning process well before they enter BSF formally. The new ‘readiness to deliver’ assessment of local authorities prior to entering BSF ensures that

authorities start their thinking earlier. All authorities in Wave 5 have been asked to prepare an early draft of their “Strategy for Change” before they enter the programme formally, so they should already be fully engaged in the visioning process. Once started, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) BSF Leadership Programme will also support authorities and schools with the creation of a strong vision.

We recognise that despite the support and information authorities are given by Pfs and supporting partners, they can underestimate the size and complexity of the task. We have learnt the lessons and are working with waves 4 and, as noted above, particularly waves 5 and 6 earlier than ever before. This is also because we have the lead-in time to do so. In addition, we are exploring the potential for NCSL to work with local authorities earlier in the process. Pfs and the Department have run pre-engagement workshops to help authorities prepare and work through the issues that could delay their projects. The new process of holding remit meetings has also greatly improved the early stages of BSF and helped all parties be ready. This requires pre-engagement with all delivery partners, providing a rounded process which leads to setting a clear remit, with agreed timescales for delivery and clarity about support and challenge.

We believe the key is therefore not to lengthen the formal visioning phase, but to begin preparatory work even earlier. Key issues such as the consideration of LEPs and private finance initiative (PFI), for example, are matters which take time and need to be worked through. There are set timescales that authorities need to work to in order to deliver their projects, and we think these are realistic with adequate preparation. These factors will also influence how we manage later waves.

Looking to waves 7 to 15, we intent to review the framework to allow local authorities to resubmit their expressions of interest, probably in the format of the “Strategy for Change” so that this becomes the tool that is applied across all local authorities for estate planning. The Department and Pfs will then publish a revised national programme, telling local authorities when each of their projects is due to start. The onus will be on authorities to get themselves ready by that time, or risk losing their slot to another better-prepared project.

Recommendation 10: The development for all BSF projects of ‘good clients’ who are knowledgeable about the process should be a key aim for authorities, Partnerships for Schools and the DCSF.

We agree that knowledge about the processes and what can be achieved is essential if BSF is to succeed. It is ultimately for each authority to ensure it is a good client. However, at a national level, Pfs manages the overall BSF programme, in terms of funding and phasing of local authorities. At a local level, Pfs’ role is to:

- help local authorities prepare for entry to the programme through pre-engagement, advise and assist on the “visioning” phase—known now as “Strategy for Change”—to ensure that their plans both meet Ministerial expectations and will deliver educational transformation;
- ensure that proposed designs make that vision a reality within the school environment;

- steer the project through to issuing an OJEU notice and the subsequent competition to select a private sector partner;
- work with the local authority to reach financial close on contracts; and
- work closely with Building Schools for the Future Investments which sits on the LEP management board throughout its operational lifetime.

The Department has also contracted with:

- NCSL to build skills with school leaders, such as education vision, change management, dealing with complex procurements;
- 4ps to build local government procurement expertise, and to prepare local elected members and school governors for the private finance aspects of the programme;
- The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) to improve local government's understanding and delivery of good design.

We have received very positive feedback on the NCSL pilot programme. Participants have valued the opportunities presented to engage with BSF, to share information and network, and to take away ideas for further debate.

Recommendation 11: The clearest message of all, therefore, from both BSF and the Academies programme is to take the time to get it right at the beginning and to maintain dialogue with the users of the building. To give authorities and schools the time to think about what they want to do and the way that they want to do it is the best way to ensure that what emerges at the end is an excellent learning environment, rather than a striking building which does not meet the needs of its users as well as it should.

We welcome this steer. These issues are addressed in our comments above.

PFI and capital funding

Recommendation 12: While we take the point that it is the viability of the project in the first instance that is the main risk factor, it seems to us that there are risks associated with PFI as a funding method.

Private finance initiative (PFI) is used in capital procurement where it can provide the public sector with better value for money in procuring modern, high-quality services from the private sector. Lessons have been learnt from the 107 PFI school contracts that started before BSF and that are now operational. PFI is only used in BSF where it offers better value for money and clear benefits.

Recommendation 13: We ask the DCSF to make a clear public statement on how many PFI schools have closed prematurely, what the overall cost to the public purse has been and how it monitors schools in danger.

We are aware of only one PFI school in England being closed, the College of Media, Arts and Technology in Brighton, which was as a result of falling rolls. In August 2005 Brighton and Hove Council decided to close the College and the school was removed from the PFI contract at a cost to the authority of £4.5million. This asset is currently leased to the City

College Brighton and Hove and is therefore still being used for educational purposes for which it is suitable.

