



House of Commons
Education Committee

The Responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Education

Oral Evidence

Tuesday 24 April 2012

*Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for
Education*

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Members present:

Mr Graham Stuart (Chair)

Alex Cunningham
Damian Hinds
Charlotte Leslie

Ian Mearns
Lisa Nandy
Craig Whittaker

Examination of Witness

Witness: **Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**, Secretary of State for Education, gave evidence.

Q196 Chair: Good morning, Secretary of State. Thank you very much for joining us. Having been caught short in our last lesson and now being late for this one, there were suggestions of detention for further questioning, but we are delighted to have you with us. If I may, I will start just by asking you about what the Head of Ofsted told us when he recently gave evidence. He said, “It seems to me there needs to be some sort of intermediary layer that finds out what is happening on the ground and intervenes before it is too late. But when failure does take place, who is going to broker support? Who is going to intervene at the right time? Who is going to approach the successful school and a successful head or an academy chain to come in in support?” What is your answer to that question?

Michael Gove: There are a lot of questions there, and it is typical of the new Chief Inspector that he should identify with such acuity some of the challenges that we face. My first concern is that we do no harm, and that, in seeking to answer those questions, we do not either recreate or generate a new bureaucratic system that has all the worst features of many of the problems that have bedevilled state education in the past. It is often the case that, when a problem or a set of challenges is identified, the people who come forward with solutions are those with a vested interest in putting forward shop-soiled solutions, rather than fresh ones.

Q197 Chair: Just before you move on, Secretary of State, “shop-soiled solutions”: who have you got in mind? What have you got in mind?

Michael Gove: Going back to the old, monopolistic bureaucratic model favoured by some of our most conservative and reactionary local authorities and their allies elsewhere in the educational establishment. What I would like to do is try to identify the most dynamic ways of identifying underperformance and then generating improvement. As ever, there is no single answer to the set of challenges Michael Wilshaw identifies. It is often a mistake in education policy to think that there is one thing—smaller class sizes, the pupil premium, whatever—that will help. There needs to be a range of interventions.

The role of the National College and national leaders of education is critical. The growth of academy chains is important too. In particular, the role of high-performing schools—whether they are led by national leaders or whether they are forming academy chains—in identifying underperforming schools, whom they can either take under their wing or take over, is

critical. If there is one unifying theme, and I suspect Sir Michael would agree, it is that the most effective form of school improvement is school to school, peer to peer, professional to professional. We want to see serving head teachers and other school leaders playing a central role.

Q198 Chair: On that basis, are you disappointed that so few of the converter academies—the outstanding and very strong schools that have converted to academy status—are playing a role in peer-to-peer support?

Michael Gove: Again, is the glass half full or half empty? There are 40 who have taken on this responsibility, and some of them have shown an eagerness to do even more. Therefore, I would argue we are seeing a lot of evidence for change and transformation, not just through those who have decided to take on the role of being academy sponsors but also those taking other schools under their wing and providing other forms of support.

One of the things that I have perhaps not talked enough about is the role of the National College for School Leadership, now the National College, and national leaders of education. The very best head teachers are identified, and they are given this status, but with that power comes the responsibility to help other underperforming schools. There is another initiative, which I have probably not said enough about but I am grateful to you for the opportunity to talk about, and that is teaching schools. 100 schools were identified last year; 100 more will be identified this year. I am going to talk to them in two days’ time in Nottingham. These are schools that are outstanding when it comes to teaching and learning; they have been identified by Ofsted as such, and it is their role and responsibility specifically to help underperforming schools and to broker solutions. I should also say that there are professional organisations, including trade unions, that have come forward with constructive solutions about playing a supportive and brokering role in underperformance. We will be hearing more about that in weeks to come.

Q199 Chair: Sir Michael seemed less than convinced that this fragmented system—as you have described—is going to pick up enough of the need. Do we need something more fundamental? You said you do not want a one size fits all, but at the moment is there not a danger—especially when we have more and more primaries becoming academies—that they will simply fall between these various stools, unless you are

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planning to change the role of the National College and leaders in order to give them a responsibility to pick up any school with signs of a problem.

Michael Gove: I am open-minded about any solution. As I say, I am sceptical about going back to something that is broken simply because it is a set of institutions with which people are familiar, but I am open-minded. If there are people, either in local government or elsewhere, who have constructive suggestions as to how we can improve school improvement, I am all ears.

One of the things I would say is that there are a complex set of issues and challenges, which Sir Michael put forward. Some of them will require different solutions. For example, you quite rightly mention primary schools. One of the things that the Coalition Government sought to do is to identify those primary schools that are underperforming. We have made the floor standards below which no primary schools should fall—which the last Government introduced—tougher, both in the sense of raising the bar and introducing new interventions if people fall below them.

In addition to that focus on underperformance at primary level, I should say it is still the case that even though we have had a significant number of primary schools that have embraced academy status, the majority of them are still part of the local authority family. I would stress that we are not in the situation I think you, in a characteristic and provocative way, described of chaos or fragmentation; I would prefer to say diversity. Let us not overstate the degree of movement from the situation we have inherited.

Q200 Chair: It is not me who says that; it is the head of Ofsted, who says that although there needs to be an intermediary layer, there is not. You have pointed to these various organisations whose role you think you should give more thought to, but you have not really been able to explain how we have a sufficient monitoring and intervention capability in the system. You have set out—having rejected the old system—to create autonomous schools, but you do not seem to have thought through fully how we are going to pick up failure within those schools where it occurs.

Michael Gove: If you think that the Coalition Government has been somehow weak on failure, I would be interested to hear how that argument played out with the former head teacher and the governing body of Downhills Primary School, or any of the other primary schools in which we have sought to intervene.

Q201 Chair: It is what we do with the academies. The Government's will to intervene to fix problems in the old broken model, as the Government sees it, is well understood.

Michael Gove: Good.

Chair: What is less clear, especially if, as the Prime Minister told me recently at the Liaison Committee, more than half of primaries become academies, is what the system is to ensure that failure in those cases is picked up. The Head of Ofsted says that by the time Ofsted arrives it will be too late.

Michael Gove: It can be. Sir Michael is someone who is not afraid of painting things in primary colours if

necessary. Indeed, he has been attacked by some—but not by me—for the strength of his rhetoric. It is interesting that his comments to you were more ruminative, and he was being—as he is—a thoughtful individual, anticipating an issue that might arise and suggesting, as we all should, “Let us consider, in this future state, what the right approach might be.” I would argue that the whole history of school improvement has often been one where there have been isolated local authorities and individuals on the ground who have done a good job, but more often than not central Government has had to intervene, whether it has been the London or the Black Country Challenge, or whether it has been the National Challenge, which my predecessor introduced as well. It has often been the case that you have had to have national leadership on that. I hope that is what the Coalition Government has shown.

The fact that Ofsted is playing a more assertive role helps us, but just because local authorities are playing a different role, that does not mean that somehow directors of children's services—or, in particular, elected members—are somehow voiceless eunuchs. It is still the case that if they believe schools—whether academies or maintained—are underperforming, they have the means of ringing the alarm bell and have also drawn that underperformance to our attention. Generally I believe the best way of asserting whether or not a school is underperforming is to look at the data; this Government has published more data about school performance than any of its predecessors.

Q202 Alex Cunningham: You used the expression “family of schools”, Secretary of State. Do you believe that academies, free schools, should all remain part of the family of schools within a local authority, and benefit from mutual support within that and perhaps even local authority services?

Michael Gove: It is for those individual schools. The relationship is best described as schools operating, collaborating together, but on their terms and not on anyone else's. Therefore when it comes to choosing whether or not to use local authority services, schools should be discriminating consumers of local authority services in the interests of the children.

Q203 Alex Cunningham: Do you think the local authorities have a role now in determining whether an academy or free school is failing? That is what you were saying before.

Michael Gove: Any local authority can make an assertion about an academy or free school and argue, and indeed suggest, that an inspection or some other mechanism may be required in order to address underperformance. What we cannot have is local authorities pursuing a vendetta against an academy or free school because that school has chosen not to buy in their services or not to be conscripted into a particular organisation. As ever, the data will help us.

Q204 Alex Cunningham: I would hope there would be no vendetta by any local authorities against any schools, because they are all about young people.

Michael Gove: I would hope so, but sadly that has not been the case in the past.

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Q205 Alex Cunningham: Yes, but surely local authorities should be keeping an eye on what is happening across the whole of the area. After all, they do have responsibilities in that, and if a school is failing they should be trying to do something about it, even if it is just phoning your Department and saying, "What are you going to do about it?"

Michael Gove: They certainly should, but I would move from the abstract realm of high principle that you have enunciated to the grim reality on the ground. The grim reality on the ground is there are many local authorities that have been failing to draw attention to underperformance, and local authorities have been more likely in many—though not all—cases to find excuses for underperformance, rather than to challenge.

Q206 Alex Cunningham: How many local authorities are failing in that way?

Michael Gove: If you look at some of the areas where we have had to intervene, or where the predecessor Government has had to intervene, you will have seen those local authorities.

Q207 Alex Cunningham: Can you name some of them? Tell us: which local authorities are failing?

Michael Gove: I will allow that judgment to be made by others. All I will say is that if you look at those areas where we have had to intervene, those areas where we have identified that there are a large number of underperforming schools, that is fine, but there are sinners that repenteth. There are local authorities that acknowledge they need to do better and that are working with the Department. It would be unfair of me to chastise those local authorities that may have been underperforming in the past but are now doing a better job. There are some local authorities—I note Mr Mearns is anxious to intervene—that have done a good job. One of the things for which I have been criticised in the past is continually praising Gateshead, where he was the lead member, in contrast to Newcastle.

Q208 Ian Mearns: It is understandable. I am interested in the points that you have been making, Secretary of State. Is it your assertion that most local authorities have been failing in the respects you have outlined, or is it just few? Is it a handful, or is it a number that should be of concern around the nation and in each region of the country? I must admit, certainly from my experience I know that the national Government and the Department have intervened in a number of authorities, but it is not a large number of local authorities.

Michael Gove: No, that is true, you are absolutely right. There are those local authorities that have been doing such a poor job that the previous Government have felt that they needed to intervene at certain points. Hackney, where the Learning Trust was created, was one. Leeds, Bradford: these are all areas where the situation was so poor that the last Government acknowledged that we needed a broader level of change. There is a difference between acknowledging there has been a comprehensive failure, as there was in those areas, those local

authorities that have been beacons—Gateshead has done, as I say, outstandingly in many, many areas—and then those other local authorities that may not perhaps be doing as good a job as they should have done, given their resources and responsibilities. This is where Ofsted and the publication of league tables and the greater generation of data have helped us.

We are now in a stronger position to be able to say, "These local authorities with these types of schools are generating results that this neighbouring local authority with very similar types of schools has been incapable of generating. Why not?" How often has it been the case that local authorities have taken the proactive stance of saying, "The Government expects us to reach this national level of performance; we think that our schools should be doing even better—we are more ambitious for our young people than the national Government has been"? My invitation to local authorities consistently has been: "Show us what you have been doing and the steps you have been taking." Some local authorities have risen to that challenge; others have said, "We need more money," or "We need more powers." I am always interested to hear the question about more powers, but it seems to me that there are, and have been in the past, plenty of opportunities for local authorities to have done more.

Q209 Ian Mearns: There is a nuance there, because you have compared authorities by the types of schools, where most of the comparative data between authorities is about children and families.

