



# New Academies, New Opportunities: An Assessment of Conservative Party Education Policy



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*with thanks to the support of*  
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## Introduction

This paper was written in response to the Conservatives' draft education policy in January 2010<sup>1</sup> and a speech given by the Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Michael Gove, in November 2009,<sup>2</sup> which built on the Conservatives' Green Paper, *Raising the bar, closing the gap: An action plan for schools to raise standards, create more good school places and make opportunity more equal*.<sup>3</sup> It follows and draws from a response to the same issues, on behalf of the Evangelical Alliance's *Forum for Change*.<sup>4</sup>

A major feature of Conservative education policy is the intended creation of 220,000 new school places over nine years through their 'New Academies' programme. This will involve the conversion of existing schools to Academy status and the founding of new ones, both by government and by 'educational charities, philanthropists, livery companies, existing school federations, not for profit trusts, co operatives and groups of parents'.<sup>5</sup> Even where these require state

funds, New Academies would be independent schools, free from local and central bureaucracy and flexible in their curriculum and staffing needs; decision-making would be returned to parents and staff, not Whitehall.

The Conservatives have stated their desire to begin this programme 'within weeks' of coming to power. These policies raise significant opportunities for the Church, along with others in society, to re-examine its role in education and to engage with schools in a new way.

This paper is intended as a starting point for discussion for all those with an interest in education. It summarises the most important points of Conservative education policy, before giving an overview of some of the major Christian principles of education. Finally, it looks at the implications and how parents and other interested parties might help found and shape the new schools created by this initiative. The intention is to identify key opportunities and how such groups might engage with these, and the policy issues that it is hoped the Conservatives will address.

John Hayward  
Executive Director  
Jubilee Centre  
March 2010

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.conservatives.com/News/News\\_stories/2010/01/~media/Files/Draft%20Manifesto/DraftEducationManifesto.ashx](http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/01/~media/Files/Draft%20Manifesto/DraftEducationManifesto.ashx) (accessed 19 January 2010).

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.conservatives.com/News/News\\_stories/2009/11/Gove\\_sets\\_out\\_priorities\\_for\\_school\\_reform.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2009/11/Gove_sets_out_priorities_for_school_reform.aspx) (accessed 8 December 2009). Full speech 'A comprehensive programme for state education' available at [http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2009/11/Michael\\_Gove\\_A\\_comprehensive\\_programme\\_for\\_state\\_education.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2009/11/Michael_Gove_A_comprehensive_programme_for_state_education.aspx) (accessed 8 December 2009).

<sup>3</sup> *Raising the Bar, Closing the Gap: An action plan for schools to raise standards, create more good school places and make opportunity more equal* (November 2007). Available from the Conservative Party website, [http://www.conservatives.com/~media/Files/Green%20Papers/Schools\\_Policy\\_Paper.ashx?dl=true](http://www.conservatives.com/~media/Files/Green%20Papers/Schools_Policy_Paper.ashx?dl=true)

<sup>4</sup> Bill Lattimer, 'Evangelical Christian involvement in New Academies', September 2009 (unpublished).

<sup>5</sup> *Raising the Bar*, p.9.

# Executive Summary

## 1) Conservative party education policy overview

- Commitment to 220,000 extra school places in the form of New Academies, with changes starting ‘within weeks’ of coming to power.
- Vision of a market-driven system with standards raised by competition; parents and other groups able to open new schools if they are dissatisfied with ones in their area.
- Issues of funding and independence (including staff appointments and curriculum) have not yet been satisfactorily resolved, especially concerning so-called faith schools.<sup>6</sup>

## 2) Christian principles of education

- Ultimate responsibility for education lies with parents, within the context of the wider community (including churches).
- The purpose of education is to become a part of a healthy society: ‘In the Bible we learn so as to know how better to love God and neighbour.’
- ‘Successful’ education goes far beyond academic achievement.
- ‘Education’ is not reduced to ‘school’ but is a whole-life event.

## 3) Questions for the Conservative Party

### i) Respecting existing rights:

We need to clarify Michael Gove’s recent ambiguity about faith-based New Academies<sup>7</sup> – exactly what freedoms would they have in pupil admissions, hiring staff, and the curriculum? What would this mean for existing faith schools (including faith-based Academies), which apparently have more freedoms than New Academies would?

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<sup>6</sup> Note that the term ‘faith school’ includes a broad range of approaches and suggests no one specific ethos.

<sup>7</sup> See BBC Politics Show, 28 February 2010. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/politics\\_show/8541826.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/politics_show/8541826.stm) (accessed 16 March 2010). The education manifesto states that New Academies will be ‘non-selective’. Nevertheless, the party has also committed to increasing the number of faith schools ([http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/education/article7060288.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article7060288.ece), accessed 16 March 2010), leaving uncertainty about what freedoms new and existing schools would be given.

Concerningly, Gove has implied an American-style ‘separation of church and state’ in this area – reducing the degree to which the rights of religious parents can be accommodated within the state education framework.<sup>8</sup> This risks the creation of a far greater problem than the one the Conservatives hope to solve,<sup>9</sup> and the action of groups who will feel marginalised as a result.

### ii) Collaboration and competition:

A ‘Second Way’ market-driven model of education to raise academic achievement can be unsustainable and harmful to teachers and pupils. For failing schools, why not start by using proven (and cheaper) relational solutions like federation with other local schools and community engagement, rather than replacement with an Academy?<sup>10</sup>

### iii) Rethinking ratings:

The inspection framework currently holds undue influence over school organisation and management, and is interested solely in academic performance. What broader value-added measures of ‘success’ will be considered (for example, community engagement, pupil behaviour, exclusion rates, alcohol/drug use, teenage pregnancy)?

### iv) Autonomy and accountability:

How will parents – and other stakeholders in pupils’ education – be responsible for school operation in practice, whilst retaining a safety net of accountability to maintain standards and, where necessary, prevent unsuitable applications?

## 4) Issues for Christian engagement

### i) Developing resources:

Freedom from the national curriculum raises new opportunities for faith schools in creating teaching resources with a Christian, relational message at their heart, rather than tacked on as a corrective afterwards.

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<sup>8</sup> This raises significant issues for the erosion of existing rights. See Article 26.3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: ‘Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.’ (There may also be issues around freedom of religion.)

<sup>9</sup> At least part of the reason for the decision seems to surround a reluctance for state schools to teach creationism – a caricature and a narrow view of a much wider question.

<sup>10</sup> See Tower Hamlets case study in Hargreaves and Shirley, *The Fourth Way* (Corwin, 2009), pp.62-68.

**ii) Understanding the process:**

Aside from the numerous clarifications of policy, it would be useful to create a set of resources to help those setting up new schools, particularly given the specific requirements and rules around faith schools.

**iii) Raising awareness:**

Many parents, teachers, churches and other groups might be interested in the opportunities posed by these developments. Now is the time to raise awareness and determine levels of interest for those who want to be involved in starting new schools.