Essex local authority is currently consulting on the future of Bishops Park School in Clacton, and will also be exploring options for other uses of the building as part of the school organisation planning. The flexible design of the Bishops Park will lend itself to other school uses. The reported case of a school in Belfast falls to the devolved administration in Northern Ireland.

Overall, although this is a risk for contracting local authorities, it is low probability, and authorities appear well able to manage such a risk without central government monitoring.

Recommendation 14: We ask for confirmation that local authorities are required to set out in their BSF plans the full revenue costs of the project and details of how they plan to meet them over the full term of the contract.

Recommendation 15: The Government needs to set out more clearly than it has done so far its assessment of the sustainability of the levels of revenue commitments across local authorities in general; how DCSF and Partnerships for Schools make judgements about how well authorities have planned to ensure that schools will be sustainable given projected future numbers of pupils; and the lessons that it has learned from those PFI funded schools which have been forced to close.

Before a PFI project is approved and funding awarded, the local authority is required to provide a statement of year on year affordability of the project for the duration of the contract. The authority must demonstrate its commitment by including in both the Outline Business Case as well as the Final Business Case, formal Council member reports covering the assessment of affordability, together with resolutions approving the budget strategy. In addition, the business case must include proof that formal school governor back-to-back agreements in relation to the PFI and ICT have been signed, setting out the contribution required from the schools. The authority must also confirm that it has sufficient cash available and provide proof of the necessary Executive approval to make investments in the LEP and PFI as appropriate. Confirmation of Executive approval to proceed to financial close on the terms negotiated with the Preferred Bidder must also be included in the business case.

The authority also has to submit its risk allocation matrix for approval. This illustrates what risks fall to each party and which are shared, and is accompanied by details of the risk management strategy and methodology.

Through BSF, local authorities now also have to set out their projected pupil places for the next 10 years across the whole authority area. This helps ensure a much tighter matching of pupil numbers to pupil places and, importantly, ensures that schools are being built in the most sensible location, given demographic shifts. These projections are then discussed at the “Strategy for Change” phase, and only when these figures have been scrutinised and agreed by PFS, Office of the School Commissioner (OSC) and Ministers can a local authority move forward in the programme.

Primary schools

Recommendation 16: The challenges facing the primary capital programme could be addressed more effectively if the DFES could ensure that:

- **all involved in delivering the primary programme have a clear view of how it interacts with BSF;**
- **explicit national goals are set out to assist those at local level who are making hard choices, including clear guidance on what DCSF means by personalised learning in the primary context; and**
- **as with the BSF programme there must be real clarity about how and to what extent this £7 billion programme is to contribute to transforming education.**

The primary capital programme is still in the development phase. The Department is presently working in partnership with 23 regional pathfinders and a range of other bodies to refine the programme before it is rolled out nationally from 2009–10. In order to access funding, local authorities will need to prepare and agree a local strategy for change, showing how they will use the additional capital investment to support education transformation in the primary sector. For the longer term, the Department intends to pilot integrated 0–19 strategies for change covering both primary and secondary phases, and including early years and 14–19.

The Department is taking a different—and lighter touch—approach to capital investment for the primary sector. This is not because we regard primary schools as being of lesser importance, but because they are generally much smaller than secondary schools with less complex building needs. Investment is spread across all authorities, rather than concentrated in a few. Where possible, existing processes, e.g. the BSF “Strategy for Change” and a LEP will be used, rather than developing new ones.

Turning to the three specific recommendations:

- The Department has made clear, both in the original prospectus and the draft guidance that we are testing with pathfinders, that we expect local authorities to take a joined-up approach to capital investment. A number of pathfinders are already looking at the potential for all-age or campus-based schools. Others will be testing the use of BSF LEPs as the preferred procurement vehicle for primary schools. We are clear that the two programmes should be seen as complementary.
- We have already set clear national output targets for the primary capital programme against which we will monitor progress—5% of the worst condition schools to be rebuilt or taken out of commission; 20% of the worst condition schools serving the most deprived communities to be rebuilt or taken out of commission; and at least 50% of primary schools overall to be rebuilt, refurbished or remodelled to bring them up to 21st century standards. We are developing a project to use secondary and primary schools to help define the implications of personalised approaches to teaching and learning for the design and use of space.

- The expectation of educational transformation was also set out in the original prospectus. The Department will set out shortly its expectations in the guidance to authorities on the primary “strategy for change”.

