

parent power

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January 2009

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About Reform Scotland

Reform Scotland is an independent, non-party think tank that aims to set out a better way to deliver increased economic prosperity and more effective public services based on the traditional Scottish principles of limited government, diversity and personal responsibility.

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Executive Summary

Objective

In 'Power for the Public' Reform Scotland outlined lessons Scotland could learn from Sweden and the Netherlands as to how parents could be given a greater say in the education of their children. As well as highlighting how and why the current state education system in Scotland is failing to ensure all children reach their potential, the purpose of this report is to expand on that research and demonstrate how greater power for parents and autonomy for schools can be implemented in Scotland in order to deliver a better education system. The paper will demonstrate how such policies can increase standards for all.

Parent Power focuses only on school education. Reform Scotland recognises that nursery education and further and higher education are also important elements of the wider education system and, as such, will be examined at a later date.

Findings

- Between 1995/6 and 2006/7 real terms funding by local authorities on school education increased by 58%, while total central government grants on school education increased by a massive 765%.
- The current state education system is failing those who need it most as schools with higher percentages of pupils registered for free school meals have:
 - lower exam results;
 - a higher percentage of pupils leaving school & not entering education, training or work;
 - higher levels of truancy.
- There is a wide variety in the type of education provided within the state sector, covering school ethos, subjects studied, homework policies and exam results. However, despite the variety available, parents have very limited ability to choose the school they believe will provide the best education for their child.
- OECD research shows that competition between schools improves attainment.

Policy Recommendations

Parental choice: We recommend that parents or guardians should be given an entitlement equal to the value of the average cost of educating a child in their local authority area which could be used to send their child to any school which costs the same as the entitlement or less. This would give parents a greater say in choosing the school they believe will help their child fulfil his or her potential, whether it is the local state school, a state school on the other side of town or an independent school if its fees were the same or less than the value of the entitlement. If an independent school charged fees higher than the value of the entitlement parents would not be able to top-up the difference themselves.

Where parents are able to exercise greater choice between schools, this introduction of competition can help improve attainment levels in all schools, an advantage highlighted in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) published in 2007.

Supplement for children in receipt of free school meals or with special educational needs: We recommend that, as part of this scheme of parental choice, pupils in receipt of free school meals or with special educational needs would receive a permanent supplement on top of their entitlement. This would come from central government and ensure that such pupils are more attractive to schools which will ensure that the scheme achieves the objective of extending opportunity and increasing social mobility.

Transitional introduction for children on free school meals: We recommend that this scheme of parental choice should be introduced initially for two years to parents and guardians of children in receipt of free school meals and then extended to all. This emphasises the most important aim of these reforms which is to help pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds, who are the pupils most obviously being failed by the current system. During this period, these parents would be given priority over other parents using the existing placing request system.

Allow new schools to be set up: We recommend that new and more diverse schools are opened up since evidence shows that competition can drive up standards in all schools. At present, nothing prevents new schools opening

up and operating as private schools as long as they meet required guidelines. However, providing the entitlement to parents to send their child to the school of their choosing will increase the potential demand for independent, state-funded schools and so provide an important stimulus for the establishment of new schools. As with existing independent schools, new non-state schools would only be eligible for the parental choice scheme if their fees are the same as the value of the entitlement or less.

Schools should not choose pupils on the basis of ability – parents and pupils should choose schools. As more schools open, the supply of independent school places should broadly match demand. However, initially if there are more applicants for a school than places available then a lottery system should be used, though preference could be given to a child with a sibling at the school. Local authorities could continue to use the existing catchment area as the basis on which to allocate places at the schools which they run.

Local authority schools could continue as before if they wish, but local authorities should be given power over teacher pay and conditions:

We recommend that local authorities continue to run the state schools they currently control. Councils should also be handed complete control over pay and conditions, effectively ending nationalised pay bargaining for teachers. Councils could still choose to agree nationwide deals through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA), but this should be for individual councils to decide.

Councils could choose to allow state schools to become independent schools if they wished, handing over the running of the schools to the schools themselves.

Conclusion

There are many good and varied state schools in Scotland but as international studies and Reform Scotland's research has highlighted, too often children from disadvantaged backgrounds are falling through the gaps and not being offered the education needed to help them fulfil their potential.

The reforms set out in this paper specifically aim to address that situation and ensure that the education system works to extend opportunity. The key to our proposals is that where the system works it should be allowed to continue, but where it doesn't we need to introduce radical reform. Under the policy proposals we are putting forward no one should receive a worse education than they currently do, but many should end up receiving a far better education.

We believe, and research from overseas backs this up, that giving parents and guardians a greater say in the education of their children should ensure that the days of Scotland appearing below average on international league tables are behind us. Scotland can, once again, aspire to be the leading light in educational development.

1. Introduction - Education in Scotland

1.1 Scottish state education system

The Education and Training section of the Scottish Government's website sets out the following aim of the education system in Scotland:

"The Government wants to ensure that everybody has access to learning opportunities that can help them achieve their full potential - giving children and young people the best possible start in life as they move from school to university and college or into the workforce, providing employability and adaptability throughout life."

Even before devolution, the Scottish state education system was entirely autonomous from the English system with its own curriculum, examinations and legislative framework.

School is split into primary (age 5-12) and secondary (age 12-16/18) with the main examinations generally being sat in 4th year of high school (Standard Grades), 5th year (Highers), and 6th year (Highers and Advanced Highers). Pupils can leave school at the end of 4th year provided they have turned 16. There are currently no proposals in Scotland to extend the compulsory school leaving age to 18, as proposed in England.

Central government supports state education through the Revenue Support Grant paid annually to Scottish local authorities. The local authorities pay for education provision using this resource as well as revenue raised through local council tax. Each local authority determines its own education budget, regardless of the amount provided by central government. Teachers are employed and paid by the local authority, though pay and conditions are set centrally. Children are allocated a state primary and secondary school on the basis of the catchment area in which they live. However, parents can lodge a placing request asking for their child to be allocated a place in a different school, though such requests are not always successful. The majority of schools are non-denominational, but as a result of the Education Act 1918, separate state-funded Roman Catholic state schools also exist.

While the Scottish Government's education department has national oversight of education, advises on national policy and co-ordinates the activities of the education authorities, the duty of providing education rests with local authorities. Councils have a statutory duty to provide adequate and efficient schools and further education, to make provision for special educational needs and to provide the teaching of Gaelic in schools in Gaelic-speaking areas. They are also responsible for the construction of buildings, the employment of teachers and other staff, and the provision of equipment and materials. They exercise responsibility for the curriculum taught in schools taking account of national guidance.

One of the most significant changes to teaching in Scotland since devolution was the implementation of the recommendations of the committee of inquiry into teachers' pay, promotional structures and conditions of service, which was chaired by Professor Gavin McCrone. The recommendations were mainly implemented from August 2001 and included:

- Teachers received a minimum salary increase of 23.1% awarded in stages by August 2003, with new teachers starting on £18,000 per year.
- All probationer teachers were guaranteed a one year contract.