**iv) Further research:**

The Conservatives have stated their commitment to opening more faith schools. However, at present it seems that these will be 'non-selective'.<sup>11</sup> Depending on how this is clarified, it may close the door on particular types of faith school. We need further research into the nature and effect of faith schools, and what they each contribute to education.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/education/article7060288.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article7060288.ece) (accessed 17 March 2010), but see also footnote 2.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Beth Green and Trevor Cooling, *Mapping the Field* (Theos, 2009), pp. 84-85.



# I. Conservative Education Policy

This section gives an overview of Conservative education policy, with emphasis on aspects of particular relevance to Christians and areas still unanswered by Conservative policy makers.

In his speech 'A comprehensive programme for state education' (November 6, 2009), Michael Gove stated five priorities on school reform for a future Conservative government:

- 1) Move to a high quality system of teacher recruitment and training similar to those in Finland and Singapore.
- 2) Give teachers the tools and powers they need to keep order in the classroom.
- 3) Deliver more robust examinations and a more rigorous curriculum.
- 4) **Open a new generation of independently run state schools.**
- 5) End waste and shift spending to a national per pupil funding formula.

A biblically-based approach to education will have implications for all of these areas. However, it is the fourth point, the 'new generation of independently-run state schools', that is the focus of this paper.

## A 'post-bureaucratic schools policy'

Conservative policy stresses the significant behavioural and academic benefits of independent schools – not necessarily fee-paying or private, but independent: '...standards in private schools are so high, because fee-paying schools are *independent from bureaucratic control and accountable to parents not ministers*'<sup>13</sup> (italics mine).

Extending these benefits further into the state schools system forms a major part of the Conservatives' education manifesto. 'We want to see a radical shift in power – away from the educational establishment – from Whitehall and the bureaucratic organisations it sponsors – and down towards schools and parents. We want, crucially, to see heads and teachers given greater freedom from bureaucracy and parents given more control over their children's education.'<sup>14</sup>

According to the Conservatives, returning initiative to parents and teachers is integral to a successful education. 'Schools and teachers can only achieve so much. Parental involvement in building better behaviour is vital. An active parental role: monitoring

homework, ensuring attendance at school and taking responsibility for behaviour, lays the foundation for educational success... Parents need to feel that they have a stronger bond with their child's education and the school community. We want to help every parent be actively involved with their child's education, making it easier to work effectively with the school to provide the best opportunities.'<sup>15</sup>

Support for the model for the new generation of proposed schools comes from Academies and City Technology Colleges, which are established independent from local and central bureaucracy. Many of these Academies have been extremely successful:

*There are many state schools which are quite superb, easily better than many fee-paying establishments.*

*The Harris City Academy in Crystal Palace is an outstanding school in every way – indeed when inspected by Ofsted earlier this month it was ranked as outstanding – the highest possible grade – in every area. It's the only school ever to secure that perfect score. 99% of its students last year got five good GCSEs, 82% got five good GCSEs including English and Maths.*

*Mossbourne City Academy in Hackney is another outstanding school. This year 85% of its children secured five good passes at GCSE including English and Maths.*

*Emmanuel College in Gateshead is another outstanding school. Again, 99% of children secured 5 good GCSEs with 83% securing five good passes including English and Maths.*

*Brooke Weston College in Corby is another outstanding school. 100% of children there got five good GCSEs, 86% got five good GCSEs including English and Maths.*

*Thomas Telford School in Telford is another outstanding school. 99.4% of children there secured at least ten good GCSEs including English and Maths.*

*I have visited all these schools, and I have to say those visits have been some of the most inspiring, encouraging, life-affirming days I've spent.*

*All these schools are comprehensive. All of them are located in working class areas and serve working class communities. In Mossbourne's case the school it replaced was Hackney Downs – one of the worst in England – and Mossbourne's intake has a higher proportion of children with special needs, children eligible for free school meals and children with English as an additional language than the Hackney average. In the case of the Harris City Academy the school it replaced – Sylvan High – had just 10% of its children securing five good GCSEs and was shunned by local parents. Now there are ten parents*

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<sup>13</sup> Gove, 'A comprehensive programme for state education.'

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>15</sup> *Raising the bar*, p.26.

*applying for every place at the Harris Academy and the working class and ethnic minority children who make up the overwhelming majority of pupils there are on course for professional success, university education and fulfilling careers.*

*Now one thing unites all these schools – beyond their comprehensive intake and socially inclusive character – they are all independent. Not fee-paying. Not private. But independent.*

*They are either academies or city technology colleges. They were established independent from local and central bureaucracy, free from central control over the curriculum, free to adopt the reading and maths policies which help the most disadvantaged, free to pay good staff more, free to have longer and more fulfilling school days, free to establish Saturday schools to help stretch and challenge pupils, free to shape and enforce more rigorous discipline policies, free to deploy resources more efficiently, free to develop excellent extra-curricular activities and free to spend the money on their own pupils which would otherwise be spent, beyond their control, by the local authority.<sup>16</sup>*

**Criticism.** It is worth noting that the Academies scheme has not met with unqualified approval by staff, parents and politicians. They have been criticised on grounds of their costs (around twice that of setting up a regular state school); it is still uncertain whether such a financial commitment is worth the improved results or whether the money could be better spent elsewhere. Sceptics have suggested that the political pressure to succeed will lead them to be selective in the pupils they accept, and may have led to higher exclusion rates than average in some cases. Although proponents claim they will raise standards in local schools through competition, the opposite could be true if they are seen as the ‘good school’ in the area, and if they exercise their right to select 10 percent of pupils by aptitude (though some do not). Some Academies are apparently failing or have worse standards than surrounding schools. The high degree of control over the running of the school that sponsors receive for a relatively small investment has led to the accusation that Academies are private schools in all but name. The fact that some are sponsored by religious groups has led to concerns about teaching standards, particularly in terms of

Although the Conservatives will make the process of setting up such schools much easier by cutting red tape, it is technically possible to do the same under a Labour government.

Creationism.<sup>17</sup>

**Note:** although the Conservatives will make the process of setting up such schools much easier by cutting red tape, it is technically possible (if time-consuming and difficult) to do the same under a Labour government, as two groups of parents have already done, in the case of The Elmgreen in Lambeth, and the Jewish Community Secondary School in Barnet. Journalist Toby Young is also heading efforts to set up the West London Free School.<sup>18</sup>

## ‘A new generation of superb state schools’

*Raising the bar* details further the features of the Conservatives’ post-bureaucratic policy:<sup>19</sup>

- Provide over 220,000 new school places. That would meet the demand from every parent who lost their appeal for their first choice school in our most deprived boroughs.
- Allow educational charities, philanthropists, livery companies, existing school federations, not for profit trusts, co operatives and groups of parents to set up new schools in the state sector and access equivalent public funding to existing state schools.
- Ensure funding for deprivation goes direct to the pupils most in need rather than being diverted by bureaucracies.
- Divert more resources to pupils who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring they get the earliest possible opportunity to choose the best schools and enjoy the best teaching.
- Make it easier to establish the extended schooling (from summer schools through Saturday schooling to homework clubs and breakfast clubs) which drives up achievement, especially among the poorest.
- Remove those obstacles in terms of centralised bureaucracy, local authority restrictions and planning rules – which prevent new schools being established.
- Allow smaller schools and more intimate learning environments to be established to respond to parental demands.