Michael Gove: Correct. To be fair, one area that has concerned me is if you were a director of children's services, and therefore the officer responsible for both schools and child protection, many of the monitoring and accountability mechanisms are geared—quite understandably—towards child protection. That is what you are inspected on, and less so on school improvement. I would want to draw a distinction between directors of children's services, who have to follow the cues Government has given them, and in some cases some elected members who perhaps have not shown the leadership that they should.

Q210 Chair: Secretary of State, you have said that, where academies are having a problem, local authorities and parents can complain directly to you, to the YPLA, or now the Education Funding Agency. During the passage of the Academies Act in 2010, Lord Hill said that the YPLA has the "capacity and capability" to fulfil this role of taking complaints. Yet we are told by the Special Educational Consortium, among others, that "members frequently reported that parents who called the YPLA were being advised that handling complaints against academies was not within their remit". How can both those things be the case?

Michael Gove: I am sorry to hear that. My impression has been that the YPLA—now the EFA—has been very effective in dealing with problems with academies. It is difficult to name individual schools in a public forum like this, and I will of course write to you with examples of some of the schools where complaints have been made and action has been taken. There is one particular school—indeed group of schools—where there has been an allegation of the

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sort of behaviour on the part of the principal that many of us would consider inappropriate; the EFA has investigated and action is being taken. There are eight academies where the level of underperformance has been such that my Department has issued pre-warning letters; warning notices may follow as a result of that, and action will be taken. I can only apologise to any individual who feels that the recourse to making complaints has been inadequate so far, and I will look to the specific concerns that have been raised.

Q211 Chair: Enquiries by the SEC suggest that the new Education Funding Agency appears to be unaware whether it should be investigating complaints against academies. That is a fairly extraordinary situation for an organisation as well organised and thoughtful as the SEC.

Michael Gove: Again, even with the best will in the world, there can sometimes be mutual misunderstanding, but it manifestly cannot be the case that the YPLA/EFA is unaware of its responsibilities to investigate when it has been investigating one particular educational institution where there are real causes for concern, which I have been preoccupied with over the course of a few weeks.

Q212 Chair: Are you confident that the new complaints system is now working effectively, because the Government had promised that it would not commence Section 45 until it was sure that was in place. During the recess it was announced that this would be implemented in July, and there are concerns that the complaints system has not yet been brought up to the required level.

Michael Gove: Hitherto I had been confident that the EFA and the YPLA were dealing effectively with concerns that have been raised. You have drawn to my attention a specific concern raised by a reputable body, and of course it is my duty to look into that.

Q213 Damian Hinds: Secretary of State, the Government is obviously pursuing a campaign for school improvement on multiple fronts. At the individual school level it centres partly on autonomy for schools and information and choice for parents. At the system-wide level, Sir Michael Wilshaw has been an outstanding hire at Ofsted, and Ofqual is on a clear path. What role does the National Curriculum play in that mix?

Michael Gove: An evolving one. The majority of primary schools, certainly for the foreseeable future, will be governed by the National Curriculum explicitly, statutorily, because they will not be academy schools. The majority of secondary schools are either now academies or en route to become academies. The question is, given that they can disapply the National Curriculum, what reason do they have to follow it? The striking thing is that, of those schools that are academies, a significant number pay quite close attention to the National Curriculum, not least because it informs the content within GCSEs, and not least because GCSE performance is one of the primary accountability mechanisms. Even those schools that can totally depart from the National

Curriculum and have never been governed by it—fee-paying independent schools—have tended—but not always—to follow in many areas the GCSE specifications and submit their students for GCSEs. The National Curriculum has a significant impact on what schools do. That impact is there because the Government is laying out a benchmark of what it believes students need to understand, skills that they need to have, the knowledge that they have to muster. It is open to other schools to develop their own curricula, and for awarding bodies to develop their own qualifications. Where they do, that is a challenge to the National Curriculum. One of the things that I have been worried by is the growing number of schools that have the freedom to do so taking on the IGCSE, for example, and the complaints we have had, for example, from schools, and as a result of the Livingstone-Hope Review, about specific areas of the National Curriculum, like ICT. Therefore I thought it was appropriate for us to overhaul the Curriculum, but at the same time make sure that it was schools that decided whether or not they wanted to adopt something that we hoped would be better, rather than me seeking to corral the creativity of good head teachers.

Q214 Damian Hinds: I suppose there are two different measures of adoption: there is adoption within subjects, whether you have taken all the principles within a subject, and then there is the number of subjects. If the number of subjects to age 16 increases, do you expect a change in the proportion of those that are not obliged to follow the curriculum following it in terms of the breadth?

Michael Gove: If we were to inflate the number of subjects that were compulsory to the age of 16, it might well be the case that there would be pressure on curricular time. I know that the Association of School and College Leaders has said, “Do not do that, because we think the pressure on curricular time is already quite intense.” There are others who would say, “We can, by extending the school day, week and year, cope with that additional level.” On the whole I am anxious to ensure—as the English Baccalaureate shows—that more students are encouraged to take up the sorts of subjects that enable them to progress on to higher education institutions, good jobs and good apprenticeships. I want to be certain that any change to the National Curriculum in terms of other subjects that we introduce at any particular key stage does not unsettle that beneficial movement towards the embrace of those additional subjects.

That is quite a long answer, but one of the things I do not want to do in this Committee is state definitively that Subject X is now going to be compulsory within the National Curriculum at an additional age, or Subject Y will not be, because the whole thing—as everyone around this table appreciates—is interconnected. I would not want to set one hare running, which would lead people to believe that we are moving in one particular direction, without knowing the rest of the picture.

Q215 Damian Hinds: We have the interim report from the Expert Panel, which I think came out in

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December, which does seem to do some of those things that you just mentioned—some that particular organisations would be opposed to. Yet there seems to have been relatively little controversy. Why do you think that is?

Michael Gove: I do not know. The point about the Expert Panel report is that it was intended to generate a debate; there has been a debate, but it has been pretty cool, calm and collected.

Q216 Damian Hinds: More of a chat.

Michael Gove: Yes: genial confrontation, like the Select Committee. I do not know; I do not know why that should be so. It may be that, when we say more, people will then move. I am sure this is the wrong metaphor, but it may have been that the period from the publication of the Expert Panel report until the publication of some of our programmes of study and our response has been the Phony War of September 1939 to May 1940, and it may be that the whole thing is about to hot up, but so far I have been pleased by the fact that the tone in which the debate has been conducted has been very civilised.

Q217 Damian Hinds: Given what we have in the Wolf Report—in particular what she says about the massive premium on GCSE level English and maths, and also, to be honest, what we know about the benefit of developing in English beyond GCSE—we have done that already—is there a case for extending the National Curriculum to include those subjects, developing those skills, post 16?

Michael Gove: There is definitely a case for trying to make sure that students carry on studying English and maths to the age of 18—more of them. You are right; Alison Wolf made the case in terms of employment and progression, and also we are outliers in how few people in particular study maths beyond the age of 16. But given the nature of what happens post 16, I am not sure that the National Curriculum is the right way of doing this. There are other ways of making sure that, whether people are in schools, colleges or pursuing apprenticeships, if they do not have a mathematical qualification to a particular level, they continue to study maths to 18.

Q218 Chair: Secretary of State, are you tempted even by those who have? A lot of people get a maths GCSE; they then do their A-Levels, arrive at university and find that they have a need for more advanced maths than they have. It is not that they are bad at maths; it is simply that they can go two years, or three years if they do it a year early—four years if they have a year off—without studying maths and then suddenly arrive at University to do economics or something and find that their maths is a little rusty.

Michael Gove: You are absolutely right. Point one: there are some people who will need mathematics because they are studying not a subject in which mathematics is dominant but a social science in which an understanding, for example, of statistics will be helpful. Then there will be others who will be studying subjects in which maths might be a helpful and useful component. For example, if you are going to study medicine and you studied biology, chemistry

and physics A-Levels, carrying on with a mathematical qualification that was not quite to A-Level level but kept your hand in, as it were, would be a useful thing as well. We recently had a seminar with ACME, Cambridge University and a number of others in an attempt to clarify better what we should do to help students in those circumstances. We also need to help people who are working to ensure that they can keep their maths up to an appropriate level until the age of 18. There is another challenge as well: for those students who are really high performing at maths, in many cases the current maths A-Level, while helpful, is still not sufficient. That is why universities like Cambridge insist on students taking the STEP Papers, the Sixth Term Examination Papers. One of the things we want to do is collaborate with high-performing universities to ensure that we can develop a suite of qualifications for students studying mathematics after the age of 16 to encompass as much of the ability range as possible.

Q219 Damian Hinds: Back at the other end of the scale, away from the Cambridge entry procedure, for kids who have really struggled with maths up to 16 and have not got the GCSE and perhaps have no realistic prospect of getting a good GCSE in maths, how do you engage them in developing their mathematical skills? The same argument applies to English language as well.

Michael Gove: There are two things. Firstly—I will not make the point at great length because I made it to the Committee before—our expectations of many students are too low. There are a lot more students who could reach a good level of GCSE than we currently allow. We have to ask ourselves why that is not the case at the moment. Part of it is a problem that we have, that we have inherited, of having an insufficient number of trained, qualified and supported maths teachers. When you visit schools that have had difficulties, it is often the case that when you ask schools that have difficulties what their real problem is, they will say, “Our maths department is our Achilles’ heel.” That is often a reflection of the fact that, if you have a good maths qualification, the return for that qualification is better than any other qualification in the marketplace.

It is a unique problem; that is why we have tried to offer more money for students who have good maths and science qualifications to become maths teachers, but there is more to do. The critical thing is improving the quality of maths teaching, but there is one other element as well, which is always thinking about how, when we are talking to young people, we can make it clear to them that not just competence but mastery in mathematics will help them enormously, whatever career they want to follow.

Q220 Damian Hinds: Just back on the practicalities of the National Curriculum review, even with the additional time that has now been made available, is the timetable you have put forward realistic?

Michael Gove: We will see. There are some specifics that again members of the Committee know I would like to see more students study, and more students are studying them. There is a question in my mind. I have

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to be careful what I say, but the question is this: at the moment more students are choosing to study history and geography as a result of the English Baccalaureate. That is a good thing. I have not mandated it, but it is a good thing. If we were to make either or both of those subjects compulsory to 16, that might put a strain on curricular and teaching time, and it might also mean that, if one favoured one of those over the other, two subjects between which it is difficult to choose in terms of how well they prepare people for future learning might suffer. These are delicately balanced issues.

When our response is published, we will show our thinking, but it is understandable that there are certain lobbies that love their subjects, that say, because it is the easiest thing to do, "Make it compulsory to 16." That is what folk did with modern languages. But there are other ways we can encourage students to study these subjects, not least by investing in quality teaching in those areas. There is always a balance to be struck between mandating from the centre and then providing other ways of encouraging people to do things we think are good and helpful.

Q221 Damian Hinds: How often do you think the National Curriculum should be reviewed? When would you anticipate the next change, and how do you future proof it, particularly in terms of generating consensus around it?

Michael Gove: This argument relates to changes occurring as a result of technology. When you published a National Curriculum in the past it would be published by the QCDA or whatever body. Then when it was going to be taught in the Scilly Isles, it would get on the ferry and be taken over there and taken out in a primary school in Tresco and all the rest of it. That would be the way in which we communicate. Now a school in the Scilly Isles or in Newcastle can decide that they want to introduce their children in citizenship to Michael Sandel's lectures on justice from Harvard, and they can all watch them online. The nature of technology means that access to information, the quality of teaching and the range of knowledge is altering dramatically. The challenge for me is to both try to ensure that there is something that is effective and fit for purpose for I hope—to answer your question correctly—the next 10 years, but also acknowledge that the scale of technological change is going to drive all sorts of changes in our education system, and I have to try to think about how we can make sure that the system is resilient and adaptive at the same time. 10 years, I hope, but technology may make fools of all of us in the scale of transformation it generates.