The Scottish Government has also been reviewing the curriculum in Scotland. The curriculum is non-statutory in Scotland and so is not dictated by the Government. Responsibility for what is taught rests with local authorities and schools, taking into account national guidelines and advice. Following a national debate on education in 2002, the then Scottish Executive gave a commitment to create a single coherent curriculum from age 3 to 18. A Curriculum for Excellence: Progress and Proposals was then published in March 2006.

1.2 Influence of parents

As much as the Scottish school system may aim to provide equality for all students, studies have shown that parental involvement, regardless of income, has a big impact on the results a child will achieve in school. How parents choose to interact with, and bring up their children, within the law, should not be a matter for government, and are not issues directly addressed by this report. However, it is important to recognise that however equal a system is designed to be, there are many external factors which mean that the educational opportunities a child has will be varied.

‘Every Parent Matters’, a report published by the Department for Education and Skills in England in 2007, highlighted the importance of parental warmth, stability, consistency and boundary setting in helping in the development of a child’s education, specifically it said¹:

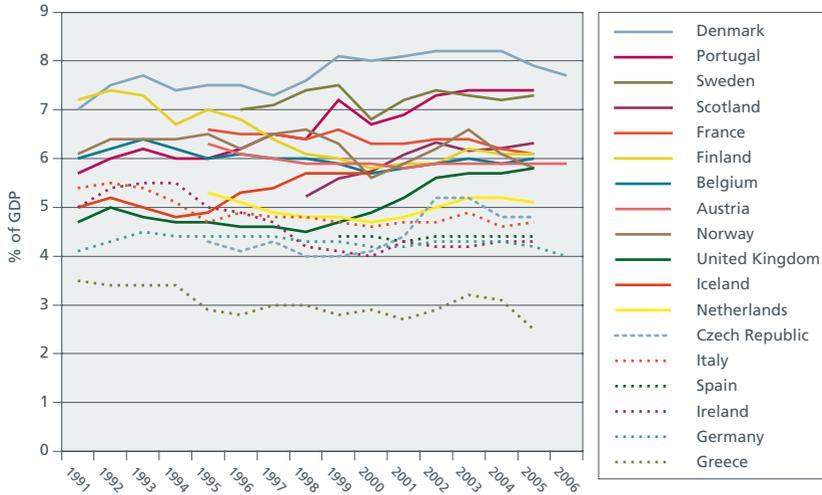
- In the early years, parental aspirations and encouragement have a significant impact on children’s cognitive development and literacy and numeracy skills;
- Parental involvement in a child’s schooling between the ages of 7 and 16 is a more powerful force than family background, size of family and level of parental education;
- Educational failure is increased by lack of parental interest in schooling;
- A father’s interest in a child’s schooling is strongly linked to educational outcomes for the child; where fathers have early involvement in a child’s life there is a positive relationship to later educational achievement
- Selective parenting interventions can substantially improve childhood behaviour. With on-going intervention, there is a real prospect of better school attainments and less violence.

1 HM Government, “Every parent matters”, Department of Education & Skills, 2007

1.3 Statistics

Spending

Figure 1: Government spending on education as a percentage of GDP, compared to other European countries²

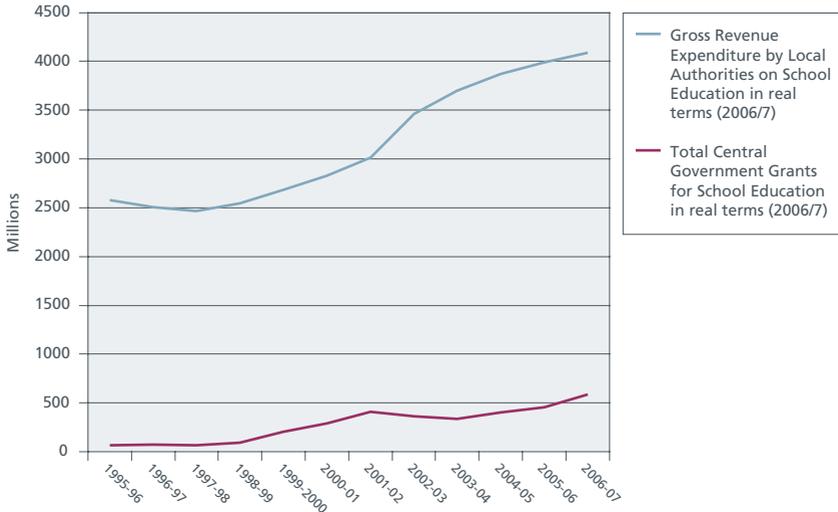


School education in Scotland is mainly funded through local authorities, though some funding comes directly from the Scottish Government. **Figure 2** outlines the real terms increase in education spending by both levels of government since 1995/96. It is not possible to add the two figures together as there is an area of overlap. However, as some central government grants for school education are not ring fenced, it is not possible to work out exactly what this overlap is.³

² Eurostat and PESA. Figures for Scotland are estimated using the spending per head index in PESA 2004 & 2007. For example in 2001/02 education & training spending in Scotland was 117 to the UK's 100. Eurostat states that Government education spending as a percentage for the UK was 5.2% in 2001. $1.17 \times 5.2 = 6.1$. Therefore we can estimate education spending in Scotland in 2001 was 6.1% of GDP. Although the PESA figures are for education and training whilst Eurostat's figures are just for education, this still gives us a best guess comparison of education spending compared to other countries.

³ Scottish Parliamentary written answer S3W-7436

Figure 2: Gross expenditure by local authorities on school education and total central government grants for school education between 1995/6 and 2006/7 in real terms (2006/7)⁴



Although the figures cannot be added together, they do highlight the steep levels of real term increases in spending on school education over the past ten years. Between 1995/6 and 2006/7 real terms funding by local authorities on school education increased by 58%, while total central government grants for school education increased by a massive 765%.⁵

Staff and pupil numbers

- In 2008 there were 2,167 primary, 377 secondary and 177 special state schools in Scotland.⁶
- The number of pupils in state funded schools has fallen from 763,539 in 1997 to 692,215 in 2007.⁷
- The number of teachers has increased from 47,761 in 1997 to 51,893 in 2007 while the ratio of teachers to pupils has fallen from 16 to 13.3.⁸

⁴ Scottish Parliamentary written answer S3W-7436 and HM Treasury GDP deflators

⁵ Scottish Parliamentary written answer S3W-7436 and HM Treasury GDP deflators

⁶ Scottish Government, "School estate statistics", September 2008

⁷ Scottish Government, "Pupils in Scotland 2007" July 2008

⁸ Scottish Government, "Teachers in Scotland 2007", March 2008

- There were 156 independent schools in Scotland in 2007 with 30,981 pupils, down from 168 schools and 31,135 pupils in 1997.⁹