<sup>17</sup> Creationism is typically taught as one explanation of the origins of the universe, not the only one.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.westlondonfreeschool.co.uk>. See also <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/dec/14/free-schools-gates-open> (accessed 19 January 2010).

<sup>19</sup> See Section 2, ‘The supply-side revolution’, pp.36-48. Summary on pp.9 and 18.

<sup>16</sup> Gove, ‘A comprehensive programme for state education’.

The first and second points, the creation of new school places and allowing charities and other groups to set up new schools and access adequate public funds, are particularly relevant to Christian individuals and organisations. The Academy model will characterise these hundreds of new schools, made possible by reducing bureaucracy and building on the existing academy legislation. There are two strands to the proposed introduction of 'New Academies':

- 1) The conversion of existing schools. 'We will let any school apply to be an Academy and the most successful schools will be automatically approved to become Academies. At the moment there are more than four hundred secondary schools which are good or outstanding which could become academies within weeks of a change of Government. And not just secondaries, we will extend the Academy programme to primary schools, allowing them to innovate and flourish.'<sup>20</sup>
- 2) An extensive programme to create new ones. 'And as well as liberating existing schools, we will facilitate the creation of a new generation of independent, free, and non-selective primary and secondary Academies. They will be funded by taxpayers but run by teachers and responsible to parents, not micromanaged by politicians. That is the way to give parents what they want - smaller schools with smaller classes, good behaviour, great teachers and restored confidence in the curriculum. Our long-term goal is that Academy status becomes the norm.'<sup>21</sup>

Both of these policies - the conversion of existing primary and secondary schools to Academy status, and the creation of new Academies - may offer significant opportunities to the Church and individual Christians in education. Teachers, heads, governors and parents involved in the 400 secondary schools identified as suitable for immediate conversion to independent status may have the chance to shape the values, ethos and curriculum of the school's new form. For churches and Christian groups, there is the exciting prospect of being directly involved in the creation of entirely new schools.

## Cost and funding

As currently envisaged, the proposed changes will make it far easier for independent groups to start new schools by removing the barriers that currently exist. 'We will make it much easier for educational charities, groups of parents and teachers, cooperatives and others to start new Academies. We will remove the huge amount of

red tape which bureaucrats use to stop new schools, from planning laws to building regulations.' The changes include giving groups access to both recurrent and initial funding.

**Recurrent costs (2.1.2).** Crucially, these new schools will receive the same government funding on a per-head basis that other local schools do. The Conservatives suggest that this will not require any additional funding, because the money essentially follows the pupil. 'We will give all parents control of the taxpayers' money that the government spends on each child - now an average of at least £5,000 per pupil. Parents will have the power to take their child out of a state school, apply to a new Academy, and automatically transfer the "per pupil" funding from the old school to the new Academy. Good schools will grow, bad schools will change, and the poorest will benefit most - just as has happened in Sweden where this reform has been pioneered.'<sup>22</sup>

The per-pupil funding model means that New Academies will have to compete favourably with existing schools to be financially viable. However, this model of financing schools may not be realistic; fixed costs (for example, numbers of teaching and maintenance staff) means that schools with decreasing numbers of pupils will see an increase in their per-pupil costs. The difference will presumably have to be made up by the taxpayer. The flipside of this is the possibility of increased interest in groups with independent funds who are willing to subsidise the shortfall, since these will save the government money.

**Capital costs (2.1.3).** Funding will also be provided for start-up costs and will be set aside from the existing education budget. 'The Building Schools for the Future budget is already set at £9.3 billion for the three years 2008-09 to 2010-11. Redirecting fifteen per cent of this would raise £1.4 billion. Assuming that the funding continues at 2010-11 levels, over nine years this fifteen per cent re-allocation from bureaucratic control to citizen choice would release around £4.5 billion for the building of New Academies.

'The current capital spending per pupil to build an Academy is approximately £20,000. On the conservative assumption that this figure will persist (conservative because it ignores, for example, the potential for our proposed changes in planning laws and building regulations - set out on pages 47 and 48 - to reduce costs), this £4.5 billion would fund more than 220,000 places over nine years.'<sup>23</sup> Changes to the currently onerous legislation imposed on Academy-type buildings mean that this could be considerably cheaper.

For those groups without capital, funding is available. However, state funding is not mandatory; philanthropic

<sup>20</sup> 'A comprehensive programme for state education'. A list of the top secondary schools can be found at [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/parentpower/league\\_tables.php?t=state\\_secondary\\_schools](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/parentpower/league_tables.php?t=state_secondary_schools) (accessed 8 December 2009).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Raising the Bar*, p.39.



sources and the business models of many American Charter Schools are two alternatives suggested by the Conservatives. (Charter Schools are schools which have been given a degree of freedom from regulation in return for ensuring certain standards, defined by a charter.)

Currently, all CTCs and Academies have some private capital sponsorship (20 percent for CTCs, 10 percent for the more common Academies, up to a maximum of £2 million. The average cost of a new Academy is currently £25 million, much of which is spent on the new buildings). In return for their capital, the sponsoring individual or organisation has some influence over the school's curriculum, specialism and ethos, as well as any new building (if applicable).

Again, it seems likely that a Conservative government would look favourably on groups willing to fund the capital costs of new schools, or which have resources such as buildings at their disposal (as many churches will).

It is currently unclear what the advantages and disadvantages would be of accessing state funding, and whether funding a proportion of a school's start-up

Lower costs and greater freedoms for entrants make the possibility of smaller schools viable in areas they were previously not.

costs would mean a greater degree of freedom – it seems uncertain what this freedom would be, given the degree of independence supposedly granted to Academies by default. Under the existing arrangements, however, influence over the curriculum is given in exchange for financial sponsorship. This is something that needs clarification.

### Administration and curriculum (2.3.2)

The New Academies would be allowed the flexibility to depart from the National Curriculum; the only curriculum requirements are those which apply to independent schools.<sup>24</sup> 'Provided New Academies abide by the Admissions Code, ensure that the needs of pupils with special educational needs are taken into account, and levy no charge or fee in respect of admissions they will be free from burdensome regulation.