Q222 Chair: Is the fact that you delayed the implementation of the National Curriculum a recognition of the need to get greater coherence between the various elements? The Expert Panel said, "The process of multiple simultaneous and semi-autonomous reviews makes this coherence challenging," which is pretty close to what we said about the English Bacc introduction—less about the English Bacc and more about the way it was introduced. Are you making sure that you are aligning

the various elements—assessment, accountability measures, the rest of it—in order that it hangs together, because the Expert Panel warn that, if you do not have that high level of curriculum coherence, it runs the risk of delivering a revised National Curriculum without substantial impact on standards of attainment. Do you think they are right?

Michael Gove: There are dangers. There tends to be, which is understandable in public policy, a belief that, when you look at change—and it is understandable—you critically analyse the change and say, "These are the risks, therefore do not change." What we often forget are the weaknesses that drove us to consider change in the first place. Yes, the Expert Panel is right, in short, but one of the things I would say about the current National Curriculum is that, if you take a subject like, say, history, there is concern about history teaching in our schools. That concern is more to do with the nature of assessment and the nature of what is tested—specifically in GCSEs, and to a lesser extent in A-Levels—and less to do with the curriculum. I have criticisms of the existing history curriculum, but it also has many strong points.

One of the problems we have at the moment is that the activities of the exam boards and the way they are structured—as you and this Committee have quite rightly pointed out—often skew the way in which good things in the National Curriculum are taught. One of the things that has given me a lot of pause for thought is the interaction between—exactly as you have pointed out—what is in the Curriculum, how it is assessed and how that drives behaviour. When we publish draft programmes of study and some of our suggestions about Key Stage 4, I am certain that this Committee and others will say, "You have got this wrong. What you need to do is refine it in this or that area." We want to put forward a set of propositions that we hope will be coherent, but which will of course be improved by scrutiny from you and others.

Chair: Thank you. Secretary of State, if I may, we have quite a lot of other things to cover, so short questions, short answers please.

Q223 Ian Mearns: The Chairman has already alluded to the work of the Expert Panel; they were arguing for a broad curriculum that does not proscribe study year on year and for a balance of knowledge and skills. I understand you also have a passion for the work of E.D. Hirsch. Are you disappointed with the Panel's report and recommendations?

Michael Gove: No. Between the two—between E.D. Hirsch's desire to have core knowledge that is specified year by year and the Panel's point about the requirement for flexibility—there lies some very interesting international practice. There may be a case for saying that a subject like mathematics, which proceeds in a linear way, should have contents specified in a year-by-year way, but other subjects should have it specified by key stage. I know these are complex and technical matters, but it is the case that a different approach towards different subjects may be right.

Q224 Ian Mearns: I understand that the Panel has been stood down. Is that right?

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Michael Gove: Tim Oates is still working with us, but, for example, the point I just made to you about maths I explained to two of the other four members of the Panel, and they could see the logic of that, which is not to say that they were endorsing that view, but they did not think it was unreasonable. The fourth member of the Panel, Dylan William, has formally stood down because he is an incredibly busy, as well as talented, figure. The other two, Andrew and Mary, remain in touch, as it were: they have done their work, and the agreement we have with them is that they are perfectly free to criticise anything that we do subsequently but we will still benefit from being able to ask them whether or not they think it is right or wrong.

Q225 Ian Mearns: Are there any particular recommendations they have made that you intend to act upon?

Michael Gove: Several. Again, I said earlier to Damian that I do not want to pre-empt the whole thing, but there is one area where I am very strongly persuaded, and that is moving away from levels at primary school. In other words, we tend to have a situation where some teachers say, “That is a level three child; that is a level four child”; in other words, you cannot expect more of this boy or girl, and this boy or girl is performing at an acceptable level. What that tends to perpetuate is a belief that there are some students who you should anticipate will leave primary school without achieving mastery in English and mathematics. The point they make is that in many Far Eastern countries the assumption that children need to master this content before they move on is a fair one. One of the points they make about Far Eastern countries in books like *The Teaching Gap* and *The Learning Gap* is that one of the problems in Western nations is the assumption that children cannot reach a particular level, and you have to differentiate teaching at all times, rather than expecting all children to succeed. Again, it is an over-long answer but that particularly weighed with me; there are other things that we may accept with nuances.

Q226 Ian Mearns: Given the fact that you intend to act upon some of the recommendations but probably not others, isn't there a danger, from your perspective, that you could be taking a report that is based on international evidence that you broadly support, but in essence you are picking and choosing which recommendations to accept?

Michael Gove: Yes, and the judgment will have to be made by others as to whether or not we have picked the right things, or whether or not we have made a mistake in not adopting others.

Q227 Ian Mearns: You covered some of this territory in answer to some of Damian's questions earlier on, but if I can get a bottom line answer from your perspective, what do you believe should be the rationale for including a subject within the National Curriculum and excluding others? Is there a hard and fast rule from your perspective?

Michael Gove: There can never be a hard and fast rule, no.

Q228 Ian Mearns: Okay, and what do you consider will be the key challenges, advantages and impact of implementing reforms to the key stage structure, like those that the Expert Panel has proposed? Do you plan to implement those proposals?

Michael Gove: What they were seeking to do is to draw attention to two problems, which is that Key Stage 2 is four years long, Key Stage 3 is three years long, and there tends to be a dip in the middle. It raises a profound question. One of the things that this research implies but does not state is that if you do not have assessment—if you do not have tests at the end of a key stage or regularly—then things drift. It is quite a big challenge for the profession, and there is a particular feeling at the moment amongst many that children are over-tested. We are looking at it; again, I do not want to prejudge what we will say, but their argument has a bit of force: that if you have too long between the statutory assessments of children or young people, there is a chance that things may drift. That does not necessarily mean that you introduce—and I do not think we are going to—tests halfway through Key Stage 2, but it does mean that we have to think hard about why they have drawn attention to that.

Q229 Ian Mearns: Also within that is a real question that is begged, because you have said that is a challenge to the profession, but of course the profession will work within the parameters that are set for it.

Michael Gove: Absolutely, that is true. The challenge is obviously for the Government to decide, on the basis of the strong argument that has been put forward by experts, how we respond to this weakness. One of the thoughts in my mind is if you change the Key Stage structure—and this was picked up by lots of teachers—people may infer that means there is going to be another set of tests.

Now, a lot of the representatives of the profession who talk to me say, “We do not need more statutory testing.” If you do divide Key Stage 2 into two, some people will say, “What is the point of that if you are not having assessment?” One of the points of it may be—to go back to an earlier point—that you say, “This is the specified content that we expect to be taught by this point,” so there is a slightly more Hirschian approach than you have at the moment, because you say, “Okay, we are not doing it year by year, but we are saying what we would expect students to know by the end of these two years.”

Q230 Alex Cunningham: We understand that you are a fan of the Singaporean education system, where they test the kids to death. How can you justify being a fan of that sort of system when you are saying the things you have just said—that maybe we should not have so many tests?

Michael Gove: I was trying to be balanced, and I was trying to fairly represent the range of views.

Q231 Ian Mearns: You are against testing to death then, I guess.

Michael Gove: I am against anything “to death”.

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Q232 Alex Cunningham: Okay, but within an inch of death?

Michael Gove: Well, there are hundreds of things to say about this, but two things to say specifically. On the one hand, there are the statutory tests that the state decrees: the National Curriculum tests at the end of primary school, and in a different way the GCSE tests, which are accountability mechanisms. But in a good school it does not matter what the Government says about testing: you will test students regularly—you will assess them. Tests are a way of making sure that students understand, recall and can use information. The more that students can recall information instinctively and the more that information is part of their working knowledge, the easier it is for them to perform more complex tasks. So even if the state does not mandate it, good schools will test regularly, and they do, in lots of different ways.

Q233 Alex Cunningham: But it does not have to have the pressure that they have in Singapore.

Michael Gove: The other thing I would say about Singapore is that Singapore as a state has weak points and strong points. One of the strong points in its education system is that the role of the teacher is rightly and highly respected, partly because of the Confucian tradition, partly because it is a country with no natural resources. The only advantage that country has is the quality of its young people and the competitiveness of its tax and regulatory regime. I personally think that we have a lot to learn from an emphasis on saying that 80% of children should get to a really, really strong internationally competitive education system, and that you should have internationally competitive tax rates and a deregulatory and pro-business environment. There are other aspects of Singapore's approach that I would not necessarily endorse.

Alex Cunningham: We can leave it there, Secretary of State.

Chair: Thank you. Otherwise we will be on to chewing gum before we know it.

Q234 Ian Mearns: One of the things that struck me—and I am sure it struck other colleagues—when we were in Singapore was the role of private tuition over and above the school system. It was really rather intense and a massive industry in Singapore, but they have not done any impact assessment of the private tuition regime when it comes to youngsters passing the exams.

Michael Gove: It is an interesting point, because when I was in Singapore I visited some of those private tutors and it was interesting.

Q235 Ian Mearns: We saw your photograph on the wall.

Chair: We all obviously get taken to the same one.

Michael Gove: I hope when I revisit I will see your photograph; it would probably be better for custom. Private tuition does have an impact, but then one of the things that is interesting about London—which was reported in the *Standard* a wee while ago—is the extent to which there is private tuition here. There are different motivations for doing it. As I am sure you

found, one thing about the schools is that it is amazing that you have children whose first language is Chinese, Malay or Tamil capable of achieving what they achieve. Part of it is that, when you look at any other country, you cannot import it wholesale. You cannot say, "We want our education system to be exactly like Finland's or exactly like Singapore's"; you cannot. What you can do is look at what unites certain high-performing countries, and one of the things that Singapore, Finland and South Korea have is that they succeed in attracting high-quality people into teaching. One of the things that has been beneficial over the years—and it long predates our arrival in office—is that the quality of people coming into teaching has been rising. That is partly due to the efforts of people like Tony Blair and Andrew Adonis, and of course organisations like Teach First and some of the initiatives undertaken before we came in. I would like to try to build on those.

Q236 Craig Whittaker: Secretary of State, good morning. Can I just ask you about the Expert Panel's recommendation around a broader Key Stage 4 curriculum and how that sits alongside your announcement and your desire about the EBac?

Michael Gove: Yes. People often assume in the conversation about the EBac that that is all anyone should be doing to the age of 16. The truth is that there is plenty of time—and head teachers have told me that there is plenty of time—to ensure that you could pursue all the subjects in the English Baccalaureate and also have plenty of time for creative subjects like music and art, or vocational and technical work in D&T, or—well, you have to have it—PE, RE, citizenship and sport. There is no inconsistency between the EBac and breadth. One of the other things is that the EBac is an attempt to encourage people to study subjects—particularly languages and history and geography—that are not statutory in the National Curriculum to the age of 16. One of the arguments lying behind the Expert Panel's recommendation is it should not just be the case that the subjects that are prescribed in the National Curriculum are studied to 16, and in a way the EBac encourages additional breadth in some of those non-compulsory areas.

Q237 Craig Whittaker: I understand what you have said, but we have an assessment process that means that schools are accountable for five GCSEs A* to C; why not make it more? Why not make it seven, eight or nine GCSEs that schools are accountable for?

Michael Gove: This Committee has been very rigorous in looking at all accountability measures that we have and pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of them. There is a danger in saying that we want to encourage every subject to be studied simply so that it can be assessed and having assessment as the sole driver for study.