Educational performance in schools

- In 2006/7, 54% of S2 pupils had not achieved the expected level E in numeracy, 47% had not reached the expected level E in writing and 57% had not reached the expected level E in reading.¹⁰

Due to the difference in education systems and examination systems around the world, it is harder to assess the performance of Scotland compared with other countries. However, there are a number of different international studies that measure education performance in key areas such as maths, reading and science. Unfortunately, Scotland is not always included in all of these. However, where Scotland has been included, the performance has been mixed:

- Scotland was ranked 26th with a score of 527 in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006, compared to England which ranked 19th with a score of 539¹¹
- Scotland scored 515 for science, 506 for maths and 499 for reading in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2006. All the figures were higher than the OECD average and the maths and reading figures were higher than the UK as a whole. However, Scotland's results have fallen when compared to previous years.¹²
- The latest international study in which Scotland participated was the Trends in International Maths and Science Survey (TIMSS) 2007, which published results in late 2008. Scotland scored below average for both primary 5 and secondary 2 pupils in maths and roughly average for both age groups in science. Most OECD countries outperformed Scotland in both subjects in primary 5, with a significant number outperforming Scotland in S2. Worryingly, the survey also highlighted that while there had been a narrowing of the attainment gap in Scotland, although still

⁹ Scottish Government, "Independent school census " April 2008

¹⁰ Scottish Government, "Scottish Survey of Achievement", December 2007. Level E is the level which most pupils should be able to reach by the end of S2, although some pupils may be able to reach Level F.

¹¹ Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2006, TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College. 2007

¹² Scottish Government, PISA 2006: Highlights from the Scottish results, December 2007

high, between the highest and lowest performers, this was more as a result of a decrease in the middle and higher performers rather than an improvement by the lowest.¹³

End of schooling

- Although still at a high level, the percentage of pupils leaving school and not entering education, employment or training has fallen from 16% (9,661) in 1996/7 to 13.5% (7,936) in 2007/8.¹⁴
- In 2006/7, 4% (2,351) of pupils left school with no qualifications at access 3 cluster or Standard Grade 5-6 or better (level 3), down from 5.4% (3,150) in 1997/98.¹⁵
- In 2006/7 the percentage of school leavers with at least five standard grades at grade 4+ (level 4) was 79% (46,445) up from 75.2% (43,875) in 1997/98.¹⁶
- The number of pupils leaving school with at least one higher (level six) has risen slightly from 43.1% (25,146) in 1997/98 to 44% (25,868) in 2006/07.¹⁷

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter set out how the Scottish education system works. While the statistics illustrated can be used to argue that the system is both working and failing, chapter two aims to explain why Reform Scotland believes that the current system is not allowing all children to reach their full potential. Chapters three and four will outline reforms which should be considered to improve the system for all.

¹³ Trends in International Maths and Science Study 2007, TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College. 2008. Scottish Government, "Trends in Maths and Science Survey (TIMSS) 2007 - highlights from Scotland's results", December 2008

¹⁴ Scottish Government, "Destination of leavers from Scottish Schools 2007/08", December 2008

¹⁵ S3W-11055 and Scottish Government, "Destination of leavers from Scottish Schools 2007/08", December 2008

¹⁶ S3W-11055 and Scottish Government, "Destination of leavers from Scottish Schools 2007/08", December 2008

¹⁷ S3W-11055 and Scottish Government, "Destination of leavers from Scottish Schools 2007/08", December 2008

2. Where Scotland falls down

2.1 Introduction

Although there are a wide range of figures illustrating the performance of the Scottish education system, as illustrated in the previous section, education is a notoriously difficult public service to measure. If people live longer, healthier lives it can be read as an indication that the health system is working for the benefit of the country, in justice the occurrence of crime is a clear measure of whether improvements have been made. However there is no such easy measure of our school system. Whilst there are exam results, the exams pupils sit vary each year, and more often than not each time the exam results come out accusations of dumbing down are levelled. Exam results also don't give an indication of how ready a pupil is to enter employment or higher education – to the extent that many business leaders and universities have said that schools are failing to teach the basics, with too many pupils unable to read, write or add properly.

Even international studies can be misleading, for example if Scotland falls in rank how much is that to do with failings in Scotland or improvements in other countries?

2.2 Attainment gap

The OECD's report, "Review of the quality and equity of education outcomes in Scotland", published in 2007 praised a number of areas of Scottish education stating it was one of the ". . . *best performing education systems in OECD countries*". However, it also highlighted the problem of gaps in achievement and an increasing number of young people leaving school with minimal qualifications.¹⁸

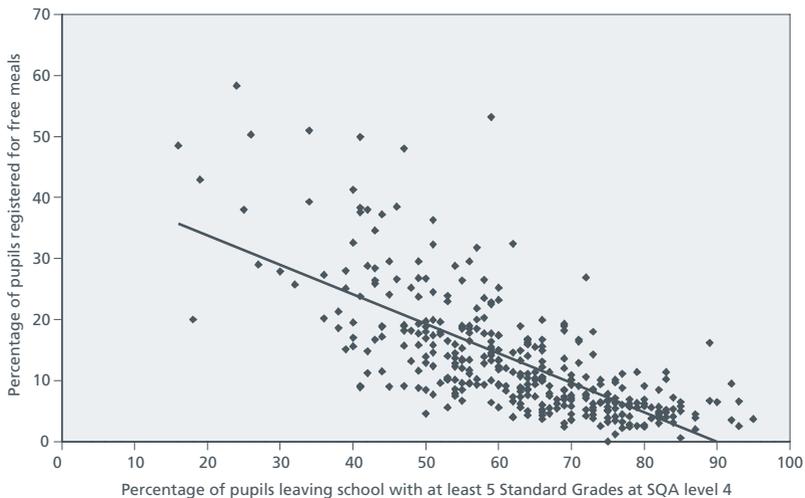
Reform Scotland believes that **Figures 3 to 5** illustrate that the Scottish state education system is failing in one of its key objectives – to enable social mobility. The comprehensive system was designed to give all pupils the same opportunities and level of education; however this is not the case. Local

¹⁸ OECD Press release, "OECD gives good marks to Scottish schools, recommends further improvements", 11 December 2007

schools vary widely in ethos and performance. Parents who can afford tuition fees and don't like the sort of education on offer at their allocated school are able to buy their way out of the state system and have their child educated privately. Similarly, within the state system wealthier parents can exert greater control over their choice of state school by moving to a house in the catchment area of what they perceive to be a good state school.

As a result those children from poorer and more vulnerable backgrounds often end up trapped in failing schools with few options. One way of measuring the deprivation of a catchment area of a school is to look at the percentage of children receiving free school meals. Using this, Reform Scotland has measured the level of deprivation against exam results, the level of truancy and leaver destinations. As a result, [Figures 3 to 5](#) illustrate the relationship between a high level of deprivation and lower exam results, higher numbers of school leavers not entering education, training or work, and to a lesser extent a higher level of truancy.