'New Academies will have no powers to select beyond those available to existing maintained schools, where

ten per cent of the intake can be selected on the basis of aptitude in a specialism.'<sup>25</sup>

### Smaller schools (2.4)

The Conservatives are also keen on creating new small schools, as these tend to be more manageable, have better discipline, lower exclusion rates, better staff-pupil relationships and higher achievement.<sup>26</sup> Failing large schools may even be broken up into smaller ones which use the same campus.

Lower costs and greater freedoms for entrants make the possibility of smaller schools viable in areas they were previously not. This is relevant for many churches, which may now find it worth considering starting their own primary or secondary schools.

<sup>24</sup> Prescribed under Section 157 of the Education Act 2002; [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2002/ukpga\\_20020032\\_en\\_14](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14)

<sup>25</sup> *Raising the Bar*, p.44.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 44-45.

## II. Christian Education

This section briefly explores some of the features of biblically-grounded education, with a view to how they might be applied within the context of the Conservatives' vision.

Relevant to any practical application is the question of what education is *for* – the aims, values and worldview underpinning it – as well as how it looks in practice. For example:

*'Conservative education policy is driven by a moral imperative – the need to make the most of every individual talent. We believe in raising the bar for achievement in Britain, helping every child to acquire a more comprehensive array of skills and providing them with the knowledge to become authors of their own life stories.'*

Whilst the change to a Conservative government at the next election would provide many opportunities for Christians – and Christians will have to operate within a secular context whoever is in power – we should also be aware that the underlying values of education policy (in this case, individual attainment and fulfilment) may stand opposed to the outward-looking, community-focused values of Christianity, or at the very least require a corrective view.

### Forum for Change Education Cluster: An Education Point of View

The Forum for Change Education Cluster has drafted a shared 'Point of View' on Education. This aims to address the Church, the educational community and the wider society:

*Education shapes the next generation and the future course of society. Therefore everyone has an ongoing interest in how each person is enabled to play their full part in the life of their community.*

*The best education:*

- *Helps everyone to develop their life-affirming physical, mental, emotional and spiritual capacities to their full potential; for all humans are of infinite value, made in the image of God.*
- *Promotes the life-long development of character and wisdom, not just the acquisition of skills and knowledge; for true understanding requires discernment.*
- *Involves families and the local community as closely as possible; for the primary responsibility for education lies with parents and families, not the state, and the context is always our relationship with others.*

- *Enables us to find our place in and contribute to wider society, using our gifts and resources responsibly; for personal fulfilment is to be found in loving our neighbour.*

*We challenge churches to consider how, as part of their wider mission to be 'salt' and 'light' in society, they could be more involved in their local schools and colleges, offering a more distinctively Christian approach to the nurture of children's lives and social interactions and to the pursuit of the common good through engaged citizenship.*

*We invite the educational community to take seriously the positive contribution that the Christian worldview has made and continues to make to teaching and learning, and to personal and professional development.*

*We invite society to welcome the distinctive contribution made by Christian values within the education system to the well-being of individuals and communities and to cohesion within families and the wider community in our diverse society.<sup>27</sup>*

From a Christian point of view, education has to be about something more than creating units of economic productivity, or pupils who 'fulfil their potential' as people. (Note that 'fulfilling our potential' is a core value of both Conservative policy *and* the EA's statement, so there is not necessarily a tension here; however, the Christian definition of 'potential', including each person's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual capacities, is much broader than the Conservatives', and this facet of education is only part of the picture.) 'Education is the key mechanism whereby a society propagates its vision of being human... Education is never neutral; it is always telling a story about what it means to be human. In the Bible we learn so as to know how better to love God and neighbour. An attachment to this distinctive worldview makes us strangers in the modern world of secularised education.'<sup>28</sup>

Nicholas Wolterstorff, a leading Christian philosopher who has written extensively on education, describes this active, outward-looking mandate. 'Characteristically, our vision of the role of the church in the world has been terribly and tragically reduced. Characteristically, we think of the church simply as those people who have faith, who live morally and devoutly, who are charged to conduct evangelism, and who one day will be rewarded with bliss in heaven. And that, to say it again, is a

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<sup>27</sup> See statement at <http://www.eauk.org/articles/education-cluster.cfm>

<sup>28</sup> Trevor Cooling, *Votewise Now!* (2009), p.41-43.

terrible and tragic reduction of God's purpose for the church in the world.

'God's good creation fell. It fell by virtue of humankind in its freedom revolting against God and refusing to live in trustful obedience, preferring instead to act as if it were autonomous. Thereby a dark cloud fell over the entire creation, so that the whole of it "groans" for deliverance. The incredible fact is that God resolved not to leave his creation in the grip of its misery, resolved instead to act for its renewal – to act so that God's kingdom would be established, to act so that people could live in shalom, in peace, in joyful fulfilment with themselves, their neighbour, nature, and God.'<sup>29</sup>

The church has a redemptive, active purpose in the world: it is 'God's called and chosen agent of renewal.' There are three aspects to this: proclaiming the gospel, acts of loving service, and to give evidence of this shalom by being an exemplary, or paradigmatic community – not just to wait for the new age, but to manifest signs of its renewing Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

Wolterstorff argues that these values have to be built into the curriculum, rather than tacked onto a secular curriculum afterwards: '...a school cannot simply supplement and correct secular perspectives on art, literature, physical creation, social issues. It must communicate *alternative* perspectives, perspectives faithful to the biblical vision of reality and God's purpose for the church in the world. Yet when one scrutinizes Christian schools, all too often one does not find such alternative perspectives. Rather, one finds secular perspectives to which are attached piecemeal supplements and correctives. Here then is a... great challenge confronting the Christian school. Of course, if the Christian school is indeed to communicate alternative perspectives, there must be such perspectives. This challenge, therefore, is as much a challenge to scholars as to educators. There can be no Christian education in the absence of Christian scholarship.' (p. 57)

Alongside these alternative thoughts must be practised an alternative lifestyle. 'Unless there is such a thing as a Christian lifestyle that transcends nations, there will be little chance that many of us will see our fundamental identity as Christians.' (p. 57)

## Principles of Christian education

This section briefly explores some of the broader features of biblically-grounded education. A fuller treatment can be found in a forthcoming Jubilee Centre paper.

<sup>29</sup> *Educating for Life*, chapter 3: 'A Return to Basic Christian Education', p.51.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p.52.

The Old Testament stresses that education is ultimately the remit of the parents (Deut. 6, Prov. 1). Whatever means they employ outside the family, final responsibility for the child lies with them. This is perhaps more understandable of a time and culture where opportunities for formal education were limited and family structures were stronger. Even today, however, parental involvement is the single biggest predictor of educational success, and studies show that the earliest, pre-school years are vital in shaping future ability to engage with school education.<sup>31</sup> Given that children spend only 15 percent of their total time at school, family background, cultural factors and material needs have a greater impact on educational outcomes.<sup>32</sup> 'Education' was therefore not reduced to 'school', but was a pervasive and ongoing feature of life.