Further Education

Recommendation 17: In order to provide properly integrated secondary education in any given area, the funding systems in place should be designed to encourage working in partnership. The DCSF should examine the way BSF, further education and primary capital projects are funded to ensure that partnership working designed to increase the range of learning opportunities available to students is rewarded and that there is as great a degree of flexibility as possible to help local authorities, schools and colleges to maximise the benefit for children and young people in their areas.

We recognise the need to give local authorities greater flexibility in the way they lead partners and fulfil their role as commissioners of services across the full range of educational provision. In recognition of this need we have set up a pilot 0 to 19 capital project. The project will test the feasibility of whether capital programmes, from early years through to further education, can be usefully joined together to give greater flexibility to local authorities and their partners in how they direct their capital spend.

In addition, we are looking at how BSF and Learning and Skills Council (LSC) capital funding can be joined together to support the delivery of the 14–19 agenda, through a “14–19 capital exemplar pilot”. The pilot will provide the opportunity for the different organisations and their respective funding streams to adopt an innovative approach to the medium- and long-term capital development of an area, with a particular focus on preparing the area for 14–19 Diploma delivery.

Local authorities and LSC are already encouraged to work closely and join up planning and delivery. This will be cemented by the planning regime being developed by the Department as part of the follow up to the Local Government White Paper.

Recommendation 18: These examples show how complicated it can be to achieve integrated provision from different sectors, but they also illustrate that the only way to ensure that there is effective educational provision in an area is through the co-operative efforts of those working locally. With the division of DfES into Children, Schools and Families and Innovation, Universities and Skills this level of co-operative effort will be equally important at the national level.

Both the DCSF and the DIUS recognise the importance of working co-operatively, and have several cross-departmental groups which oversee capital policy. It is the responsibility of these groups to ensure all new capital policy is developed jointly, making the necessary links with other relevant funding streams and stakeholders, and thus ultimately presenting a single, coherent capital policy for all of the education sectors. The Department will also continue to promote the commissioner role of local authorities.

Recommendation 19: We ask the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills to set out its policy on the appropriateness of PFI as a means of financing the redevelopment of colleges.

Whilst PFI can be a good way for public bodies to obtain the facilities they need now, whilst offsetting risks and life cycle costs, there are a number of barriers which puts into question its suitability as a procurement vehicle for the FE sector.

Previous reports on PFI in the FE sector have highlighted that projects of a certain scale (preferably in excess of £50 million) and nature should explore the potential for PFI procurement. It has also been suggested that one possible way of reaching this threshold is to ‘bundle’ together college projects. However, given the wide range of projects that are completed within the FE sector, it is unlikely that there would be one method that would be appropriate in all cases.

On balance, it is DIUS’s view that PFI is still, broadly speaking, not beneficial to the FE sector. Its capital budget for 2008–2011 does not, therefore, include any PFI credits. However, it is recognised that there are advantages for several projects “bundling” together, and such relationships would be encouraged where appropriate. There may be other specific cases where PFI would be appropriate and we would expect the LSC to review those on a case by case basis.

Recommendation 20: We applaud the commitment shown by the LSC in stating these principles that need to be met and providing funding to offset any additional cost (although not all sustainable features incur extra costs). This checklist would be useful for anyone seeking to build sustainable educational buildings, not just Further Education colleges.

DIUS is pleased that the Committee acknowledges the LSC’s commitment to sustainability. We will consider what use might be made more widely of the LSC checklist.

Educational transformation

Recommendation 21: The crucial question here, and one that the Department does not answer in this document, is what do we want education to be in the 21st century?

Recommendation 22: This suggests that, as we commented earlier, the early phase of development of what is now called the Strategy for Change is key to the success of the whole process. People need to be given enough time to think through the issues about how secondary education should be provided in their area before they are required to start making firm decisions. A clear statement of the national ambitions for 21st century education could help to provide guidance and challenge to this local decision-making process.

The Committee has asked the Department to provide more detail of what is meant by educational transformation, to articulate more clearly what is the 21st century education that the BSF programme aims to support.

We are clear that BSF is not just an investment programme and that educational transformation is not just high-quality school buildings. As the Committee acknowledges, the development of the “Strategy for Change” is a key stage, designed to capture both the education vision and what this will mean for the school estate. Our guidance to local authorities already sets out those elements we expect the “Strategy for Change” to address to ensure that schools can transform teaching and learning and achieve better educational

standards. But the way forward needs to be a combination of a national vision and a locally determined vision for the shape of educational provision in their area.

