



Centre for Policy Studies

PLANS, PLANS, PLANS

AN EDUCATION POLICY BASED
ON CENTRAL CONTROL

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THE AUTHOR

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION 1

PLANS TO IMPROVE STANDARDS 3

PLANS FOR ORGANISATION AND ACCESS 6

MISCELLANEOUS PLANS 10

THE PLAN FOR PLANS 12

1,000 MAN YEARS 13

THE ROLE OF LEAS 15

CONCLUSIONS 16

APPENDIX I

APPENDIX II

FOREWORD

The intention of the previous Conservative Government's education reforms was to create a diverse range of schools while providing a light, but effective degree of central accountability. Hence the initiatives which gave birth to both Grant Maintained schools and Local Management of Schools were balanced by the creation of a powerful inspectorate (OFSTED), the introduction of the National Curriculum and the publication of performance tables.

One year ago in his Centre for Policy Studies pamphlet, *Levelling Down*, Sean Williams warned that the Labour Government was about to reduce diversity and parental choice in schools to the detriment of standards. He showed, compellingly, how the Schools Standards and Framework Bill (now enacted) would mean decision-making powers were to be taken away even from successful schools and centralised into the hands of LEAs and the DfEE. The Government was planning a return to the "comprehensivisation" of state education. Even successful schools would no longer determine their own admissions policy. The assisted places scheme was to be abolished. Staff numbers – teachers, caretakers and cleaners alike – were to be decided by LEAs, not schools. And the independence of Grant Maintained and religious schools undermined. Pluralism was under attack. An egalitarian, centralising agenda was being pursued which would punish good schools for the sake of equality of outcome. New structures would compromise standards.

The wolf was at the door and Sean Williams was right to cry out about it. That can be the only conclusion that can be drawn from Andrew Povey's excellent analysis of the extraordinary number – seventeen! – of Plans that have been imposed on the education system in the last year. A Kafkaesque paperchase involving a maze of new quangoes has been created which is not only wasteful and undemocratic but potentially devastating to the fragile state education system.

This is not a theoretical argument. The practical consequences of the Government's obsession with equality of outcome are beginning to bite. Three schools in Wandsworth – described by OFSTED as “outstanding” – have just been told by a DfEE-appointed “adjudicator” to reduce selection by up to one half. Two comprehensives in Croydon have been banned from introducing selection for up to 15% of their children by ability. Petitions to trigger ballots forcing grammar schools to abandon selection are expected to start next month in five areas – Medway Towns, Kent, Barnet, Ripon and Trafford. Partial selection could also be swept away in dozens more schools across the country in admissions decisions expected soon in Barnet, Bexley, and Bromley, Derbyshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Northamptonshire and Surrey.

And consider how the Government's appetite for control will effect an excellent school such as the London Oratory. It will lose up to 5% of its budget to its LEA – and as nearly 90% of the budget is spent directly on teachers' salaries the impact on the school's discretionary spending is drastic: either the complement of teachers will have to be reduced, or extra-curricular activities cut, or funds found elsewhere. Its admissions policy now has to comply with a code of practice laid down by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and then has to be agreed, *every year*, with the LEA. Its Junior School teachers must teach literacy and numeracy according to the dictates of a “Strategy” which is, in the opinion of many experts, deeply flawed. A large part of its discretionary funding has to be won through “bids” to the DfEE, making sensible budgeting an impossibility. Weeks of senior teachers' time now has to be spent in committees, or preparing plans, or consulting new quangoes (time which would otherwise, of course, be spent with children). And interference from the LEA permeates every level of its activities.

The Prime Minister sends his children across London to the London Oratory because he knows that this school provides his children with a better education than was available in any of the local state schools in Islington. Yet he and his Secretary of State for Education are overseeing the elimination of Grant Maintained status and the gradual erosion of the financial base of these good schools.

The Government's determination to bring all schools down to the same level while attempting to raise standards through central planning has led to the ridiculous situation whereby it has created the extraordinary web of Plans that Andrew Povey describes in this pamphlet. “Plans everywhere!” seems to be their slogan. Can anyone really believe that all these Plans will improve standards?