Q238 Craig Whittaker: Just before you go on, I understand what you are saying, but there is a broad range at Key Stage 4, as the recommendations say, so there would be a menu of subjects that students could pick, but if you made the assessment process, the

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accountability process, higher in regards to the amount of those subjects that they have to achieve, surely you are going to achieve your target of getting the EBac subjects covered and will also raise the standard.

Michael Gove: Let me think about it. As I said right at the beginning, when there are thoughtful suggestions that spring from the right sort of measures, I will have a look at it.

Q239 Craig Whittaker: Do you plan to ease the tensions between curriculum and accountability above that in other areas—between school autonomy and also the centre. How do you balance the four together, because the whole thing you have already said around the Curriculum Review is getting those four things to marry up?

Michael Gove: It is the debate we are having within the Department and with the profession at the moment. It follows on from the point you and the Chairman have made in the past about accountability driving behaviour. There is a balance between recognising that it is a very powerful driver of behaviour and recognising that it is not the only driver of behaviour. I am glad that the EBac has changed behaviour in a particular way; sometimes if you have too many tilts on the wheel you end up cancelling everything out. The question in my mind is: what are the right interventions we can make in order to support what we, and I think the public, believe are the right sort of measures of progress, while at the same time recognising that the people who should be leading change in the education system are teachers, and that they will often emerge with and come forward with ideas that are far better than anything I could generate.

I will mention one very briefly in passing. Ian mentioned E.D. Hirsch and his approach towards the curriculum. If I tried to apply an E.D. Hirsch-style curriculum across the board in every respect, there would be a lot of pushback from some schools. However, there are some schools that are already doing it for themselves. For example, Pimlico Academy has created—or is in the process of creating—its own very, very knowledge-based curriculum, and it may well be that the success that generates leads other people to look at what is happening there. It is a difficult balance between giving people who are strong and confident the opportunity to shape the curriculum in the interest of their student body and community, while at the same time making sure that there are certain interventions that drive behaviour and that they are not too heavy-handed, and your suggestion has merit in that debate.

Q240 Craig Whittaker: Can I just ask you about raising the participation age? Should the National Curriculum not extend past post 16?

Michael Gove: We thought about it, and there are two things. One is that participation post 16 will often involve lots of people being in jobs with training or in apprenticeships. The question there is, rather than having a National Curriculum—going back to the points that Damian, among others, made—what do we

want to say is a minimum that people should be following? In a way you could argue that our requirement that people continue to study maths until 18—especially if they do not have a qualification—is something close to an extension of the National Curriculum to the age of 18, but it would be inappropriate to over-specify post 16. If someone is doing a high-quality apprenticeship, that would be very different from someone who is studying three A-levels as a precursor to going to a Russell Group university.

Q241 Craig Whittaker: Can I just ask you about physical teaching time? Five to 16 I think is about 10,400 hours. What proportion do you think should be spent teaching the compulsory subjects of the National Curriculum?

Michael Gove: It depends at different points, in that we will have a greater degree of detail in primary school about the core subjects—English, mathematics and science—and progressively as students move through the education system, we will prescribe less. That is the overall approach that we are going to take. When we publish we will come back with some models of how some of the changes that we propose might bear on individual schools that sought to follow that recommendation.

Q242 Craig Whittaker: Will one of those recommendations be longer school days?

Michael Gove: I am all in favour of longer schools days, but that is a matter for individual schools. One thing I should say is that the last time I was at the Select Committee I was asked about teacher hours, and I have stated the number that was the minimum. A number of people quite rightly pointed out that most teachers—in fact almost all teachers—work well beyond the minimum, so can I take this opportunity to say that I was just answering a question about the statutory minimum at that point, and I know that even beyond the teaching hours the overwhelming majority of teachers put in an enormous amount of work that often goes underappreciated—but not by me.

Q243 Craig Whittaker: Okay, so are you confident then that the National Curriculum—particularly extended in subject terms—will allow enough time for vocational subjects as well?

Michael Gove: Yes. Part of our aim is to make sure that we do not so overprescribe that we squeeze out those subjects that are not part of the National Curriculum, so that every school can—even within the teaching hours that are currently followed by the majority—provide people with non-National Curriculum options that are right for them and for the jobs or paths they want to follow.

Q244 Craig Whittaker: Would you like to put a percentage figure on that?

Michael Gove: I will not at this stage, but Alison Wolf's points in her report about the percentage of time that should be devoted before the age of 16 to academic and the percentage that should not be is a good rule of thumb, but I would not want to be prescriptive about it.

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Q245 Craig Whittaker: Can I just finally ask you whether you think the three-tiered curriculum works well: national, local and basic. Does that work well, or are you minded to simplify it even further?

Michael Gove: I am tempted to simplify it even further, but I will not say more at this stage.

Q246 Damian Hinds: I am going to ask the Semmelweis question, which refers to the fact that when anybody of our age—my age—talks about Semmelweis, you have no idea who he is, but, when you talk to a 15-year-old, everybody knows exactly who he is because it seems he is taught—I do not know about university—very extensively in schools. My question is really about how Semmelweis gets to be taught in schools for children today whereas not when we were at school. It strikes me that quite often when normal people talk about the National Curriculum they mean something different from what the educational system means, because it is actually more about principles than about content, but sometimes there is a public interest in specific content being taught in schools. For example, some people are lobbying for lifesaving skills to be taught in school; parenting and brain development in the Frank Field Report; financial education in GCSE maths. If you wanted those things to be taught in the main curriculum—not as a bolt-on to PSHE, but in the main curriculum—first of all, is there a role for that, for specifying that in terms of content, and secondly, how would you do it?

Michael Gove: Can you tell me a bit more about Semmelweis?

Q247 Damian Hinds: I think you know Semmelweis: an Austrian physician—have I got the name wrong again? No, I think he is an Austrian physician—

Chair: No-one apart from you has heard of him, apart from 15-year-olds, so tell us who he is.

Damian Hinds: He discovered the difference in mortality rates between two different maternity wards in a Viennese hospital. The difference was that one was run by midwives and the other was run by doctors. The doctors carried more germs into the ward, therefore creating a higher mortality rate. Semmelweis discovered basically that if you wash your hands a lot, you are less likely to have a higher mortality rate in hospitals.

Michael Gove: When do students learn that?

Q248 Damian Hinds: GCSE Science, Key Stage 3 I think. I could not say it is universal, but I have heard it more than once in classes I have sat through, and it is a fascinating story.

Michael Gove: It is a fascinating story.

Q249 Damian Hinds: It obviously links with a public policy objective about hygiene in hospitals, and there is probably somebody else who discovered that five a day fruit and veg was a good idea, so how do these things get in? Who do you have to lobby if you want your particular pet project to be taught in schools?

Michael Gove: Very good point; I will try to answer this quickly. There are two points that I draw from that. The GES recently made a point about geography. It is one particular village in India that is the most famous village in the world. It is in one particular textbook because it is in one particular awarding body's favoured approach. You have situation where nowhere in any National Curriculum document produced by the Government is this village named, but because the Government awarding body has it in its textbooks, everyone studies it. In the same way, the National Curriculum has lots of lists of poets, but there are certain books that tend to crop up in English—they are in the Edexcel poetry anthology, so everyone studies Benjamin Zephaniah or whatever. Awarding bodies have a huge influence on what is taught, often more than the National Curriculum. That is why you have to look at the two together.

Point two: even though it is in the science curriculum it is basic common sense to say, "Why do you not wash your hands?" in the same way as there are certain other things that it would be a good thing to teach. There is a problem, though, which is if we prescribe from the centre everything schools should do—teach children to wash their hands, teach them how to cook a series of basic recipes including how to make scrambled eggs and all the rest of it, and lifesaving skills, and some of the other admirable principles—it would be very difficult. At one stage there was a well-organised campaign to have gardening in the National Curriculum. You can get to an overload point. The most important thing to do is to concentrate on English, mathematics and science. Let me make a deliberately controversial point.

Damian Hinds: Go on then.

Michael Gove: I am all in favour of good sex and relationships education. Our investigation into PSHE is an attempt to find out which schools do it best, because we want to learn from them and ask, "What do you do?" so we can spread it in a more widespread way. However, if you look at the way in which we can encourage students not to indulge in risky behaviour, one of the best ways we can do that is by educating them so well in a particular range of subjects that they have hope in the future. There is a direct correlation between how well students are doing overall academically and the propensity to fall into risky behaviour. Some might argue that their performance academically is a prior function of the poverty of the homes from which they come and you should tackle that, but my broader point is that there is not an automatic relationship between, for example, teaching someone in minutiae how to wash their hands and then more broadly inculcating character, resilience and intelligence.

Q250 Damian Hinds: Absolutely. On the content point, isn't it the case that the way people talk about these things is that the National Curriculum sets principles that must be learnt at different stages and then schools decide how best to implement them? In principle we would all agree with that, but de facto that is not what happens. De facto in SRE it is whoever creates the teaching materials, and some of the BBC stuff and Channel 4 stuff is quite startling

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when you see it, and in terms of geography or history or whatever it is, whoever writes the specification ends up being the exam board.

Michael Gove: Correct.

Q251 Damian Hinds: The exam board is essentially in control of what children learn and are not as accountable in the public sphere as either the individual school or indeed the Department for Education would be.

Michael Gove: You are absolutely right, and that is why when you reform the National Curriculum you also have to look at the specifications for the examinations that count at Key Stage 4. One of the things that I appreciated at the beginning but has really been reinforced in my mind during the course of the National Curriculum Review is the fact that you have to reform GCSE specs and change the behaviour of awarding bodies.

Q252 Damian Hinds: Should that include there not being multiple specifications competing with one another in the same subject?

Michael Gove: Possibly.

Q253 Ian Mearns: I would like to come back to some of the things you told to us, Secretary of State, because you did say, when we were looking at academies assisting other schools that are not so successful, you felt that from your perspective your glass was half full, but we are only talking about 3% of converter academies assisting schools that have problems. There are many more schools out there that need assistance, but only 3% of the converter academies are currently engaged in that process. Do you not think we need a strategic overview to make sure that this work is tangibly being done to a much greater extent on the ground?

Michael Gove: We do need a strategic overview; I hope the Department provides that. There has been a dramatic set of changes on the ground—driven by teachers and heads, not by me—that has seen academy status become more and more popular. There are some schools that leapt at the chance, having acquired academy freedoms, to then sponsor other schools. There are others that prefer different forms of support rather than outright sponsorship. It is understandable that we should look at those schools that have been bravest, like Altrincham Girls Grammar, in seeking to become multi-academy sponsors, but we should not neglect those other schools that are developing new ways of supporting other schools short of sponsoring those schools.

Some schools will say, “We do not want to join an academy, but we do believe that you as an academy can help us,” and they do in a number of different ways. There is a case in point in my own constituency, where one of the schools that is an academy—Collingwood—is not sponsoring other schools but is very, very involved in school improvement work with local primaries and others.

Q254 Ian Mearns: Isn't there a problem in your approach that there is going to be a massively differentiated response between both primary and

secondary, because there are many more primary schools but by proportion many fewer academies? Therefore the capacity in the primary sector to bring forward the sort of response that you are putting forward does not currently exist and does not look likely to exist any time soon, whereas in the secondary sector the proportion of academies as the number of overall secondary schools is much greater. Therefore I can see a potential for the capacity to exist in secondary, but it is a long way from existing in primary to that extent.