PfS is taking a lead role in working with other key NDPBs and similar organisations within the education sector to begin defining a clearer vision for 21st century education as it relates to the BSF programme. This work has a number of key strands under the banner of 'leading learning' and a particular element within it is support for the development of innovation zones around local authorities in the BSF programme. This concept is currently being piloted in two local authorities (Knowsley and Sheffield).

The forthcoming Children's Plan, to be published later this year and informed by extensive consultation with parents, children and young people, frontline staff and experts, will develop the Government's vision for educational transformation in the context of a wider vision for all services for children and young people. This will further improve the quality of long-term strategic decisions about BSF at local and national level. We intend to stimulate with partners further public discussions.

Local decisions versus Government policy

Recommendation 23: Given the amount of expenditure which is being authorised, it is right that the DCSF should satisfy itself that it is being spent appropriately. On the other hand, it does not look much like "devolving resource and power to local level" if there is a detailed check list of Government objectives which have to be addressed to allow a project to be signed off.

Recommendation 24: While it is important to ensure that expenditure is properly monitored, we have seen no evidence that local authorities have put forward particularly inappropriate plans for their BSF projects. The Government should have the courage of its convictions, and allow local authorities greater flexibility to develop local solutions within a clear framework of priorities, such as the need to promote innovative approaches to learning and the need to embed sustainability.

As the Committee acknowledges, it is important to get the balance right. The investment in BSF is significant and it is right that the government can be assured that its priorities will be met through that investment. We want a programme which supports and encourages innovation and also delivers the BSF objectives. We do have examples of plans which, without our close involvement, support and guidance, would not have delivered the objectives, particularly in respect of addressing the tough issues of poor performing or undersubscribed schools. Other plans showed a lack of innovation, with little educational transformation or estate rationalisation, including removal of surplus places.

We believe we now have a good balance. The new "Strategy for Change" process sets out the central vision and, with an early remit meeting, makes clear what is non-negotiable. However, after that we certainly encourage local innovation, but with appropriate consideration and challenge going forward to ensure that difficult issues are being addressed properly.

Recommendation 25: The DCSF should place a requirement on local authorities to ensure that One School Pathfinders are used as test beds for ways to transform education.

Local authorities are using One School Pathfinders as a local test bed for educational transformation and for managing large-scale procurement projects, and the Department has emphasised this from the outset.

The Department held design events for local authorities, schools and their design teams covering visioning, inspirational school design and modern methods of procurement. To help lever up design quality, we provide four days of CABI enabling time for each of the Phase 1 Pathfinders. For Phase 2 Pathfinders we have offered match funding for between 12–15 days of RIBA client design advisor time. Phase 2 Pathfinders have also been offered a specially adapted version of NCSL’s BSF Leadership Programme, which has an emphasis on visioning.

The Department is also using the Pathfinders as national test beds. We are running three demonstration projects on sustainability, and six on science (the Faraday Project). These projects should demonstrate how well-designed buildings can help transform education.

Recommendation 26: If the Government is serious about wanting BSF to provide educational transformation, it ought to be encouraging local authorities to be more innovative.

As the Committee notes, innovation needs to be at the service of teachers’ vision, rather than driving change for change’s sake. We believe that BSF gives plenty of scope for innovation and the key to enabling this is to give enough time for considered thought. However, these are local government projects and ultimately, it is for each local authority to ensure that the project delivers educational transformation locally, within the broad national framework.

Developing the use of ICT

Recommendation 27: We believe that ICT is a vital area for the development of education over the coming years, but that does not mean that each school needs to have a bespoke system created for it which differs from systems in all other schools.

BSF does not involve bespoke systems for individual schools; the preferred model is of a local-authority-wide managed service which is flexible enough to meet the specific needs of each school.

A “one size fits all” solution is not the way to achieve educational transformation. The ICT output based specification (2006) encourages local authority and school enhancements to the basic specifications; it allows solutions can be tailored to a school’s specialism(s) or the needs of a community whilst, still being based upon a core specification that is common to all schools in the area.

It would not be appropriate to roll out a single ICT model to all schools as this would not encourage innovation or response to local circumstances. For this reason Becta establish minimum specifications for school ICT infrastructure to ensure the inter-operability of systems between schools. Schools need to implement solutions which meet a minimum set of specifications and standards, not identical solutions.

As BSF rolls out further, PfS and Becta will work with local authorities from the early waves to share their experience with those in later waves.

Recommendation 28: We recommend that information about systems in use is made widely known amongst authorities in later waves of BSF so that they can take advantage of the experience of those which have already procured their ICT.

