Education Polity, England 2015: Social justice and a 'Self-improving Schools System'

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This paper reports work in progress; citation by request only please. Feedback and comments welcome. Aspects of the paper are intended for publication: a further journal article and a new book (intended publication 2015).

Published Abstract (January 2014)
Developing features of the English Education Polity since 2010 include the accelerating academy 'conversion' of primary and secondary schools (Gunter, 2012), and the parallel development of free schools (Benn, 2011). These have been accompanied by repeated repositionings of local authorities, formerly seen as key to improving opportunity (Deloitte, 2011; Pritchard, 2012, Brent Council, 2012), but now searching for a role.

At the same time, organisations involved in or with the new schools, the sorts of non-state actors now prominent in education policy (Ball, 2010), speak with multiple voices and, with some exceptions (eg Coles, 2013), do not yet frame their discourse in systemic terms.

This paper considers findings from a short series of interviews with key representatives in the developing polity: leaders in private sector organisations providing public services, academy chains, and organisations opposed to compulsory conversion. It compares the common and differing views across the sample with recent research and national policy documentation such as that articulated through the National College for Teaching and Leadership (Hargreaves, 2012).

The paper argues that the notion of a self-improving school system reflects the developing logic of the state under the UK Coalition; genuine national aspirations for achieving greater social justice are seen as being largely realised through wider, undirected coalitions of the willing (Riddell, 2013). The paper reports innovative practice, but argues that, while the 'system' is still 'steered' (Ozga, 2009), achieving equity in educational outcomes remains as chancy as ever.

Background and introduction

This paper reports some initial findings and makes a first analysis of a short series of interviews undertaken during the academic year 2013-4 with individuals occupying key positions in the developing education 'polity'. This term has been chosen to represent the complexity of developing, and by no means complete, arrangements for education government, governance and policy networking in England. In the paper, what becomes apparent is that the English Education 'system' cannot be characterised simply by traditional descriptions of national policy development and local implementation, or the devolution of central government powers to schools, local authorities and others, who do similar, or indeed the growing influence of non-state actors (Ball and Junemann, 2012).

Rather, the way that decisions are made and, preferably described as, 'realised' (Gale, 2003) appears to contain all three elements that vary with location and who is actually involved. And although the author has previously characterised Coalition Government *stated intentions* as seeing policy aspirations developed and realised by a coalition of the willing (Riddell, 2013), a position by which he stands, the reality is that there remain in place some very traditional command and control mechanisms, as one interviewee described them, where satisfying the requirements of organisations such as Ofsted and, maybe in the imminent future, the newly appointed Regional Schools Commissioners, is the *sine qua non* of the continued working, and sometimes very existence, of schools and their leadership teams. This is consistent with Ball and Junemann's observation that the 'assemblages' (p138) of the developing nature of state education are unstable, and there are different blends of 'steering and rowing' (p141) at work, which in England vary by location, status of school and the actors involved.

The intention behind this research was to illuminate developing Coalition policy towards schools and 'school improvement' – discussed more fully below – and enable a deeper and more critical examination and reading of policy documentation. It is an attempt at mapping the current arrangements, as reported by those who live them, with a view to where they are developing and with an attempt to assess whether the general election will make any difference to them. The principal questions for the research focus are:

- What are the organisational and governance arrangements affecting schools at the moment?
- Are they likely to enable schools to raise attainment more effectively than those pertaining under the last Government?
- Specifically, is it likely that they will help address the inequities in school outcomes (by social class and ethnic origin) that are far greater in the UK than in other developed countries (OECD, 2010) and despite the claims of a narrowing of the 'gaps' under the last Government (Whitty and Anders, 2013)?

Selecting the interviewees; methodology

The interviewees included senior and individual private sector providers (of consultancy and Ofsted inspections); the heads of two academy chains (one large and one medium sized – see below); individuals involved in campaigning nationally or locally against academy conversion; promoters of free schools; and, in three local authorities in two regions, at least

one senior officer (usually the DCS) and one primary and one secondary headteacher. Some of these headteachers were representative, for example, in being chair of the local primary heads' association. The headteacher interviewees are continuing and will include at least one free school. There is also some further work to be done in acquiring a better picture of the work now of private sector consultants with schools, a piece of work being pursued at the moment. The interviewees included two individuals who have been appointed Regional Schools Commissioners, adding new insights to the development of the polity. Overall, the heads came from a mix of sponsored and convertor academies (ie post 2010, though some heads had been approached before the general election) and local authority-maintained schools.

Initial approaches were made to individuals in the author's own network, acquired through nearly forty years' experience as a teacher in comprehensive schools, an officer in four authorities, including seven as a Director of Education, a consultant working with LAs and (the then) LSCs and, though not directly relevant here, as head of education for a human rights NGO. This was before joining Bath Spa five years ago. So the interviewees were chosen opportunistically and the field then widened and secured by 'snowballing'.

Interviews were semi-structured with questions sent out in advance. Most questions were generic for the different groups, though were sometimes modified in the light of the author's developing knowledge of the local area, for example, in one LA, the LA-supported development of school networks. All the interviews were transcribed, though at the time of writing this is not yet complete. The first ten were paid for by a grant from the School of Education at Bath Spa and then after that at the author's own expense or, in one case, by himself. All interviewees were sent copies of the transcription, a few commented on the accuracy and some made further observations, sometimes detailed. In some cases, these were the basis of further discussions, interviews or meetings. All quotations used here have been agreed with the interviewee. This process is not as yet complete, however, and this has limited the direct quotations at this stage which could be used for this paper.

The interviews were analysed by some initial intuitive coding which was first open, looking for responses connected with key topics, eg relations with the LA, capacity building for school to school development, then axial to compare the responses by category of interviewee, though obviously these involved very small numbers, was not very fruitful and was abandoned. It could be argued that this was not a truly grounded approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), as the initial questions were too specific and formed an initial view of the topic to which respondents were asked to respond. This would be correct, but the categories into which the questions fell are all set out in the Government's policy documents (considered below) and help define the field for investigation; whether that then determines action, or paints a full picture, it would also be argued, is a matter for interpretation, but the responses provide a ready interpretation of government intentionality, the current state of its realisation and, importantly non-realisation. They are the 'lived reality' of the reform and show how these senor post holders are positioned within it (Gunter, 2012). For example, a 'given' for *all* interviewees was that schools needed to be good, or preferably outstanding, in Ofsted terms and this was the basis of development work in the 'self-improving system'. In some very data-rich, extensive interviews (the longest was just under two hours), the Ofsted status – and related

attainment data – were see as the key underlying driver of school development activity. This is now an important feature of the English schools polity and defines the role of purpose of school leaders. Whether it should be is not considered in this paper, but it is the *sine qua non* referred to above.