In keeping with this characteristic, 'education' encompassed both righteousness and wisdom, found in the exhortations to teach Torah (Deut. 6:6) and Proverbs (2:1). In reality, the purpose behind these two books may not have been so very different. 'Deuteronomy does not fall neatly into a single theological category. It is traditionally Torah, being one of the five books of Moses. As Torah it is close to wisdom, since both are interested in instruction, and the themes of law and wisdom often overlap... As wisdom, the book offers training in *the right way to live*, and in this respect is closer to Proverbs than anything else.'<sup>33</sup> (Italics mine.) The 'curriculum' was therefore broad, and focused on real-life application as much as technical knowledge. As one commentator writes, 'The aim of Torah is to create a righteous community... [posing] the question of moral capability...'<sup>34</sup>

Further indications of what Torah instruction was supposed to achieve can be found in Deuteronomy

Parental involvement is the single biggest predictor of educational success.

<sup>31</sup> 'Research has shown that – based on the socio-economic background of children – the child's developmental score at 22 months will allow you to accurately predict that child's educational qualifications at the age of 26 years.' See Centre for Social Justice, *Breakdown Britain: Educational Failure* report. See [http://www.centreforsocialjustice.com/client/downloads/BB\\_educational\\_failure.pdf](http://www.centreforsocialjustice.com/client/downloads/BB_educational_failure.pdf) (accessed 25 January 2010), p.61. Cf. Leon Feinstein, 'Very Early', online at <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/CP146.pdf> (accessed 25 January 2010).

<sup>32</sup> CSJ, *Breakthrough Britain: Educational Failure* report, p.4. <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.com/client/downloads/education.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (IVP USA/Apollos, 2002), pp.42-43.

<sup>34</sup> McConville, p.43.

itself. According to various passages, the purpose of learning Torah was:

- To ‘learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land...’ (Deut. 31:13).
- ‘To obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive...’ (Deut. 6:24).
- To realise God’s blessing (Deut. 7:12-16).

Similarly, Prov. 1:7 reads: ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge [*dā’at*, meaning discernment and perception as well as skill, wisdom and technical knowledge], but fools despise wisdom and discipline [*mūsār* – moral discipline, chastening, correction].’

Teaching *the right way to live* is a fundamental purpose of biblical education. Moral discernment was considered more important than technical knowledge. (We do not have to have one at the expense of the other; for example, the best sermons are the ones that combine academic rigour, accessibly and interestingly presented, with practical application.) As Wolterstorff states, building moral values back into the curriculum must be a priority – otherwise there is little distinctive about that brand of ‘Christian’ education.

## Church schools

- One in three schools in Great Britain is a Christian school
- Christian schools educate around 2 million pupils across England, Scotland and Wales
- The majority of faith schools in Britain are Church of England or Catholic.

Research suggests that faith schools may promote community cohesion more than non-faith schools.

There are 7,000 Christian schools in England (of a total of around 21,000 state schools; there are fewer than 50 schools of other faiths, including 38 Jewish schools,<sup>35</sup> 7 Muslim, 2 Sikh and 1 Hindu). Over 90 percent of Christian schools are primary schools, and well over half of them are Church of England schools.

Wales has 168 faith schools,<sup>36</sup> and 50,000 pupils are educated at faith schools – 13.5 percent of primary school children and

7.7 percent of secondary pupils.<sup>37</sup> In Scotland, there are 389 state-funded faith schools (14 percent of a total of 2,722) – 385 of which are Catholic, 3 Episcopalian and one Jewish.<sup>38</sup>

Much of the criticism around Church schools involves state funding, and the accusation that they are exclusive and socially divisive. However, whilst some of these schools prioritise the children of Christian parents, many serve the children in their local area regardless of faith. (Research suggests that faith schools may promote community cohesion more than non-faith schools.<sup>39</sup>) Moreover, there is no coherent approach to the schools’ broader ethos, even within the denominations. The *Mapping the field* report identifies four different worldviews:<sup>40</sup>

- Schools that understand their distinctiveness in the context of the Christian community and mission, and are concerned primarily with the extent to which Christian distinctiveness at the school impacts pupils’ own identity.
- Christian distinctiveness is seen in terms of the wellbeing and spiritual development of the whole child, regardless of their membership of the Christian faith community.
- Christian distinctiveness forms a moral and ethical framework for character formation and promoting civic values.
- Christian distinctiveness contributes to pupil performance through beneficial learning habits.

Compare statements of admission from two Church secondary schools:

- ‘[The school] is a joint Church of England / Roman Catholic foundation, and its purpose is to serve Church of England / Roman Catholic families who live within travelling distance of the school. If there is room, the school also welcomes pupils from committed Christian families of other denominations and from families of other faiths who accept the aims and ethos of this Christian school.’<sup>41</sup>
- ‘The school wishes to protect its Christian character and ethos but also **warmly welcomes applications**

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2009/11/12/allow-faith-schools-to-wither-on-the-vine-says-hart-in-fight-to-lead-labour-91466-25150554/> (accessed 26 January 2010).

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/FAQs> (accessed 26 January 2010).

<sup>39</sup> See <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/education/cocoresearch.pdf> (accessed 15 March 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Beth Green and Trevor Cooling, *Mapping the field: A review of the current research evidence on the impact of schools with a Christian ethos* (Theos, 2009), pp.84-85.

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.st-bedes.org.uk/admissions> (accessed 26 January 2010).

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/6827724/Faith-school-admissions-in-doubt-after-ruling.html> (accessed 26 January 2010).

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/wales.church.school.pupils.achieve.above.average/24204.htm> (accessed 26 January 2010).

**from the wider community.** [After prioritising children in public care, those with a particular medical or social need to attend the school, and those with a sibling already at the school:] The remaining (residual) places will be allocated within two categories: 60% of the places available will be allocated as Foundation/Faith Places; 40% of the places available will be allocated in the 'Community Places' category.<sup>42</sup>

Christian schools therefore differ considerably in their missional purpose, which affects their values and intake. Whilst some difference is only to be expected, what is less well understood is the effect that this tends to have on pupils (see further below). It is worth remembering that all schools require – implicitly or explicitly – some kind of worldview or statement of beliefs as a context for education. Church schools perhaps articulate this more clearly and deliberately than most.

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<sup>42</sup> [http://www.townsend.herts.sch.uk/prospectus\\_and\\_results/2008%20Prospectus%20annual%20info.doc](http://www.townsend.herts.sch.uk/prospectus_and_results/2008%20Prospectus%20annual%20info.doc) (accessed 26 January 2010).



### III. Engaging

Dr Peter Jensen, Archbishop of Sydney, has warned: 'We must ask what is the goal of schooling, and must have an answer which differs from and is far better than the alternatives... Unless we are knowingly theological..., we will not succeed in being any different from secular schools, especially after one or two generations.'<sup>43</sup>

The question remains of how best to move forward in deploying a Christian model – or, given the evidence for different worldviews and philosophies behind Church schools, Christian models – of education within the framework proposed by the Conservatives.