Ensuring that lessons learned are shared is essential to the success of BSF, but we do not believe it is appropriate for us to arrange for local authorities to share information about technical systems. This is counter to the output based approach where it is not the specific technology, but how it is employed, that delivers the desired outcomes of transformation education. In addition, the sharing of commercial information about the specific technological solution delivered by one provider to an authority to other authorities who are about to enter into procurement could create serious risk in relation to commercial confidentiality.

However, PfS have gathered information from two of the early procurements which shows the scope and scale of what can be achieved through a BSF procurement. PfS are now considering how to share this learning with all authorities without breaching commercial confidentiality or endorsing a particular solution.

Recommendation 29: Guidance on making the most of ICT and examples of good practice should be issued by the DCSF.

This is an area where PfS, the Department and Becta will continue to work together. A CD about ICT familiarisation has been developed which contains lots of stimulating examples in video and text form. This is updated for each BSF wave and incorporates material from other agencies including Becta.

In addition, Becta supports the education sector to make the best use of ICT so that every learner in the UK is able to benefit. They have a continuing role in disseminating good practice in a variety of ways; for example, through the winners of their ICT Excellence Awards, conferences and events and a variety of research reports and publications.

Future proofing

Recommendation 30: There should be a post-occupancy review of every school within the BSF programme so that a proper assessment can be made of what has worked well and what has caused difficulties, on procurement and construction issues and also on the design and conception of the school. These reviews should be given the widest possible circulation so that all those involved in BSF, in the current waves and in the future, can use them to ensure that mistakes are not repeated, that good ideas are adopted more widely and that the desired flexibility for the future is in place. Transformation of education for the 21st century will only occur if we learn the lessons about what works best.

We welcome the Committee's views on post-occupancy reviews, something we are already taking on board. The first brand new BSF school opened in Bristol recently and a post-occupancy review will be carried out there. Reviews have been carried out on other recently built secondary schools to identify key lessons and experiences. We will use the BSF

knowledge portal to disseminate these lessons more widely. These aims are also included in the independent evaluation by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Recommendation 31: When planning the development of schools in an area, local authorities must ensure that the way provision for 14–19 education is to be made and in which responsibility for delivering each of the diploma lines is to be shared is considered at an early stage. It is important that schools should be seen as a system, not just individual institutions.

Local authorities are required in the Strategy for Change process to set out the local facilities required to deliver the 14–19 entitlement, including the contribution of further education providers. The LSC should be fully involved in developing the “Strategy for Change” and will ensure that its investment plans are informed by and consistent with the local Strategy.

Personalisation

Recommendation 32: The DCSF should provide a clear vision of what it wants from personalisation, with guidance about how it might be realised in BSF projects, not as a prescription but in order to inform the debate on how schools should operate in the future.

From the beginning of BSF, through the exemplar design work which we commissioned, we have stressed the importance of flexibility in designs to future-proof for developments in teaching and learning. Personalised learning is our next stage of reform: a way of raising standards further, ensuring every child realises his or her full potential. We will look guidance on design implications as part of the planned work on educational transformation referred to above.

The introduction of Schools’ “Strategy for Change” will also support the development of buildings that respond to the personalised learning agenda.

Accountability framework

Recommendation 33: We recommend that Ofsted, in consultation with the DCSF, should draw up and publish for consultation a protocol on how its inspection regime is to be modified for schools in BSF.

The Department believes the current inspection framework is sufficiently flexible to allow inspectors to take account of BSF. However, we and Ofsted welcome the opportunity to discuss further the implications of this initiative on the inspection of schools.

Currently, inspectors take account of the adequacy and suitability of learning resources and accommodation when they are inspecting schools. The Select Committee expressed concern that pupils’ education should not suffer because of building work. Ofsted shares this concern. Where building work is taking place, inspectors will take account of the disruption this has on the education of pupils and of the actions managers and leaders have taken to ensure that they are not disadvantaged.

Inspectors are expected to take a school's context into account when preparing for an inspection. When preparing the pre-inspection briefing, inspectors would take BSF issues into account particularly if they are raised by the school in the self-evaluation form (SEF) and in discussion between the head teacher and the lead inspector prior to the start of the inspection. Where buildings are complete, schools can provide evidence of how they have involved stakeholders in the design or fitting out of them; along with evidence of impact the new accommodation has had on for example, curriculum opportunities, the attitudes of the pupils and their achievement. The impact of the new building on the quality of learning will usually be discussed with the pupils and the teaching staff and will often feature in the responses parents give in the questionnaires they are asked to complete regarding the work of the school.

