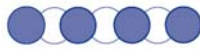


CLES Bulletin is a topical summary of an issue which has recently emerged. Its aim is to provide a pithy précis of the issue, thus creating a quick and easy to read document which directs to more detailed material, if required.

CLES Bulletin No. 37
A New Focus: Children and Young People

CLES BULLETIN





Introduction

In the last couple of years the Labour Government have sought to develop key policies and interventions around children and young people in an effort to narrow the gap between the most deprived in society and the rest of the population. The Government has recognised that there are a number of issues that young people in the United Kingdom encounter in their everyday lives that impact upon their development, quality of life and integration with their peers and with wider society. In recognising the issues such as crime, health, education and inclusion, that Young People face, the Government is looking to develop young people in ways that will eventually develop into a healthy and skilled workforce. The present focus on children and young people covers a wide range of Government Agendas as well as a number of specific policy interventions. Government Agendas, include a key focus on children and young people in schooling, higher education, sporting, arts and skills agendas. Another focus of the Government's third term is its radical Respect Agenda, which is heavily focused on young people and addressing issues around anti-social behaviour, intergenerational mistrust, and community inclusion. As regards specific policies, three key policies in relation to children and young people have emerged:

- ***Every Child Matters*** – this paper, released in Autumn 2003, sets out proposals for reforming the delivery of services for children, young people and their families.
- ***Youth Matters*** - this paper released in Spring 2005 sets out proposals for engaging, encouraging, informing and providing support for teenagers in the United Kingdom.
- ***Higher Standards, Better Schools For All*** – this White Paper released in Autumn 2005 sets out the Governments proposals to transform the schools system in England so that every child receives an excellent education regardless of their background and where they live.

Each of the three policies seeks to sustain and further improve the progress made since 1997. The purpose of this bulletin is to:

- To identify the issues affecting children and young people in the United Kingdom today;
- To look in more detail at the three policy interventions that have emerged since 2003;
- To assess the role of local authorities and other stakeholders in delivering priorities and services for children and young people;
- To critique the proposals identified in the White Paper from a regeneration perspective and summarise the bulletin.

The Key Issues

The Labour Government can point to a number of achievements that have contributed to improving the lives of children and young people in a number of themes. These include:

- Young people learning more – 53.7% of pupils in 2003 achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C;
- Some health sectors improving – smoking among young people aged 11-15 years has fallen from 13% in 1996 to 9% in 2004;
- Young people contributing more – 45% of 16-24 year olds participate at least once a month in informal volunteering.

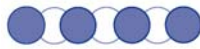
Despite these achievements there are a number of issues that continue to affect children and young people in the United Kingdom:

Education – there are key disparities in educational attainment across a number of sectors of the population:

- Children and young people living in deprived areas underachieve in education when compared to those from more affluent areas.
- Disabled children have far lower levels of educational attainment than their peers.
- There are significant differences in educational attainment, between young people from different ethnic groups.
- Truancy levels remain high.

Health – there have been marked improvements in the health of younger children in recent years, but:

- Health problems in the key areas of sexual health, obesity, alcohol, substance abuse and mental health amongst teenagers is worsening.



- Binge drinking and drugs abuse is an increasing problem amongst 13-19 year olds.
- Obesity, especially in younger children, is also becoming an increasing issue.

Crime – anti-social behaviour is becoming increasingly common amongst young people:

- 1700 young people received an anti-social behaviour order between April 1999 and April 2004.
- The volume of anti-social behaviour and crime for which young people are responsible is also significant, with upwards of one third of crime being committed by 13-19 year olds.
- As well as being perpetrators of crime and anti-social behaviour, young people are more likely than any other sector of the population to be victims of crime.

Living Environment and community – the housing, housing conditions and physical environment that young people live in have key impacts on everyday aspects of their lives:

- Living in cramped, overcrowded conditions has knock-on effects, for example educational attainment and health can be affected.
- Young people are also often stigmatised in their communities as ‘troublemakers’ by elderly sectors of the population.
- Young people are often not as involved in the decisions that affect their communities, as they could be.

Whilst it is useful to look at these key issues thematically, it is also important to ensure that the issues are considered in a joined up manner, and that Government interventions cut across all themes. The next section looks to assess how these issues are being brought together in the shape of specific policies

Policy Interventions

1. Every Child Matters

The aim of Every Child Matters is ‘to ensure that every child has the chance to fulfil their potential by reducing levels of educational failure, ill health, substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, abuse and neglect, and crime and anti-social behaviour among

children and young people’. Every Child Matters^{1/2} is based on consultation with children, young people and their families and this is reflected in the five outcomes:

- **Be Healthy** – enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle;
- **Stay Safe** – being protected from harm and neglect;
- **Enjoying and Achieving** – getting the most out of life and developing the skill for adulthood;
- **Making a Positive Contribution** – being involved with the community and society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour;
- **Economic well-being** – not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life.

