

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Accountability hearings](#), HC 341

Tuesday 30 April 2019

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); James Frith; Trudy Harrison; Ian Mearns; Lucy Powell; Thelma Walker; Mr William Wragg.

Questions 1934 - 2083

Witnesses

Lord Agnew, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System, and Dominic Herrington, National Schools Commissioner.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Lord Agnew and Dominic Herrington

Q1934 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you for coming today. For the benefit of the tape and those watching Parliament TV, can you kindly introduce yourselves and your titles? Please note that the acoustics are not brilliant here, so if you could speak loudly, thank you.

Lord Agnew: Yes, I am Theodore Agnew. I am the Lords Minister for the Schools, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the School System.

Dominic Herrington: I am Dominic Herrington, the National Schools Commissioner.

Q1935 **Chair:** Thank you. Could I ask you what are you doing in terms of dealing with malpractice in academies?

Lord Agnew: Yes, it has been an iterative journey, but I have focused a great deal of my time and effort on this in the last 18 months or so. We have been improving the funding agreement, which is the legal agreement between academies and the Department, iteratively since it was created in 2002, but since 2010 we have increased the accountability of academies through that relationship. In the last year or 18 months I revised the Academies Financial Handbook, which is the regulatory handbook that sets out the code of practice for academies, and I am doing so again this year, where we are adding some additional improvements.

Q1936 **Chair:** Can we afford to rely on whistleblowing or do we need to be more proactive?

Lord Agnew: No, we absolutely need to be far better equipped than relying on whistleblowers, and that is what the Academies Financial Handbook really does. It sets the code of practice and an expectation for behaviour by the sector.

Dominic Herrington: One of the other things that we have been doing is tightening the relationship between the regional schools commissioner teams and the ESFA teams. Compared to where we were two years ago, those teams are now working much more closely together. That allows us to spot at a much earlier stage any kinds of problems, a much better sharing of information, much quicker escalation of problems to me and the Minister—not just in the post-regulatory side, but trying to get at these issues at source. Those systems are much better now.

Q1937 **Chair:** Some of my colleagues will come on to these things later. I know you are aware of the problems of Aspire, the alternative provision academy in Harlow, having also featured on the BBC “Panorama” programme that covered it. When Aspire was taken over by TBAP MAT in 2017, they had a healthy balance and a very strong business plan. Since then it has been revealed that TBAP has been in serious debt and its



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public accounts were found to be inaccurate and Aspire has been dragged down with it. What can be done to help this school rebuild itself and be re-brokered into another academy trust, and why has this been allowed to happen?

Lord Agnew: The first thing is on TBAP itself. When its financial problems became apparent in the last year or so, we organised a package of support but there was a great deal of conditionality around the support that we gave it. We required that it had to restructure its operation, providing us with regular management accounts. The head of that trust resigned from the HTB so that he could concentrate wholly on his job. That is all work in progress. In terms of the particular academy that you refer to, as we have discussed I am very happy to meet you to look at the options for that school going forward.

Q1938 **Chair:** Should you not help it to re-broker with another academy, given what it has faced? The head teachers had to whistleblow, many members of staff are off sick—it is clearly not running in the way that it should be.

Lord Agnew: I think it is a possibility. I do not want to commit to taking the school out without having a proper look at the trust and what progress they are making following the intervention of last year. It is absolutely an option and we will consider it.

Q1939 **Chair:** Why does Ofsted not inspect MATs at a trust level and should they not start doing so?

Dominic Herrington: There is a lot of oversight of multi-academy trusts at the moment already. That takes place through the ESFA and through the regional commissioner teams. Local authorities have oversight in the areas of safeguarding and special education needs, and of course Ofsted does play a role with a set of summary evaluations that it carries out.

There is a lot of oversight of multi-academy trusts, and that has grown in the last 18 months. Of course, all of that oversight uses the valuable single Ofsted reports on individual schools to form a view about the trust as a whole. There has been a real increase in the amount of oversight we have given multi-academy trusts in the last 18 months but obviously the position is always under review.

Q1940 **Chair:** Can I ask what have you been doing, as academy commissioner, once the “Panorama” report had come out, in terms of the Aspire Academy—helping the academy, and looking at what has gone wrong?

Dominic Herrington: All the work to address those issues in those reports was already under way. Thankfully, cases like that are quite rare but where they do happen we now have a process in place where we will go very, very quickly to establish the facts. We will try to protect the schools in that position.