There are a number of different actions in which Christians in education, churches and parents could be involved.<sup>44</sup> These include Policy development; Further research; Determining and encouraging levels of interest among churches and groups of parents; and Creating resources.

#### 1. Influencing policy development

With Labour and the Conservatives racing to position themselves, there is a comparatively short time left before the General Election to influence policy. Likewise, after the election, there will be little time to make changes before implementation. It is important that ideas are developed now put to Conservative policy makers as soon as possible.

From the stated perspective of a Christian approach to education, there are a number of strengths, potential weaknesses, and questions for further discussion and hopefully development in the Conservatives' education policy.

#### Questions about the current proposals

**Redistributive funding.** This is a surprising policy (apparently being more at home in a Labour government) in the draft manifesto: 'We can't go on giving the poorest children the worst education, which is why we will introduce a pupil premium – weighting school funding towards children from disadvantaged backgrounds.' This concern for justice for the worst off should hopefully go some way towards countering the criticism that those Academies which do select by aptitude will be elitist and might disadvantage other local schools by attracting the highest-achieving pupils. Effectively it should create some incentive for schools to attract the most disadvantaged as well.

- How will the weighting work in practice? How much will it be, and what proportion of children will receive it?
- This also raises questions for church schools. Depending on their specific ethos, different schools will look to serve different sections of the local community. In some cases this additional funding may help counter the accusation that church schools can be socially divisive, since it encourages them to take pupils from worse-off families.

**Empowering parents.** Reducing bureaucracy is a very welcome move, intended to shift responsibility and initiative away from politicians and back towards governors and parents – those with the largest stake in their children's education and those with the greatest incentive and ability to determine its outcome.

- What broader moves will be made to remove barriers and strengthen parents' involvement in their children's schooling? For example, unnecessary and often useless CRB/VBS (Vetting and Barring Scheme) checks for millions of parents, volunteers and support staff have discouraged or prevented many from giving their time.
- Flexible work arrangements will be crucial for some parents to participate more fully in their children's education.
- On a related point, how desirable is it to have a 10-12 hour school day? Given the evidence that home life is ultimately most important to educational outcomes, there is a balance between giving pupils the extra help they need, and incentivising a 'convenience culture' that can encourage parents to treat schools like day care centres.
- Some parents themselves may not have the educational background to engage with their own children's education, particularly young children. Over 5 million adults in the UK lack functional literacy skills, and nearly 7 million lack functional numeracy skills. Since it is hardly fair to expect parents who struggle with literacy and numeracy to be involved in helping children learn to read and count at home, and the strong evidence for the difference this makes, are there ways of targeting/prioritising help for disadvantaged parents in this area (cf. the current Skills for Life scheme)?
- To what extent will parents, and other participants in the educational process, be able to influence the ethos of a new school?

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<sup>43</sup> See <http://www.aec.edu.au/assets/files/The%20Armitage%20Lecture%202009.pdf> (accessed 19 January 2010).

<sup>44</sup> The framework for this section is taken from Bill Lattimer's unpublished paper for the Forum for Change Education Cluster.

- How can parents realistically be given the opportunity to influence the shape and development of their local schools, given constraints on time and the level of their desire to be involved?

**Transparency of data.** ‘A Conservative government will reform school league tables so that schools can demonstrate they are stretching the most able and raising the attainment of the less able. We will publish all performance data currently kept secret by the DCSF so that web-based applications can create many new and different sorts of league tables. And we will establish a free online database of exam papers and marking schemes so that parents, teachers and academics can see for themselves how exams have changed.’<sup>45</sup> These are encouraging proposals. However, questions remain about the nature of assessment, the problem of ‘backwash’ or ‘teaching to the test’, and grade inflation.

- Currently, league tables generally reflect academic performance to the exclusion of all else. A Christian worldview sees ‘education’ in a far broader perspective than exam results alone. Whilst giving academic achievement due weight, therefore, assessment must not focus on it solely as a measure of success in education.
- The nature of assessment will depend on our understanding of what education is for. The definition: ‘The purpose of education is to enable pupils to access the best jobs’ will produce a very different outcome to ‘The purpose of education is to enable children to participate in the life of society as adults.’<sup>46</sup> (Assuming a definition something like the latter, we need to keep in mind the shape of the ideal society in which we hope they will participate.)
- We would expect that assessment of a school and, to a more limited extent, individual pupils, would include measures far beyond the academic. For example, behavioural record; rates of crime, alcohol and drug abuse; obesity/physical health and fitness; rates of teenage pregnancy; measures of engagement in the wider community such as volunteering, Duke of Edinburgh, and so on. These measures would need to be measured against local and national averages to determine the ‘value added’ or otherwise of a school. Using such assessment measures would require the support of all relevant stakeholders, including employers and university/college admissions authorities.
- ‘And we will establish a free online database of exam papers and marking schemes so that parents,

teachers and academics can see for themselves how exams have changed.’<sup>47</sup> Publishing tests and marking schemes will inevitably lead to greater ‘backwash’, as teachers learn how to prepare pupils for passing tests more effectively. Unless this move is accompanied by a reform of assessment processes, it risks being a step backwards. Assessment must accurately reflect the pupil’s education, not their ability to pass tests.

**Funding and independence.** Recurrent funding for the Academies model will be on a per-pupil basis – if a pupil changes schools, the funding effectively follows them. Capital costs may be significant; on average an Academy currently costs £25 million, though new buildings account for much of this and the smaller schools envisioned by the Conservatives would cost less. For founding organisations without the necessary resources, state funding will be available: ‘For those organisations without capital reserves we propose that the capital costs of New Academies, like community schools, should be 100 per cent financed out of government funds.’<sup>48</sup>

- Schools have relatively high fixed costs. How realistic, therefore, is the per-pupil model of funding, and what shortfall in recurrent costs might smaller schools, in particular, need to meet?
- In contrast, successful schools should prosper; ‘The system must not be determined by the struggling schools but by the best. Where there is genuine need some extra help should be available. Above all there must be no “protection” for schools which are poorly led and which therefore fail to deliver a satisfactory education to all their pupils.’<sup>49</sup>
- What are the criteria for deciding whether an organisation should or should not be allowed to access state funds to cover capital costs?
- Related to the question of funding is that of independence. Currently, flexibility is given to Academies in exchange for capital sponsorship (10 percent, up to £2 million), but the Conservatives have stated that anyone who wants to set up a new school will be able to access state funds. What levels of independence and flexibility over ethos, curriculum, etc, will be granted, depending on the level of state funding accessed? Will full independence only be available to groups providing the necessary funds? There may be particular freedoms in terms of curriculum, ethos, staff appointments (for example, the proportion of Christian teachers employed in a Christian school), and so on, that founding organisations might

<sup>45</sup> Draft manifesto, p.6.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Watts, *Some Biblical Perspectives on Schooling*, Jubilee Centre, March 1991 (internal paper).