Inspections are approached on a case by case basis. Ofsted publishes a protocol giving guidance to situations where an inspection may be deferred. However, it would be unusual for inspections to be deferred when building work is taking place, especially when learners are still being educated at the school.

The Select Committee also stated that “schools which are attempting innovative ways of delivering education should be given credit for that.”

The current framework for inspection focuses on the outcomes pupils achieve including their personal development. Where achievement is high and pupils are making good progress, inspectors will report this and will explore the reasons why. If there is innovation in the way a school manages its provision and this is making a difference then the school will be given credit and the report will exemplify this. Section 5 inspections are tailored to the context of the school and to the things that make a difference to the outcomes pupils achieve. Schools are encouraged to set out their strengths and weaknesses in the SEF and inspectors will use the SEF to help focus the inspection.

Sustainability

Recommendation 34: As the Sustainable Development Commission told us, the schools estate contributes 2% to national carbon emissions overall, but that figure represents almost 15% of UK public sector carbon emissions. If the Government is to meet a target of at least 60% reduction against the 1990 baseline, and if it intends to set an example by the way in which it looks after the public sector building stock, it clearly has to address the issue of schools' carbon emissions.

The Sustainable Development Commission estimated that schools contribute 2% of the UK's overall carbon emissions in a scoping study commissioned by the Department during 2006. This estimated that annual emissions of approximately ten million tonnes of carbon dioxide were attributable to schools, and that around half of these emissions (i.e. 1% of overall UK carbon emissions) arise from the use of electricity and fossil fuels within school buildings. The other 1% was attributed to school-related transport and the “embodied energy” required to manufacture goods and products that are used by schools.

To date all new and refurbished schools within BSF have been set a target of energy performance that is equivalent to the upper quartile performance level. This represents an improvement of around 20% on current median consumption levels.

The Energy White Paper signalled the Government's intention to reduce significantly energy use in buildings as an important element in its climate change strategy. Energy efficiency requirements in the Building Regulations are one of the mechanisms through which these reductions will be achieved.

All schools must comply with building regulations. The provisions within the April 2006 amendments ensure that the energy performance of new schools built to today's standards represent a 40% improvement on those built prior to 2002. The regulations now contain further new requirements that apply when refurbishing or extending existing buildings, including provisions to upgrade overall building performance as well as achieving compliance for the work in hand.

The Department has announced additional funding of £110 million over the next three years period to reduce carbon emissions further from new and refurbished school buildings beyond the current requirements. We are also considering what can be done to raise the bar even more.

The costs of reducing schools' carbon footprint

Recommendation 35: We welcome the extra funding the Government is to provide to help achieve its target of carbon neutrality. We hope that this will be carried forward into the general funding of the BSF programme. However, the Government should specify what proportion of the total carbon emissions will be achieved through carbon offsetting. The ideal would clearly be for all new school buildings and plant to be carbon neutral.

Our current proposals are that a minimum reduction in carbon use of 50% (on average, close to 60%) would be achieved for all new secondary school buildings through energy efficiency and renewable energy measures on school sites. The saving will be assessed against the energy used within any new school building that is compliant with the 2002 Building Regulations. We are investigating options to offset the remaining emissions through UN-regulated projects.

We have not included carbon emissions that arise from transport or energy that has been consumed during the manufacture of products used by schools. Emissions from sources other than measurable energy cannot be quantified with certainty, and there is limited scope to influence these emissions in BSF.

We are investigating ways of achieving "zero carbon" new school buildings. Our initial research indicates that with current technologies, new "zero carbon" schools can only be achieved at considerable extra cost, and even then site constraints mean that zero carbon cannot be achieved in all cases. It appears that the level of capital investment would exceed any potential savings in school running costs.

Recommendation 36: We recommend that the Government provides funding on the basis of an amount per pupil rather than an amount per square metre where authorities request it.

This recommendation has been made in the context of reducing the carbon footprint of school buildings by reducing the amount of time each pupil spends in school through

collaborative arrangements for 14–19 education. We do not believe that this recommendation should be adopted because funding for schools is already indirectly allocated on a per pupil basis, but with a mechanism that reflects that there are space (and therefore cost) savings with larger schools.

Within BSF, the guide cost for schools is allocated in proportion to the gross area of the school building. This gross area of the school buildings is, in turn, determined by pupil numbers.

Recommendation 37: Greater flexibility on building standards, emphasising that they are guidance rather than requirements, would allow authorities at local level a greater degree of choice over their school estates, and allow them to find the most suitable ways of making schools in their area more sustainable.