Q1941 **Chair:** What are you doing specifically to help the Aspire Academy in Harlow, given what has occurred?



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Dominic Herrington: What is happening with TBAP at the moment is there is a series of regular reports coming in directly to the Minister about the progress of TBAP, both in terms of its financial recovery but also in terms of the actual academies. When all this happened, all the academies had good or better Ofsted judgments, so educationally we did not have a warning sign. Obviously since that programme both our initial, "Are we absolutely sure we are doing absolutely everything right here" and also the regular reporting that is now coming into the Minister on this specific trust directly from officials, and through me—

Q1942 **Chair:** Have you as the academies commissioner offered to meet the staff of the Aspire Academy or the head teacher, for example, to find out what has been going on?

Dominic Herrington: I have not, but I am happy to meet anyone who wants to talk about these issues. Obviously one of the things that regional commissioners do in this situation, if invited, and through me as well, will be to talk to parents who may be concerned.

Q1943 **Chair:** The reason why I raise this is that this of course has affected my own constituency or Harlow, and it is an alternative provision school so it is all the more important that it is run properly. These things are happening elsewhere in the country and I think it highlights a number of problems in terms of academies.

What I am trying to get from you is, rather than just waiting for a BBC "Panorama" report to come out, what proactively do you do to solve these kinds of problems and why have you not gone into the school and said we should re-broker—because that is what the school wants, or the staff and the head teacher want, is to re-broker with another academy. Why have you not proactively gone and done that rather than waiting for the BBC to uncover these things, or for the bravery of the head teacher to whistleblow as to what has been going on?

Dominic Herrington: As the Minister said, in that individual case if there is a request for re-brokerage we will take that very, very seriously. We are doing lots of things proactively across the piece now to address the point you make. Some of that is about the tightening up of the official teams that I am overseeing directly.

There is now a lot more support out there for multi-academy trusts to stop them getting into these places in the first place. There is a whole host of wider organisations that are providing leadership support. We have a whole set of support going in through financial advice, financial support through the Education And Skills Funding Agency. I think we have moved a lot in the last 18 months.

Q1944 **Chair:** Can I ask you to directly meet with the head teacher to find out what has been going on? I know that you and I have been meeting with the head teacher—but I am talking about you as the academies commissioner, because this is quite serious and affects not just the Harlow Academy but a number of academies.



Dominic Herrington: I would be happy to.

Q1945 **Chair:** If I can move on to general performance, according to a number of reports at an aggregate level there is not much difference in performance between academies or local authority schools, but there is substantial variation in performance among academy trusts and also among local authority schools.

The implication is that simply moving to an academy-only model or reverting to a local-authority-only model may not in itself necessarily improve standards. Does the latest intelligence at the DfE support these claims and is there specific evidence that academisation alone specifically is raising standards?

Lord Agnew: Yes, I think there are three key points I would like to make. Firstly, there are now 500,000 more pupils in good or outstanding academies than there were seven or eight years ago. These children were previously sitting in failing local authority schools. When they were taken out of the local authority about 90% were RI or worse and now in academy status, of those that have been inspected 65% are good or better. Those children were really entrenched in schools with very entrenched failure and they are now seeing a better education.

The second thing is that we did publish a report in January of this year that shows that standards are rising more quickly in these difficult schools where they are under academy control compared to local authority control, similar cohorts. Lastly, pupils in secondary converter academies have seen more progress than the national average for the last three years in a row.

I accept that the progress is not as fast as we would like. I am not going to pretend that it is moving as quickly as we would like, but I think people do forget the extent of the change that the academisation programme has brought to state education. It is the biggest change, probably, since the 1944 Education Act. When you are doing something at that scale it does take time to flow through, but I am completely confident that we are delivering a better education system. Notwithstanding the individual problems—and the one you have just mentioned is one of them—the broad direction of travel is encouraging.

Q1946 **Chair:** Where academies are underperforming and the relevant local authorities are high performing, is there a case for allowing those high-performing local authorities to take over the struggling academies, particularly if there are shortages in sponsor capacity?

Lord Agnew: We do not have a shortage of sponsor capacity. Rather than create a lot of new sponsors—we have about 1,200 at the moment—we are trying to increase the capacity of the existing MAT framework. For example, the MDIF funding last year went out to 350 academies specifically aimed at increasing their capacity. I am certainly not in favour of reverting to local authority. I think it would cause a great deal of



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confusion in the system and I believe there is sufficient capacity in the academy system to support where there are problems.

