

Education and Skills Select Committee

Every Child Matters

10 November 2004

1. NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Every Child Matters agenda of reform for children's services.
2. NASUWT is the largest union representing teachers and headteachers in all sectors of education throughout the UK.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. NASUWT welcomes the Government's commitment to a strategy that sets out to protect those children at risk of harm and neglect, whilst ensuring better services for all children.
4. The Government has been right to identify the adverse impact of poverty and low income on the progress, achievements and life chances of children and young people. The link between poverty, low income and antisocial behaviour has also been clearly established. Indeed, these social characteristics have remained largely unchanged over time, and are also intergenerational.
5. The Government's Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda provides an important and necessary contribution in protecting children from harm and giving every child access to high-quality educational opportunities and life experiences. The Government has established clearly its commitment to improving provision for young people and their parents. The National

Childcare Strategy, the expansion of Sure Start and the development of universal parenting services are clearly important measures in the Government's strategy to make a difference to the life chances of future generations of young people.

6. However, NASUWT does not believe that the ECM agenda as currently devised will overcome the fundamental structural effects of poverty and deprivation which significantly determine the life chances of many children and young people. The Government has taken a number of important steps to reform the financial support available to parents and families under the New Deal. These reforms are an important and necessary complement to the Government's ECM agenda.
7. Further work is also needed, however, to improve the big picture; improving individuals' life chances depends upon improving the neighbourhoods in which people live, improving the opportunities for high-quality paid employment and equality of access to high quality education and healthcare irrespective of postcode. The Government has rightly identified that schools should make an important contribution to making a difference to improving local neighbourhoods. In many areas, schools are at the heart of local communities, they are often the main or only point of connection between the individual citizen and the state, and they function as the lifeblood of our democracy by providing essential educational opportunities for children and young people.
8. However, NASUWT strongly cautions the Government to recognise the limits of what schools and teachers can do in meeting the full range of needs of every child.
9. Many school buildings have been designed for a clear and singular purpose: namely, the provision of education for young people. Yet, the quality of school buildings is hugely variable, and some are no longer fit for their original purpose. The Government has been right to signal the need

for improved investment in school buildings, providing that such investment does not come at a price to the effective provision of education; in particular, NASUWT believes that the Government's commitment to the use of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to fund school building and renewal programmes threatens to undermine the provision of educational opportunity for the majority and could also threaten the viability of the Government's ECM agenda. The available evidence demonstrates that PFI has been costly and damaging to the delivery and development of public services wherever such schemes have been established. Moreover, it is wholly unlikely that the Government would be able to assure the effective delivery of the complex service arrangements anticipated under the ECM agenda, where the organisational control of school buildings is removed from the public sector. The Government's ECM commitment must be complemented by a clear commitment to invest in the fabric of school buildings, which must not undermine the provision of teaching and learning whilst enhancing the potential for school buildings to contribute in new ways in meeting the needs of children and families.

10. Equally critical to the resource of the school building are the staff employed within schools. The Government rightly recognises that access to high quality, motivated and committed teachers and support staff is essential to the delivery of high educational standards. That is why the Government, unions and employers signed the National Agreement on '***Raising Standards and Tackling Workload***' in January 2003. NASUWT believes strongly that the provisions of the National Agreement are critical to how the Government takes forward the ECM agenda.

11. It is essential that the pursuit of the ECM agenda does not take schools back to the position prior to the signing of the National Agreement whereby successful teachers were defined as those persons who did anything other than teach. Currently, teachers and support staff are employed in schools to deliver teaching and learning. The ECM agenda must not detract

existing staff from their core purpose in meeting the educational needs of every child.

12. At the present time, many schools have sought to embrace the ECM agenda. However, many have done so in a naive way, and in a way which could jeopardise the Government's important commitment to raising educational standards. NASUWT has assembled evidence from many schools where headteachers have become diverted from their responsibility for leading teaching and learning, and where they are now embroiled in the machinations of running extended service provisions, combining healthcare, counselling, social service support, welfare rights support and other activities. NASUWT does not argue that these services are not important, however, it does not require a headteacher to organise and run these provisions.

13. Local authorities and schools have an important contribution to make together in identifying local community needs. However, this should not mean that the burden of responsibility for meeting these needs should not rest with the school, in the guise of the headteacher.

Integrated Services (Health, Social Services and Education)

14. NASUWT believes that extending the way in which school buildings are used should represent a helpful development in meeting the needs of children and families generally. However, the school's educational function must not be compromised as a result of any such developments.

15. Whilst the provision of breakfast clubs, parenting classes, healthcare services and a range of other activities have, in many cases, been popular, the impact of these initiatives on children's educational progress and attainment is not clear. Neither can the educational benefits be assumed.