<sup>47</sup> Draft manifesto, p.6.

<sup>48</sup> *Raising the Bar*, p.38.

<sup>49</sup> Tony Leach, personal correspondence.

consider essential if they are to engage with the idea.<sup>50</sup>

**Primary Schools.** ‘We want every child to benefit from our reforms. So we will give every existing school the chance to achieve Academy status, with ‘outstanding’ schools pre-approved, and extend the Academy programme to primary schools.’<sup>51</sup> To date the discussion of Academies has focused almost exclusively on secondary-level education. The creation of primary-school Academies is a completely new proposal, but one that has apparently received little attention.

- It is worth underlining the importance of this initiative and our support for it – as it is worth stating the support from Christians for the Conservatives’ proposals and desire to see them succeed.
- Federation of new primary schools with other small schools may play a part in increasing their success and educational experiences they can provide.
- Note that at present there are comparatively few Church secondary schools.

## Broader concerns

There are some concerns about the overall approach taken by the Conservatives. However, there cannot be

broad-scale changes to the manifesto at this stage. How can a Christian framework be implemented within the structure already laid out? What adjustments/additions would we like to see to existing proposals?

**The Swedish model.** The Conservatives have committed themselves to a course of action, borrowing a promising-looking model from Sweden (though also drawing on US and

Canadian education systems) and adapting it for use in the UK. Whilst this offers many new opportunities, there are some concerns about both the theory and practice of the ‘Swedish model’.

How will the proposals involve all of the stakeholders in education – parents, teachers, students, communities and other groups?

- To what extent is it possible to import this model and expect it to work? Sweden is a very different society to the UK. There is low income inequality due to the high tax rate and strong welfare system, in comparison to the UK, where there are enormous inequalities, particularly for minority groups. Most of the reasons for educational failure lie outside the school.<sup>52</sup> How can schools both contribute to, and be a part of, wider healthy communities? (Such as the inspiring community redevelopment efforts that have transformed schools in Tower Hamlets.)
- How effective is this model in Sweden? What (value-added) academic and social results can be demonstrated? The OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) suggests that Sweden is ‘not statistically significantly different from the OECD average’ for science.<sup>53</sup> 21 countries scored more highly, including the UK.
- PISA suggested that ‘performance was not very closely related to the schools in which students were enrolled’<sup>54</sup> in Sweden (and Finland) – standards are similar *across the educational system*. What implications does this have for creating New Academies on a Swedish model and expecting them to lift standards?

**Relational implications.** The Conservatives have suggested a state-supported but market-driven model of education focusing on academic results. The theory is that competition between schools drives achievement because parents will opt for schools that offer the best education.

- In the last few years, education policy has brought excessive regulation and standardisation as benchmarks for assessment and competition.
- Endless competition for the highest results is not sustainable. Around 40 percent of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) drop out of the state system within just six months, and another 18 percent within three years.<sup>55</sup> Not all of this is due to teacher burnout. However, teachers often do have to work long hours, with lesson planning and marking outside the school day. They often have little time to see their families.
- A focus on academic standards is not why people enter the profession; it is a reason they leave it. Loss of professional autonomy and the constant

<sup>50</sup> Michael Gove has been particularly ambiguous about the level of autonomy that will be given to Christian schools – whether they will be able to hire Christian teachers, and whether they will be able to select pupils on that basis. For comparison, American charter schools are non-religious in character, non-discriminatory, but can affiliate with religious organisations: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/cspguidance03.pdf> (accessed 16 March 2010).

<sup>51</sup> *Draft manifesto*, p.7.

<sup>52</sup> See *Breakthrough Britain, Educational Failure*, p.4.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p.22.

<sup>54</sup> 2006 summary, p.31.

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1206477/Half-newly-qualified-teachers-drop-months.html> (accessed 1 February 2010).

gathering of short-term performance data has damaged teacher motivation.

- How desirable is a constant, built-in churning of both pupils and teachers? To what extent has the relational impact of education policy been assessed?

**A fourth way solution?** Andy Hargreaves, founder of the *Journal of Educational Change* and a leading authority in the field, explores a ‘fourth way’ of educational change, in contrast to the state-controlled first way, the market-driven second way, and the combination of free market and state intervention of the third way.<sup>56</sup> He draws heavily on the Finnish education system, which boasts high achievement but low levels of assessment. There is much here that overlaps with the Christian, relational perspective described in Section 2 – as well as with the vision described in the Conservatives’ education manifesto.

‘[The] fourth way brings together government policy with professional involvement and public engagement around an inspiring social and educational mission.’<sup>57</sup>

A more comprehensive brief description (though the idea resists easy summary) is: ‘The Fourth Way achieves coherence by assigning huge priority to the development of sustainable and distributed leadership that is knowledgeable about learning; by placing responsibility before accountability (with accountability serving as a conscience through sampling); by initiating and supporting but not over-regulating professional networks of improvement; and – most of all – by developing an inspiring and inclusive educational and societal vision that connects the future to the past and leaves teachers collectively responsible for pedagogical decisions and a lot of curriculum development.’<sup>58</sup>

There is an emphasis on inclusivity, responsibility, active involvement by all stakeholders, partnership, long-term sustainability, democracy, respect, and support. Characteristics of the fourth way are:

- An inclusive vision with schools, communities and corporate partnerships working together
- Learning that is creative, engaging and demanding
- Shared and ambitious improvement targets
- Prudent accountability that tests samples
- Strong schools helping their weaker peers
- An evidence-informed, rather than data-driven, profession

<sup>56</sup> See *The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change* (Corwin, 2009).

<sup>57</sup> Andy Hargreaves, chapter one in *Change Wars*, p.13. See online at <http://www.solution-tree.com/Public/Media.aspx?ShowDetail=true&ProductID=BKF254> (accessed 1 February 2010).

<sup>58</sup> *Change Wars*, pp.39-40.

- Sustainable leadership that spreads and lasts.<sup>59</sup>

More specifically, the fourth way of educational change is built on:

- An inspiring and inclusive moral purpose, rather than a narrow one (such as ‘literacy’); public engagement to balance state involvement; investment in communities as the broader context of education; corporate educational responsibility rather than a self-interested agenda; students as partners in change, rather than its targets.
- High-quality teachers, with the profession controlled at the point of entry and high retention; continuous professional learning and professional standards; collaborative learning communities rather than classroom isolation.
- Sustainable leadership; support through networks of schools; placing responsibility before accountability; building from the bottom whilst steering from the top.

