

# A Good Local Education Authority

## Introduction

As the Coalition Government presses on with its second Education Bill in a year, the status of Local Authorities in respect of Education is even less sure than before.

CASE believes that it has become a matter of urgency to spell out the positive role of a Local Education Authority and why it is critical to the development of an effective, comprehensive education system that offers the best – for all children.

## The limitations of “autonomy”

CASE rejects the idea that the right model for community schools, which serve over 90% of the population, should be to become a poor imitation of independent or ‘public’ schools whose defining characteristic is to compete for school fees from the wealthiest and most ambitious parents.

Even the strongest proponents of the doctrine of school autonomy are forced to recognise that a wider support-base is required for small or troubled schools than just its own Headteacher and governors.

Most practitioners concerned with raising standards expect staff to collaborate across as well as within schools to promote best practice and good teaching methods.

Parents value the role of Local Authorities in championing their cause and that of their children in respect of admissions and exclusions by ensuring that procedures have been fairly applied.

We must therefore question why any government should wish to marginalise democratically-elected local authorities in this area?

The Secretary of State for Education’s willingness to take even more personal powers clearly demonstrates that these changes are in no way seeking to make Education a “politics-free zone”.

## The collaborative model

CASE believes that most schools work best when they form part of a “family”, able to offer mutual support and expertise that lie beyond that of its own staff and governors.

We welcome vigorous and independent governing bodies, but long experience shows that their competence and levels of activity wax and wane over time, often depending on relatively small

numbers of keen members. They can also become inward-looking and out-of-date without support.

We strongly believe that governing bodies should represent a balance of stakeholders, particularly parents and staff but also the Local Authority, whether through the local people that it nominates as representatives or via its officers when necessary.

## The role of the local authority

The LA has many other duties and powers apart from education which may impinge upon schools, including child protection, economic regeneration, housing, waste management, waste collection, libraries, social services, transport, planning, licensing. It also maintains links to local employers and Higher Education institutions which can be effective partners.

The Local Authority’s also shares duties with schools under “Every Child Matters”, which are defined as ensuring that children can: *Be Healthy, Stay Safe, Enjoy and Achieve, Make a Positive Contribution* and *Achieve Economic Well-Being*. No argument has been made that these duties are irrelevant or unnecessary.

## Learning from experience

Local Authorities have not always been ideal partners or representatives of the community’s voice.

Local Management of School (LMS) showed how some Headteachers could use devolved resources imaginatively and effectively when freed from excessive bureaucracy. Governing bodies were released from micro-management by Council officers and occasional meddling by Councillors. Minor officials were reminded that they were there to support, not run schools.

However, locally based subject advisory services often became unviable and peer group meetings of subject specialists frequently ceased, with consequent negative effects upon secondary school subject teaching.

Additionally, experience has shown how “autonomous” schools such as Grant Maintained Schools, Academies and Trust Schools may



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sometimes make poor or even corrupt decisions affecting procurement, admissions policies or industrial relations.

CASE believes that a better balance can be struck when the rôles of schools and Local Authorities are clearly defined and complementary.

One way to achieve this is for Local Authorities to offer consistently excellent support. Where it is effective and economic, LAs should work together to provide subject and phase specialists, as well as legal, financial and personnel expertise.

## Characteristics of a good Local Education Authority

Good Local Education Authorities are active partners with schools. They promote higher educational standards and offer rich and rewarding educational experiences to all children and young people that is valued by their communities.

### Strategic

- 1) They provide a strategic framework for planning, monitoring and development.
- 2) They make this strategic framework publicly available in the form of a School Organisation Plan and ensure that it provides a suitable place for every eligible child.
- 3) They develop and maintain a locally-sensitive funding system that provides schools with budgets that meet their needs and also support the development of new or changing schools.
- 4) They make available land and other resources to support school development.

### Services to schools

- 5) They support schools in recruiting appropriate and suitably qualified senior staff, especially Headteachers.
- 6) They provide a local, knowledgeable and consistent approach to monitoring teaching standards and organise networks of professionals to help raise them.
- 7) They broker and monitor cost-effective deals with suppliers that benefit schools collectively.
- 8) They respond to calls for assistance from schools in cases of emergency, such as fire, flood and natural disasters, particularly where there is an urgent need for alternative accommodation or additional transport.

- 9) They work with schools to develop and deliver those services which schools are not individually well-placed to deliver for reasons of economy of scale, the need for specific expertise or infrequency of use.

### Services to the community

- 10) They act as champions for the rights of parents and pupils in general and in particular by running an effective and impartial admissions system.
- 11) They work with other agencies to provide social and medical support for children at risk.
- 12) They manage school exclusions in collaboration with schools to minimise the disruption to pupils' education.
- 13) They ensure that special educational needs are assessed in a professional and timely way and make provision to meet the identified needs.
- 14) They monitor and plan the educational transfers of children and young people with learning difficulties or physical disabilities and develop special educational needs policies
- 15) They conduct objective and transparent consultations in respect of current and future educational provision.
- 16) They broker use of those school facilities which can provide benefits to the community and make community facilities available to schools where appropriate.
- 17) They arrange and co-ordinate cultural events and experiences to enrich the education of pupils and their families.
- 18) They work with Headteachers and governing bodies to minimise social conflict and criminality.

### Governance

- 19) They provide information, training and advice to school governors on the discharge of their responsibilities.
- 20) They contribute representatives to school governing bodies to link them to the local community.

Feedback on this document is welcome. You can contact CASE by post c/o 98 Erlanger Road, London, SE14 5TH or by email at [contact@campaignforstateeducation.org.uk](mailto:contact@campaignforstateeducation.org.uk)

Our website is: [www.campaignforstateeducation.org.uk](http://www.campaignforstateeducation.org.uk)

*CASE has been campaigning on education issues for over 40 years and relies entirely on membership fees to fund its activities.*