Figure 3: Relationship between the level of free school meals within a school and the percentage of pupils leaving school with at least 5 standard grades at SQA level 4 including English and maths in 2006/7.¹⁹



¹⁹ Scottish Schools online, parliamentary written answer S3W-12840

Figure 4: Relationship between the level of free school meals within a school and the percentage of pupils leaving school and not going on to education, training or work 2006/7.²⁰

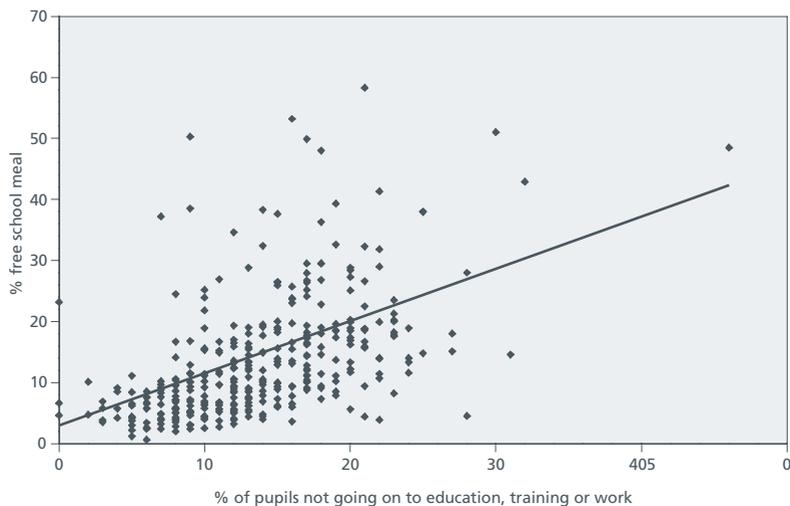
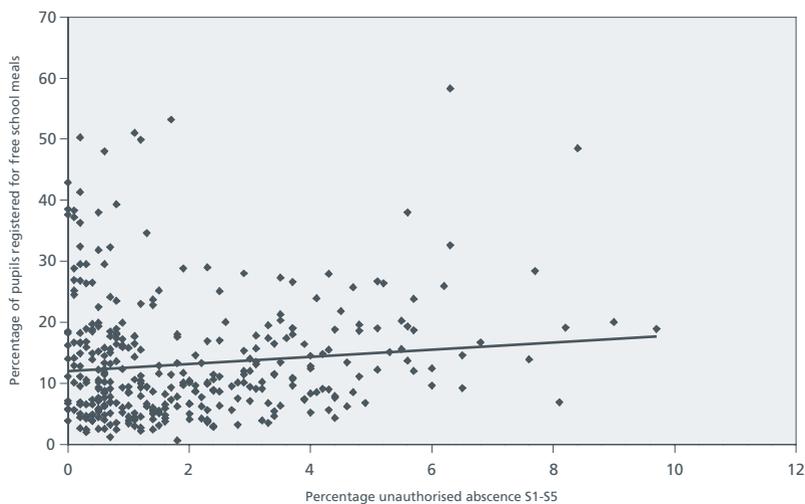


Figure 5: Relationship between the level of free school meals within a school and the level of truancy, 2006/7.²¹



²⁰ Scottish Schools online

²¹ Scottish Schools online

Figures 3 to 5 are charted using figures taken from Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) through its Scottish Schools Online portal.²² The figures²³ were taken from each secondary school within Scotland's thirty two local authority areas.

The results showed that regardless of local authority area, those schools with higher percentages of pupils registered for free school meals generally achieved lower exam results and pupils were less likely to enter education, training or work when leaving school. To a lesser extent there was also a slight correlation between a higher percentage of pupils registered for free school meals and a higher level of truancy.

When taking into account the level of children in receipt of free school meals it is important to recognise, as the graphs show, that some schools perform better than would be expected given the high level of pupils receiving free school meals, while other schools with a lower level of pupils receiving free school meals don't perform as well as might be expected. For example, in Fife St Columba's High had 18% of its pupils in receipt of free school meals in 2006/7 and had 73% of school leavers leaving with at least 5 standard grades at level 4 including English and maths. However, Inverkeithing High had a lower level of pupils receiving free school meals at 9.4%, but also a smaller percentage of pupils (60%) leaving with at least 5 standard grades at level 4 including English and Maths. Equally, Castlemilk High School in one of the most deprived areas of Glasgow, with 50% of pupils receiving free school meals, was given six ratings of "excellent" out of 17 areas in a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education – the second highest rating ever recorded.²⁴

These figures DO NOT show that children from deprived backgrounds are less bright or intelligent than their wealthier counterparts; rather the educational environment available to them is not helping them to reach their potential. In essence, the state system is failing them because it is not facilitating social mobility and parents have little ability to change this.

²² Scottish Schools online

²³ The figures used were *Percentage of pupils leaving school with at least 5 Standard Grades at SQA level 4 including English and Maths* given in written answer S3W-12840 and *Percentage of pupils registered for free meals in 2006/07*

²⁴ Paterson, S, "High School in deprived area rated top of the class by inspectors", The Herald, 17/5/08

2.3 Limited choice

It would be unfair to read too much into exam results without considering the ethos of a school, or indeed any other element of a school environment. However, the point is that despite such differences in neighbouring schools, parents have very limited choice over where to send their children within the state sector.

For example:

- In Edinburgh, if you live at one end of Duddingston Park South you would live in the catchment area for Portobello High School, where 63% of pupils leave school with four or more Standard Grades at level 4 or more including English and Maths. If you live at the other end of the street, you live in the catchment area for Castlebrae High School and the figure drops to 24%.²⁵
- In Dumfries and Galloway if you live in the catchment area of Lockerbie Academy, in addition to French and German, Spanish is on offer to S1 and S2 pupils²⁶, however at the nearby Annan Academy only French and German are available in S1 and S2.²⁷
- In Dundee, Sidlaw View primary has recently scrapped traditional homework in favour of pupil ‘challenges’.²⁸ Each pupil is asked to complete 6 challenges per term which are designed to make the child more responsible for his or her own learning and encourages parents to get involved. However, Eastern Primary School also in Dundee does provide homework to reinforce work done in class and provide a link between home and school.²⁹

These are only a few examples to highlight that schools across the country are quite diverse and do not provide exactly the same school environment. This is something that Reform Scotland welcomes, indeed in our paper ‘Power for the Public’ we argued that there should be far greater diversity in the provision of state education. However, if schools are providing different environments and

²⁵ Scottish Schools online and Edinburgh Council’s catchment area maps

²⁶ <http://www.lockerbie-academy.co.uk/depts/modernlanguages.htm>

²⁷ <http://www.annanacademy.org.uk/Departments/german.htm#2>

²⁸ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/tayside_and_central/7701903.stm

²⁹ <http://www.easternprimary.co.uk/daolpuelifileUpload/file.asp?ID=352>

opportunities it must be unacceptable to give parents no say over the school to which their child is sent.