The Department's guidance on school design—Building Bulletins—generally does offer flexibility by allowing designers to take alternative approaches to proposed guidance. The building bulletin most commonly referred to in the context of BSF is Building Bulletin (BB) 98. This fulfils two main functions. Firstly, it establishes the overall build area that would be needed for a secondary school of a given number of pupils. It gives a clear, fair and equitable mechanism for funding all types of new school buildings. This function of BB 98 is widely understood by local authorities, designers and developers. Secondly, BB 98 gives minimum areas for various types of indoor and outdoor school spaces.

However, these are minimum standards only—not requirements. BB 98 offers a flexible approach to designing a school. The Department actively encourages designers to think creatively about 21st century design, meeting these challenges with a range of spaces of different sizes to suit schools' curriculum and management models.

Some of the criticism of BB 98 comes because some local authorities impose the minimum areas as 'standard'. This creates frustration both for schools who want to operate different organisational or curriculum models, and for architects who wish to design more creatively. We are working with PfS to produce a simple document which will help schools and designers understand the principles of BB 98 and how it can already give them the flexibilities that they need to develop transformational school designs within budget.

Sustainable procurement

Recommendation 38: We ask the DCSF and Partnerships for Schools to tell us how the recommendations of the Sustainable Procurement Task Force are being implemented in BSF. We also ask for a response on whether they consider that using 30% of recycled material in construction would be cost neutral and, if so, whether they will consider raising the level required.

The Government has published its Sustainable Procurement Action Plan which incorporates its response to Procuring the Future, the report of the Sustainable Procurement Task Force. The only specific reference to BSF within Procuring the Future was a comment on research undertaken by the Sustainable Development Commission. This stated that there are opportunities for maximising the sustainability benefits from the schools' building programme through a combination of energy efficiency measures and

microgeneration, and that these benefits should be realised by ensuring that capital and running costs be looked at together. These issues are covered by our response above.

In June 2007, Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) published a case study which investigated the potential for recycled content within the design of three new schools. This estimated that the recycled content within these designs ranged from 13–17% but could be increased to 16–21% at no extra cost. The current output specification for the BSF programme sets a target of 10% for the recycled content of construction material (suggesting that 12.5% is achievable) and requires contractors to adopt the findings of WRAP. This output specification is currently under review, and the potential to revise the target for recycled content will be investigated as part of the review.

Is BSF the best way to spend £45 billion on education?

Recommendation 39: We are not arguing that BSF is a waste of money or that it should not proceed. Indeed it represents an unprecedented opportunity to ensure that all of the physical spaces which pupils occupy effectively support their learning. What we are saying is that, given the scale of the project and the amount of money proposed to be spent, there is a danger that everyone involved will concentrate on getting through to the end and that the question of whether the project's scope and aims remain appropriate will not be asked.

Recommendation 40: We ask the DCSF in its reply to give us a considered response to the issues we raise here so that we can be assured that it does have a process of regularly reviewing the question of whether this is best way in which to spend £45 billion on education.

We have made clear our commitment to address the legacy of underinvestment in our schools. We would point out, however, that the cost of this programme is not all additional: the school building stock needs to be maintained, and improved in line with developing educational needs in any case. Many secondary schools buildings are now well past the end of their original design life. Even to maintain just like-for-like has an investment need for the secondary school estate. What is exceptional about BSF is its scale and its management—its targeting of investment on an area by area basis and tying investment to educational transformation.

Each spending review, the Department has to consider its aims and objectives and how it can best deliver the Government's programme for education. This is the opportunity to review the appropriateness of its capital programmes such as BSF and the Primary Capital Programme.

Additionally, the Department has commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to evaluate the impact of BSF on educational achievement. This is, internationally, the first time that there has been a programme of this scope and aim, where evaluation has been a part of the programme from the beginning, and where relevant data can be systematically collected. It will, of course, take some time for relevant quantitative evidence to become available. Evaluating the impact of one factor on educational achievement is notoriously difficult. We are therefore also looking in the research for early lessons from more

immediate qualitative indicators, and at the impact of the programme on the levers to educational achievement.

Finally, we are reviewing the operation of BSF waves 7 to 15, and will launch a consultation shortly. This will mean that, by summer 2008, there is a clear revised national programme for BSF.

The Management of the BSF project

Recommendation 41: The BSF project provides a good test as to whether the DCSF has taken on board all of the lessons of the Capability Review, and at present it appears that it has not. More effective strategic planning, a more clearly defined view of the role of local authorities and less micro-management would undoubtedly help the authorities who are developing their plans for BSF.