For the purposes of this paper, the reasonable consensus areas from the interviews are taken as adumbrating the principal features of the polity, as set out in policy documentation, and as it is lived currently, although these are also supplemented by secondary evidence gathered from a range of sources, which also includes other and earlier interviews. This adumbration then forms the basis for the brief consideration of equity.

Policy background – the development of a 'self-improving school system'
In English national policy terms, the stated expectation and assumption that schools, irrespective of their context, are responsible for their own improvement and development is at least twenty years old – for example, this was spelt out in a letter to Local Education Authorities by the then Secretary of State, Gillian Shepherd in 1995 (DfE, 1995). The questions for policy making arise from how school improvement can be encouraged (and by whom) and what should happen if school quality or improvement are insufficient (to be defined). And to answer these questions, of course, policy makers need to know how it can be measured.

This is the framework for the development of neoliberal education policy-making for three UK Governments and decades, with its fullest realisation in England since devolution, though there is no doubt an argument to be made here about Wales. The full panoply of Ofsted inspections, annual performance tables, target setting, floor targets, varying kinds of prescriptions and interventions, particularly for schools variously described as 'low performing' or serving 'challenging circumstances', and the shifting arrangements in the kinds of power available and who may wield it have arisen from these basic questions. However, the intention in this paper is to map out what seems to be happening empirically at the moment, rather than give a detailed policy history or critique the overall approach with all its consequences.

There are, however, several key aspects of this shifting melange which are relevant to the current policy formation and how this may or may not be realised in terms of what schools are actually doing now. They both relate to first where schools would look to seek support and development for their own improvement and second what will happen if they do not improve sufficiently. This paper does not debate 'improvement'.

Under the Coalition, the early *Importance of Teaching* White Paper (DfE, 2010a) reaffirmed school responsibility (p16) and stated the Government's intention of 'making it easier for schools to learn from each other' and in so doing, to 'support the school system to become more effectively self-improving', thus helping 'develop its capacity' to do so. The implications of these early statements were that as academy status becomes the norm (p55 – largely realised now for secondary schools), the increasing 'school autonomy' was the way to generate this capacity and enable school-to-school brokerage. This mix of autonomy and school-to-school 'collaboration' (discussed below) has arguably been around for over ten

years now, from the development of 'Fresh Start' and its successor initiatives onwards (DfEE, 1997), and of course 'superheads'.

Importantly, though Local Authorities would continue to monitor the data of what increasingly are referred to as 'maintained schools' (eg the Secretary of State in TES, 2014b), particularly when they were falling below 'floor targets', and challenge their performance, any support and improvement programmes were to be brokered from other, outstanding schools, or from the developing programmes of Teaching School Alliances. At the same time, the DfE made it clear that it intended, through the Office of the Schools Commissioner (OSC), to monitor the performance of *all* schools carefully, beginning with a view to potential academy conversion. The OSC's 'school brokers' featured in a number of interviews with local authority officers and heads. The situation currently is highly complex, varies by place, and the new intended 'system' is barely emergent it is argued (this is backed up by Greany, 2014), but may change rapidly during 2014/5, as the new Regional Schools Commissioners take up their responsibilities.

David Hargreaves (2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b) authored four 'think pieces' for the National College for School Leadership (now the National College for Teaching and Leadership, but crucially and potentially one of the three *current* local arms of the state reported below), based on his own school visiting. In these papers, he develops the theme of school partnerships being the core infrastructure for school improvement (my phrase), and argues that 'deep partnerships' (2012b) have to be the aim of any self-improving system, particularly for schools. The four key characteristics of such partnerships are 'collective moral purpose', 'joint practice development', 'high social capital' and 'evaluation and challenge'. Besides his own history and the significance of the NCTL – or perhaps because of them – these papers have become core texts for partnerships which are developing nationally (see below for the evidence of this), whether promoted by local authorities or schools, facilitated by private sector consultants or indeed as investigated by other consultants (see Crossley, various, and Crossley-Holland, various) where the advice given by Hargreaves is taken as a yardstick. In other words, local authorities and schools have been doing what is expected by national policy. This has major implications for the future, as will be argued below.

Neither is the emphasis on school to school partnerships, to provide extra pressure for improvement in attainment outcomes, new. Excellence in Cities (DfEE, 1999), incorporating the early 'education action zones', was the first central government initiative to make partnership *compulsory* (largely though not exclusively of secondary and special schools in this case, beyond phase 1) in order to receive and spend substantial sums of central government grant and achieve attainment outcomes. These partnerships had salaried coordinators who were not intended to be members of the LA's staff (but may have been formally). They incorporated other initiatives such as Beacon Schools which were able to offer expertise in particular areas to a wider group of schools. This was continued more widely during the Labour Government with lesser known initiatives such as Education Improvement Partnerships (DfES, 2005), a major push of the second and third terms, but with much less money, and the beginning of developing school-to-school challenge and support - first with School Improvement Partners, crucial to interventions in terms of, for example, achieving floor targets through the National Challenge (DCSF, 2008). This gave the

term 'partner' something of an ambiguous ring as some heads commented. Later, there was the development of a network of National and Local Leaders of Education, recruited from schools with 'outstanding' Ofsted outcomes via the then National College for School Leadership. Local Authorities were expected to draw on these individuals, as well as their own staff, as part of their interventions in non-academy schools not meeting the floor targets (academies were numbered just in hundreds before the 2010 General Election), or with poor attainment trajectories. They themselves were subject to Ofsted inspection and intervention (and still are).

The difference now, over four years into the Coalition Government, is that Local Authorities are not expected to be significant partners. The evolving partnerships reviewed by Hatcher (2014) and also some quoted by him (for example, those reviewed following work by the NfER [Aston *et al*, 2013], and individual investigations in, for example, Southend [Crossley-Holland, 2013] and York [Crossley, 2013]), appear to have LAs in more minor roles. But nor are universities involved largely and one of the implications of Hatcher's review is that parents and governors are also marginalised. Again, this has implications for the emerging 'school-led' system – 'schools' largely means 'headteachers'.

Class, deprivation and the Issue of Equity in Outcomes
Whitty and Anders (2013) argue that the Coalition Government - on the face of it - are more ambitious than their Labour predecessor in wishing to 'close', rather than just 'narrow' the so-called 'achievement gap'. The association between socio-economic background and attainment, and other related outcomes such as university attendance – and, perhaps more distal, occupational and income trajectories - are long attested in England (for example, DCSF, 2009; Hills *et* al, 2010; Kerr and West, 2010; Goodman and Gregg, 2010; Clifton and Cook, 2012; NCB, 2013).