Dominic Herrington: Could I add something on what we see from the evidence? Last year 55 or 60 new sponsors were created. We are also looking at the size of the MATs in the system, and 73% of the MATs in the system are between one and five schools. We think that there is capacity within the existing sector, within that group and the group above it, to create more sponsorship through that and not say we have to create sponsors all over the place in a willy-nilly way. We need to think about it strategically, think about the size of the MATs.

Q1947 **Chair:** If the local authority is performing well and better than the academy, why not let the local authority sponsor as an academy?

Lord Agnew: I think it would just cause confusion. We have to wind the clock back to why this whole programme was begun in 2002. It was because of systemic failure. Yes, there are some good local authorities out there but we have been progressively moving schools to academisation and I think that is the direction of travel we should maintain.

Q1948 **Chair:** Can I move to the independent sector, which I know that you cover, Minister? Independent schools get substantial benefits from their charitable status, including tax exemptions and relief such as the ability to reclaim gift aid on any qualifying donations they receive and other things and certain reliefs from VAT, but not enough disadvantaged pupils benefit from private schools in return. If you look at *Schools Week* newspaper, it has highlighted that just 1% of the 522,000 pupils in private schools receive full bursaries for their school fees, a proxy for the lowest income earners.

Will the Government, something I have proposed in the past, introduce or consider introducing an independent schools levy to bring in society's most disadvantaged children—not just middle-class people on bursaries but genuinely the most disadvantaged—which could include free-school-meals students, children in need or foster children? The levy would not be a tax. The schools would be able to reclaim their investment if they in turn invested in the future of our most disadvantaged children. I am proposing a private school levy in a similar way as the apprentice levy would work and it would be dependent on perhaps the amount of fees the schools charge.

Lord Agnew: First, I completely agree with you that they do need to more to bring in children from disadvantaged backgrounds. One of the things I have worked with Barnaby Lenon on, who is the Chairman of the Independent Schools Council, is to persuade the sector to be far more discriminating in the use of scholarships.

In other words, it is ridiculous giving a wealthy parent a scholarship of a couple of thousand pounds a year just because they have a bright child. Far better to corral that money into means-tested bursaries, and they are



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now doing much, much more on that. If you look at the pot of money available, they are shifting quite quickly to a means-tested bursary model. Should they go further? I think it is a very good idea.

The problem is we have to remember that these independent schools are not wealthy institutions. There are a few well-known ones but the majority are not wealthy at all.

Q1949 **Chair:** The levy would be according to their bills they charge. If they are charging £30,000 or £50,000 a year, whatever it is, obviously the levy would be higher. The important thing is there would be a proper mechanism set by Government to ensure that those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds have a chance to go to these schools and get all the benefits that they bring. It would offset all the tax reliefs, the charitable benefits that these schools currently get.

Lord Agnew: I think it is a good idea and I am very happy to take it up with Barnaby Lenon and hear his side of the argument. I am worried for them this year because of the impending huge increase in pension contributions. If they are going to remain part of the teacher pension scheme they are going to have to come up with a 42% increase in pension contributions for their teachers. I do not want to break the camel's back because I do believe they provide an overall benefit to society. I accept they could do more for the most disadvantaged children.

Chair: You will look at the idea of a private schools levy?

Lord Agnew: I am very happy to talk to him about it, yes.

Q1950 **Chair:** Thank you. The manifesto in 2017 said that independent schools would need to work harder to support state schools, ie sponsoring academies or building partnerships with other schools. The Government's response to "Schools that work for everyone" consultation said they would introduce measures to harness the resources and expertise of those independent schools to support disadvantaged schools, and there was a range of measures you will know about in the paper.

The Department subsequently published guidance and case studies to encourage partnerships between state schools and independent schools but the emphasis is still very much voluntary. It is quite low key. The DfE and the Independent Schools Council have agreed that the Independent Schools Council would publish details of the outcomes of partnerships with state schools.

Is there a danger that these very light-touch initiatives—and they are light-touch—lack ambition? Do we not need something more heavyweight to achieve a really meaningful difference?