Questions that this model raises about the Conservatives’ education manifesto include:

- What provision will there be for schools federations under a Conservative government – raising standards through collaboration rather than – or at least, as well as – competition?
- What measures will there be to help struggling schools and stop them getting to the stage where they need to be converted to Academy status<sup>60</sup> – surely a cheaper and less disruptive option (e.g. RATL, *Raising Achievement, Transforming Learning*, which employs collaborative networks between schools to improve performance, rather than relying on top-down directives)?
- The Swedish educational model is heavily emphasised. What can we learn from Finland, which consistently ranks amongst the best countries in the world for student achievement, or from the Netherlands, which scores highly for child wellbeing? Canada also consistently scores highly in the PISA report. Sweden typically comes around halfway down the list.<sup>61</sup> (Again, we need to bear in mind that Finland is also a very different society to the UK.)

<sup>59</sup> Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley, *The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change* (Corwin, 2009).

<sup>60</sup> ‘Any school that is in special measures for more than a year will be taken over immediately by a successful academy provider.’ (Draft Education Manifesto, p.7)

<sup>61</sup> See 2006 summary data at <http://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/13/39725224.pdf> (accessed 2 February 2010).



- How will the proposals involve all of the stakeholders in education – parents, teachers, students, communities and other groups?
- To what extent can the Conservatives' model be seen as long-term, stable and sustainable?
- Do we see 'education' as a ring-fenced event that takes place at school, under the direction of teachers and the state, and isolated from the rest of our time? Or do we have an integrated vision that places it within the context of the life and wellbeing of the community?

## 2. Further research

Although a Conservative government would ostensibly enable the creation of many new faith schools, there is considerable ambiguity among church schools themselves when it comes to ethos, and the effect that this has upon pupils and families. The *Mapping the field* report has highlighted the gaps in our thinking when it comes to faith schools. Specifically, there is 'a lack of consensus regarding the purpose of, and contribution to be made by, Christian distinctiveness in education.'<sup>62</sup>

The research also suggests that explicitly Christian schools can have an opposite effect to the one intended: 'counter-evangelism'.<sup>63</sup>

The report identifies four types of 'Christian' school, with different worldviews (see above). Not every church school will share the same objectives. Ultimately, this will come down to choice; some parents may prefer their children go to a Church school so that they

are educated in an environment that is in line with the beliefs practised at home; others schools will see their missional purpose as reaching out to the broader local community by providing an ethical framework and a good but not explicitly Christian education.

However, further research is needed to understand the impact that each type of school tends to have in practice, why, and what other factors are significant.

### Federations

More research needs to be carried out into the benefits of school clusters or federations, as an alternative to replacing a failing school, and as a way of creating strong new smaller schools, which might otherwise find

themselves unable to offer the range of services that larger schools can.

Benefits of federating include continuity (if primary-secondary), recruitment, costs, sharing resources and admin, improvements in weak schools, curriculum choices, staff job satisfaction and professional development, reducing exclusions, extra-curricular activities.<sup>64</sup>

'By working together, through federation and other partnership arrangements schools can:

- Raise their standards, for example, by shared training, encouraging their staff to support each other and developing integrated curriculum and pastoral policies.
- Offer pupils a wider range of opportunities, for example, by holding joint activities or sharing facilities or teachers that might be difficult to sustain individually.
- Develop a range of extended services and activities for pupils and the wider community.
- Improve their leadership and management, for example, through shared headship or School Business Managers.
- Maximise the sharing of resources, taking advantage of economies of scale.

The ability of [sic] federate under a single governing body could also be of particular benefit to small schools or schools in more isolated rural areas, opening up opportunities to share management and governing body responsibility and curriculum expertise.'<sup>65</sup>

Needless to say there can be problems, or perceived problems, with federation (such as loss of identity, autonomy, and logistical problems), but federating provides one alternative to the costly and disruptive replacement of failing schools with a New Academy.

### 3. Interest among churches

It is unknown how many churches and Christian parents across the country are aware of the opportunities presented by the New Academies initiative, or might want to be involved. Given that new schools can only be started by local groups with an interest in their children's education, raising awareness among churches is vital if changes are to occur on a broad scale.

There are two possibilities for churches and individual Christians:

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* p.77

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* pp.61-62.

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/federations/> (accessed 15 March 2010).

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/federations/benefits/?version=1> (accessed 15 March 2010).

More research needs to be carried out into the benefits of school clusters or federations, as an alternative to replacing a failing school.



- Creating new schools from scratch
- Being involved in the conversion of schools to independent status, including influencing the worldview and policy of schools converted to independent status.

There are ‘...more than four hundred secondary schools which are good or outstanding which could become academies within weeks of a change of Government.’<sup>66</sup> This might offer immediate opportunities for change, depending on the involvement of school heads and governors. Although there would (presumably) be little scope for the conversion of existing schools to faith school status, there would be opportunities for parents, teachers and governors to influence academy values, core beliefs and curricula.

#### 4. Developing Resources

Within the next few months it would be helpful to develop resources to assist those who are considering starting New Academies, or become involved in them as teachers, parents or governors.

- **Create an online resources package.**

There would be enormous value to developing a website and other resources which would take applicants step-by-step through the practicalities of starting a new school and answer common questions. Presumably most or all of the necessary information would be freely available from the government; however, those wishing to set up faith schools might have specific questions and would benefit from the experience and expertise of others who have done so. The New Schools Network (<http://www.newschoolsnetwork.org/>) is one organisation set up to increase the number of independent schools in the UK, though faith schools may well have particular requirements.

- **Developing teaching resources.**

The Conservatives state their hope to convert a number of top secondary schools to independent status ‘within weeks’ of a general election. However, assuming a May election, it seems highly unlikely that any changes would be made to the curriculum before the end of the academic year (July 22/23). This would give some time to develop teaching resources. One important question for further discussion is how best to build a moral dimension into a curriculum.<sup>67</sup> For example:

- How can we encourage the effective moral application of knowledge?
- How might a new curriculum adopt an outward-looking, not self-centred approach?

- How far do current curricula reflect individualistic consumer culture, and how much do they emphasise Christian, relational values (the ‘fourth R’)?
- How much is education collaborative, and how much is it competitive?
- To what extent do we teach relational skills as well as transfer of information?

Finally, what are relationships like between staff, pupils, governors and parents? How are these fostered and developed; to what extent do parents’ evenings encourage engagement; to what extent are heads and teachers supported by those within and outside the school?

#### About the Jubilee Centre

- The Jubilee Centre is an independent think tank based in Cambridge. Established in 1983, it offers a Christian perspective on a wide range of current trends and social issues. Other recent reports include *Cohabitation in the 21st Century* (2010), *The UK Marriage Index* (2009), and *Sustaining Democracy* (2009). All of the Jubilee Centre’s publications are available via its website, at [www.jubilee-centre.org](http://www.jubilee-centre.org)

<sup>66</sup> Gove, ‘A comprehensive programme for state education’.

<sup>67</sup> For further suggestions, see Michael Schluter and David Lee, *The R Option* (Relationships Foundation, 2003), pp.171-82.