Differences by 'pupil characteristics' can be read straight from the annual performance tables: for example, DfE, 2014, the first statistical release for the 2013 data, with its accompanying Excel spreadsheets, concludes that the 'gap' had *not* narrowed over the previous year. Some of these publications, including the DfE figures, measure the gap as one of entitlement to free schools meals, focusing the issue on material deprivation and its consequences. All working class children are not physically 'deprived', however, on any such measure, and the 2009 DCSF document, produced under the last government, examines socio-economic background and the free school meals measure, now, as Ever6FSM, used to allocate the Coalition's pupil premium. There are more complex measures such as IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index) where the nature of the communities served by schools is considered. This was used by two of the LAs visited for this research, but is less useful in some urban communities where secondary schools take children from more than twenty primaries.

This paper does not have the space to theorise adequately how and why this complexity translates into different social, occupational, economic and, as Ball (2013) argues strongly, democratic trajectories, though the author has considered some of this elsewhere (Riddell, 2003; 2010; 2013). Like successive UK Governments, the author here and elsewhere is primarily concerned with the necessary policy interventions that might effectively reduce – and, ultimately, end - such inequities. While increasing income inequality (Belfield *et al*,

2014) can easily be understood for its carry-over effects into the classroom (for example, NCB, 2013), there are clearly other effects deriving from social structure, as mediated by many factors, including parental education, disability/SEN and, maybe, the nature of aspiration (this is not necessarily about not being 'high' enough and this may also be a social indicator or association, not a result). All seem to have their effects.

These differences seem to be particularly extreme in England, to judge from the 2009 PISA results (OECD, 2010), taken as authority by the Coalition for their educational reform programme. And a Sutton Trust-published study (2011) similarly looks at countries that might be considered similar to England, but which have much narrower gaps in attainment outcomes. The Sutton Trust is similarly concerned with the implications that this has for occupational and income mobility. As Strand has argued previously (2010), it matters much more educationally in England whether you are middle class or not and, he says in this particular London Borough, particularly if you are white.

Many wish to argue (eg Kerr and West, 2010) that schools cannot be held completely to blame for the misdeeds of social structure, but they of course do have a role in transmitting, justifying and reproducing it (Apple, 2012 [1995], and many others). Nor are they responsible for economic policy that may be making life more difficult for many families (Belfield *et al*, 2014). However, in the era of big data (McKinsey, 2011), it is arguably possible to partition effects on children of attending particular schools as opposed to so-called within-pupil characteristics (poverty, EAL, disabilities, SEN, etc), as the IPPR maintains (Clifton and Cook, 2012). On this basis, attending a school recognised as outstanding by Ofsted does make a difference. Leaving aside the variability of this measure, as averred by some interviewees for this research, Rasbash *et al*'s partitioning (2010) leads to the conclusion that the quality of the school attended can account for up to 20% of the difference in attainment outcomes by the end of the secondary stage.

So what schools do is worth paying attention to. And, from a national policy perspective, so is how they do achieve improved outcomes and can be encouraged (or pressured?) to do so. This improves the trajectories for their children and, hence the author would argue, contributing to greater social justice. It is in this context that this research was undertaken. Whitty and Anders (2013) have argued that some of these gaps were actually narrowed under the Labour Government, as has been said. Will the policy mix under the Coalition, therefore with its emphasis on 'self-improvement', enable the *elimination* of such gaps in England? These findings, and the picture these snapshots put together of the system-in-development-as-it-is-evolving, need to be evaluated in that context. Having more outstanding schools, in that sense, matters. Is it likely with the developing polity?

Findings and initial discussion
At the time of writing (late August, 2014), some of the interviews had not been concluded, as the programme had been extended beyond the original timescale to include a wider number of respondents. And of the completed interviews, a slightly larger number did not yet have a professionally finished transcript. The findings are laid out below therefore, including quotations where available and agreed now; otherwise these will follow, and at greater length, with further publication.

I am most grateful for the time offered generously by all the interviewees. Most overran the time I had asked for and responded to follow up emails, including when I was asking for documents. The questioning for all interviewees was about their involvement in the developing polity, their relationships with other key players, and how was this changing, particularly as academisation gathers pace (see below). Each was also asked what their view was of the developing system and what they thought of it. Their interest in and engagement with the topic of this research – and its outcomes - suggests that most headteachers at least do not have the opportunity to discuss strategic directions any more, or at least not sufficiently in their view, and certainly with senior officers of the LA. And, for that matter, nor do academics with those people who have to implement change or, in some cases, oppose them!

1. **Local Authority Role?**

   As might be expected, the developing role of the local authority was a theme in many discussions, even when a specific question had yet to be asked. This was both with the heads of 'maintained schools' and academies, private sector providers and those working with free schools (none of the other schools whose heads were interviewed had been affected by free school proposals). It features in this section and the next.

   'Letting Go'

   Officers in all the LAs visited (one shire county, one unitary and one metropolitan borough) had made the decision to 'let go' as Crossley (2013a) expresses it (p7) in connection with York LA. By that is meant they had made arrangements, or were making them, to set up the sorts of school-to-school arrangements referred to and, more particularly, to let schools make the decisions about what might have been formerly termed the 'strategic direction of the service', either in a local geographical location, or across an LA area. Broadly, by 'schools' here is meant 'headteachers', as has been mentioned.

   Though this could be seen as an LA-driven initiative, it could also be seen as a reaction to a different policy context: LA officers were reacting to be the perceived direction of government policy (and Ofsted views). There is more on this below, but LAs are most certainly not in the driving seat for these changes nationally.

   However, taking the three LAs visited for this research, those covered by the Crossley-Holland and Crossley consultancy work undertaken in association with the NfER, those reviewed by Hatcher (2014), and those reported on by other private sector consultants interviewed for this paper, the arrangements differ markedly for school-to-school partnerships. These are considered in more detail below. Partly reflecting the numbers of academies, no doubt, LA-wide partnerships will not be universal, and where there are some, academy head involvement varies from full to non-existent. It is difficult to make an argument for LA-wide partnerships. If the importance of 'place' has emerged (as Hargreaves [2012b] argues) as a driver for heads, then the long term partnership may be LA-wide, for example, in a city, where loyalty may be strong. This seems less likely though in a large shire county.