Lord Agnew: I have been very frank with Barnaby Lenon and said that they need to move at pace to sustain their place in our system of schools because people do not like to see a very privileged education for a very small number of people even if they are paying for it. They are upping their game. Is it quick enough? I do not know, is the honest answer, but I



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can assure you that they are upping their game dramatically and the pace is continuing to accelerate.

Q1951 **Chair:** What is important to me is that it should not just be seen as cosy clubroom chats between the DfE and the independent sector, because I want people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds to benefit from what these schools bring. I am not anti private school in any shape or form but it is important that this guidance has more teeth. I have seen good examples of things happening with the private schools and the state sector but there needs to be a lot more. I feel that the Government needs to push this much harder.

Lord Agnew: I have been pushing it harder at any independent school event that I speak at and I make it very clear. I offer them examples of things that are—

Q1952 **Chair:** Should the guidance be toughened up?

Lord Agnew: I am certainly am very happy to look at that for the next iteration, the next draft.

Chair: Will and Lucy are going to come in on the independent sector.

Q1953 **Mr William Wragg:** Thank you very much, Lord Agnew. It is always quite easy to bash the independent sector, but could you give any details of the work that they do to support the academy sector and if that might be enhanced along the lines of sponsoring and so on?

Lord Agnew: There have been sponsorships by some of the independent schools. They have struggled, to be honest with you, because the cultural difference between the institutions they are running and often the failing schools that they are taking over has overwhelmed them. I do not believe that that is one of the key solutions.

The most successful intervention that I have seen is something so simple and so replicable that it should be done on a much wider scale. I agree with the Chair on this. I went to a girls' free school in Slough a year or so ago where every week 15 bright A-level maths students came from the local private school. It is Eton, so of course that sets everyone off but it does not have to be Eton.

These are bright boys doing A-level maths and they came down and coached 30 of the bright girls doing maths GCSE. That interaction was incredibly powerful. It stimulated the girls, who were learning from their peer group, a couple of years older. It brought two very different cultures together and of course it is not very expensive. I do think the independent sector needs to be more innovative in how it can help, without it having to cost a great deal of money.

Dominic Herrington: One reflection from what I see on the ground is that the route to that sponsorship is initially through curriculum partnerships and working together and getting to know each other so it becomes much more of a natural stage of a relationship rather than



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something that we force overnight, because then you have the kinds of things going on that the Minister talks about. The partners know each other, they have been working on a pre-existing partnership and then coming into maths or a sponsorship becomes the next natural step.

Lord Agnew: Dominic is right. The London Academy of Excellence, which is an east London sixth form college, has produced the most outstanding results with extraordinarily numbers of Oxbridge entry. Underpinning that is a curriculum provided by four or five of the independent schools. It is similar at Westminster Sixth Form, supported strongly by Westminster School on curriculum. They got something like 40 Oxbridge offers this year.

Q1954 **Mr William Wragg:** If we drove these schools out of business, do we have enough school places for the students who would be displaced?

Lord Agnew: That is the dilemma. It is not my intention to put them out of business, certainly, but that is something that we have to balance. It is a balance because on the one hand people do not like seeing extraordinary levels of privilege. On the other hand, if you kill the sector you are going to create a huge financial burden on the taxpayer.

Q1955 **Chair:** To reiterate, and I cannot speak for other members, I personally am supportive of private schools, as I said. I just want to make sure that everyone has a chance to climb that ladder and get into those schools, whatever background they come from.

Lord Agnew: I agree with you and that has been my discussion with the sector, "If you want to retain legitimacy in your role you are going to have to do more for the least best off".

Q1956 **Lucy Powell:** Briefly on that, I think what we are talking about is a level playing field and that playing field being fair. Do you think that it is fair that private schools can and do routinely put their pupils in for the IGCSE, which is unregulated and not robust in the same way as the new GCSEs, and yet on the basis of that, where 70% plus of those pupils get A or A stars on the basis of that are competing against state school pupils who are capped at 20% to get A, A star, with comparable outcomes for university places?

Lord Agnew: I think university admissions are for universities and I think they are getting better at sifting through what might be perceived as gaming of the system, if that is what you are suggesting.

Lucy Powell: They do not. They do not sift that.

Lord Agnew: You are suggesting IGCSEs are easier to do than the new system?

Lucy Powell: No, you are suggesting it is, the Government suggest that, yes.