Tessa Keswick
Director

SUMMARY

Rt Hon David Blunkett MP, Secretary of State for Education and Employment, recently attacked Local Education Authorities for excessive red-tape and bureaucracy: "Statistics on 148 English education authorities showed too many were wasting money on 'red tape'," he stated in a speech to a meeting of the Local Government Association on 18 June 1999.

'Too many LEAs are wasting money on red tape' – David Blunkett, 18 June 1999

Yet since his appointment two years ago, the Government has introduced 17 different 'Plans' which every Local Education Authority in England and Wales is expected to complete, either by statute or to enable them to bid for extra funds.

The Government has introduced 17 different 'Plans' which every Local Education Authority in England and Wales is now expected to complete

The 17 Plans can be divided into four broad categories:

- Plans to improve standards (the Education Development Plan, the Literacy Plan, the Numeracy Plan, the Information and Communications Technology Plan).
- Plans for School Organisation and Access (the Schools Organisation Plan, the Early Years Development Plan, the Class Sizes Plan, the Special Educational Needs Development Plan, the Lifelong Learning Plan, the Asset Management Plan, the Admission Plan).

- Miscellaneous Plans (the Behaviour Support Plan, Post-Ofsted Action Plan, Children's Service Plan, Quality Protects Management Action Plan, Education Action Zone Plan).
- A Plan for Plans (the Local Performance Plan requires Local Authorities to take a broad overview of all the various Plans being produced and to plan for their co-ordination).

It is estimated that the 150 LEAs in England and Wales are now collectively producing over 2,600 Plans.

The manpower involved in the production, scrutiny and review of these Plans is formidable. It is estimated that a complete set of Plans for every LEA in the country would take the equivalent of over 1,000 'man-years' to complete.

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The production of these Plans does more damage than merely creating a bureaucratic and expensive monster: it undermines diversity, imposes further centralisation and above all tries to impose a flawed uniformity across all schools – particularly those which are already successful. It also contradicts the claim made in the 1997 Labour Party Manifesto that: "Our approach will be to intervene where there are problems, not where schools are succeeding": the only schools in which head teachers have been given greater freedom are those in designated action zones – in other words, those schools which are underperforming. On the other hand, good schools – such as the London Oratory – now have to comply with and adhere to Plans decided by LEAs whose record in promoting good standards is, in some cases, lamentable.

Nor will many of the Plans achieve their (often laudable) goals

Nor will many of the Plans achieve their (often laudable) goals. The two organisations which are most responsible for failing to tackle underperforming schools – the DfEE and the LEAs – are those which will prepare, implement and monitor many of the Plans. The failure of the National Literacy Strategy to include the required level of phonics is but one illustration of how good intentions (in this case the desire to improve the literacy rate of primary school children) can be subverted when the bodies originally responsible for the problem have the responsibility for implementing the solution to that problem.

The role of LEAs is confused: with some Plans, they are responsible for drawing up and implementing Plans; in other cases, they combine and consolidate the Plans produced by schools; in yet other cases, they are losing powers to new quangos which have been given responsibility for producing and approving Plans.

The Government's desire to raise standards is admirable. But its attempt to do so through centralisation will prove counter-productive. Far better is to encourage autonomy, diversity and parental choice (albeit under a rigorous inspection system to identify and correct failure) and to reduce the interference of both LEAs and the DfEE in schools.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Our task is to raise the standards of every school.”

“All parents should be offered real choice through good quality schools, each with its own strengths and individual ethos.”

“Our approach will be to intervene where there are problems, not where schools are succeeding.”

Labour Party Manifesto, 1997

New Labour’s two main education ambitions – to raise standards in schools and to offer real choice to parents – were admirable in their intentions: after all, as it stated in its Manifesto, nearly half of all 11-year-olds in England and Wales were unable to read well enough to cope with the secondary syllabus. British teenagers were ranked as among the least literate and the least numerate in Europe. And, in its Manifesto at least, New Labour appeared keen to build on the last Conservative Government’s attempts (such as the creation of Grant Maintained status for schools, specialist schools, Local Management of Schools and so on) to increase diversity and parental choice in education.