Politicians of different parties in Scotland have argued that parents don't want greater choice as to the school their child attends. However, the high number of placing requests being lodged each year would suggest otherwise. Consistently since 2000 about a fifth of parents with children starting primary one have lodged a placing request for their child to attend a different school.³⁰ In 2006/7 in three council areas, over a third of parents lodged a placing request and in a further eight local authority areas over a quarter of parents lodged a request. A high number of placing requests isn't even specific to urban areas – in 2006/7 over a quarter of parents in both Angus and Moray lodged requests.

More recently, since the introduction of the SNP's policy to reduce class sizes to 18, there have been a number of high profile cases in the media of parents willing to go to the expense and stress of going to court to demand the right for their child to go to the school of their choice. The following are only a few such examples:

- Haddington Sheriff Court and the Court of Session sided with an East Lothian family who wished to send their child to a school outwith their catchment area, against the wishes of the local authority.³¹
- Linlithgow Sheriff Court sided with a woman who wanted to send her child to the school of her choice in West Lothian.³²
- Argyll Sheriff Court sided with George and Liz McCulloch and agreed they knew better than the local authority about what was best for their daughter. The McCullochs wanted their visually impaired daughter to attend the Royal Blind School rather than be mainstreamed; however Argyll & Bute Council disagreed.³³

³⁰ Scottish Government, "Placing requests in Schools in Scotland" annual publications

³¹ BBC News online, "Couple win school of choice right", 12/9/08 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/scotland/edinburgh_and_east/7612856.stm

³² Denholm, A. "Court case throws key policy on class sizes in chaos", The Herald, 20th August 2008

³³ Thompson, T, "Court upholds blind girl's right to attend special school of choice", Scotsman 2/10/08, <http://news.scotsman.com/latestnews/Exclusive-Court-upholds-blind-girl39s.4549358.jp>

Two of the examples relate to class sizes and the fact that the legal limit for a class size is 30 in Scotland. So where local authorities have decided against a placing request because they are trying to maintain a smaller class size limit, there is no legal basis for the limit and the courts have therefore sided with the parents. However, regardless of the legal technicalities, pursuing such a case through court can be expensive and stressful and shows the lengths that parents are willing to go to in order to get their child into the school of their choice.

Equally, the number of people being home schooled has increased. In 2001/02 451 children in Scotland were home schooled, but by 2007/08 this had increased by 60% to 756, with about eight out of ten of the children being withdrawn from the classroom by their parent.³⁴

Basically such statistics and cases illustrate that parents are willing, and want, to exercise a degree of control over the education their child receives, however the current system does not allow for it. Pupils are told by the local authority which school they will attend, regardless of their abilities, needs or interests – such a system does not encourage a child's potential to be fulfilled.

Reform Scotland believes that this failing is a fundamental flaw within the Scottish education system and illustrates why reform which provides greater choice, diversity and competition between schools is so necessary.

2.4 Other issues

The current system is also experiencing a number of other problems from teacher recruitment to disputes over the curriculum. Some of these issues are outlined below:

Teacher crisis

Although all newly graduated teachers are allocated a place on the teacher induction scheme, providing their first year's employment and therefore helping ensure they become fully qualified teachers in a quicker time, newly qualified teachers who have completed their probationary year are finding it increasingly difficult to find full time employment. According to an investigation carried out by the Sunday Herald at the start of the new school

³⁴ Scottish Government, "Children educated outwith School and Pupil Projections, 2008", November 2008

year in August 2008, fewer than half of the record number of probationer teachers qualifying had secured a teaching post.³⁵ Similarly, the General Teaching Council for Scotland's December 2008 survey found that only 33.4% of newly qualified teachers who had completed their year's probation had found permanent employment, down from 43.5% in 2007.³⁶

Part of the problem stems from the current financial relationship between local authorities and the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government has stated that it wants to reduce class sizes in primaries one to three, and to do so would require additional teachers. However, councils have complained that they don't have the resources to pay for the additional teachers.

Discipline

Official government statistics on indiscipline are outlined in [Table 1](#).

Table 1: Scottish Government's 2006 perception data from teachers regarding indiscipline. The data represents reports by teachers of behaviour that occurred at least once in their classrooms during the one week period of the survey.³⁷

	Primary	Secondary
Talking out of turn	98%	99%
Hindering or distracting others	85%	95%
Making unnecessary (non-verbal) noise	85%	88%
Pupils leaving their seat without permission	81%	80%
Pupil on pupil verbal abuse	60%	74%
Pupil on pupil physical aggression	58%	50%
Pupil on pupil physical violence	37%	23%
Pupil on teacher verbal abuse	15%	41%
Pupil on pupil sexist abuse	6%	26%
Pupil on pupil racist abuse	5%	11%
Pupil on teacher physical aggression	5%	8%
Pupil on teacher physical violence	2%	2%

³⁵ McArdle, H, "This summer 3454 new teachers qualified. Today there are 13 jobs advertised in Scotland. The Result? Do the maths", Sunday Herald 10 August 2008

³⁶ http://www.gtcs.org.uk/News/employment_statistics_newly_qualified_teachers.aspx

³⁷ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/TrendDiscipline>

However other studies suggest a worse picture. For example in July 2008, following freedom of information requests to all Scottish councils, the Sun published a report suggesting that school staff suffered almost 5,000 verbal, physical and/ or sexual attacks in 2007/8. Particularly worrying was the level of attacks being carried out by primary school children.³⁸

Although the number of permanent exclusions is falling, there are questions over whether this is down to improved behaviour. Willie Hart, secretary of the Glasgow branch of the Educational Institute of Scotland, Scotland's largest teaching union, told the Herald in August 2008:³⁹

"We are not convinced the reduction in exclusions reflects a positive change in pupil attitude or the provision of appropriate facilities to support young people whose behaviour is challenging, but rather reflects pressure from the education department on schools not to use the sanction of exclusion, even when it is merited. The perception from teachers is that the level of difficulties encountered in the classroom has increased in terms of anti-social behaviour."