Recommendation 42: We believe that, within a clear basic framework, local authorities should be given more freedom to shape their local school system as they consider appropriate.

As we set out above, we believe we now have a good balance between central vision and local freedom. The strategic role of local authorities is set out clearly in the guidance for the new “Strategy for Change” and we believe the level of challenge is appropriate to ensure that objectives of BSF will be met.

Recommendation 43: One thing which could make life much more straightforward would be to establish one gateway for an authority’s discussions with central Government about its BSF project.

The Department quite clearly has responsibility for setting the overarching strategic context for the government’s capital investment in schools. In terms of BSF, there is clear delineation of responsibilities: the Department is responsible for the development of policy and PFS is responsible for the strategic management and delivery of the programme, including day-to-day management of individual projects.

These aspects clearly interrelate and the Department and PFS work closely, particularly so on the translation of policy into delivery. Furthermore, the performance management arrangements for the delivery of BSF incentivise PFS to deliver the programme and enable a light-touch approach by the Department

We believe that current arrangements are a step towards the single gateway recommended by the Select Committee, and agree with the benefits that further movement in this direction will provide. PFS has a strong relationship with local authorities and this is in no large measure due to the steps we have taken to strengthen the focus on PFS as the delivery agent for BSF. Going forward, the Department intends to streamline its own delivery-side arrangements to give even greater clarity to the BSF community.

PFS already acts as the key single point of contact for local authorities and this role will be further strengthened by PFS’ recent reorganisation and the introduction of the relationship management concept. This ensures that a single PFS contact works with each local authority throughout the duration of its project.

As the BSF programme matures the Department and PfS continue to refine and streamline roles and responsibilities more broadly. For instance, we have recently streamlined the business case approval process, including clarification of the key points of contact for local authorities. Also, further guidance has been issued to local authorities to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the core central government bodies involved in BSF.

How will we know if BSF has been a success?

Recommendation 44: We believe that there should be a set of clear objectives by which to judge how well the project is progressing. We ask the DCSF to define what it considers to be the key indicators that will demonstrate the success or otherwise of BSF in its response to this report. Given that new Public Service Agreement targets will be set this autumn for the new Comprehensive Spending Review, we also recommend that progress on BSF ought to be one of the areas which the Department should have as one of its high level targets.

The overarching objective of BSF is to deliver educational transformation within every state secondary school in England and, in so doing, improve the life chances of millions of young people. BSF has a range of output Key Performance Indicators which it measures itself against, but these are not definable in the context of Public Service Agreements. PwC research will show the impact of BSF whilst correlating for other relevant variables but it needs time for evidence to become available.

Recommendation 45: Schools and authorities should be supported and encouraged by the DCSF, and by Ministers in particular, to explore new approaches which may help to improve attainment overall and particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds who typically have low levels of engagement with the school system.

The Government has set the policy framework, including the new CSR07 policy package, which builds on agendas around personalisation, raising standards and Every Child Matters. It aims to narrow the attainment gap through a combination of universal and targeted policies with the potential to deliver the greatest gains for disadvantage in five critical areas. At the centre of our approach will be a concern to secure excellent teaching and learning in every setting, from early years to work-based learning provider, to adopt a whole child approach in considering the links between achievement, behaviour and health, and to secure better help for every child and young person to overcome any barriers to learning.

Recommendation 46: The policy initiative that all new schools designed from now on must be carbon neutral is welcome, but it is now important that the policy is effectively delivered. We would welcome further information on how the carbon emissions of school buildings are going to be measured, and we urge a consistent approach for all schools.

The Department recognises that design intent is not always realised in practice and we are keen to ensure that our expectations in respect of carbon reductions will be met. Data on school energy performance is periodically reviewed (e.g. when energy benchmarks are revised) and the Department will consider this exercise as a means of monitoring the energy performance of new schools. There may also be opportunities to measure energy

performance when the requirements to display energy certificates are introduced—from April 2008 the occupants of new buildings (including schools) will be required to publish their predicted energy use and publish actual energy performance on an annual basis. Communities and Local Government (CLG) is responsible for implementing these requirements and DCSF officials are working with CLG to ensure that policies are complementary.

We are developing an evaluation methodology to ensure that the options for reducing carbon emissions from schools are assessed on a consistent basis.

Scrutiny of Building Schools for the Future

Recommendation 47: The Government's increased capital expenditure on schools is welcome; the task now is to ensure that is spent as effectively as possible.

We agree and address these points above.