Some urban LAs, one in the North and one in the south west – not visited, but reported on by a consultant interviewed who was working on these matters – were proceeding with partnerships because, in the words of the consultant, they provided a partnership for 'Billy No Mates', ie for heads that did not belong to any collective arrangement at all but felt they needed to be able to have recourse to one in the new polity. In this connection, even where there is support currently, the long term sustainability of these arrangements – and their usefulness - will need studying.

Elected Democracy, Community Democracy and Professional Democracy
Hatcher (2014) provides a critique of the LA-wide school-led partnerships from a governance perspective. They differ in terms of involvement, but, as has just been said, headteachers predominate. This may be a professional democracy, but is not democratic in the usual sense of a wider community having an input into a key public service, as Hatcher says, referring to this as 'depoliticisation' (p368), that is, education is no longer (apparently) a matter of political objectives. Of course, each of the new Regional School Commissioners are also supported by, and are responsible to, boards of elected outstanding headteachers too, in Ofsted terms.

The very notion of 'democratic' was challenged by an interviewee who had worked with free schools. He felt that these schools 'are giving accountability to people in a different sort of way, because… they are created with the support of local parents and they're very much reliant on …parents choosing to send their children to them. (They have) a kind of very close relationship with the school'. After being asked about the traditional operation of a public LA meeting, with public galleries full (perhaps) of people (parents) who disagreed with a potential decision about to be made, his view was that they were possibly, though not necessarily, unrepresentative of a wider public. The processes involved could not guarantee it either way in his view.

This mobilisation model has been utilised by various campaigning organisations, such as the anti-academies alliance, to try and resist (successfully in some cases) the 'forced' academisation of schools that have been identified as 'requiring improvement', or worse. The great force of the campaigning parents' and teachers' argument about compulsory status change is that it has been proposed sometimes *against the wishes of all local people*. And the simple governing body vote necessary for post-2010 convertor academies similarly, sometimes taken allegedly over summer holiday periods according to one interviewee, is quite different from, for example, earlier conversions to grant maintained/foundation status, where two votes were required, plus consultation with parents, and often a public meeting where parents had an opportunity to hear from both 'sides'.

So this sort of argument is that significant change should not be effected without the *agreement* of those directly involved – a hard criterion to meet as even minor decisions such as changes in catchment areas can be hotly contested. There are other issues for local authorities, though. One chief officer did restate the case for the LA as the only democratically-constituted body in an area and therefore the only one legitimately able to develop a local vision for all communities. Leaving aside the arguments about minimal electoral turnout (the author writes as an ex-LA chief officer), the workings of Local

Authorities from day to day, and particularly on the occasion of major decisions (school reorganisations plans, planning new places, etc), can be criticised, with the move from Committees in the late 1990s. A large deliberative visible meeting, where votes may be taken on a major decision by elected representatives, with members of the community in the gallery watching them do it, is quite different from the Cabinet member announcing his decision at a regular calendared and announced meeting.

And with the advent of mayors, matters have changed again. In one of the urban authorities in which a private sector consultant interviewed was working, the elected mayor had retained all executive power to himself, so even Cabinet meetings were not deliberative, leaving Cabinet and full Council to advise on nearly all matters except the budget and individual planning decisions. At one of the LAs visited, the mayor was of a different party from the Cabinet and so did not speak at all at Cabinet meetings, yet still had executive power. There may be an argument to be made for Cabinet and Mayoral government, but it is not one about open democracy.

One of the mechanisms for holding executive members and local government to account is through the so-called scrutiny commissions. In the south west LA where a private sector consultant was working, the Children's Services Commission had taken expert evidence on the future role of the LA in relation to schools and published a lengthy report setting out its aspirations. This document shows little input from schools, though some members were governors, and headteachers were reportedly ignorant of the document and, indeed, did not wish to be told what their role was by the LA, as it was reported. There appeared to be a classic 'legitimation crisis' (Cooke and Muir, 2012) here for the LA – not for the first time in the past 25 years, of course - which was echoed in all the LAs visited and, possibly, even in those visited by Crossley-Holland and Crossley. Even the Local Government Association (2013) recognises there is some crisis in democracy, specifically in England.

Secondary schools and LAs
History appears now to have moved on with respect to secondary schools and LAs and possibly will never be reversed. *All* the secondary heads interviewed for this research made comments along the lines that one colleague made, that 'the LA can no longer offer us anything in this school', which was not intended to be negative. By this was meant there was no one on the LA's staff any more to whom the heads and their senior leadership teams could turn for strategic advice and support (my phrase). One head referred to the 'hollowing out' of the 'middle of' the local authority, leaving a large 'senior layer', as he put it, with very high salaries and 'strange job titles', referring to the Strategic Directors in his Authority. The 'middle' referred to those senior staff with experience of senior management of secondary schools. Indeed, school improvement teams, even where these contained seconded staff, had been shrunk considerably since 2010, partly in response to severe budget cuts and partly because of strategic reviews of purpose and direction.

The heads were also asked about the role of elected members and whether they had any presence in schools. There were a number of comments about the 'quality' as one head said of elected members; another said that 'when you get beyond the few key

people' who were senior members of the councils, this 'quality' was 'very poor', although satisfying secondary heads has never been an explicit criterion for achieving democratic office of course! Some had politicians as governors and others had experience of planning and traffic decisions and the like which seemed to be motivated, they said, by party politics. These were unfavourable comments, but some heads still wanted some elected body to have some oversight of their area, or 'place'. However, one academy said his school was 'just trying to say' to the LA 'work with us, not fight us', not always successfully.

There was a varying litany of more detailed complaints, some, as the author knows well from professional experience, not new. These criticisms were strongest from academy heads, but by no means confined to them. They included many complaints about the size of annual PFI payments to the Special Purpose Vehicles set up to manage contracts (far too high, though the author will follow up some of these figures), what were regarded as unjust priorities for building work, and a lack of involvement generally in strategic decision making in their areas (for example over the development of a local community hub that would affect a particular head's school and, everywhere, Building Schools for the Future). It would seem largely that old issues about children's services and joint working are dead: universally, secondary heads complained about the 'we know best' attitude of some LA staff (social workers, service managers and youth workers, where they still existed). And, as a private sector consultant working with secondary schools said, elected members are 'essentially irrelevant' to their work.

All these heads were asked by the interviewer about their School Improvement Partners (SIPs); many had high opinions of them and considered them important in their own 'improvement journeys' (a common phrase actually); they were not regarded as LA staff or even associates (surely this was the intention of the Labour Government too [DCSF, 2007, 2008, 2009]). Some SIPs, or even ex-School Improvement Advisers, were undertaking paid work with individual schools or groups of schools. The author is undertaking some further work with individuals working with schools as part of their portfolio.