The problem of indiscipline is compounded by schools apparent inability to deal with such pupils in the way they would like to as disciplinary action in schools is the responsibility of the local authority. At the Annual General Meeting of the Educational Institute of Scotland in Dundee in June 2008, teachers complained of cases where pupils brought weapons in to schools or carried out attacks yet were not being permanently excluded from the school. Teachers felt that serious incidents were swept under the carpet by council staff.⁴⁰

External criticism

In addition to the problems outlined, both universities and employers have voiced concerns that the current education system is not adequately providing pupils with the basic skills necessary, for either entering work or higher education – as illustrated by the following quotes:

"Schools are failing to engage meaningfully with too many young people, leaving them far short of being 'work-ready', often with few or no

³⁸ Angove, K, "War on Teachers" Sun, 23/7/08

³⁹ Denholm, A, "Big fall in pupils put out of school", The Herald, 18/8/08

⁴⁰ Denholm, A, "Scale of classroom violence revealed", The Herald 6/6/08

qualifications at all and little to show for the years spent in the classroom. As a consequence, Scottish businesses have to invest an unacceptably high proportion of the £2bn they commit annually to training on what is effectively remedial education, rather than on sharpening their competitive edge” – CBI Scotland manifesto 2006⁴¹

“It has become normal to stay on for an additional year, whether to retake Highers, tackle one or two Advanced Highers or pursue other activities. It is hard to see this rather ragged pattern as making the most of educational value and it has left universities admitting students into their foundation year with increasingly divergent attainment levels.” – Professor Andrew Hamnett, of Strathclyde University⁴²

⁴¹ BBC News Online 6th September 2006 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/5318440.stm>

⁴² Denholm, A. “University call for two year higher courses”, The Herald, 2/1/08

3. Learning lessons from overseas

The previous chapter outlined the problems in the Scottish education system which restrict social mobility and see too many children trapped in poorly performing schools. Reform Scotland looked at a number of other countries to see how they addressed this problem and whether there were lessons which Scotland could learn. The following offers a brief summary of how some education systems operate choice-based systems. Reform Scotland does not believe any of these examples offers an ideal model for replicating in Scotland, and it is also important to remember that there are a number of other factors, often outwith the education system, which affect the academic success of these countries. However, the examples all show some of the different benefits extending parental choice can bring.

3.1 The Netherlands

The Netherlands is generally one of the best performing countries in international league tables – it was the fourth best performing country on the science scale in PISA 2006 with a score of 525.⁴³

Parental choice of school education in the Netherlands has been enshrined in the Dutch Constitution since 1917. This allows for the average per-pupil cost of state education to follow a pupil to the school of the parents' choosing. The money goes directly to the school from the Ministry of Education. The amount that follows each pupil is weighted to take account of their socio-economic background. As a result, children coming from lower income families can receive up to 190% of the standard level.

It is relatively easy for any group of parents, or organisation, to set up a school. Only 50 parents are needed in towns of fewer than 25,000 people, or 125 parents in towns of more than 100,000. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that 65% of schools in the Netherlands are independently run.⁴⁴ A number of vocational and specialist schools have also emerged in the independent sector.

⁴³ The Programme for International Student Assessment 2006, OECD, 2006. Scotland was not included in the survey, though the UK was ranked 8th in the OECD with a score of 515.

⁴⁴ www.reform.co.uk/website/reformaroundtheworld/netherlands.aspx

Once a school receives state funding, it must teach the national curriculum, face regular inspections and ensure that pupils sit national exams. Every pupil is also given a number, which enables their educational achievement to be monitored.

Parents have a powerful role in education, both in the state and independent sectors as it is easy for state school students to transfer to an independent school if parents become dissatisfied with the education their children are receiving.

3.2 Milwaukee

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program is the oldest public voucher system in the United States. It was first introduced by African-American State Representative Polly Williams to respond to the huge gap in drop-out rates, test scores and educational opportunity between middle and low income families.

The scheme gives pupils whose household income is below 175% of the poverty line, a voucher equal to the cost of a place at a state school.⁴⁵ The scheme has a mandated cap of 15,000 pupils and the voucher can be used to send the child to choice schools which include private schools, religious schools and state schools. If a school is oversubscribed then places have to be allocated by a lottery – schools cannot select pupils and are not allowed to take past disciplinary records into account.⁴⁶

In January 2005, 13,978 pupils were using vouchers to attend 117 independent schools.⁴⁷

Research by the Manhattan Institute found that standardised test scores for pupils using vouchers in independent schools (for three or more years) were on average higher than for a control group of state school pupils. Further research has also shown that Milwaukee pupils using vouchers to attend independent schools graduated at a higher rate than those in state schools.⁴⁸

45 Green, D & Cackett, B, "School choice & equality: learning from overseas experience", Civitas 2005

46 Hockley, T & Nieto, D "Hands up for school choice", Policy Exchange 2004

47 Green, D & Cackett, B, "School choice & equality: learning from overseas experience", Civitas 2005

48 Green, D & Cackett, B, "School choice & equality: learning from overseas experience", Civitas 2005

3.3 Sweden

Prior to education reforms in the early 1990s, funding of state schools in Sweden came from central government though the schools were operated by the local municipalities, the lowest tier of local government. State funded schools also had to operate under strict national rules and regulations from central government. As in Scotland, children were allocated a school on the basis of the catchment areas they lived in.

Following reforms to Sweden's education system in 1992, independent schools were given the right to receive funding from municipalities. A voucher system was introduced which allowed parents to take 85% of the average cost of educating a child in their municipality and use it to send their child to an independent school, or to choose to send their child to another state school. In 1997, the voucher was increased to 100%.

Central government approves potential schools through the National Agency for Education. If the Agency judges that a school fulfils basic requirements, such as meeting academic standards and adhering to the national curriculum, the school is entitled to the voucher funding, regardless of whether it is religious, charitable or for-profit. However, once a school is established, they are not allowed to charge top-up fees, and must allow entry to all children regardless of ability or religion. Once a child is admitted to a school they cannot be expelled, even on disciplinary grounds.⁴⁹

Parents play a very powerful role in the Swedish system. As well as being able to choose the school they feel is best for their child, they are also able to change their child's school and therefore take their money elsewhere. As a result, unpopular schools will lose pupils and close. This makes schools responsive to the demands of parents and the needs of children, as they determine funding, rather than central or local government. This applies both to schools run by the local municipal governments and the independent sector, and has increased competition between schools which has coincided with improved results in both the state and independent sectors.

⁴⁹ Hockley, T & Nieto, D "Hands up for school choice", Policy Exchange 2004

From 90 independent schools in 1992, the figure increased to 565 in 2004/5, accounting for 11% of all schools.⁵⁰ A research study conducted by Mikael Sandstrom and Fredrik Bergstrom for the Research Institute of Industrial Economics supported the hypothesis that school results in public schools in Sweden had improved due to the introduction of competition.⁵¹

3.4 Finland

In the OECD's PISA studies in 2000, 2003 and 2006, Finland was amongst the best performing countries in each of the areas examined.

Generally, Finland's 432 municipalities are responsible for providing basic education, assigning a place in a local school to pupils. If places are available at other state schools, pupils are free to choose that school instead. The central government pays a statutory government transfer to the education provider based on the unit cost of education, but also taking into account the amount of special needs education provided by the school and the number of immigrant pupils. Parents can choose to send their children to private schools, which also receive a statutory government transfer.⁵² Within the state sector however there are choices between being taught in Finnish or Swedish.

The private schools established before 1998 receive the same monetary funding as the government contribution to state schools in the same city. However, the so-called new private schools, established after 1998, only receive 90% of the government contribution. Although the government contribution for comprehensive schools is paid directly to private schools, in the future it is expected the contribution will be paid to the municipality which, in turn, will distribute the funds to private schools.⁵³ However, there are still relatively few private schools in Finland.