Michael Gove: I would not say there is a problem, but there is a question about how we ensure that there is sufficient capacity to drive improvement at primary level. The number of sponsors overall has increased, and we are on track to have, by the end of this calendar year, 200 underperforming primary schools having been sponsored. Some of the schools and some of the chains that are helping us—Greenwood Dale, AET—are led by head teachers. It is also the case that some of the most energetic primary school heads are seeking to develop collaborative arrangements with groups of academies converting to academy status at the same time. The whole reason why we made floor standards for primary schools tougher is that we believe that we needed to shine a light on it, and there are—to be fair to them—a number of local authorities that are saying, “Okay, we are looking even more seriously at some of the problems in our primary schools and we are coming forward with our own solutions.”

Q255 Ian Mearns: At the same time, unfortunately, until this progress is made the capacity within the local authorities that could do it before to conduct this intervention work is reducing. That capacity is reducing, and therefore there may be some sort of hiatus between that capacity going to one side and the capacity in the academies being built on the other.

Michael Gove: Theoretically it is an issue; I would be interested to look at the facts on the ground. If there are specific examples of local authorities that are not in a position to drive school improvement themselves and find that there is no support on offer from outside, I want to talk to those local authorities.

Q256 Ian Mearns: I am very glad that you have said that, because I would be interested in you doing an assessment of that on the ground. It is really your job, Secretary of State.

Michael Gove: It is. I absolutely agree. My belief is that we have identified local authorities in every region of the country—and we are looking to identify more—that are in need. We had a conversation in the Department only yesterday about those local authorities that may be facing some of the greatest challenges in school improvement. We are seeking to do that; I will report back to the Committee on what our judgment is. By definition I would be more inclined to say the picture is helpful rather than pessimistic, without in any way belittling the scale of school improvement that we all have to do, but at the same time we are trying to identify those areas where we need to do more. I would be grateful to hear from

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any local authorities that feel we are not in a position where we are giving them the support they need.

Q257 Ian Mearns: To move on, what role do you see for Ofsted in brokering support for failing schools? They are the inspector, but is it their job to broker support when they discover schools are coming up short?

Michael Gove: I do not believe so, per se. One of the roles of Ofsted is to identify not just schools that are underperforming but also schools that are doing a brilliant job. It is on the basis of Ofsted doing that that we have identified the teaching schools, whose job it is to help increase the capacity for school improvement across the board. One of the things we are trying to do is make sure that we have teaching schools in every part of the country that are helping. One thing I would say is that it is not part of Ofsted's role to broker. It is the case that the profession has said to me that Ofsted is the biggest single resource of information about what happens in good schools, and we could make better use of that information. That is fair. It is not any criticism of Sir Michael Wilshaw, because I do not think he has been in post long enough to do that, and I certainly would not want to criticise his predecessors, who have been doing a good job. It is a fair challenge to the Government to help Ofsted to do this.

Q258 Ian Mearns: Sir Michael, when we have had him here, has seen the development of chains of academies. Also in discussion with him he has seen that there could be a progression where chains of academies become like mini LEAs. We asked him if he thought there was a role there for Ofsted in inspecting academy chains, because they would have this overarching, overseeing view of schools. Do you have any thoughts on that, Secretary of State?

Michael Gove: Yes I do. It is a good point, but the irony—and it goes back to one of the points that the Committee was making earlier—is that we do not inspect local authorities for their record on school improvement; we do inspect them for their record on child protection. In a way we would be inspecting academy chains in a way that is more rigorous than the way we inspect local authorities at the moment, but maybe it is the right way to go with respect to both of them.

Q259 Ian Mearns: Where a school is found to be failing, do you think, from your perspective, there is any other answer than just driving it into academy status in terms of improvement?

Michael Gove: Yes there can be, absolutely. One of the things we have said to local authorities is we are here saying, "We have identified a challenge and we have a solution." We are not here just saying, "It is a problem; what are you going to do about it?" However, if anyone can say to us that they have a robust alternative plan that will clearly generate the sort of improvement that we believe is necessary, then absolutely. It has been the case as we have talked to local authorities that some of them have said, "In this case we are not convinced an academy solution is right. We have already taken action. We already have

a good head teacher from a neighbouring school helping them. The existing head teacher has only been in place for 18 months. Let us see how we go with this approach." We have said, "Great; that seems convincing."

Q260 Ian Mearns: A last question from me: the last time you were here in January, Secretary of State, I asked you a specific question about your Department doing an impact assessment on the educational and social concerns arising from the Government's welfare and benefits changes, and you have subsequently written back and said you did not think it was your Department's responsibility. If welfare and benefit changes are going to have a detrimental impact on children's educational prospects, whose responsibility is it to do an impact assessment?

Michael Gove: I hate shovelling responsibility on to other people if it is not theirs, but I do think it is the Department for Work and Pensions' responsibility to conduct impact assessments for their policy, but impact assessments when conducted by individual Government departments obviously bear overall on Government and Government policy. It is the case that there are other departments that will have produced impact assessments that will influence the policymaking advice I get from officials.

Q261 Ian Mearns: Since you do not feel it is the DfE's responsibility to carry out such an impact assessment, have you asked the DWP to do one?

Michael Gove: I will talk to DWP ministers.

Q262 Lisa Nandy: Could I just ask whether you will ask the DWP to do one as part of those discussions?

Michael Gove: I will talk to DWP ministers and I will say that the Committee has asked me what their argument is. I will not pre-empt what it is that they might say, but it is an entirely fair point. I will ask them what they think, what actions they are taking and then report back to the Committee, if that is okay.

Q263 Chair: Can I just ask you quickly about your mention of teaching schools providing this intermediary layer? They have to be outstanding; they then take on the training of lots of trainee teachers, and that is another hugely demanding job. My understanding is that they get paid £60,000 as a premium, which does not sound a great deal. There they are: they have to maintain their own outstanding school, they have to train all these trainee teachers, and somehow they are also going to have the capacity to go out and meet the needs of any failing academies. Given the way things go, often these things come in and all collect in the same place. It is possible to imagine that, with more and more academies, you could have an area where you get a great number of challenges at the same time. How robust do you think that is as a vision—for teaching schools to be able to deliver that kind of level of support?

Michael Gove: I think I underplayed the importance of teaching schools before this Committee met, and I may now be in danger of attributing too many powers to them, if your question is the inference others will have drawn. Let me stress: when it comes to training

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the next generation of teachers, I would like more of them to be trained by high performing schools, but there will be money for that: the money that would have gone to higher education institutions will go to schools that train teachers. That is additional to the money they get for being teaching schools.

Secondly, the question, “Do they have enough resource to do the job asked of them?” is one that I have asked both the National College and individual schools. We are assessing whether or not it is too much, too little or just right. The third thing I was going to say is that they have been successful so far, not just in using the money that they have from their teaching school status. Some of them—Altrincham Girls Grammar School, for example—have extra resource as a result of taking over schools as a sponsor when they become academies; others find that level of resource is sufficient for them to be able to do the sort of work that they need to do with other schools. We keep things constantly under review, and one of the things we might want to talk about in due course are our plans for reform of initial teacher training. We will be saying more about that in due course. I am sure you will want to interrogate whether or not we are going to get value for money from it.

Chair: Our Report on Attracting, Training and Retaining the Best Teachers will be coming out shortly.

Q264 Charlotte Leslie: I would like to move on to that, and perhaps touch on some of the things we have been looking at in what we have found out about teachers. I am interested in the move that teaching schools signify. It seems to me much more along the medical model, where you have closer unity between the practitioners and those in training. One of the issues that affects schools that begin to fail and fall behind is not only the initial teacher training of the teachers going into schools but the upgrading and continued professional development of those teachers in those schools. I wondered if, along the lines of teaching schools, the Department has at all thought about teaching teachers, or consultant teachers, along that line, which might provide some CPD and also prevent erosion of standards in schools of those teachers who need continuing professional development.

Michael Gove: The short answer is yes. The thing is there are different types of continuous professional development. One of the most effective is the opportunity of teachers to observe outstanding fellow teachers, learn from them—how to construct and deliver a compelling lesson—and then themselves be observed and then receive advice about how they can improve their practice. That is the best form of CPD, and teaching schools are uniquely well equipped to provide that. But there are also other institutions that are led by teachers that provide CPD on a subject basis. For example, the Prince’s Teaching Institute—another undervalued institution—does a fantastic job in bringing together people who are passionate about subject knowledge, inspiring them by introducing them to great names within education and then generating a sharing of good practice.

Q265 Charlotte Leslie: Do you think, with all the various organisations that there are—and you have mentioned teachers’ unions in providing support, teaching schools, the National College for School Leadership, which seems to be more of a management-focused organisation than for practitioners—there is a need for a more overarching, centralised professional body that is looking at practice, rather than run by professionals for professionals, if schools are going to be looking to more different areas to get their support.

Michael Gove: It is important that people have as much information as possible about how support can be provided, but I am wary of centralising responsibility for all CPD into one institution that the Government owns. That would be a way of unfairly dragooning the creativity of the different institutions that are responsible for generating better professional support and development.

Q266 Alex Cunningham: Secretary of State, do you plan to continue your policy of forcing primary and other schools to become academies?

Michael Gove: Yes.

Q267 Alex Cunningham: How do you justify ignoring schools, parents and the community?

Michael Gove: I never ignore schools or parents or the community.

Q268 Alex Cunningham: If the community, schools and teachers are saying, “We do not want to be an academy,” why are you going to force them?

Michael Gove: There is one school, Downhills in Haringey, where there was particularly strong opposition from certain individuals towards conversion to academy status. There have been other schools in Haringey and elsewhere that have acknowledged that there are weaknesses and have recognised that academy status is a way of bringing about transformation. What is striking is that, when we have identified 200 schools in need of academy solutions, there has only been one that has been the site of this sort of battle. One of the reasons for that is that there were—to borrow a phrase from Harold Wilson—a tightly knit group of politically motivated men and women who sought to make Downhills an issue, and who spread some misinformation and propaganda about what academy status would mean. That meant that we had a greater degree of acrimony about the support we were offering Downhills than—

Q269 Alex Cunningham: That is just one school; there are many, many—you just mentioned 200, maybe 40 in the Midlands. But what would a school or a community or a teaching body or a governing body have to do to convince you that they should not have to go the academy route?

Michael Gove: If a school, a community, governing body or local authority demonstrates that they understand why it is that we have identified underperformance and that they have plans in place to deal with it and those plans are robust, then we will say, “Absolutely, great.” The whole point of the process of identification, conversation and the

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identification of potential sponsors is to say we, the Department for Education, have a national responsibility to ensure that children who find themselves in underperforming schools have that underperformance addressed. But if you tell me you are already on the case, then great.

Q270 Alex Cunningham: Can you set out the options for dealing with a failing academy? I know that there are many, so I would ask you to be quite tight on that, but do you feel there are any circumstances at all when they could return to the control of the local authority?

Michael Gove: There could be, yes.

Q271 Alex Cunningham: Which?

Michael Gove: There are eight I mentioned earlier to whom we have given pre-warning letters; we may give them warning notices. There is one academy where we had one weak sponsor, a diocese, and we replaced them with a strong sponsor, ARK. If, for the sake of argument, you have a strong local authority that says they would like to move into the academy sponsorship business and they would like to set up a trust—perhaps Gateshead might say they would like to take over some underperforming schools in Newcastle or County Durham—I would be interested to hear the proposition.

Q272 Alex Cunningham: Just a couple of very different questions: what is your justification for approving applications for free schools in areas where there is currently a demonstrable surplus of secondary school places—good secondary school places?