Now, half way through its term in office, the Government still proclaims its determination to raise standards. What seems to have been forgotten, however, is its belief that good schools should be allowed to work without interference. The Government appears to believe now that standards can only be improved at the expense of diversity.

Within the last two years, an incredible number of compulsory “Plans” – ranging from Literacy Plans, through Lifelong Learning Plans, to the *Yes Minister* pinnacle of Plans about all the other Plans, the Local Performance

Plans – have been demanded of schools and LEAs (Appendix I lists those Plans which are statutory and those which are required for additional funds). The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) has imposed 17 different Plans which every LEA must now complete. At least 2,618 individual Plans are being produced. All Plans require extensive committee work, consultation with the individual schools within the LEA and many other bodies, costing, drafting, revising and, eventually, approving (see Appendix II for a list of the bodies who need to be consulted for a typical plan). Then, of course, progress against the Plan will have to be reviewed; the Plan revised; and once again the whole cycle of bureaucracy spins into action.

A bureaucratic monster has been created – ironically by a Secretary of State who has publicly criticised LEA red tape

A bureaucratic monster has been created – ironically by a Secretary of State who has publicly criticised LEA red tape. At a speech to the Local Government Association conference on 18 June 1999, David Blunkett urged “local education authorities to cut red tape and ensure schools receive their full allocation of money.” He went on to warn them that he would use his powers “to ensure money spent on too much town hall bureaucracy was focused on raising standards for pupils.” Similarly the Schools Minister, Estelle Morris MP, has stated that “Ministers would cap unnecessary bureaucracy” (DfEE Press Release 434/98). But what could be more unnecessary than insisting that LEAs should have to produce so many different and overlapping types of Plan?

Some might point out that the sign of a good school is one which plans carefully. True indeed, but to have to do so in the form and manner laid down in stone by central government means mountains of paperwork rather than plans carefully targeted at local needs. The man in Whitehall sadly does not know best which areas are the most appropriate for attention in each LEA and in each school. The confusion about the role of an LEA, the burden of gratuitous paperwork which takes resources from the classroom to the education planning department in the Town Hall, and the fact that over 2,600 Plans are being produced in England and Wales means that good schools are having their time wasted by government and their diversity imperilled. Power has been taken away from schools and put into the hands of LEA or DfEE bureaucrats, or new quangoes which have little or no accountability.

Plans and uniformity do not improve standards in themselves – a fact that the Government sometimes seems to be aware of: in “failing schools”, head teachers get something close to a free hand to address the problems they find. Head teachers of good schools, on the other hand, are rewarded for their efforts by having their work interfered with and their time squandered through these new centralising requirements.

Diversity in schools, combined with a strong and effective regulatory regime, is more likely to raise standards than the centralising instincts of the Government. The Secretary of State should re-read his party’s manifesto and be prepared to relinquish some of his appetite for control.

CHAPTER TWO

PLANS TO IMPROVE STANDARDS

THE EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN (EDP)

The Education Development Plan is the central Plan for every LEA. Its purpose is defined by the DfEE as follows:

“EDPs are designed to focus the efforts of LEAs and schools as they work together to improve standards. LEAs and schools must identify what needs to be done to drive up performance and who will do it.”

Initial Plans, required under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, are for three year periods (1999-2002) and must describe the actions that LEAs and schools will take to raise standards in this period. The degree of consultation required is extensive, including governors, head-teachers, Diocesan bodies, parents and other organisations with whom the LEA works: LEAs are already concerned about the administrative burden.

The form of the Plan is set down centrally by the DfEE. It is “strongly recommended” that the EDP focuses on:

- improving standards in literacy and numeracy;
- supporting schools causing concern;
- raising standards for underachieving groups of pupils and pupils with special educational needs;
- supporting school self-evaluation and review;
- using ICT to support learning and teaching;
- improving pupil attendance and behaviour;
- disseminating good practice.

The extent to which the EDP overlaps with other Plans is quite remarkable (as will become obvious from the examination of these other Plans below).