⁵⁰ Green, G and Cackett, B, "School choice and equality – learning from overseas experience", Civitas

⁵¹ Sandstrom, M & Bergstrom, F, "School Vouchers in Practice: competition won't hurt you!", Research Institute of Industrial Economics, Working Paper No. 578, 2002.

⁵² Finnish Department of Education <http://www.edu.fi/english/page.asp?path=500,4699,4847>

⁵³ National Association of Independent Schools in Finland's report to European Council of National Association of Independent Schools, 2008 www.ecnais.org/documents/Nat.ReportFinland-2008.doc

3.5 Denmark

Denmark, like the Netherlands, has a long-established history of publicly supported independent schools based on government-financed vouchers. All children must receive 9 years of education, but - provided a certain minimum standard is obtained - it is a matter of choice for the parents whether that education is provided in state schools, independent schools or in the home.

In 2006 there were 491 independent schools and 600 state schools.⁵⁴

Independent schools are roughly divided into the following categories:

- small independent schools in rural districts
- large independent schools in urban districts
- religious or congregational schools,
- progressive free schools,
- schools with a particular educational aim, such as the Rudolf Steiner schools
- German minority schools,
- immigrant schools.

Approximately 80% of municipal spending on schools follows pupils who register at an independent school, with the money paid directly from the Ministry of Education to the school, the municipality then reimburses the Ministry of Education.⁵⁵ However the voucher does not cover the full cost of tuition at independent schools, with all but the poorest having to contribute something towards the cost. This is due to the belief that parental interest and control of independent schools would diminish if they were entirely funded by the state.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Danish Ministry of Education, <http://eng.uvm.dk/Uddannelse/Primary%20and%20Lower%20Secondary%20Education/Private%20Schools%20in%20Denmark.aspx>

⁵⁵ Rebanks Hepburn. C, "The Case for School Choice: Denmark", The Fraser Institute, 1999

⁵⁶ Rebanks Hepburn. C, "The Case for School Choice: Denmark", The Fraser Institute, 1999

3.6 Alberta

Canada generally performs fairly well in international league tables of educational attainment; however it is of particular note how much better the province of Alberta does, scoring well above the Canadian average for science, reading and maths. This is particularly true in science, where Alberta was second only to Finland and scored 550 compared to Canada's 534 in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment 2006, and in reading where Alberta scored 535 and ranked fourth compared to Canada's 527, also in PISA 2006.⁵⁷

However, Alberta's educational spending is not that different from other provinces⁵⁸ and the teacher to pupil ratio is one of the highest across Canada⁵⁹. The key difference is that Alberta's education system offers greater parental choice. Parents can choose from a wide range of schools including separate schools (normally religious), francophone schools, state schools, private schools, charter schools (autonomous non-profit public schools designed to provide innovative or enhanced education programmes) as well as alternative learning programmes involving home education or outreach. If parents choose to send their child to a school outwith the state sector the provincial government will pay 60% of the cost of educating the child within the public sector towards the cost of the private schooling.⁶⁰

57 Education Quality & Accountability Office, "Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 2006 Highlights of Ontario Results" December 2007

58 Manning, P, "Making the case for parental choice", The Montreal Gazette, 17/10/07 <http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette/news/editorial/story.html?id=6efdb304-f454-4b13-b02e-833acfdee8bd>

59 Frontier Centre for Public Policy, "Educational Achievement in Canada: Alberta's choice-based model leads provincial comparison", May 2005

60 Alberta's department for education, "Opportunities for choice in education" <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/educationsys/ourstudents/iv.aspx>

4. How Scottish education should be reformed

For many people in Scotland, the Scottish state education system works well, a fact recognised by the OECD's review of the Scottish system. Many children learn a great deal from their time in school and progress on to good jobs or further or higher education. For those successful schools where parents are happy with the educational opportunities afforded to their children, Reform Scotland does not believe any radical reform is necessary. If parents are happy with the status quo and the relationship between their school and the local authority, that should be able to continue. Indeed, whilst there may be a perception that independent schools always perform better than state ones, this isn't the case and many state schools actually have better levels of attainment. For example:⁶¹

- In Stirling, the percentage of the S4 year group receiving at least one higher in S5 in 2006/07 was higher at the state school, Dunblane High (69%), than at the independent school, Beaconsfield (63%).
- In East Renfrewshire, the percentage of the S4 year group receiving at least one higher in S5 in 2006/07 was higher at the state school, Mearns Castle High (71%), than at the independent school, Belmont House (69%) which also boasts one of the smallest average class sizes of a major school in Scotland.

However, even within the best performing state schools, there is always room for improvement – a fact brought home by Scotland's poor performance in the 2007 Trends in Maths and Science Survey published in 2008.

More importantly though, not every child in Scotland is lucky enough to be attending a school which performs well and, as demonstrated in chapter 2 and highlighted by the OECD, too many children in Scotland are being left behind in schools which don't allow them to fulfil their potential. Therefore, what is needed is reform which allows the good schools to carry on doing the good work they are doing, but leads to improvements in attainment and educational opportunities for more disadvantaged children.

⁶¹ Scottish Schools Online

Parental choice

Reform Scotland believes that the cornerstone of such a system is to give parents a far greater say in the education of their children. Reform Scotland believes that this should mean giving parents the ability to choose the school they feel offers the best education for their child. Schools within the state system are all very different, which is to be celebrated; however those differences are meaningless if parents are unable to choose between them. Where parents are able to exercise greater choice between schools, this introduction of competition can help improve attainment levels in all schools, an advantage highlighted in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) published in 2007:

"Across OECD countries, 60% of students were enrolled in schools whose principals reported competing with two or more other schools in the local area. Across countries, having a larger number of schools that compete for students is associated with better results, over and above the relationship with student background."⁶²

In practical terms, we believe this should mean that parents or guardians are given an entitlement equal to the value of the average cost of educating a child in their local authority area which could be used to send their child to any school which costs the same as the entitlement or less. If private school fees are the same or less than the entitlement then parents can choose to send their child there. However, if the fees are higher, parents will not be able to top-up the difference themselves.

Parents would also be able to send their children to new state-funded, independent schools which would be able to open up as long as they passed education requirements and the cost was equal to or less than the entitlement. New independent schools, like current ones, would be responsible for their own teacher pay and conditions.

Independent schools which accept the entitlement would not be able to choose pupils on the basis of ability – parents and pupils should choose schools and not vice versa. Initially, before new schools are able to open, if demand for places at independent schools exceeds supply a lottery system

⁶² OECD, "The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2006: executive summary", 2007

would need to be used to allocate places at a school, though preference could be given to pupils with a sibling at the school. Local authorities could continue to use the existing catchment area as the basis on which to allocate places at the schools which they run.

Supplement for children in receipt of free school meals or with special educational needs

The central objective of extending parental choice is to extend opportunity and increase social mobility. To ensure that this objective is achieved, pupils in receipt of free school meals or with special educational needs would receive a permanent supplement on top of their entitlement. This would come from central government and ensure that such pupils are more attractive to schools.