These negative comments were made by all headteachers nominated by LA officers, including those likely to give 'alternative' or 'individual' views of the way the LA and wider polity were developing, and who had not opted for converter status after the 2010 election (though all were considering it now). There might also have been some further and corresponding changes over the period 2010-4 in some London Boroughs. A consultant doing work there reported that heads had been involved in the reorganisation of a West London Borough's school improvement service, following a strategic review just after the 2010 election. After options had been agreed, however, after, as always, some delay, there was marked reluctance on the part of the heads to be involved in strategic management bodies of LA services (different from the LA-wide partnerships reviewed by Hatcher, 2014), including in making new staff appointments.

Although this was not quite mirrored in the LAs visited, this reluctance did reflect a developing view of the LA as a non-privileged provider of services, just one among many, although some outsourced ex-LA services are reported to be doing well commercially

(eg Oxfordshire, Devon and Surrey), according to another private sector consultant. The balance of these particular services will be investigated further by the author.

Primary heads and LAs
Primary heads did not take the same sorts of view, even when they had gone down the converter route and were now academies. Many of the positive statements they made, however, related to the reported quality of individual members of LA staff, who were still around or now independent, and who had given highly valued professional support and advice in the past and were continuing to do so. Often, but by no means always, these staff had been primary heads or deputies. It seems that LAs had done more pump-priming work for primary than secondary schools everywhere visited and this was appreciated. Although primary heads may 'have less time to think about these things' as one consultant said, most said that local geographical clustering was invaluable and, perhaps, more important than any support they now received from the LA.

Not all said this, however, and clearly clustering is weaker in some geographical areas than others. One head in a shire county reported how the academisation and incorporation of a primary school into a Multi-Academy Trust had weakened local collaboration because of the renewed emphasis on competition in an area of falling rolls, an issue raised more often by secondary school heads. However, this head also said he appreciated the advice from the LA in making some of the strategic choices necessary in a rapidly changing set of national organisational arrangements. This head may have had privileged access to LA officers as he was chair of the local primary heads' association.

2. **Partnership working and school-to-school relationships**
   The reviews of LA-wide school partnerships in Aston *et al* (2013), to which the various visits by consultants Crossley-Holland and Crossley contributed, provide some evidence that LAs were trying to encourage school-led mechanisms for enabling school-to-school support for continuing improvement.

   One of the LAs visited for this research had pioneered the development of 'learning communities' for such a purpose that were based on geographically-based clusters. It provided time-limited funding (now finished) whereby each of the learning communities had a Director whose salary was paid. In addition, within each learning community, the LA pump-primed 'hub schools' that had been developed to take a lead in a particular area, eg literacy or IT, based on particular identified expertise. At the same time, three of the LA's secondary schools were funded (£50,000 each) to take a lead in English, Maths or Science, all an obvious focus for Specialist Leaders of Education. These developments, according to an LA senior officer, had helped the schools develop into Teaching Schools, of which there were eight in the Borough, all of which were now outstanding in Ofsted terms. According to the same LA officer, the intention of these developments had been to 'put ourselves out of business'. In addition to budget reductions, the rest of the LA school support services had been outsourced and incorporated into an Independent Provident Society, now responsible for meeting its own costs.

Primary heads in this Borough said that now there was sufficient 'commonality' in these learning communities to know what they were 'buying into' (this was the head of a primary academy speaking), while recognising that the 'elephant in the room', as he put it, was money, especially after the LA pump-priming had finished: 'people will only buy into it if they see what sort of impact it was going to have', but this head's particular learning community had 'specific frames of work' that *were* worth buying into, both for 'maintained' schools and academies. These cluster arrangements had gone through a process of development to the extent that they had similar understandings of what needed to be done.

The secondary heads interviewed in this Borough were also positive about the learning communities ('they're a great thing to have') but regarded them as primarily focused on primary schools and their joint development, which they recognised as being in their own long term interest (is this Hargreaves' [2012] collective moral purpose?). However, the heads, although contributing financially and sometimes in staff time to their particular learning community, did not themselves think they got much out of it for their own schools' development. And however broadly a cluster of primary schools is focused, secondary schools in urban areas, like this one, draw from a much wider group. One of the academies draws its year 7 from up to 30 schools each year.

Primary clustering in the sense of this metropolitan borough's learning communities did not seem to exist to the same extent in the other LAs visited and such data was not gathered in sufficient detail from the NfER studies (Aston *et al*) – or at least reported as such - to make a judgment possible. Whereas primary heads elsewhere discussed good relationships with neighbouring schools and regular meetings, sometimes with, for example, such things as joint Maths days, they did not report the richness of discussion about classroom practice that this Borough seemed to have enabled, at least to judge from the snapshots given here by the heads interviewed.

Secondary heads reported working in a variety of collaborative arrangements – 'belonging' is not an appropriate word here in the sense it was for primary schools. Most likely, the issue lying behind the development of LA-wide partnerships is precisely how this 'deeper' level of collaboration could be developed. Partnering arrangements were common, especially when the head was a National Leader of Education. From these schools emerged a picture of some longer term pairing whereby senior leaders in other schools were mentored and supported in developing improvement plans. And Specialist Leaders of Education, mainly subject leads, did the same for their counterparts, often providing INSET for whole departments.

All the secondary heads interviewed were involved in arrangements of this type; all except one were heads of outstanding schools. Some of the arrangements had been developed formally, for example, after another school was found to be requiring improvement (RI) or worse, at the behest of the DfE or request of the local authority. Others had arisen from informal approaches and, in one case, this was done by a SIP. One of the academies – an early converter and one of the 100+ schools approached by the former Coalition Secretary of State before the 2010 election – was clearly at the

centre of wide, *varying* (and in the author's judgment, very rich) professional networks. There was not one prime partnership.

All the secondary heads had some straightforwardly simple descriptions of the areas that schools need to address in order to be of high quality and improve what they offered children. All of them, however, described their model of working as collaborative, that is, it was not seen to be a 'take over' and all said how much they could learn themselves as a staff from such support and mentoring arrangements. However, this was not the model adopted by the DfE, one academy head said regretfully. There is clearly some more research to do on this; the notion of 'joint practice development' in the Hargreaves papers (2010 etc) is intended to be collaborative rather than hierarchical, with the notion of embedding different practices depending on the teacher taking responsibility for the change, not the 'change agent' or senior partner imposing them. This of course does not mean a challenge free relationship – for both parties.