Each activity within the EDP must be costed and that cost assigned to either the school improvement budget or the standards fund. It is now clear that LEAs have little flexibility to use the funding available to focus on local priorities. There is now much more prescription from central government on what may be funded from amounts retained by the LEA. In addition, the Fair Funding Regulations state that the LEA can only centrally fund those school improvements that are set out in its EDP. These must have been broadly agreed with the schools.

Every EDP must be approved in Whitehall by the DfEE. When this is coupled with the central control inherent in the Fair Funding Regulations, a handful of officials in Whitehall seems to have achieved almost total central control.

Unfortunately, there has also been considerable criticism of the DfEE and the manner in which they are exercising their powers over EDPs. Criticisms have included:

- a lack of appreciation of the amount of work required to satisfy the Regulations and DfEE guidance;
- an overly dogmatic approach from the DfEE, and a lack of flexibility;
- inconsistency of advice from the DfEE regarding the activities to include;
- constant chopping and changing, suggesting that the DfEE had not properly thought through the totality of the exercise before starting;
- a failure to appreciate the work necessary by LEAs where pupils were relatively high achievers.

The Education Development Plans have become an exercise in (particularly inefficient) central control and bureaucracy

Sadly, it seems that far from being a device for effective planning and co-ordination, the EDPs have become an exercise in (particularly inefficient) central control and bureaucracy.

THE LITERACY PLAN

The Literacy Plan is a four year Plan aimed at improving the literacy skills of all learners so that they reach the level required for life, learning and employment. The LEA Literacy Plan is, in a sense, an amalgam of Plans for each individual school, with a particular focus on the primary phase. It is required as a condition for a bid under the Standards Fund (see the School Standards and Framework Act 1998).

The National Literacy Strategy requires every primary school to draw up a literacy Plan which addresses certain prescribed issues: e.g. how the school will implement the literacy hour, monitoring arrangements, staff training. Other requirements are imposed by the national strategy, including specified training days (which previously were left to the discretion of schools).

There is considerable overlap between the literacy strategy and the EDP as inevitably they both entail target setting at key stages. In addition, the ICT strategy (see below) on the use of new technology to raise educational standards also shares much of the same ground.

THE NUMERACY PLAN

The National Numeracy Strategy is a Plan to raise the achievement of pupils in numeracy. In order for LEAs to access extra funding from the Standards Fund for additional efforts in numeracy, a Plan focusing on prescribed matters must be in place.

Monitoring of Plans will take place at school level and by the LEA. In addition, the Government has also appointed “Regional Numeracy Directors” – civil servants – who will ultimately monitor performance across LEAs, in another instance of control moving to the centre.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY PLAN

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is considered by the Government to have a crucial role in raising educational standards and providing all pupils with the skills necessary for work in the future. The National Grid for Learning is a web of technological and educational services, based on the internet, to support teaching and learning in all schools, colleges, universities, libraries, workplaces and homes. By 2002, all schools, colleges and universities should be linked to the National Grid to allow them access to resources to enhance curriculum delivery and the professional development of teachers.

In order to facilitate these aims, there are, once again, grants available from the Standards Fund to provide help to schools to secure access to the Grid, and to provide basic training for teachers in the use of ICT.

A condition for obtaining these grants is that each LEA must produce an “ICT Development Plan”. This must:

- give details on the innovative use of ICT in the delivery of the curriculum and in teachers’ professional development;
- deal with the phasing in of the relevant equipment over a four year period;
- set out how the LEA will cope with the Millennium Bug;
- set out how schools will protect pupils from on-line access to unsuitable materials.

The problem is of course that the Plans are designed to cover a three year period, but no account can be taken of advances in technology. The bureaucratic nature of Plans is particularly ill-suited to the fast-paced world of technology.

Moreover, the grants have to be “match funded” by LEAs; thus schools budgets have to be top-sliced to meet a central government agenda. Schools have been understandably resistant to being told by central government how their budget must be spent, with no account taken of local priorities.

CHAPTER THREE

PLANS FOR ORGANISATION AND ACCESS

SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN

The School Organisation Plan, required under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (together with the Education (School Organisation Plans)(England) Regulations 1999), is a five year Plan which must include demographic information about the supply of, and demand for, school places. It must also set out the conclusions to be drawn from this data. The policies of the LEA regarding the provision of school places are also to be included.

