

CAUGHT IN THE ACT CONFERENCE – 19 NOVEMBER 2011

Presentation notes: Sam Ellis

There are some key expectations placed on secondary schools which are more fundamental than whether or not they are setting by ability, encouraging pupils to take courses leading to an “English Bacc” or operating as a state funded independent institution. These more fundamental expectations include:-

- pupils are taught in classes,
- for around 25 hours per week,
- by a qualified teacher,
- organised mostly chronologically.

In addition to these four there is the idea of parental choice which could be interpreted as putting schools in a market place where there is overcapacity to allow for pupil movement between schools.

These points are independent of any curriculum discussion or any decision about how one might group or select pupils for different schools or groups within schools.

The underlying reality for all schools is that they have to be financially viable. The current fiscal climate of frozen per pupil funding for 5 to 16 with the exception of an increasing pupil premium and of reducing post 16 funding means a real terms cut for most institutions. This is explained in detail in the Institute for Fiscal Studies Briefing Note 121 “Trends in Education and Schools Spending”, Haroon Chowdrey & Luke Sibieta, October 2011.

The combined effect of a cut in real terms, the increasing demand on schools and the speed of change associated with the academy and free schools agenda has produced a very uncertain climate for many institutions. There is a real risk that some schools and LA’s may reach a tipping point beyond which they can no longer deliver the basic expectation outlined above and remain financially viable.

The tipping point for a school can be calculated in terms of three numbers. A simple calculation using the revenue funding per pupil, the proportion of the funding available for teaching expenditure and the average teacher cost produces the pupil to teacher ratio the school can afford. It is simple to compare that to the pupil teacher ratio a school needs to operate in the most basic manner described by the four bullet points above. It is almost inevitable that some schools will find themselves on the wrong side of this simple piece of mathematics. Discussions about standards, super-heads, the English Baccalaureate and education practice we should import from others have no impact on the mathematics. There is a simple conclusion.

If,

a school’s budget proportion available for teaching falls too far

or

the average teacher cost rises beyond a certain point

or

the “Quantum” and/or distribution formula result in a per pupil level that is below a certain value

Then either

- the school goes down financially
- Or
- Class teaching, with a qualified teacher, in a chronological structure stops.

There are tools available from the ASCL website to support schools in trying to anticipate and avoid the tipping point.

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