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Lord Agnew: They are independent schools, they run their own businesses. I do not think I can impose on them the sort of curriculum that they want to use. If you feel that universities are not being selective enough, that is certainly an issue that we—

Q1957 **Lucy Powell:** Would you agree with that? Do you think if there is a unregulated set of GCSEs and a regulated and then the places are being given to those who get the unregulated because they are outside the state system—

Lord Agnew: Universities are trying hard to widen participation. They are spending a colossal £800 million a year collectively in the widening participation programmes. Certainly at the top end Oxbridge entries are improving for state schools and the private schools are feeling the pinch. The two examples I mentioned—

Q1958 **Lucy Powell:** It is really hard, is it not, when you are 7% of the school system, to only get 50% or 60% of the places at Oxbridge? That is tough going, would you not say?

Lord Agnew: The game is changing.

Lucy Powell: I said that ironically, obviously.

Lord Agnew: Yes, but the game is changing.

Q1959 **Lucy Powell:** Not fast enough, though, is it?

Lord Agnew: I genuinely see that. The challenge should be to the universities. They need to lift their game. If you feel they are not being discriminating enough, that is certainly a battle to have.

Lucy Powell: I do but I am not a Minister in the DfE and you are.

Lord Agnew: I am not the universities Minister but I am very happy to challenge universities.

Lucy Powell: If you would, yes.

Lord Agnew: If that widening participation programme is not working adequately, we should challenge it and I accept that as a valid criticism.

Q1960 **Chair:** We are going to come on to this a bit later, but I want to ask about home schooling. An analysis by *Schools Week* based on a freedom of information request to local authorities found that between 2011-12 and 2016-17 the number of home-educated pupils known to local authorities had soared by 97%, almost doubling, in just five years. Some 22% of children withdrawn from school to be home educated in 2017-18 had special educational needs. Does the Department envisage allowing any sort of inspection of outcomes of home-educated pupils as part of its consultation exercise it is doing?

Lord Agnew: This is a very, very sensitive, difficult area and I suspect you have been an MP long enough to remember someone called Mr Badman who tried to bring legislation through the Commons 10 years



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ago on this whole area of home education and having more oversight of it. The Commons were in uproar and the whole thing was withdrawn.

I have pushed hard since I became a Minister to up the level of scrutiny in this area because I am very worried about it. I agree with you the numbers of children who are—because we do not have the statistics we are not certain but anecdotally we believe there has been a substantial increase in the number of children who are being “home educated” over the last four or five years.

That is why we have in our recent consultation document put forward the proposal that there should be a registration system for children who are not being educated in school, so that we have more visibility on it. I think that is the first step, but I would defer to you on the tempo of the Commons in how this would be received.

Q1961 Chair: Does the Department plan to ensure that parents are fully aware of the implications of home schooling before they take their children off roll? There is a lot of evidence to suggest that this is not the case. There is very little evidence to know whether or not these children are getting a good education or not. What are you doing about that to check that?

Lord Agnew: We have been working with local authorities to improve the quality of guidance that they provide to parents. Some of the local authorities do provide very good guidance, so that if you are a parent considering home education you can at least look up and get some idea of the commitment that it involves, which is a massive commitment. I would never do it.

Q1962 Chair: What is the Department doing to make sure that these children are getting a good education in their home if they are being home educated? How do we know? What evidence are you collecting?

Lord Agnew: We do not collect evidence and we work on the principle that the primary educator of a child is their parents. We have to start with that principle. Moving to a registration system would at least give us the visibility of the numbers of children that we are worried about and then we would begin the very difficult process. I am not going to pretend for a second this is easy, because you have tens of thousands of parents who are good home educators and have done it for a long time and we must respect their right as parents to educate their children in that different way.

One of the things that we have included in the consultation—I hope I am right in saying this—is to provide help with access to exam centres. At the moment, home-educated children do not have easy access to exam centres. We want to improve that to try to make the job a bit easier for those who do it well. I remain very worried about those who are not doing it properly and the impact that it has on those children.

Q1963 James Frith: The distinction here is between those who have elected to home educate and those who feel forced out. There is a growing number



of young people for whom home education becomes the only alternative for them because they are being let down in mainstream. I would caution against linking the two to some, what I will put indelicately, middle-class outrage at the choice factor in home educating, which I suspect is what you are referring to a convenient 10 years ago—which of course was not your Government—and the situation that you are now presiding over, which is an explosion of excluded children who are now at home not being educated. To that point, should children who are home educated remain a responsibility of the school that they most recently attended vis-à-vis the results that they achieve?