Every LEA is expected to publish a draft School Organisation Plan. This draft Plan is sent to the governing body of each school maintained by the LEA, every neighbouring LEA, the Further Education Funding Council, each Anglican diocese in the LEA area, each Roman Catholic diocese in the LEA area, public libraries and local district and borough councils. There is then a two month statutory period for objections to the Plan.

Decisions which were once made by elected LEA members are now made by a largely unelected quango

The draft Plan, together with the objections made to it and the LEA's observations on these objections, then has to be submitted to, and agreed by, a new statutory body called the School Organisation Committee. This Committee comprises five or six voting groups (including elected LEA

members, representatives from the Church of England dioceses and the Roman Catholic dioceses, school governors and representatives from local further education colleges).

A decision which was once made by elected LEA members is now made by a largely unelected quango. Moreover, failure to agree entails a reference to the Government-appointed adjudicator who has the power to make the decision. The paper chase continues. Meanwhile, critical decisions on school places are deferred or, in some cases, never taken at all.

EARLY YEARS DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDCARE PLAN

The Government's approach to education in the early years of childhood has proved to be one of the most bureaucratic and cumbersome of all. Each LEA is obliged by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to produce a Plan to ensure that there are sufficient nursery places for all four year olds, and then to start a process for the eventual provision of suitable places for three year olds.

The Plan, though it has to be approved by the LEA, is in fact under the control of yet another quango: the "Early Years Partnership". This is a committee consisting of officers and representatives from a range of interested groups including churches, TECs, Pre-School Learning Alliance, etc. In a large authority, the partnership is required to have district/borough-based sub-committees, plus various "development groups". This proliferation of "committees", "partnerships" and "groups", none of whom any voter or parent is likely to have ever heard of, has meant that in Surrey – a typical large shire county LEA – there are no less than 15 new bodies covering this single topic in this single authority, all of which have to be serviced by the LEA.

Resources which could have been used in the classroom are thus being used to maintain a bloated bureaucracy.

CLASS SIZES (MAXIMUM 30) PLAN

The Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires LEAs to ensure that all children aged five, six or seven are in a class of 30 or under by September 2001. While there are no statutory limits for class sizes in 1999 or 2000, the Government is pressing LEAs to show that they are moving towards compliance by September 2000.

Again, each LEA must produce a Plan to demonstrate how it will achieve the Government's aim. The Plan must set out how each school with children in the five to seven year old age group will meet the Government's targets. This may involve recommendations altering the admission numbers of schools or their buildings requirements.

There are a number of major problems with the Government imposing a limit on certain class sizes. Firstly, the number of mixed-year classes will have to rise, very much against the preferences of parents. There will be a reduction in choice for parents as schools reduce their intake to comply with the legislation. Some schools will suffer financially as class sizes are reduced or if they do not meet the criteria for extra funding on splitting a class in two. There is also mounting evidence that class sizes for eight to eleven year olds are increasing in size.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS DEVELOPMENT PLAN

An LEA is required to keep under review the arrangements it makes for special educational provision. While a Plan is theoretically optional, it is a virtual necessity to meet this statutory duty. Typically, the duty will require a development Plan which sets out the priorities for the development of provision over, say, a five year period. This provides a framework for resource allocation and distribution.

LIFELONG LEARNING PLANS

In order to access additional DfEE funding, a Lifelong Learning Development Plan is required. This has to set out a council's work in relation to the Government's aims for "lifelong learning". The Plan is expected to cover statutory responsibilities to secure adult education and to describe future developments so as to widen participation; to raise the level of achievement of learners; and to improve the quality of provision. The Plan has to be submitted to the DfEE by autumn 1999.

In addition to the Lifelong Development Plan, 'Lifelong Learning Partnerships' are themselves expected (under the Partnership Protocol) to come up with yet another plan – the Lifelong Learning Partnership Plan

At the same time, the Government has established Lifelong Learning Partnerships. These new quangoes are made up of LEAs, Further Education Institutes, TECs, etc. These Partnerships are themselves expected (under the Partnership Protocol) to come up with yet another Plan – the Lifelong Learning Partnership Plan – setting out objectives for the partnership. It is difficult to understand this obvious duplication of labour.