Michael Gove: We are only approving free schools where there is strong parental demand and where they will provide additional opportunities for parents for an even higher quality education.

Q273 Alex Cunningham: Something very different again: do you agree with Jamie Oliver that, given the seriousness of the problem with childhood obesity in this country, the nutritional standards of school meals should not be left to luck or chance? Assuming you do, what is your justification for allowing the erosion of minimal nutritional standards in academies and free schools?

Michael Gove: Firstly, I love Jamie Oliver.

Alex Cunningham: Your personal relationships are a matter for yourself.

Michael Gove: My adoration is also married with a belief that sometimes, if you have a bad situation, strong, central intervention is right. In the past the Labour Government said, “Literacy in this country is not good enough; we are going to have the National Strategies—direction from the centre.” But as the architect for the National Strategies, Michael Barber—another man I adore—pointed out strong central intervention gets you from bad to good, but you move from good to great not by strong central intervention but by trusting professionals to be creative. The food standards that Jamie campaigned for and that have been implemented have got us from a situation that was bad to a situation that is better. The next stage for improving school food is about

identifying what are the best practices in the strongest schools.

Q274 Alex Cunningham: Should it not be the same for every school, whether it is an academy, a free school or not?

Michael Gove: No.

Q275 Alex Cunningham: So it is okay for academies, free schools and any others making money off sugary drinks and sweets in vending machines, as is claimed in the media?

Michael Gove: It has been claimed, but I have not seen, and I would be interested in, any evidence that any academy has introduced as a result of those freedoms lower quality food. All the evidence seems to me to point in the other direction: that schools that have academy freedoms have improved the quality of food they offer children. There are bound to be cases that people have heard about where they fear that might not be the case, but I have not seen any cross my desk.

Q276 Alex Cunningham: What are you going to do about those ones? There are some of our children that are being let down; what are you going to do about it?

Michael Gove: You assert that they are being let down; I fear that they may be, but I do not have any evidence that they have been. I am not denying that it is a possibility, but all I am saying is that, until I know, I cannot see. As to your prior question about what I am doing about it, I want to find out what happens in the best schools, because there are some schools that do even better—many, actually—than what Jamie and his standards would have required of them. For me, the challenge is which schools are best in sourcing ingredients in a sustainable fashion? Which schools are best in preparing a nutritious meal?

Q277 Alex Cunningham: I am more concerned about the kids who are not getting the best.

Michael Gove: This is an interesting point, Alex, because when we look at studies of poverty in international development terms, it is often the case that some people say, “Why are these countries poor?” I ask the question, “Why are other countries rich?” You say, “I am interested in children who are not getting good school meals”; so am I. The way in which we ensure that children get good school food is by asking who is successful, and can we replicate that elsewhere? That is the practical choice.

There is another thing as well, which is that we know—to go back to the point—central intervention can only achieve so much; conscription can only achieve so much. What you want to do is to identify those places where there is a greater degree of creativity and better quality. Let me put it another way: there is one food outlet in this country, or chain of food outlets, where everything is prescribed down to the last detail; that is McDonald’s. They have national standards. There are other food outlets where there is a greater degree of creativity because they employ talented people to produce high-quality food. I am interested in moving beyond simply a bare minimum to a higher quality of school food, and we

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will be saying more about how we propose to do that shortly.

Q278 Lisa Nandy: Just a quick follow-up on that: if removing central prescription for academies has not lowered standards in terms of the school dinners that are provided, are you going to get rid of the guidelines for all schools?

Michael Gove: The question is: have they? We do not know.

Q279 Lisa Nandy: No, I am asking you, Secretary of State, and you seem to think they have not. By your own logic, surely that would lead you to get rid of the guidelines for all schools. Have you talked to Jamie Oliver about that?

Michael Gove: Two points: firstly, this again reflects the glass half full, glass half empty thing. The automatic assumption of some—statists—is that if you remove central control, things will automatically get worse: without the state there to intervene, people will automatically be wicked and evil and do the wrong thing. I do not believe that.

Second point: schools that become academies are schools that already have strong leadership. Our belief is that they will demonstrate that strong leadership not just in the curriculum but in other areas. But I am not leaving it to chance. The School Food Trust has looked at improvements that have been made in school food, and they will be publishing a report shortly. As I mentioned to Alex, I am going to be taking steps shortly to look at best practice to see how we can spread it. The binary point you put to me is an insufficiently nuanced way of looking at the whole question of how we improve our children's nutrition in order to make sure not just that we fight obesity but also that we ensure that they can learn effectively later on.

Chair: Alex, I need to move on.

Q280 Alex Cunningham: I will only be a second. You tried to be controversial earlier; I would like you to be really controversial. If you do identify where the best sex and relationship education exists, will you ensure that best practice is rolled out across all schools, whether they are academies, free schools, mainstream schools, faith schools or whatever?

Michael Gove: I will do everything possible to ensure that as many schools as possible emulate best practice.

Q281 Craig Whittaker: Could I just ask you about Eileen Munro's "one year on" report? Can I just ask you when you expect to receive it and when we can expect it to be published thereafter?

Michael Gove: Shortly, and as shortly as possible I will pass it on to the Committee.

Q282 Craig Whittaker: Can we have your guarantee then that it will not sit in the Department for months on end?

Michael Gove: Now that you have asked me, I know that it will not sit in the Department for months on end. The most successful way of doing so is by asking this question in the open. I would say, though, that there have been a number of changes in the whole

area of social work and child protection that have occurred under the Coalition Government that I would be very happy to explain and justify.

Q283 Craig Whittaker: And publish the report?

Michael Gove: Absolutely.

Q284 Craig Whittaker: Thank you. Can I ask you then what you expect it to say?

Michael Gove: Again, it is for Professor Munro, but I hope that what it will do is note the increased emphasis we have placed on the professionalism of social workers. I hope that it will acknowledge that we have set up a College of Social Work and that we are advertising now and seek to appoint a Chief Social Worker. I hope it will acknowledge that through the Step Up to Social Work programmes we are attracting more great professionals from other areas to move into social work. I hope it will acknowledge that we have accepted many of her recommendations about how serious case reviews should be used as tools to generate a wider sense of understanding of how we can improve child protection and that they will also, in the specific areas where tragedies have occurred, have led to improved practice. I hope it will also acknowledge that ministers, not least Tim Loughton, have been incredibly energetic in defending the practice of social workers and that, as a result of that, we have seen social workers increasingly confident in their judgments about taking children into care.

Q285 Craig Whittaker: It is fair to say, then, she will not say that progress has been stalled?

Michael Gove: It may be the case that there are areas where we could move faster, but we will see.

Q286 Craig Whittaker: Do you think post-Munro is being implemented then at local level? We have just heard what you say is happening at national level, but what about at the local level?

Michael Gove: As ever the situation is patchy. We know that we inherited a child protection system that had flaws; we know there are many local authorities that were found wanting by Ofsted in terms of the quality of their child protection, often local authorities that were very strong in other areas. The process of improving the whole child protection system can be painful, and one of the examples of that with which I have been wrestling most recently is with the Doncaster local authority, which you know. We hoped that we would be able to publish the serious case review into the Edlington case. We have been able to publish it, but we had to negotiate with the local authority in a way that was more heavily redacted than I would have wanted. That is why we have asked Alex Carlile QC, Lord Carlile, to look into that situation.

Progress relies on some local authorities doing better, but to be fair there are other local authorities that have been achieving significant things in the field of child protection. It is only fair to acknowledge there have been people from local government who have shown fantastic leadership—Matt Dunkley from the ADCS, Moira Gibb from Camden—and there are local authorities that we use as models: Harrow's co-operation with Coram in the whole area of adoption

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is one that Tim Loughton has quite rightly praised. Saying that things are patchy is not meant to be a criticism of all local authorities; it is a way of acknowledging that there are some local authorities that are doing a fantastic job.

Q287 Craig Whittaker: You mentioned adoption. Troubled families are also a huge priority, which the Government is rightly investing time and money into. Does that mean that Munro is no longer a priority?

Michael Gove: No, I do not think so, no. Improving social work practice sits alongside a variety of other things that we are doing. Children in need—as well as being a huge and popular charity—is a technical term in Government guidance that refers to those children who are at risk, but there are also children who are not at risk or not potentially subject to children protection plans who do also need our support, often in poorer homes. One of the other things the Government is doing, for example, in extending 15 free hours of pre-school learning to disadvantaged two-year-olds, is trying to connect things across the whole range of areas covered by early intervention. My Department is doing a lot of things, but as has been pointed out very successfully by people like Frank Field and Graham Allen, no single Government department can do everything, and because the role of local government is so important I am really pleased that Eric Pickles and Greg Clark are playing such a big role in this. I am also pleased that Louise Casey has got the bit between her teeth.

Q288 Lisa Nandy: The UK Border Agency, with which you share a safeguarding duty, recently started x-raying young people to determine whether they are adults or children. Could you tell me what concerns you have raised with the UK Border Agency about those trials?

Michael Gove: The Minister of State, my colleague, Sarah Teather, has raised some specific concerns about this. Following from an editorial in *Children & Young People Now* and your own parliamentary question, I asked a series of questions of officials about the wisdom of pursuing this. Reading the editorial and listening to your question, I have to confess that I thought there were causes for concern, and so we have raised those causes for concern with the Home Office and UKBA.

Q289 Lisa Nandy: Can you tell us what they are?

Michael Gove: We need to be clear that this is a proportionate and wise intervention in order to ensure that we can keep our borders safe. I am concerned, obviously, to ensure that we do not have people exploiting the generosity of this country, but I am also clear that we should ensure that the dignity of individuals, and in particular the rights of children, are respected.

Q290 Lisa Nandy: And you have some concerns about their dignity and rights?

Michael Gove: We have raised those concerns. To be fair to the Home Secretary, I have not yet seen the Home Office's response. It is not an area in which I would count myself an expert, but I think it is right

that it was raised, and, as I say, the Minister of State has, prior to your raising it in the House of Commons, raised some—as you might imagine—specific concerns, which she sought reassurance on.

Q291 Lisa Nandy: Was your Department given more than a couple of hours' notice, as the other children's experts and children's commissioners were?

Michael Gove: I do not know.

Q292 Lisa Nandy: Was your Department asked for permission? Have you sanctioned the use of ionising radiation in relation to children?

Michael Gove: I do not know.

Q293 Lisa Nandy: Can you find out for us, Secretary of State?

Michael Gove: I certainly will.

Q294 Lisa Nandy: Would it be possible for you to look into this with some urgency, given that these trials are currently taking place and children are being exposed to radiation that the medical profession almost unanimously says is harmful to children?

Michael Gove: I read the reports in which that view was reflected, and those reports influenced both the questions that I asked and also the questions that Sarah had previously asked.

Q295 Lisa Nandy: Has your Department discussed this with anybody in the children's sector?

Michael Gove: Yes; to the best of my knowledge the Minister of State has discussed this with a variety of individuals outside the Department. I cannot tell you who because, as you might imagine, this is an issue that was of great interest to the Minister of State, and knowing her interest in this area and the strong connections that she had with individuals in the sector, this is an area where I have felt that policy handling was in the best hands. It is an area where Sarah has the contacts and the authority to be able to take this forward.

Q296 Lisa Nandy: I am very grateful for that, but obviously as the Department responsible for safeguarding children—with primary responsibility for safeguarding children—it seems strange that your Department is only now starting to ask questions, when these pilots started on 29 March. Can you explain to us how that came about and what you are doing to make sure that children are not subjected to harm in this way without discussion between your Department and another Government department that sees fit to do it?