Two heads of academy chains were interviewed for this paper and their documents and plans examined. When these chains had been approached to help with a school, even when just 'requiring improvement', it was usual to 'put in' a new principal and, sometimes, heads of faculty. In one of the chains, a medium sized one, this new principal was commonly either an existing principal or assistant principal within the chain (they were all employees of the same organisation), and new head of faculty an existing head of subject; in the large national chain there was more of a mix of approaches. There was not a common employer there. Both chains, however, laid great store on a good improvement plan; performance management of the new principal was seen as a key mechanism for improvement, and members of staff of both the chains were involved in lesson observation.

Given that the expectation of a self-improving system is that expertise is found within the network of schools to support improvement - and especially help schools that *require* improvement (RI) - the development of the appropriate and skilled capacity to do this is clearly crucial, now that this does not exist anywhere else, especially in LAs. Joint practice development requires the supporting member of staff to be present in the classroom(s) of the supported. Without funding, this is very difficult for primary schools with less room for manoeuvre in their budgets. One of the primary heads interviewed, who had been appointed under the fresh start arrangements, and had overseen his school develop to achieve outstanding status, said at first there was little interest in what the school had done, but, via the National College, aspiring heads came to visit through the then NPQH scheme. As a result, he had developed a system of 'learning walks' whereby other schools could send staff to learn about what his school was doing well. This is clearly going to be one of the great challenges for a self-improving system.

The secondary heads reported a variety of arrangements. One, still head of a 'maintained' school, had been funded by the LA for one year to work with another school in the same town. This had enabled the joint practice development as described by Hargreaves, with some of his staff, including at the middle and most senior level, to spend considerable amounts of time in the other school. The funding then stopped, but

the job was not yet 'done', according to this head, so the support requirements fell more on his own senior staff.

The most developed system – and enabled by the extra funding made available by academy conversion, according to the school's head - involved appointing an extra member to the school leadership team which then enabled the head and other deputies and assistant heads to be out of this urban school without undue worry. This arrangement also allowed some succession planning, in the sense that increasing numbers of schools (especially in the chains) were beginning to think about where the next generation of school leaders was to come from and, so, they were 'growing their own', as one chain head said. In this particular school, however, to enable the heads of faculty to do their support as Specialist Leaders of Education, they were provided with at least half a day a week off timetable (the crucial issue for classroom teachers), to enable support work at other schools to take place or INSET provided during the day (a particularly important issue for this head – when the 'teachers are not tired'). Again, according to him, this was enabled through the extra funding due to academy status.

So currently, some secondary schools, especially when their heads have become National Leaders of Education, have developed ways of providing the time necessary for 'joint practice development'. Its quality cannot be judged here, except by the reported changing Ofsted status outcome of some of the supported schools. The chains visited were also able to provide some of this capacity, but it is doubtful whether all chains have this capacity, or even the quality of leadership necessary, to undertake this sort of work across the chain, to judge from some DfE interventions (eg into EAct and AET). And one of the private sector consultants was also of the view that 'there is nothing there' in some of the chains – a major problem for developing the capacity required to move towards the self-improving system.

Further, although partnership arrangements are developing nationally, again to judge from these snapshots, it is probably very uneven (this is backed up by Simkins *at al*, 2014) and LAs are playing more minor roles. Really significantly, particularly in terms of the issues to be considered in the next section, it must be understood that, first, most heads are not involved in the new arrangements discussed here for improvement because they have already achieved a good or outstanding status. There were mixed views about the involvement of headteachers in partnerships – *vide* the comment made about 'Billy No Mates' above – but it is most unlikely that all arrangements are of the 'deep' nature with which Hargreaves (2012b) is concerned. And of course, especially at secondary, schools are involved in a variety of partnerships.

It will be interesting to study whether the new Ofsted criterion under 'leadership and management' in the revised Ofsted Handbook (2014b), 'how effectively the school works in partnership with other schools, early years providers, external agencies and the community (including business) to improve the school, extend the curriculum and increase the range and quality of learning opportunities for pupils' (p44)… will encourage schools to move towards more systematic partnership arrangements.

There is an issue here too though, given the lower frequency of inspection now in outstanding schools, about who observes them. This is not a new concern, but was mentioned by several LA officers in connection with the perceived limitations of the Ofsted risk assessment.

3. **Mechanisms for raising standards in the new polity**
The three arms of the local state
When these interviews began, three local 'players' were emerging as the important local arms of the national state in terms of school improvement and shaping school provision more generally. The first was and oldest was Ofsted, the second the Office of the Schools Commissioner and the third was now what is called the National College for Teaching and Leadership. All three have been involved in the developing story of the polity since then.

The major focus of interview discussions in 2013 was on what happened to schools found to be requiring improvement, or with serious weaknesses, or requiring special measures (both of these latter the components of the overall score of 4), or with poor data outcomes. Primarily, concerns were reported by senior LA officers in terms of 'forced academisation' with, at that time, the staff now generally known as 'school brokers' visiting schools with poor inspection reports or outcomes to discuss conversion. Sometimes this had been without the knowledge of the LA but, by later in the academic year, this had been resolved, and such visits were made with the LA's knowledge at least. It should be born in mind, however, that some LAs had been encouraging all their schools to become academies from 2010 onwards.

Crucial to addressing any school finding itself in this situation, however, is the need for an improvement plan and, preferably, for some intervention or support before matters reached such a crisis point, if that is what it has become. For 'maintained' schools, the trajectory, it has been expected, should have been monitored by the LA which could then put in place the plan. LAs maintain a range of data in addition to that available to schools themselves through RAISEonline or Fisher Family Trust data, including about admissions, financial performance, community matters, parental complaints, child safety records and other issues that, for example, trade unions may speak to them about. They also have some of this for existing academies, but the national DfE Agency, the Education Funding Agency, has this formal responsibility.

An example of some of the difficulties of the current arrangements was given by a senior LA officer who expressed his concern that an academy in one of the towns in the LA's area had reached a crisis with a staff vote of no confidence in the headteacher, yet the LA had been aware of a number of developments over a longer period that culminated in this vote, including some concerning parents of children with special educational needs or a disability. The LA raised concerns directly with the academy (without response), and then formally with the Secretary of State, without, according to this officer, any outcome. The LA would have intervened earlier with a 'maintained' school he said.