Lord Agnew: It is a very complicated landscape because, as you say, some parents may be doing this for the reasons that you have just suggested but the statistics do not bear that out. For example, if you look at the admissions rates, the percentage of parents who get their top-three choice at either primary or secondary is up in the mid to high 90s.

Q1964 **James Frith:** With respect, Minister, this is not about applications process and people getting the school of their choice, this is about in-school, in-year failure to include children, of all levels, who are then presented by the school or left with very little alternative but to home education. The Education Policy Institute confirmed that the most recently collected figures out in recent weeks are that 55,000 children, for unexplained reasons, have disappeared from the schooling system. I put to you that is not the middle classes electing to home educate for a whole raft of reasons. This is a failure of an inclusive education system.

Dominic Herrington: We take that really, really seriously.

James Frith: I would hope you would.

Dominic Herrington: We read that report very, very seriously and there is a review going on into exclusions, led by the former Minister, Edward Timpson, that should be reporting shortly. The new Ofsted inspection framework is tightening up on that whole area of exclusions and off-rolling, looking at leadership and management through that lens, looking at behaviour and attendance as one of the sub-judgments. We are acutely aware that any exclusion has to be reasonable, lawful, proportionate.

We also know we have lots of leaders in schools who never came into teaching or becoming a head teacher to exclude children. They did not do that. They work in communities where those children need different and new life chances. We are trying to balance all that. Those kinds of numbers are ones that we would take really, really seriously because we know that we want an inclusive education system where young people get the chances they need and that we do not have any kind of off-rolling or illegal off-rolling. We are watching that really, really closely.

Q1965 **James Frith:** To that end—my final point—from both of you a simple yes or no. Do you support the removal of the category “other” as one of the reasons a school can cite in excluding a child, which now represents 20%



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of all exclusions on this Government's watch?

Lord Agnew: Yes, I do entirely support that. I am worried about the gaming of—the coding system for non-attendance is completely labyrinthine and a number of the codes do not have to be reported, so there is something called a B or a D code, which is a child who is sent home to work at home. What the hell does that mean?

James Frith: Excellent, thank you. I am not surprised but thank you for confirming that.

Q1966 **Thelma Walker:** On the back of that, 22% of children who are home schooled have SEND. I feel this is a safeguarding issue because the recommendation from the DfE is that LAs contact parents annually to check on the home environment and home schooling, but that is a recommendation. We have 22% of vulnerable children who are being home schooled currently with just a recommendation from the DfE that there is a check annually. What are your thoughts on that and how we can protect our most vulnerable children?

Lord Agnew: I am certainly worried about the proportion of children who are being home educated who have SEND, so I share your concern with that. That is why we have been increasing the provision of special and alternative provision free schools and indeed we have shifted some of the mainstream free-school budget across to AP and special so that we are increasing the capacity.

We have just announced 37 specials and two APs in the last few weeks. That is on top of 34 and 43 already open and a further 54 and 11 in the works. I think that is a key part of it. The other thing we have done is we have strengthened the guidance to local authorities in how they carry out their oversight.

Q1967 **Thelma Walker:** Do you think LAs have the capacity to fulfil that requirement? It is not even a requirement, it is a recommendation.

Lord Agnew: Yes. I think that is something that we have to look at. I agree with you that if they do not have the capacity that is something we need to look at as a Government because these are very vulnerable children.

Q1968 **Thelma Walker:** Are you going to look at it? It is something we need to but are you going to?

Lord Agnew: We are considering it. These things are all on the table, absolutely.

Q1969 **Ian Mearns:** I am afraid to say, Minister, that being worried or concerned about this does not cut the mustard. This is something that does need urgent action because the number of youngsters being off-rolled by schools and now appearing as home educated is of a different proportion to what we have ever known before.

A previous iteration of this Committee did an inquiry into home schooling,



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and in the vast majority of cases home education provided by knowledgeable and educated parents can be a very positive thing for the children concerned. But to have a burgeoning of home education, more than doubling, we estimate, more than doubling in a very few years, from children who were previously on the rolls of schools paid for by the taxpayer, does not seem to me as some sort of massive blossoming of the whole ethos of home education.