Every Child Matters comes with an array of attached programmes and initiatives to attempt to contribute to meeting the five key outcomes. These include:

- **Sure Start Children's Centres**³ – these are to be created in each area that falls within the 20 percent most deprived neighbourhoods in England. These centres look to combine nursery education, family support, employment advice, childcare and health services on one site.
- **Full Service Extended Schools**⁴ – these are to be promoted across England to provide facilities, which are open beyond school hours such as breakfast clubs and after school clubs. As well as providing educational services these should also be integrated with health and social care services for the community on the same site.
- **Young People's Fund**⁵ – this has an initial budget of £200million to increase the focus on activities for children out of school, for example

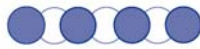
¹ HM Treasury (2003) *Every Child Matters Green Paper*
<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/files/EBE7EEAC90382663E0D5BBF24C99A7AC.pdf>

² For Further Information and other Publications visit the Every Child Matters Website: <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/>

³ For information on Sure Start Children's Centres visit:
<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/earlyyears/surestart/centres/>

⁴ Department for Education and Skills (2003) *Extended Schools: Access to opportunities and services for all- A Prospectus*
<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/doc/8509/Extended-schools%20prospectus.pdf>

⁵ For more information on Young Peoples Fund visit:
<http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/programmes/ypf/>



contributing to the funding of arts activities or local sports clubs.

2. Youth Matters⁶

The consultation document for Youth Matters sets out Government proposals for young people aged 13-19. Whilst the Government recognises that changes in the economy, in society and in technology mean that young people have far more opportunities than previous generations, there are a minority of young people who encounter serious difficulties in health, education and well-being. Youth Matters is just not about providing more opportunities and support for young people but also reaching a balance that ensures that those least able to take advantage of opportunities are recognised and supported.

Whilst in the last decade a number of publicly funded services for young people have been developed and utilised, such as Connexions and Youth Services, these have come in for a degree of criticism as a result of:

- Not always meeting the needs of individual young people;
- Not working together as imaginatively and effectively as they should;
- Not doing enough to halt a drift by young people into poverty and or crime;
- Failing to exploit the full potential of the internet, mobile phones and other technologies;
- Failure to consult young people on the services provided.

Therefore Youth Matters sets out a new strategy for providing opportunities, challenges and support to young people. The Government vision is to see services integrated around young people's needs helping all teenagers achieve the five Every Child Matters outcomes. The proposals in Youth Matters therefore aim to address four key challenges:

- ***Empowering Young People: Things to do and Places to go*** – the first proposal aims to put young people in control of the things they do and the places they go in their area. The idea is

based on the premise that when young people are involved in activities and are busy, they are less likely to drift into trouble or engage in anti-social behaviour. The Government therefore proposes two measures, which will put power directly in the hands of young people. First, the Government proposes that local authorities develop Opportunity Cards, which would provide discounts on a range of things to do and places to go. Second, the Government proposes an Opportunity Fund for each local authority to spend on local projects that young people want to see made available.

- ***Young People as Citizens: Making a Contribution*** – the second proposal is about encouraging more young people to volunteer and become involved in their communities. As well as setting up a new body tasked with achieving a step change in the level of volunteering amongst young people, the Government also proposes piloting a reward system to further encourage volunteering.
- ***Supporting Choices: Information, Advice and Guidance*** – the third proposal is about providing better support to young people as they make decisions about their careers, education, health and other livelihood issues. The Government proposes in Youth Matters, clear minimum expectations for the advice, information and guidance that young people receive at certain ages and also proposes a continuous ICT service through which young people can easily access national and local information on life choices.
- ***All Young People Achieving: Reforming Targeted Support*** – the fourth proposal is about providing more tailored and intensive support for young people, particularly those who have been involved with the Criminal Justice System or at risk of offending. The Government proposes merging a range of existing Government Programmes so that funding can be used more flexibly and effectively to tackle the needs of young people in a joined up manner.

⁶ HM Government (2005) *Youth Matters*
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/Youth%20matters%20pdf.pdf>



3. Higher Standards, Better Schools For All⁷

The most controversial and contested plans for children and young people, and those bringing the most pressure to bear on the Government are contained in the 'Higher Standards and Better Schools for All' White Paper. The Government believes that good progress has been made with regard education since 1997 but that the reform programme needs to go much further if progress in schools is to be sustained. The White Paper on education sets out plans to improve the school system by putting parents and the needs of their children at the heart of the school system, allowing schools to be innovative and successful and focussing on parent and child choice. The Labour Government is therefore developing a radical new school system whereby:

- Every school will be able to acquire a self-governing Trust similar to those supporting Academies, which will give them freedom to work with new partners to help develop their ethos and raise standards;
- Academies⁸ will remain at the heart of the programme, with continued and new opportunities to develop them in schools and areas of real historical underperformance and underachievement;
- Independent schools will find it easier to enter the new system;
- A national Schools Commissioner will drive change, matching schools and new partners, promoting the benefits of choice, access and diversity, and taking action where parental choices are being frustrated.