16. Extended school provisions must, at a minimum, deliver real and tangible improvements in educational participation and the standards achieved. The Government must scrutinise carefully the findings and conclusions arising from the evaluation of the extended schools programme and by working closely with its school workforce social partners.
17. Of particular concern to NASUWT is that in many schools involved in the provision of extended services, these activities have already begun to overshadow the school's core function. Whilst the Government has sought to adopt a planned strategy to developments in this area, it is clear that many schools and LEAs have acted on their own terms and in the absence of appropriate guidance. The impact of these developments on public service provision and industrial relations are likely to be significant.
18. There is evidence that headteachers have begun to migrate from being leaders of pedagogy (teaching and learning) to become general managers of mixed services (i.e. equally knowledgeable about health matters, social care provisions and attendant legislation and regulations). Some of the Government's extended schools pathfinders have previously reported that they had delegated leadership of teaching and learning to their deputy headteachers! This highlights the potential dangers of the extended schools strategy, particularly where clear guidance is not available to schools regarding how these services should be established. Moreover, such guidance to schools must be subject to regulation, which should make clear the range of activities in which schools may or may not engage, and also confirm the activities and responsibilities which may not be undertaken by persons employed under the provisions of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document.

Practical Implications of the Duty to Collaborate

19. The Government has rightly recognised the problems which may be caused where multiple and disparate agencies are involved in meeting the

needs of children, particularly vulnerable children. The potential that no single agency takes responsibility for the needs of the child have been highlighted previously and with tragic human consequences. For NASUWT, this is at the heart of what the ECM agenda must be about. Clearly, this will require an emphasis on collaboration and an end to competition between public service providers and the atomisation of public services across the board.

20. The problem of a fatally fragmented public service has been caused by such policies as privatisation, contracting-out of services, local financial management, deregulation, performance tables and the operation of best value policies. These policies have weakened the basis for institutional co-operation, collaboration and information exchange; in particular, they have impacted adversely on the ability of schools, social services and the health sector to recruit and retain necessary staff. It is essential that the Government takes steps to tackle these issues; however, the ECM agenda currently falls short in a number of ways.

21. Whilst the Government continues to promote the policy of collaboration and co-operation, it continues to advance an alternative and contradictory agenda linked to the mantra of extending choice. The establishment of Academies and the expansion of foundation schools will continue to weaken the bonds between schools, their local authorities and the wider communities they serve. These provisions are often predicated on the principle of extended deregulation and the pursuit of individual institutional interests which appears to run counter to the rationale of ECM. Moreover, where such schools are not subject to the same admissions and exclusions procedures as maintained schools, the danger is that they can effectively opt out of their civic responsibility as articulated under the terms of ECM.

22. The Government must recognise that a move towards greater integration of what it calls the 'frontline' children's services will carry significant

financial implications. It is important for the Government to be clear about how these financial implications will be met in ways that do not jeopardise public services in the medium to long term. Unfortunately, in implementing the provisions contained in the Gershon Review, the Government is in real danger of undermining the effective establishment of high-quality children's services in local areas. By dispensing with vast numbers of civil service roles, at a time when positions in many local authorities have also been hard hit, will leave schools in an isolated position, reinventing the wheel and devising their own 'solutions' with all of the attendant unintended consequences this may bring. NASUWT does not regard this as a viable strategy for building effective children's services.

23. The establishment of a Director of Children's Services has the potential to provide a way forward in terms of the co-ordination of services on the ground. However, regrettably, and with little direction from the Government, local authorities have set about establishing these posts without any clear national direction as to the scope of functions that such a Director should carry. The current free-for-all arrangements could have seriously negative consequences, not only for the provision of services, but also in terms of ensuring that every child, wherever they live, is guaranteed the same range of rights, protections and opportunities they need.

24. Presently, there is little clarity as to how the move towards greater collaboration between children's services will be funded. There is a very real danger that the effect of LEA restructuring of children's services could reduce the quantum available to schools, and as local authorities seek to hold back funding which would otherwise have gone to schools. At the same time, the secret garden of local authority finance creates the conditions for the Government's ECM priorities to be undone.

25. The establishment of extended schools is, potentially, a very costly undertaking. The Government must make clear how it intends to fund this strategy, without detriment to core educational functions.
26. The issue of co-location raises important implications for the schools' capital building programme. NASUWT would invite the Government to engage in dialogue with the social partners on the implications of co-location in this respect.
27. NASUWT is concerned that the Government's aim to establish Children's Trusts in every local authority area should be the subject of a more extended dialogue and detailed scrutiny. In particular, the impact of these new arrangements on the quality of services provided for children, the recruitment and retention of staff, the costs of implementing change of this nature, the bureaucratic burdens to be introduced and the democratic accountability of these bodies must be properly assessed. NASUWT believes that the Government's timescale for achieving the establishment of the Children's Trusts might also undermine the democratic and inclusionary principles that underpin the ECM agenda.