LAs have been seeking the wider power to 'challenge underperforming academies and free schools' (LGA, 2014:12) to help counter this. LAs asked for clarification from the DfE about their statutory duties in general this year, but more specifically with regard to academies and free schools, as a result of national consultation on the future of the Education Service Grant for the last year before the general election in 2015 (DfE, 2014b). They obliged with a new annex to their response (DfE, 2014c) which makes it clear that *LAs have none*, giving rise to the possible notion of 'two (or more) polities' for schools, depending on the status of governance or Ofsted category. This is considered further below.

With respect to a 'maintained' school then, the LA is expected to monitor and to intervene when necessary. The national expectation that they would intervene through 'brokerage', that is, putting the school in touch with organisations able to provide support, which may be its own outsourced services, other schools or individuals within them, another LA, or, according to the intended national pattern, a Teaching School Alliance. If an LA does not do this – which is what Ofsted clearly expects for example (2013), and certainly Her Majesty's Chief Inspector – then the local National College member of staff could nominate an organisation or individual, and the Office of the School Commissioner would approve the arrangements on behalf of the DfE.

An Ofsted provider said that their inspection teams had noticed that in some LAs, outsourcing had just been about saying 'get on with it' to another organisation, and there were few people left who knew much about schools. Commissioning there became somewhat of a hollow process according to this person. Some LAs 'knew (next to) nothing' about their schools now and might only allocate a day's staff time once a year if the school was not in crisis.

However, and in this connection, there are two significant and relevant changes instituted recently by Ofsted, to which the author was alerted by an Ofsted Inspection provider, LA officers *and* headteachers. The first is that the Regional Ofsted establishment now includes a regional HMI team, which is expected to maintain good working relationships with LAs (attested to in all the LAs visited) but which also, significantly, has commenced support and development work with schools requiring improvement. There is some conflict here, as pointed out by a number of interviewees: if Ofsted provided the support, Ofsted would be inspecting its own work.

The regional Ofsted inspection providers raised this with HMCI, according to one of them, and so it has been agreed that HMI will inspect those schools that have had HMI support - but it would be different HMIs. This evidence is interesting in the light of other comments made by LA officers and schools. A universal distinction is now made between 'HMI', who are the salaried, permanent Inspectors, of whom nothing but favourable comments were made by interviewees, and 'Ofsted', who are the experienced additional inspectors (AIs) employed on a contract basis by the three regional providers (SERCO, CfBT and Tribal). There is a common issue here as well: these contracted teams were universally described as of varying quality. This came from senior LA officers, heads and heads of academy chains. This has also had a lot of airing recently in the educational press (eg TES, 2014). As one senior officer explained: 'an HMI team

will have been working with an RI (requiring improvement) school and will then decide that they are ready for a Section 5 (inspection) because they are considered good. The inspection team then comes and reads the data differently, saying the school is still RI'.

There are some interesting issues here that the author has been following up since the original interviews, though this work has not finished. One is that the follow-up inspection, according to one inspection provider interviewed, would be HMI (as mentioned above), not AI. It may be the case, the author was also told that, with short (now in some cases no) notice inspections and the simplified format of reports, schools would not be clear about the status of the members of the team visiting them. However, the head of a large rural school, inspected during 2013, pointed out that the CVs of all the members of the inspecting team were made available to the school.

Other issues are that Ofsted have now decided to train all inspectors themselves (this is done by the providers currently) and to take all the contracts in house from September 1st, 2015 – except for early years. At the time of writing, a private sector change management consultancy was holding a two day event with providers and senior Ofsted staff at the end of which there would be an action plan.

A significant different finding was that none of the LA officers or heads had anything much to say about the National College. One chief officer thought 'we had had some contact', but she and her colleagues could not identify it. Officers in another LA and one academy head were also sceptical about the quality of the selection process for National Leaders of Education, given some of their experiences of joint work. This may be further followed up, but the local presence was not felt at all in the three LAs visited.

A new round of academy conversions?
In the light of the DfE's expressed view that only the Department would monitor academies and free schools itself (2014c), the developments in the Office of the Schools Commissioner are perhaps most significant. Eight Regional Schools Commissioners have been appointed to take up post during the autumn of 2014. Two of them have been interviewed as part of this research, though one had not been appointed as such at the time of interview. It is intended that the RSCs, with their small local teams, but drawing on the wider Department, will discharge the DfE responsibilities primarily for academies and free schools in the first instance. This is something it is felt that the Education Funding Agency could not do adequately, and whose competence to do so has been questioned by the National Audit Office (2014) - and also one of the academy chain heads interviewed.

The evidence for the following comments comes from interviews, a letter sent out by Frank Green, the Schools Commissioner, to headteachers on April 2nd, 2014, and internal briefing documents produced by DfE officials. These will not be referenced to ensure the source remains anonymous. The RSC teams, advised by an elected panel of outstanding (academy) headteachers, now elected following the votes of 1600 headteachers, and given some release for the purpose, will review data from the DfE on all academies and free schools, including performance data and Ofsted outcomes, and will then look to put underperforming academies and free schools in touch with

Teaching School Alliances and other providers, including 'maintained' schools if appropriate, to ensure that an appropriate intervention is 'prescribed'. This could be by arranging a different 'sponsor' for example: the RSCs have to ensure there are enough 'high quality sponsors to meet local need'. One of the new developments is to have one-school sponsors, according to the head of an existing academy who is engaged in some of the wide range of partnerships described above. His school might be one: this development could provide a formality to what are sometimes informal arrangements currently, some of which have been described above.

But the crucial issue is that the RSCs will take decisions on the creation of new academies (and make recommendations on new free school proposals). The DfE will continue to monitor all schools, the data from which will be available to RSCs, and the RSCs will be able to draw on the Regional Ofsted 'risk assessments' in between inspections, again of all schools. As it was expressed in interview to the author, where a 'maintained' school is underperforming, the RSC would work with LAs and would be happy if an adequate action plan was in place. However, there will be 'no hanging about'; the expectation is that improvement would be 'rapid' (within a year) and that if an action plan did not enable this, the RSC would look at alternatives. These will include academisation, possibly in association with what will be a much wider group of sponsor schools.

So in this sense, this is not quite Lawn's 'systemless system' (2013), and Simkins *et al* (2014) prefer the term 'landscape'. There remain two ways in which schools will be monitored, reviewed and subjected to intervention, but the RSCs and their teams will be making the decision on the adequacy of the arrangements. Improvement, including that in the equity of outcomes, will be pursued by academy conversion if the LA route does not work quickly.