These two Plans – the Lifelong Learning Development Plan and the Lifelong Learning Partnership Plan – do not seem to fit in with more recent Government proposals on post-16 education. The "Learning and Skills Councils" (yet more quangoes) duplicate the work of the Lifelong Learning Partnerships as well as creating yet another layer of bureaucracy.

ASSET MANAGEMENT PLANS

The aim of the Asset Management Plan is to set out the information needed, and the criteria used, to make decisions about spending on school premises. LEAs are expected to produce Asset Management Plans in partnership with schools and dioceses. These Plans are intended to provide the means through which likely future capital needs are assessed, criteria for prioritisation are set and informed decisions on local spending priorities are made. In its publication *Asset Management Plans*, the DfEE recommends the following six stage approach to preparing a Plan:

Stage 1: The Local Policy Statement. This is intended to "identify roles, responsibilities and scope of Plan."

- Stage 2: Assessment of existing premises. Each LEA should “set up a database and compile basic data on each school.”
- Stage 3: Identification of needs. Each LEA should consider the “condition, sufficiency and suitability needs” of school premises and identify areas of concern. It should also “consider Authority LEA Plans and School Development Plans.”
- Stage 4: Determining Priorities. Each LEA should “develop overview on priorities”...and “prioritise its most serious and urgent needs.”
- Stage 5: Feasibility studies and option appraisal. Each LEA should establish the “feasibility of potential solutions to priority needs” and “appraise options and establish economic and effective proposals” and “investigate funding and procurement arrangements.”
- Stage 6: Implementation, review and evaluation. Each LEA should “develop proposals and finalise funding” and “implement new/improvement/rationalisation /maintenance works” and “arrangements for review and evaluation.”

According to the DfEE’s Guidance material, among the various considerations which the LEA should consider in drawing up this Plan is Agenda 21 – that is, the conclusions agreed at the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit on sustainable development: “The Government encourages local authorities to develop and implement Local Agenda 21 strategies. The DETR, in conjunction with the Local Government Association and the Local Government Management Board, is preparing guidance.”

Asset Management Plans are produced once every five years but are expected to reviewed and revised annually.

ADMISSION PLANS

Following the School Standards And Framework Act 1998, the DfEE published a circular (12/98) outlining the procedure by which LEAs must “consult county and voluntary controlled schools’ governing bodies each year before finalising and publishing admission arrangements and policies.” LEAs will also have to consult local “forums” which are intended to “enable all admission authorities in an area to consider how local arrangements can best meet the needs of parents and how admission arrangements mesh in with other issues such as planning, children with special needs and children with difficult behaviour.”

Mutual consultation will be required between admissions authorities: in Surrey LEA, for example, there are 237 individual admissions authorities. If they all consulted each other, there would be a total of 56,169 consultations.

If all the eligible bodies consulted each other, there would, in a typical LEA, be a total of 56,169 consultations

The Admission Plans must be published and sent to parents in the LEA catchment area.

These Plans represent a further centralisation of power: no longer will foundation (Grant Maintained) schools and church schools, for example, be the sole determinant of their own admissions procedure.

CHAPTER FOUR

MISCELLANEOUS PLANS

BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT PLAN

The Education Act 1997 obliges all LEAs to have a Behaviour Support Plan to set out the arrangements for the education of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Plans were to be operational from January 1999, with provision for regular reviews.

The Plan must describe the actions LEAs will take to raise standards of behaviour over the next three years, and explain how they intend to ensure coherent, comprehensive and well-understood local arrangements for provision of support to manage pupil behaviour. Again, extensive consultation is required between the LEA, schools, teachers groups and social services departments.

POST-OFSTED ACTION PLANS

All LEAs are now subject to inspection by OFSTED and all will be inspected over the next few years. Necessarily, the OFSTED report will bring forward a set of recommendations as to how the performance of the LEA under inspection can be improved. An action plan is then required by section 39 of the Education Act 1997 to put the recommendations into practice. Monitoring of progress with regard to the Plan is to be conducted at least half-yearly.