Staff and Management Needs

28. In January 2003, the Government, employers and school workforce trades unions signed an historic agreement designed to raise educational standards and tackle teacher workload. The National Agreement is founded on the clear principle that the role of the teacher is to teach. The Agreement has identified a staged strategy to bring about reforms to the school workforce, which will include freeing teachers to undertake teaching, planning, preparation and assessment for learning; the deployment of support staff in schools to undertake a range of administrative and clerical activities previously undertaken by teachers; and the appointment and training of support staff to undertake such tasks as cover for absent teachers and to support teaching by working with

groups of children under the direction of a qualified teacher. These reforms are critical to providing a platform for raising educational standards and the delivery of programmes of teaching and learning more tailored to the needs of individual children.

29. The workforce reform implications arising from the ECM agenda are not inconsiderable. There are many complex and controversial issues to be addressed, not least implications relating to initial training, professional development, professional regulatory standards, staff deployment, pay and conditions of service for the children's workforce.

30. NASUWT supports the establishment of a Children's Workforce Unit within the DfES, but on the basis that it builds on the principles of social partnership which have made the school workforce reforms possible.

31. There still remains a need to tackle bureaucracy and workload across children's services, which is often linked to a lack of consistency in the data standards and protocols between different service organisations. Moreover, the issue of excessive workload must be tackled urgently; however, this will not be aided where appropriate guidance in respect of aspects of the ECM agenda (for example, concerning extended schools, the Directors of Children's Services, "educare") is not forthcoming. Where, for example, schools and local authorities are developing provisions, it is essential that this is achieved in line with the provisions of the National Agreement '***Raising Standards and Tackling Workload***'.

32. NASUWT accepts that one of the barriers to effective service integration has been the absence of a common language and understanding across the different professional roles. However, it is critical that common/core training and development does not result in professional obfuscation. Teachers have a role which is very distinct from that of GPs, and so on. It will be essential that a consensus is reached in terms of the specific

contribution made by each professional discipline in meeting children's developmental, welfare and protection needs.

33. Where schools become the focus of multidisciplinary and co-located services, there is no justification for investing the responsibility for managing such provision with headteachers.

34. There should be no expectation that teachers should undertake the extended roles envisaged within the Government's ECM agenda. In particular, the role of the lead professional need not be undertaken by a qualified teacher. Indeed, NASUWT would suggest that such a role should be undertaken by persons other than teachers who might have the expertise and time to focus clearly on this role.

35. The Government has previously identified that 'pastoral staff in schools, who may already have trusting relationships with the child or parent, may be in a better position to discuss initial concerns with a child or parent, and work with them over time, than a social worker with whom the family has had no previous contact'. Whilst there should be no assumption that teachers would take on this responsibility, it must also not be the case that existing staff employed to support teaching and learning are not diverted from their core responsibilities. Schools should recruit appropriately trained professionals for this purpose. Parents will also need to be informed as to the development of such roles in schools so that they can develop confidence in them. Increasing the number of support staff employed in schools would dramatically help schools to deliver the Government's reform agenda for early intervention and effective protection.

36. NASUWT believes that there is a need for clarity on the relationship between multidisciplinary teams and existing specialist and/or mainstream services. Previous experience of multidisciplinary arrangements has, in general, not been successful, especially where the conflicts between the various professional group interests have not been resolved prior to their

establishment, and where funding arrangements have not been consistent with multidisciplinary practice.

37. The Government ECM agenda envisages that, 'over time, professionals and non-professionals might increasingly work together in different types of teams'. This raises vital questions about who would manage these teams, how staff would be deployed on a day-to-day basis, and what terms and conditions would apply to staff employed in these teams. NASUWT will oppose any attempt to undermine the national pay and conditions machinery for school teachers.

Inspection

38. The Association welcomes the principle of establishing a common assessment framework. Currently, further consultation is taking place on this issue, to which NASUWT will respond fully.

39. The inspection frameworks will need to be amended to ensure that they better contribute to supporting service improvement whilst removing the often attendant problems of excessive workload and bureaucracy. Any new inspection framework(s) must recognise and take account of the agenda for reform of the school workforce in particular, and the Government's proposals for a coherent and integrated children's services workforce.

40. The Government has made clear that it expects the inspection arrangements to provide 'a powerful force to secure genuine integration' of children's services. The Government has helpfully made clear that the burdens of inspection should be reduced; this will be an essential pre-requisite to the effective inspection of what will be a complex set of service arrangements.