Transitional introduction for children on free school meals

To further help pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds, who are the ones most obviously being let down by the current system, Reform Scotland believes that such a system of parental choice should be introduced initially only to parents of children who receive free school meals. This would be for a transitional period of two years and, during this period, these parents would be given priority over other parents using the existing placing request system.

Allow new schools to be set up

As the OECD PISA report highlighted, the effect of competition can drive up standards across the board, which is why it is important to allow new and diverse schools to open up. Nothing prevents new schools opening up and operating as private schools at present as long as they meet required guidelines. However, providing the entitlement to parents to send their child to the school of their choosing will increase the potential demand for independent, state-funded schools and so provide an important stimulus for the establishment of new schools.

As has been pointed out by the OECD and is illustrated by the experiences of other countries, this increase in the number of independent schools along with further variety and diversity will help increase competition and raise standards and attainment across all schools.

Local authority schools could continue as before if they wish, but local authorities should be given control over teacher pay and conditions

Local authorities would continue to run the state schools they currently control; however should they choose, they could allow state schools to become independent schools, handing over power on issues such as pay and conditions directly to the school.

Reform Scotland believes that in addition to continuing to run their current schools as at present, councils should be handed complete control over pay and conditions, effectively ending nationalised pay bargaining for teachers. Councils could still choose to agree nationwide deals through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA), but this should be for individual councils to decide.

If local authorities choose to operate their own pay and conditions, perhaps to attract teachers to remote areas, then this would end the way that the McCrone deal is implemented. However, education is currently the responsibility of local authorities, so it is only right that they have full control over their own pay and conditions. As more independent schools open up, schools that would be operating their own agreements anyway; the case for a nationwide scheme is weakened.

As outlined in chapter two, there is an inconsistency at present between the legal limit for class sizes and the limit being imposed by the Scottish Government and local authorities. If the Scottish Government does not bring in legislation to reduce the legally enforceable class size limit, then local authorities should be allowing pupils to take these places in the schools their parents choose without having to be forced to allocate the place by the courts.

5. Conclusion

Reform Scotland believes the reforms laid out in this report offer the best way of improving Scotland's education system, and in particular helping more pupils reach their full potential. However, it is important to recognise that any education system can only go so far. Parents and communities also have a huge impact on the educational attainment of their children and cannot expect the state to be able to make up for parental neglect of a child's education.

The reforms set out in this report provide a path to reinvigorate Scottish education, to ensure that, in due course, the days of appearing below average on international league tables are behind us and that once again Scotland can be a leading light in the provision of education.

Central to our proposals is the belief that where the system works, it should be praised and allowed to continue; however where it doesn't, real radical reform is needed – this principle means that no one receives a worse education than they currently do, but many end up receiving a far better education.

"The charge against us of introducing elitism and two-tierism to the school system I find incomprehensible. As I said, we inherited multiple tiers of schools in the state system - some excellent, some indifferent, some failing - and that is precisely what we are seeking to overcome."

Tony Blair's Fabian Lecture on education at the Institute of Education
Sponsored by the Sutton Trust
Wednesday July 7, 2004

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7. Appendix

Council	Total Gross Expenditure 2005/06 in £millions	Pupils in Publicly funded Primary schools 2005/06	Average cost per pupil per council area, in £s
Aberdeen City	58,296	12,815	4,549
Aberdeenshire	77,236	19,736	3,913
Angus	34,084	9,064	3,760
Argyll and Bute	33,502	6,741	4,970
Clackmannanshire	15,008	4,030	3,724
Dumfries and Galloway	40,799	11,348	3,595
Dundee City	40,753	10,097	4,036
East Ayrshire	35,942	9,575	3,754
East Dunbartonshire	36,889	9,100	4,054
East Lothian	34,306	7,664	4,476
East Renfrewshire	35,332	8,589	4,114
Edinburgh, City of	111,230	25,643	4,338
Eilian Siar	16,746	2,128	7,869
Falkirk	46,497	11,964	3,886
Fife	125,450	27,679	4,532
Glasgow City	174,728	39,456	4,428
Highland	74,564	17,535	4,252
Inverclyde	26,393	6,315	4,179
Midlothian	27,196	6,599	4,121
Moray	27,796	7,516	3,698
North Ayrshire	47,354	11,046	4,287
North Lanarkshire	111,706	27,638	4,042
Orkney Islands	10,623	1,630	6,517
Perth and Kinross	46,217	10,312	4,482
Renfrewshire	56,232	13,608	4,132
Scottish Borders	36,443	8,587	4,244
Shetland Island	12,423	1,944	6,390
South Ayrshire	36,942	8,196	4,507
South Lanarkshire	99,065	24,341	4,070
Stirling	24,830	6,922	3,587
West Dunbartonshire	33,131	7,299	4,539
West Lothian	57,474	14,683	3,914
SCOTLAND	1,645,187	389,800	4,138

Council	Total Gross Expenditure 2005/06 in £millions	Pupils in Publicly funded Secondary schools 2005/06	Average cost per pupil per council area in £s
Aberdeen City	63,025	10,375	6,075
Aberdeenshire	90,085	15,836	5,689
Angus	39,759	7,034	5,652
Argyll & Bute	36,074	5,735	6,290
Clackmannanshire	16,253	3,042	5,343
Dumfries and Galloway	47,575	9,581	4,966
Dundee City	50,645	8,433	6,006
East Ayrshire	44,049	8,139	5,412
East Dunbartonshire	47,890	8,348	5,737
East Lothian	33,980	5,803	5,856
East Renfrewshire	40,510	7,705	5,258
Edinburgh, City of	126,036	19,978	6,309
Eilean Star	18,281	1,882	9,714
Falkirk	54,599	9,119	5,987
Fife	131,194	22,213	5,906
Glasgow City	187,317	28,499	6,573
Highland	85,816	14,908	5,756
Inverclyde	30,690	5,444	5,637
Midlothian	33,844	5,502	6,151
Moray	30,669	5,990	5,120
North Ayrshire	51,309	9,203	5,575
North Lanarkshire	122,991	22,123	5,559
Orkney Islands	10,808	1,427	7,574
Perth & Kinross	47,519	8,023	5,923
Renfrewshire	62,742	11,506	5,453
Scottish Borders	41,609	6,971	5,969
Shetland Islands	16,995	1,673	10,158
South Ayrshire	43,597	7,350	5,932
South Lanarkshire	105,360	20,170	5,224
Stirling	32,616	6,022	5,416
West Dunbartonshire	38,357	6,255	6,132
West Lothian	59,900	10,967	5,462
SCOTLAND	1,842,094	315,256	5,771

Source: Government Expenditure on School Education in Scotland 2005-06 & Statistical Bulletin Education Series: Pupils in Scotland*

*This is the best estimate of local authority spending on education available.