Michael Gove: I would draw a distinction between the Department and me. There were individuals in the Department—officials and the Minister of State—who had taken, as you might imagine, a strong interest in this area. I try to run the Department on the basis that I trust ministers to deal with areas in their area of responsibility. If they are—as ministers sometimes are—frustrated by other Government departments in the work that they do, I ask them to escalate it to me to see if there is more that I can do. I know that the Minister of State—again, to the best of my

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knowledge—is making progress in having some of her questions answered. As I say, because I read it in the sector press and because you very properly raised it in the House of Commons, I asked some additional questions myself, and those additional questions have helped inform the work that Sarah is doing. I know that the team within the Department will be reporting back to me shortly on the progress of her discussions with the UKBA and the Home Office.

Q297 Lisa Nandy: There is a strong feeling across the medical profession—and, indeed, the four Children’s Commissioners, who have called this appalling and, indeed, potentially unlawful—that children should never be exposed to ionising radiation for non-medical purpose. The former Chief Medical Officer called it “entirely unethical”. Do you share that view?

Michael Gove: I have raised some concerns, and quite properly I should hear both sides of the argument before making a definitive judgment. A number of views have been raised, but it is also the case that the UK Border Agency and the Home Office are responsible organisations. They will have a case to make. I do not think I should pronounce before having seen their answers to the questions that we—and you—have raised.

Q298 Lisa Nandy: So you could envisage some circumstances under which it would be acceptable to expose children to ionising radiation for non-medical purposes?

Michael Gove: If a question has been raised by professionals and by concerned and authoritative Members of Parliament like you, I will raise that too, but by definition it can sometimes be the case that, when a strong case for change is put, there is an equally strong case for a policy that, until it is heard, it would be unfair to pronounce on.

Q299 Lisa Nandy: Can I put one other point to you? The former Children’s Commissioner, Sir Al Aynsley-Green, who has 30 years of experience in paediatrics and, indeed, in this particular area, was strongly critical of the proposal to x-ray children and highlighted the unreliability of the tests for particular ethnic groups. Do the potentially racist implications of the trials that are ongoing concern you?

Michael Gove: I am aware that there are some who argue that these tests are unreliable in certain circumstances. I know it would not be the intention of the Home Office or the UK Border Agency to operate in any way that was racist. The commitment to antiracism within my Department is total. I note the points that you make, and without going into any details a range of concerns that were expressed externally have been communicated to the Home Office, and we will hear back from them, but again, in fairness, basic natural justice means that we have to allow the professionals within the Home Office and the UKBA to let us know why they believe this is a fair and proportionate technique before making a judgment, because there are arguments that deserve to be heard before a conclusion is reached by me or by others.

Q300 Lisa Nandy: Given that there has been overwhelming condemnation from the children’s sector and the medical profession of these trials, do you not believe there is a strong case for you, as the Secretary of State who has primary responsibility for children, to intervene to halt these trials until your concerns are answered?

Michael Gove: I do recognise the strength of feeling, and because of that strength of feeling I have, as I mentioned earlier, asked the questions and worked with the Minister of State. But it is important that in Government, while I will always seek to do my best to raise issues across Government that bear on the welfare of children, I seek to work in a collaborative and consensual way to achieve things that are of benefit to children, rather than necessarily taking the opportunity that you have been kind enough to extend to me to publicly criticise a position taken by another Government colleague before I am fully in possession of the facts.

Q301 Lisa Nandy: It seems quite strange, Secretary of State, given that you were very quick to intervene in the Downhills School case, for example, and many others—when you have views you do not seem to be reluctant to make them known. It seems very odd that at this present time children are being exposed to ionising radiation for non-medical purposes, which has been condemned widely across the children’s sector and by medical experts, and yet you do not seem to have any view whatsoever about it.

Michael Gove: You are absolutely right that when there is an occasion to speak out, I will take it, but I also hope that people would acknowledge that, when I have taken positions, I have done so: a) after evidence has been put forward; and b) after giving other organisations or institutions an opportunity to state their case. It might be the case that I vigorously contest the case that is made, but it is only fair, when a strong case has been made, as is the case that you and others have articulated, that the other side has an opportunity to explain their own position.

Q302 Lisa Nandy: In which case, can you tell us how quickly you will be demanding answers from the UK Border Agency, and if those answers are not satisfactory how quickly you will intervene in order to stop these tests?

Michael Gove: I have requested answers to come as quickly as possible, and if those answers are unsatisfactory then of course I—

Q303 Lisa Nandy: Will that be this week?

Michael Gove: I will report back to you and to the Committee on when I expect to hear from the Home Office and the UK Border Agency in response to the concerns that have been raised.

Q304 Lisa Nandy: And you will be able to do that by the end of the week?

Michael Gove: I will certainly be able to reply by the end of this week as to when I anticipate receiving a response, absolutely.

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Q305 Lisa Nandy: And will you also be able to let the Committee know in full what the concerns are that you have raised with the UK Border Agency? You can appreciate it is obviously a matter of real importance.

Michael Gove: I appreciate it is a matter of importance, but there is a difference between the vital importance of dealing with this and the necessary confidence that extends to discussions between ministers and officials. Given the lead on this has been taken by my ministerial colleague whose principal ministerial responsibility is this area, I would not wish to say that I could share with this Committee conversations that she has had with ministerial colleagues, because by definition she may have asked questions in a way that will have been robust and they will have been robust because they will have been governed by confidence, and confidence, as I am sure you will appreciate, is necessary to the robust conversations within Government or elsewhere.

Q306 Lisa Nandy: With respect, Secretary of State, you also have a responsibility to inspire the confidence of the most vulnerable children in this country and the people who work with them. It is very important to them and to us that we know that your Department is taking this seriously. So far we have had the spectre of another Government department, who also has a safeguarding duty towards these children, taking steps that have been widely condemned and are of real concern to many of us. Why is it that your Department cannot tell us what concerns you have about that?

Michael Gove: It is fair to say that there are concerns, but it is also important that, as I mentioned earlier, if people are going to have robust conversations in Government—or even genial conversations—they do so in the knowledge that there is a safe space to disagree. Within that safe space to disagree—or to agree—you can then get the robust testing of policy. If these arguments are played out in a public arena, people are less likely to ask the robust questions that I know you would want to be asked on behalf of children everywhere.

Q307 Lisa Nandy: With respect, I did not ask you for a detailed note of all of the conversations that have gone on within Government. I would just like to know which concerns you have about these trials that you are asking for answers from the UK Border Agency about.

Michael Gove: With respect, you are asking for a detailed account of a conversation that another minister has had with others within Government, and I cannot give you that.

Q308 Lisa Nandy: I am asking for a list of your concerns, the questions that you would need to be answered before you would be able to sanction these trials, as the Secretary of State with primary responsibility for keep children safe in this country.

Michael Gove: I will let you know when I am satisfied with any answers that I have received or not satisfied with any answers that I have received.

Q309 Alex Cunningham: The Children's Society is supporting an inquiry by a couple of APPGs about trafficked children: how easily they go missing and the services that are available and the strategies needed to stop that happening. Evidence at the first session yesterday suggested that services were patchy at best. I would just like to know what your plans are to ensure that such children are properly protected and removed to an appropriate place—probably well away from where they are picked up—of safety and provided with good services.

Michael Gove: The minister who leads on trafficking issues is my colleague Tim Loughton. He is bringing forward an action plan to deal with this issue. At the moment Government is discussing the shape of that action plan. Once we have agreement across Government on what that action plan should involve, Tim will publish it, and I am sure he will be delighted to answer questions, and if you would like me to appear alongside him, I would be happy to do so.

Q310 Ian Mearns: Secretary of State, going back to the issue Lisa raised with you, did any of your officials raise their concerns with you or with ministers directly about the policy and the implementation of that policy by the UK Border Agency?

Michael Gove: The first that I specifically noted was in reading—about two weeks ago—an editorial in *Children & Young People Now*, but when I mentioned it it was already the case, I was informed, that the Minister of State and other officials were dealing with the matter. Again, without wanting to labour the point, there are divisions of responsibility within the Department, and provided I know that a minister is on the case I will trust them. If I have any reason to believe that that minister, for any reason, has been distracted from something that is important, I will pursue that by asking questions, and that minister will always know that if they have concerns, because they believe that either within the Department or externally there is a blockage to them getting the answers they want, I will escalate it. The impression I had was Sarah—as she does with a variety of issues—was lobbying hard to get the answers that she felt that she needed in this area, and I stood ready to support her in whatever way.

Q311 Ian Mearns: But the fact that the policy of the UKBA and the Home Office is being implemented now, and youngsters have been being x-rayed for a month now, is obviously from my perspective a matter of grave concern, and I would have thought that if you are intending to act on this it should be done with urgency.

Michael Gove: I do not think that there has been any lack of urgency or vigour in Sarah's desire to secure answers to her questions.

Q312 Lisa Nandy: Does it normally take a month to get answers from another Government department about an issue of grave concern about the safety and welfare of children?

Michael Gove: It sometimes takes a very long time to get some answers from some parts of Government.

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Q313 Lisa Nandy: About the safeguarding of children?

Michael Gove: About a whole range of issues.

Q314 Lisa Nandy: Does that not concern you, given that there is potential real medical damage being done to a group of children for whom you are ultimately responsible?

Michael Gove: Firstly, you make the point that there are concerns about real medical damage, and that is a concern to me. I am waiting to hear what the appropriate answers are. But yes, it is often the case that I am frustrated that across and within Government we do not always get speedy responses to the precise questions that we ask, but I have to say that is part of the learning process of being in Government. But I have a wonderful team in my private office who have become accomplished at being determined and persistent, and the same applies to all my ministerial colleagues, in seeking answers to questions. Sometimes, and I know you will probably share this frustration, we get an answer but it is not the answer to the question that we asked.

Q315 Ian Mearns: Lastly from me, on a slightly different tack, I understand, and I think you have admitted, that it is the case that you have more staff in the Department working on academisation of schools than you do on the wider field of children's services. Is that true?

Michael Gove: No. In the Children, Young People and Families Directorate we have between 600 and 700 full-time equivalent staff; the number of people who are working either in academies or free schools is certainly lower than that. There is something called the Infrastructure and Funding Directorate—sorry about the technical name—that covers, among other things, all school funding for all maintained schools—all capital for all maintained schools. It is not the case that there are more staff on academies than on children's services.

Q316 Ian Mearns: There are, though, growing concerns that the DfE itself has identified something like 120,000 families that they consider are having enough problems that they need some form of intervention. I understand that to be one of those 120,000 families you have to meet five of seven criteria that the Department have identified. The report post the riots identified something like 500,000 families. Within those families are going to be children who are, at some stage, going to be of concern when it comes to safeguarding their welfare and their educational futures. Do you think you need to beef up your act in response to the size of that demand?

Michael Gove: I certainly think that we can literally never do enough to help children in need. That is true. The question I am continually asking is: what are the changes that we can introduce at every level in order to ensure that we support professionals on the front line and we generate the sorts of results that mean that there are fewer children at risk? There is a range of questions that we need to ask ourselves. We need to ask ourselves, as you have, where are the families

where children are at risk? It is sometimes the case that they will be troubled families that face real challenges, but it is often the case that within those families perhaps the children are not at risk and should not be subject to a child protection plan—that there are multiple pressures on that family but they are still warm and nurturing environments for children. But in many cases the presence of precisely the problems you mentioned will mean that we need to be particularly concerned.