41. The Government and the inspectorate are likely to face a serious problem in respect of the recruitment of inspectors with the requisite skills and expertise. NASUWT believes that these problems will intensify if the inspectorates continue to utilise a system of private contracting rather than the recruitment of a permanent group of professional, qualified and trained inspectors. At the same time, the Government must assure that persons identified to undertake common assessments are competent to do so.
42. The standards and focus of inspection must be clear, relevant and determined nationally. The ECM five key outcomes for keeping children safe, healthy, happy, must be translated appropriately to suit each service context. It would be wholly inappropriate for these objectives to be applied in a standardised manner across such different agencies as schools, social services, health, youth services and the arts/cultural services. The Government must take steps to remove the potential for service distortion arising from the introduction of the new arrangements for the inspection of children's services.

Listening to Children – The Children's Commissioner

43. NASUWT remains concerned that the establishment of a Children's Commissioner, whilst being an advocate for children, should not undermine confidence in children's services as a whole. The Government should be invited to explain how it intends that the Children's Commissioner will work with other partners, particularly representatives of the children's workforce, in ensuring that the needs of children are met without the risk of services failing. NASUWT would look to the priorities of the Children's Commissioner to be concerned not with attributing blame to individuals or agencies, but identifying what works and developing and disseminating good practice.

Working With Parents

44. Parental responsibility is also a critical factor in ameliorating life chances. Central to this is the need to extend to working parents greater opportunity to fulfil their family responsibilities. Improvements to flexible working arrangements and progress in respect of work/life balance are particularly important. The Government is currently promoting that the opening hours of schools should be extended for the provision of before and after school provision (e.g. breakfast and homework clubs). NASUWT does not object to this in principle; however, there are considerable practical implications which need to be addressed with some urgency. The Government has given assurances that it does not expect teachers to take responsibility for running these services. This is welcome. However, clarification is still required as to how such services would be run in practice. Headteachers may well believe that they will be responsible for these activities, and accountable to the governing body, OFSTED, the LEA and others for the standards of these provisions. Some headteachers might assume that they are required to be on site when these services are provided; indeed, it is highly likely that parents will regard such services as an extension of what headteachers and teachers should do. In this context, it is essential that clear guidance regarding the organisation of these provisions is made available nationally, and is devised to take account of the provisions of the National Agreement on '***Raising Standards and Tackling Workload***'.
45. Families, local communities and the society at large have a vital role to play in the raising of future generations. The norms and values of the society must be considered as part of any long-term strategy for social improvement, economic prosperity and civic participation. The Government's strategy must serve to enhance the role of parents and the wider community in the raising of children and young people. It would be wholly unfortunate if parents were encouraged to abnegate their responsibilities as a result of measures to "institutionalise" parenting, such as the provision of extended schools. Schools must play an important part,

but not at the expense of building better relationships between parents and children.

46. NASUWT shares the Government's view of the value of extending the provision of family learning programmes as a means of bridging the gap between home and school. However, to make progress in this area, the Government must identify how it intends to fund the provision of additional staff to roles which are not directly connected to the provision of teaching for pupils in schools. It is essential that such provision does not add to the pressures on school budgets.

Creation, Management and Sharing of Records

47. The Government's ECM agenda rightly emphasises the importance of information sharing between the various agencies involved in working with children. Even where this takes place, it is important that agencies are equipped and committed to make use of the data they have at their disposal, if tragedies like the death of Victoria Climbié are to be avoided in future.

48. NASUWT supports the Government's long-term vision 'that information is stored and accessed electronically by a range of agencies' and that such information is developed using a common approach. Local authorities have a key role to play in ensuring the establishment of effective information hubs, which conform to appropriately determined standards in respect of scope of data included, economy/efficiency, equality, effectiveness, timeliness, manageability, accuracy, confidentiality and security.

49. The introduction of data systems in schools must be in line with the provisions of the National Agreement on ***Raising Standards and Tackling Workload***.

50. A unique identifier for each child does appear to be an essential prerequisite for the provision of reliable and coherent children's services. The implications for the design of this system, the strategy for its introduction, costs and reliability must be addressed. Moreover, the Government must also ensure that any tracking system is able to track highly mobile and transient communities, including asylum-seekers, missing children and other particularly vulnerable groups.
51. The Government must consult further on the question of thresholds and triggers for sharing information about a child. There is a danger that information systems could become overloaded with irrelevant data.
52. There is also the issue of how the agencies involved in any information hub might be expected to act upon the information. There is a danger of large numbers of records containing red flags which could trigger interventions even where they are unreasonable and/or unnecessary.
53. Clear protocols regarding the use of data must be established in consultation with the relevant professional bodies. Appropriate paid training for relevant staff must be provided to ensure that data held is timely, accurate, appropriate and secure.

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