Looking at the proposals for Self-Governing Trust schools in more detail, it is proposed that these could have a number of advantages including:

- They could provide a genuinely personalised education, whereby schools are working with parents, children and local communities to drive reform and not central or local government;

- They could have the ability to control their own assets, employ their own staff and set their own admissions criteria;
- There could be a wide range of organisations that may wish to establish trusts in partnership with schools such as neighbourhood groups, local parents or charities.

The Role of Local Authorities in Reforms for Children and Young People

Roles for local authorities and other key local stakeholders can identified in each of the three policy documents on children and young people:

A Partnership Role – the proposals identified in Every Child Matters and Youth Matters present opportunities for local authorities to work closely with public, private and voluntary organisations to improve outcomes for children. Organisations such as the Police and Primary Care Trusts have a new duty to work with local authorities to safeguard children and promote their well-being. Proposals also promote more Community Schools meaning that local authorities can further their relationship with schools and utilise school facilities such as Sports Halls and Playing Fields for wider community use.

Funding Control – the proposals especially in Youth Matters present new funding opportunities for local authorities to tailor services for young people to their requirements and to the local area. The proposals allow local authorities to close down ineffective and unproductive childrens services and free up resources to spend on activities the local children can identify with and contribute towards.

Consultation – the focus on devolving power and funding to local authorities means that there is an opportunity for local authorities to further devolve decision-making to teenagers, their parents and their schools and colleges. Many of the issues faced by young people regard facilities and often the lack of facilities. This leads to young people often committing anti-social behaviour or loitering. The proposals outlined in Youth Matters present the opportunity for young people to drive the facilities and services that are delivered.

⁷ HM Government (2005) *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All*
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/schoolswhitepaper/pdfs/DfES-Schools%20White%20Paper.pdf>

⁸ For Further Information on City Academies visit:
<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/>



Higher Standards, Better Schools for All – A Critical Perspective

The Education White Paper released in October 2005 has drawn a wide degree of criticism from MPs, the political and regeneration press, and schools themselves. This section aims to draw together some of these criticisms from a regeneration perspective:

‘Schools to be ‘freed’ from council control – Public Finance 28/10/2005 (Cles Library 29a36)

This article states that proposals to ‘free’ schools from council control will exacerbate inequalities and frustrate child protection plans. Proposals to hand over assets and admissions will leave schools with the option to pick and choose the children they would like to attend their school. Concerns surround the belief that schools will become more selective in their admissions policy with children selected from more well-off backgrounds at the expense of the more disadvantaged. Proposals to open up options to schooling to a radius of six miles from a child’s home have also been criticised for their failure to comply with the objectives of the Every Child Matters paper. The proposals have also been criticised for their failure to give councils enough clout in schooling delivery. With schools set for their own admissions policy, there is concern that local authorities and other partners will lose out in the relationships they currently have with schools.

‘Plans for Nationwide School Trusts’ – Regeneration and Renewal 28/10/2005

This article also expresses doubts over the proposed formation of Trust Schools and the possible exclusion of children from lower income backgrounds. Trust schools promote the idea of having parent councils helping to make decisions about their schools. However, these proposals have been criticised for primarily potentially attracting parents from middle class families and not sufficiently targeting the participation of poor families.

There has also been criticism of proposals to introduce more academy type independent schools in England. Whilst increases in performance have

occurred in some Academy’s, on the whole the Academy Programme has been expensive. The capital cost of Academies is significantly beyond that of other new schools with capital funding from the DfES ranging so far from £13million to £38million. A number of concerns have emerged from a recent parliamentary paper⁹ on the benefits of Academies including:

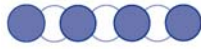
- There is relatively little evidence as to the success of City Academies thus far, yet the Government proposes the further development of 200 more in forthcoming years;
- There is concern that the good results achieved by some academies have come at the price of those children that are harder to reach and reducing the proportion of children in school from deprived backgrounds;
- There is concern over the nature of the sponsors involved in the Academies and the functions of these sponsors.

Conclusion

The Labour Government has in recent years placed a fair degree of importance on policies, programmes and initiatives for children and young people. There are key opportunities for children and young people to become involved in and shape the way in which services and activities are delivered. The new proposals for educational reform however, have received a fair degree of criticism, particularly proposals to give schools greater independence in their admissions policy. There are key concerns that the proposals will in fact widen social inequality with schooling reforms likely to offer schools greater flexibility in their admissions criteria and independence. It has been argued that this could come at the cost of children from more disadvantaged backgrounds, as is already being found in the City Academy programme.

For further information on this topic please contact:

⁹ House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2005) *Education and Skill Fifth Report*
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmeducsk/86/8602.htm>



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