CHILDREN'S SERVICE PLANS

The Children's Service Plan, required by the Children Act 1989 (Amendment) (Children's Service Planning) Order 1996, is a "multi-agency plan" concerning children in need and their families. It covers several sensitive areas such as child protection and services for children in care, and requires considerable input from the LEA. There is, however, obvious overlap with aspects of the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan, the EDP and the Behaviour Support Plan.

QUALITY PROTECTS MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

This is a multi-agency plan co-ordinated by Social Service Departments within a Local Authority. It requires major input from the education service. It derives from statutory guidance in the Local Authority Circular (98) 28. Its overall objectives include that “children in need gain maximum benefits from education opportunities”. It is designed to help those children for whom the Local Authority has taken on direct responsibility, of which responsibility for their education is inevitably a key part.

EDUCATION ACTION ZONE PLAN

Any authority seeking to establish an Education Action Zone – an area designated as needing extra help to achieve an appropriate standard of education – will need to set out a Plan in order to bid for zone status and its associated extra funding.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PLAN FOR PLANS

THE LOCAL PERFORMANCE PLAN

This Plan represent the pinnacle (or nadir) of the obsession with Plans. The Local Performance Plan is, in true Sir Humphrey style, the Planning Plan, the Plan to co-ordinate all the other Plans. Part of the Local Government Bill, published on 1 December 1998 and currently going through Parliament, this Plan would be required to take a broad overview of all Plans from local authorities and try to plan how they could be co-ordinated.

Unfortunately, all the various Plans – which will include Plans for all Local Authority services in addition to education – start on different dates and all have different review periods. It is therefore highly unlikely that they will mesh together: Plans are bound to be contradictory in some respects and cease to be meaningful in others.

A greater proportion of local government expenditure is thus being used for creating and monitoring bureaucracy instead of improving local services.

CHAPTER SIX

1,000 MAN YEARS

The following calculation is, necessarily, a very broad estimate of the amount of time required to complete all the various education Plans which have been introduced by the present Government. As each Plan requires a different procedure and entails a different workload, it has been based on an average figure of the time spent in total on each Plan by governors, teachers and other educational professionals.

CONSULTATION WITH SCHOOLS AND OTHER BODIES

Each LEA controls on average over 160 schools. It is estimated that the time spent in consideration of each Plan by a school or other body averages half a day for each Plan. This element of a Plan is thus estimated to take the equivalent of 80 days work to complete.

LEA CONSIDERATION

LEAs will (presumably) undertake some consideration of the information they receive from their consultations. It is assumed that this will require a further five days work per Plan.

DRAFTING OF PLANS

It is assumed that each Plan will have to be drafted and costed – an exercise which, it is conservatively estimated, would take at least 15 working days per Plan.

REVIEW AND REVISION

A further five days per Plan is assumed.

THE CALCULATION

Consultation: 80 days

LEA Consideration: 5 days

Drafting: 15 days

Review and revision: 5 days

Total per Plan: 105 days

105 working days per Plan x 17 Plans x 150 LEAs = 267,750 working days.

Assume 225 working days per year (365 days – 104 weekends – 26 days holidays and Bank Holidays – 10 days training and illness):

267,750 divided by 225 = **1,190 years**

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ROLE OF LEAS

The current role of an LEA that emerges from this web of Plans is confused.

In some cases – such as the Behaviour Support Plan and the Class Sizes (Maximum 30) Plan – an LEA has a duty to draw up and execute the Plan in partnership with the teachers in the area. In other cases – such as the Literacy and Numeracy Plans – the Plans an LEA comes up with are just amalgams of the Plans schools themselves are obliged to draw up. In other cases again – such as the ICT Plans and major elements of the EDP – an LEA will be drawing up Plans in areas where any properly-run school will have made proper provision itself. Finally in some areas, the LEA has had its erstwhile powers removed and placed in the hands of quangoes which must now consider or approve the relevant Plan. This is the case with the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan (which must then also be approved by the LEA), and the Lifelong Learning Partnership Plan (this duplicates a Plan made by the LEA itself).