Further discussion and summary of conclusions at this stage of the research
Wider Applicability
These interviews provide a snapshot of what seems to be happening currently in the development of the Education Polity in England that is likely to be in place by 2015 at the time of the next General Election. Although the three LAs are quite different from each other and in different parts of the country, they could not automatically be assumed to be representative. However, taken together with Simkins *et al* (2014), Hatcher (2014), and the studies cited published via the NfER (Aston *et al*, 2013), there are certain findings that can be assumed to apply more widely:

- There is a hugely varied pattern of provision emerging nationally in the 'landscape' for schools;
- Some of this reflects different approaches being taken by LAs towards partnership activity, but many arrangements have been school- or indeed DfE-initiated (or in one case by a SIP);
- LAs seem to be the very minor partners in all these arrangements, or not partners at all;
- Because of the nature of some of the partnerships (eg large LA wide), they cannot be assumed to be providing the deep and strategic partnerships

considered essential for joint practice development by Hargreaves (2012b) or improving schools by drawing on support available locally. These depend on establishing relationships of trust with people you begin to know on a sustained basis. This seems unlikely routinely across a whole LA;

- Secondary schools no longer look for routine day to day support from LAs, though the diminishing number of 'maintained' ones may by subject to an LA-brokered intervention plan, which may anyway involve academisation;
- The picture is more mixed for primary schools. In some LAs, collaborative arrangements have been pump primed and appear to be valued;
- The leadership responsibility within the Education Polity is being given to headteachers, and not teachers, parents, governors, wider community groups or indeed elected members of LAs.

Other conclusions

There are a number of other conclusions that can be drawn at this stage, however, after reflection on these interviews and policy documentation. These are:

- Some school to school support arrangements are valued by all the schools involved;
- There is a preference for collaborative, mutually learning arrangements between schools working together, even where pairing has been between one which is outstanding and the other one requiring improvement. Some rich veins of activity were discovered in this context. This fits with Hargreaves' views, but, according to one academy head, is not the model being 'pushed' by the DfE;
- Given that LAs are no longer the drivers of change for school collaboration and improvement, it remains to be seen whether LA-wide partnerships will be sustainable. Where there is clear identification with place, for example, in a town or city, this may be easier because headteachers may be committed to developing a vision for it. In large, for example, counties, this may prove more difficult. In the large county visited, there had been no effort to build such a partnership. In any case, these are not bodies with day-to-day capacity but are more about governance;
- Capacity remains a key issue for school-to-school working. A number of ways of doing this were identified as part of this research, including additional appointments to leadership teams, building time into Senior Leader's timetables to allow support work in other schools, and developing open days for learning walks from other schools. This appears to be easier in academies as a consequence of their receiving the extra funding, though funding was only cited once as a reason for seeking convertor status;
- Potentially, leaving aside their championing families and children responsibilities (DfE 2010a; 2014c), LAs could continue to offer services in a variety of traded services, including to academies, but there may be questions over their long term viability. One of these services is data. All of the LAs offer at least an annual review of data to schools, including academies, but in only one do academies take up this offer. This is in an LA with a long tradition of low intervention;
- The democratic credentials and legitimacy of LAs are under challenge, not for the first time in the past generation. Leaving aide Hatcher's (2014) arguments about the headteacher-driven partnerships, which have varied involvement from the

LA, including elected members, the democratic practice and quality of LAs was challenged by headteachers, some LA officers and others. Criticisms included the lack of open, public deliberative decision making, lack of involvement in decision making, the alleged poor understanding (and in some cases) interest in schools of elected members and criticisms of a range of (in headteachers' views) poor local decisions that had affected their schools badly. These latter were not made just by academy heads;

- In terms of improvement, the significant organisations locally are Ofsted and the Office of the Schools Commissioner; the National College did not feature at all in any of the three LAs. The appointment of the eight Regional Schools Commissioners, with their own support teams, and drawing on the wider resources of the DFE, may increase the pace of academisation with new sponsors (sometimes single schools) especially at secondary level. But RSCs are also expected to engage with 'maintained' schools, via LAs. They will be assisted in this by the new headteacher boards, all of whom have some release time.

Interim conclusions on equity

There is not the space within this paper to do justice to this wide issue, but the basic considerations are restated as follows. School attainment differences, and occupational trajectories, are deeply embedded in the social and economic structures of our society, as has been discussed. Nevertheless, socio-economic differences seem to be more pronounced in England than in other developed countries (OECD, 2010) and these vary by ethnic background. At the same time, the Coalition has claimed it wishes to see the attainment 'gap' closed as a result of its school reforms (as opposed to seeing it narrow under the Labour Government) (Whitty and Anders, 2013).

Given the major policy upheavals attendant upon academisation and the related declining role of the LA with respect to its school improvement work – as attested to by the evidence gathered for this paper - it seems a reasonable success criterion for Coalition policy that the pattern of reform will indeed help bring about such a change.

All conclusions would have to be interim on this matter. There does not appear to have been any *narrowing* of the gap to date (DfE, 2014a), so the question is whether the new mechanisms for supporting school development, and intervening when improvement does not seem to be sufficient or fast enough, will increase any pace of change. The basic motors for change in England depend heavily on leadership interventions, and have done for some time (eg Riddell, 2009), after the identification of failure to meet whatever benchmarks are in place at the time. Key ones at the moment are the floor targets and achieving an Ofsted 'category' – either 'Requires Improvement' (RI) or either of the categories under a score of 4 (serious weaknesses or special measures). This is certainly, as was said earlier, the steering at a distance by data (Ozga, 2009) and fixes the terms of any public debate or, for that matter, professional life.

All interventions described as part of the current arrangements, even where leadership teams are not replaced in whole or part, involve some leadership pairing, even at the gentler end of a mentoring spectrum. All involve some monitoring or performance management of the writing and implementation of an improvement plan (by leadership). So

the responsibility rests almost entirely now on the shoulders of headteachers – particularly as they move towards running the entire system – as it always has done. So any change is about how fast intervention might take place and, therefore, remains as chancy as ever. This will need to be monitored, especially over what is likely to be a key academic year.

Other data and issues to be considered as part of this research
Some of the issues arising from the data have not been dealt with, but will be in further publication. These include:

- the perceived adequacy or inadequacy of current ITE routes and plans, especially in urban areas, with new developments in place in some academy chains;
- new (reported) models of professionalism emerging in academies, apparently giving greater professional discretion to classroom teachers;
- the nature or relevance of the LA data offer;
- more sensible performance management for all staff, with less emphasis on 'showboating' in observed lessons, and more measurement over time of pupil progress (this might reflect current Ofsted consultations on not grading individual lessons, especially when only part 1 has been seen);
- whether what is happening on the ground reflects the Coalition's own characterisation of the existing state of the state.

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