My Department has made—some of them I listed to Craig earlier—a number of changes that are intended to address this. Now, maybe history will judge that these changes have not been enough or that they have been wrongly directed, but I do not think we can be accused of having been idle in seeking to expand the reach of preschool learning to more and more children—particularly disadvantaged children; to change the way in which the whole child protection approach operates; and to change the way in which the social work profession has been seen. I was surprised and delighted that a *Guardian* journalist quoted some of the things that I said about social workers and said that they could not imagine any Conservative politician praising social workers. In the same speech I also criticised judges, and I was pleased to do so; I think there is rather more to be proud of in our social work profession than there is in the judiciary in this country at the moment. I am happy to say that on any platform.

One additional thing I would say as well is that there has also been an element of controversy that has been generated by the number of children who have been taken into care. What is striking is that you have seen a divide amongst commentators on this issue. There have been some who have said this is a tragedy, and then there have been others who have said it is a necessary response to a broader tragedy. There are a lot of children who have been brought up in adverse circumstances; the fact that more of them are being taken into care is a sign that more is being done to deal with these children. It is a bit like a higher clear-up rate when there are more crimes: the fact that sometimes the prison population rises is a sign that the police are being more effective. I would never want to equate being taken into care with prison, but the fact that more children are being taken into care means there is a greater prospect of those children being rescued, and that is a good thing.

Q317 Ian Mearns: But given the answer you have just given, which demonstrates to me an obvious concern about the welfare of our children, do you not think there is an inherent contradiction between what you have just been saying and the fact that you did not think it was your Department's role to carry out an impact assessment on the effects of benefit changes on children, their welfare and their educational prospects?

Michael Gove: There are two things I would say. I am concerned—and it influences how we think about policy—about some of the broader changes that are occurring in other areas of Government policy. As always, when there are changes elsewhere that are driven to provide the best of measures, there are

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always going to be risks and potential benefits as well. As the Children's Society has noted, the move towards universal credit may change the way in which free school meals are allocated. There are both risks and benefits in that, and we are looking at that closely because we want to model what the impact will be. There is a difference between that and also the Government approach towards impact assessments overall. I personally think that the form we have inherited of impact assessments is a bureaucratic exercise that does not always necessarily help us in the formulation of policy. There are two things I would say: do I seek to assess the impact of policy on children and how well they will do in life? Absolutely. Is the formal impact assessment required by statute one of the best ways of doing so? No.

Q318 Ian Mearns: Improve it.

Michael Gove: I am very keen to.

Q319 Chair: What would that look like? At the moment when we come to scrutinise a Bill, the equalities impact assessment and the broader impact assessment provides data to challenge policy that otherwise is not available. I would worry about having a Secretary of State with a treasured, cherished Bill making his own assessment without any framework to ensure that the data we might want to use to scrutinise it are available to us.

Michael Gove: In an ideal world assessing the impact of the policy would be part of the process of policy formulation. In the Department for Education we constantly ask questions when a policy is being put

forward to us: what is the impact in the real world? How will this change behaviour? If I put this in the National Curriculum, will anyone pay any attention, or will it simply be a dead letter that satisfies us? We had that debate earlier. That is different from the production of impact assessments, which are often produced after the fact in an attempt to retrofit a justification on to the policy. That is a problem with the way in which Whitehall works that needs to be addressed, and in a spirit that has marked all my interactions with this Committee, total candour, I can say that the current system of impact assessments is not—to use a Whitehall phrase—fit for purpose.

Q320 Chair: Thank you very much, Secretary of State. When you were last with us in January you said that you were going to shadow a teacher. Has the Department yet had the chance to set that up for you?

Michael Gove: A number of teachers have expressed an interest, and I have expressed an interest in a number of teachers.

Alex Cunningham: Back to your relationships again.

Q321 Chair: Are you using Match.com?

Michael Gove: No, I am not using Match.com, but there is one particular school that I am very keen to visit in East Yorkshire, but I do not think it is in your constituency, Mr Chairman. I will say more about it in due course.

Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much for giving evidence to us this morning.

Michael Gove: Thank you very much.

Written evidence submitted by Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Department for Education

Thank you once again for such a stimulating and thought-provoking discussion with your Committee. I wanted to take the opportunity to further explain some of my responses to your questions, and to provide the additional information requested.

Much of our session considered the question of whether a new “intermediate tier” is necessary to support schools in an education system where academy status is becoming—at least for secondary schools—the norm. As I explained to the Committee my first principle here is to do no harm. It would be too easy to impose a new layer of bureaucracy, which could stifle the exciting and innovative new practice I see in schools across the country.

As you will know headteachers are rarely shy about voicing their concerns but I'm yet to meet one worried about a lack of regulation. Indeed one head recently told my Department that since becoming an academy his senior staff has saved 43 days a year, previously spent in “irrelevant” Local Authority meetings. It would be very wrong to curtail this progress in pursuit of what are, at the moment, largely theoretical concerns.

I find myself agreeing with Christine Gilbert's comment (made in her speech opening the Academies Commission): “I'm increasingly persuaded, by what I see up and down the country, that we've reached a tipping point in favour of schools, school leaders, and teachers themselves, as the primary drivers of systemic improvement. I'm keen to explore a range of models about how that potential might ensure support for every school in the country without the introduction of a new layer of bureaucracy.”

That does not mean, of course, that the Committee did not raise some valid questions about how existing policies support school improvement as more schools choose to become academies.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

As I said to the Committee earlier this year this Government's model of school improvement is based on peer-to-peer support. This means promoting policies that help schools help each other, rather than assuming central or local Government can mandate change by means of strategy or taskforce. My strong belief—bolstered

by an emerging evidence base—is that our policies to encourage such improvement are more powerful than the levers available to previous Governments.

The very process of converting so many schools to academy status is a pertinent example. All converter academies are asked to commit to supporting a weaker school. Over 1,600 schools are now benefiting from this, such as Beech Green Primary in Gloucestershire whose years five and six are being tutored in core subjects by teachers from The Crypt Academy. Similarly, primary schools in Rugby receive support from Rugby High School, to enthuse children about science.

Furthermore, the best converters are strongly encouraged to become sponsors for the most seriously underperforming. Sixty-eight outstanding schools have now agreed to become sponsors with more expressing interest all the time.

Many of the best existing academy chains and federations were formed from outstanding City Technology Colleges: Harris Crystal Palace, Thomas Telford, Leigh, Haberdashers, Cabot. On a larger scale we are now witnessing a similar phenomenon, with converter academies like Altrincham Grammar School for Girls starting their own federations. Tudor Grange Academy in Worcester was sponsored by its sister school in Solihull. The impact can be immediate and transformative. Nene Park Academy, sponsored by Swaveley Academy put a new staffing and curriculum structure in place in three months. In the next twelve months I am eager to persuade as many of the best schools as possible to take on a similar challenge.

Often the process of formally sponsoring other schools emerges from less structured interventions brokered as part of the National Leader of Education programme. A particularly spectacular example is Scalby School, a secondary in Scarborough, that went into Special Measures in 2008 with just 33% of pupils achieving 5 A*–C (including English and Maths) and a budget deficit of £465,000. A team led by the headteacher of Outwood Grange Academy transformed the school between January 2009 and August 2010, when Scalby achieved a Good rating from Ofsted. Exam results had risen to 69% 5 A*–Cs including English and maths and the deficit was cleared. Since then Outwood Grange have developed a superb academy chain to support a number of other struggling schools in their area.

School improvement is also a responsibility of Teaching Schools and their alliances. For example, Teaching Schools in the North-West have been co-ordinating small groups of satisfactory schools in similar situations working together with local outstanding headteachers. The approach involves problem diagnosis, direct coaching, access to teaching school support and services, and ‘best practice’ sessions led by the outstanding headteachers.

With 1,500 good and outstanding converter academies, over 650 NLEs, and now over 200 Teaching Schools, the combined capacity of improvement programmes is greater than anything previously available in the English education system. By its nature this capacity grows rapidly and continuously, augmented by similar initiatives emerging as a result of the autonomy this Government has given to school leaders (but which are not generated or managed by Government).

For example, the Challenge Partners programme established by some of the schools previously involved in the London Challenge now numbers over 160 member schools. This includes a number of Teaching Schools and Academy Sponsors representing 130,000 students. Member schools support each other with rigorous peer-led audits and mentoring. They are also involved—with the Education Endowment Fund—in a project to help narrow gaps between rich and poor children in their schools.

It is also encouraging to see the response from other influential quarters. Earlier this month the NAHT launched a new initiative—Aspire—to enable their most successful members to support those who are currently rated satisfactory by Ofsted. I’m very glad the Department has been able to support this encouraging initiative and match fund support for the first pilot group of schools.

It is important to remember that the best and most constructive Local Authorities can, and should, play a role: helping to find the best academy sponsors for weaker schools; brokering NLEs and support from converter academies; working closely with Teaching Schools to help build their alliances; supporting initiatives instigated by local schools. All of these policies are at their most effective when LAs are constructively engaged.

But crucially none of these policies are *reliant* on LA support or involvement. Those schools that are unfortunate enough to have an unsupportive or incompetent LA are not prevented from benefiting from peer-to-peer support; through the Department or the National College all of these interventions can be brokered nationally or directly by schools.

In the Committee we discussed how Ofsted could play a greater role in school improvement. In the short time the new Chief Inspector has been in post Ofsted have made significant progress in making better use of the information they collect to support improvement across the system. For instance:

- From September, inspection reports will be redesigned to be clearer, with the steps schools need to take more evident on the first page of the report.
- Ofsted now publishes more data, more often. The latest detailed inspection results for all schools in England, and analysis of trends in inspection results, will be published every three months, providing greater—comparable—information about local quality.

- In addition Ofsted now has a good practice database which allows weaker schools to identify both what they should be doing and who they should contact to help them.
- Ofsted is the joint owner, with the Department, of the RAISEonline database which provides the detailed data about pupil attainment and progress in each school. Most recently the summary report has been enhanced with more detail about reading and writing performance in primary schools.

I hope to work with the Chief Inspector over the coming months to see how we can do even more with the information they collect, especially information to better understand what makes schools outstanding, from which we can all learn.

PARENTAL COMPLAINTS

You raised the question of whether the EFA is ultimately responsible for dealing with complaints about academies. The answer is unequivocally yes. As a first step all academies are required to make available on request a procedure for dealing with complaints by parents of pupils. This procedure must comply with The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2010 and must offer:

- an opportunity to resolve the complaint with the Academy on an informal basis for example through discussion with a senior member of staff;
- a formal complaint stage when the complaint is made in writing, and
- a hearing with a panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom must be independent of the management and running of the school.

Once this complaints procedure is exhausted—or if it is not properly followed -the EFA will investigate. Guidance for anyone wishing to make a complaint about an academy to the EFA is available on the departmental website at <http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/complaintsprocedure/a00208461/complaints-about-academies>.

In addition parents can make complaints to Ofsted, which can choose to inspect a school if these complaints raise serious concerns. Guidance on parental complaints to Ofsted can be found here: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/complaints-ofsted-about-schools-guidance-for-parents>.

OTHER ISSUES ARISING

- There was some discussion over whether the Department should have done its own impact assessment on the educational and social effects of changes to welfare benefits. I wanted to emphasise that Minister of State for Children has taken a keen interest in welfare changes and has been in close contact with DWP Ministers to ensure that impacts on children were considered at all times. I can assure the Committee that her advocacy has been of considerably greater value than the production of a formal, tick-box, impact assessment.
- The Committee asked when the progress report on Eileen Munro's review and recommendations is due to be published. It will be published on shortly and I will ensure you receive a copy.