The position of the LEA in the education hierarchy is now illogical and incoherent. As central government takes direct control over the manner in which education is provided, the role of the LEA becomes more confusing. And when good schools will be making provision in many of these areas themselves, one has to ask why another level of control is really necessary. How can an LEA literacy Plan possibly be better targeted to local needs than a school literacy Plan? And when Whitehall stipulates how the matter should be approached in every single school – even in those schools which had been able to devise successful teaching programmes of their own – little is left to the discretion and on-the-ground knowledge of individual teachers and head teachers.

The general public, and in particular parents, can only be bewildered by the different bodies involved in education and by their respective roles. The diffusion and confusion of accountability will inherently work against raising standards.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

The Government's attempts to grapple with the problems of poor standards in schools may be well-meaning, but their heavy-handed centralising approach is likely to be counter-productive.

The role of LEAs must be reformed. They should abandon their largely superfluous planning role, which serves only to stifle reform in schools themselves, and take on the role of service providers for those schools which opt to use their services. Schools should be allowed to budget for the central services they need, buying in the LEA services which they want, and opting out of those services not needed in their particular environment. More money will thus be left to spend directly on pupils, services can be better targeted, and efficiency at all levels can be promoted.

Attempts to centralise control over 150 LEAs, 25,000 schools and 440,000 teachers are impractical and unhelpful

The government should allow and indeed encourage schools to make their own Plans, in the light of their own individual strengths and weaknesses. It should also grant them maximum control of their own budgets. With a rigorous inspection system to identify and rectify failing schools, flexibility and dynamism can be fostered.

The attempt to control schools through this tangled web of Plans wastes vast amounts of both time and money. And it stifles diversity. Attempts to centralise control over 150 LEAs, 25,000 schools and 440,000 teachers are impractical and unhelpful.

It is impossible for such blanket treatment to do any justice to the individual needs, strengths and weaknesses of different schools and their children. Anyone with any experience of local bureaucracy must fear that the Plans have become ends in themselves.

Not only is a new and unnecessary tangle of bureaucracy created, but flexibility, diversity and the ability to react to the needs of local children lost

The cost is high. Not only is a new and unnecessary tangle of bureaucracy created, but flexibility, diversity and the ability to react to the needs of local children lost.

APPENDIX ONE

THE LEGAL STATUS OF PLANS

PLANS FOR STANDARDS

Education Development Plan	Statutory
Literacy Plan	Statutory
Numeracy Plan	Required for a bid
Information and Communications Technology Plan	Required for a bid

PLANS FOR ORGANISATION AND ACCESS

Schools Organisation Plan	Statutory
Early Years Development and Childcare Plan	Statutory
Class Sizes 30 Plan	Statutory
Special Educational Needs Development Plan	Meets statutory duty
Lifelong Learning Plans (2)	Required for a bid
Asset Management Plan	Statutory
Admission Plan	Statutory

MISCELLANEOUS PLANS

Post-Ofsted Action Plan	Statutory
Quality Protects Management Action Plan	Statutory
Children's Service Plans	Statutory
Education Action Zone Plan (if applicable)	Required for a bid
Behaviour Support Plan	statutory

THE PLAN FOR PLANS

Local Performance Plan	Statutory
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APPENDIX TWO

LIST OF PEOPLE WHO NEED TO BE CONSULTED

PLANS FOR STANDARDS

Head teachers of all schools in LEA

Governors of all schools in LEA

Parents (through public meetings) and parents' representatives

Church of England and Roman Catholic representatives

Elected Members of the Local Authority

Local Trade Unions

PLANS FOR ACCESS

Head teachers of all schools in LEA

Governors of all schools in LEA

Parents (through public meetings) and parents' representatives

Church of England and Roman Catholic representatives

Elected Members of the Local Authority

Local Trade Unions

Further Education Colleges

Neighbouring LEAs

District/borough councils

Representatives from social services

Private nursery providers/Pre-school Learning Alliance

Health Authorities

Police Authorities

For a shire authority such as Surrey County Council, this would represent over a thousand different bodies.