It is happening for reasons. One of the reasons is that some academy trusts have decided that the best way to improve their results, which are accountability measures according to the Schools Minister, is to off-roll children who are problematical to the welfare of the school from their perspective. If it is happening on an industrial scale, which it has been with some academy trusts, and even Ofsted in investigating and inspecting schools is giving schools that have off-rolled children on a grand scale a clean bill of health, there is something rotten in the system.

We have, then, tens of thousands of children not being adequately educated. I am afraid to say being worried or concerned is not good enough. What action is the DfE going to take to make sure the children are appropriately placed in schools that will meet their educational needs?

Lord Agnew: There are several questions there. The first thing is that there is no evidence that academy trusts are worse at this kind of backdoor off-rolling than any other part of the system. There is no evidence of that.

Q1970 **Ian Mearns:** Excuse me, I am sorry: I will interrupt that. Is it not up to the DfE to go out there and research this thoroughly and collect the evidence to see what is happening on a systematic basis?

Lord Agnew: That is why we commissioned Edward Timpson, and his report will be out very soon. One of the recommendations in there is that schools should have some ownership of that child's progress after he or she has left the school. We are proposing that accountability be tightened for that specifically.

Q1971 **Ian Mearns:** If you will excuse me for one moment for interrupting. When Edward Timpson's review was started, it was to look at exclusions, and I am not convinced that off-rolling was ever written into the remit. We did want it written into the remit, as a Select Committee, but I am not convinced that it was ever written into the remit. If it has been, I am delighted.

Lord Agnew: Certainly he addresses off-rolling, I can assure you of that.

Lucy Powell: It is good to know you have seen it. It would be good if we could all see it.

Lord Agnew: Indeed.

Q1972 **Chair:** Ofsted are investigating 300 schools for off-rolling and many of



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those will be academies.

Lord Agnew: Indeed. Half the system are academies, so I am not trying to pretend that there has not been some bad practice by any part of the system. That is the important point I want to make.

I am really delighted that you as members of the House of Commons want to do something about this, because when I came into my post nearly two years ago I was told there was no appetite in the Commons to deal with this. I give full credit to your colleague Lord Soley, who has brought it through the Lords as a private Member's Bill.

Q1973 **Chair:** Should schools, to clarify, be required to keep home-educated children on their rolls to enable easy reintegration if they decide to come back to school?

Lord Agnew: I think that is a good idea. Certainly in my own personal experience, at the last academy I took over before I left my trust two or so years ago, when we went in the school was in total chaos. Behaviour was out of control, teachers were being physically abused and we had to clamp down very hard on behaviour in that school. A lot of parents threw their toys out of the pram and did not like the new behaviour code that we introduced. About 40 parents took their children out and said they were going to home educate. Within about two months most of those parents sent their children back when they realised their children were now getting a good education.

Q1974 **Chair:** We have a lot to discuss but, as an aside, the key thing for me is if these children are being home educated, what kind of education are they getting? Are they getting a quality education, are they getting good outcomes? I am genuinely mystified that not more work is done by the Department to first find out how many children are being home educated, whether it is informally or formally, whether it is known or not known, but also the quality and the outcomes of those children. That is the crucial thing to understand whether or not home education is a good thing or not.

Lord Agnew: That is a fair point. You have to understand where we coming from culturally as a country. Up until quite recently, home education has been carried out by diligent parents who do a good job. It is only in the last two or three years—

Chair: We do not know that because there is no evidence.

Lord Agnew: That is fair.

Q1975 **Chair:** You are saying something without any proof whatsoever. That may be true that maybe many middle-class families are doing this, I have no idea. All I am saying is why is there not proper research and evidence done into the quality and outcomes of every individual child being home educated?



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Lord Agnew: Because the view has been—and you may disagree with this view—that a parent has the right to educate their own children.

Q1976 **Chair:** That is not saying they do not have the right. What I am trying to say to you is, fine, if there is the right, there is the right, but the key thing is whether that education is quality and they have an outcome. That is a very different thing from saying parents should be allowed or should not be allowed.

Lord Agnew: I think a lot of those parents would say that it would be excessively intrusive by the state. I am not here as an apologist for home education.

Q1977 **Chair:** If a child goes to school we have Ofsted inspections and regional commissioners going in and all sorts of things. If a child is being educated at home, surely there should be some kind of analysis generally by the DfE, or whoever it may be, as to whether that child is getting a good education and a good outcome to that education.

Lord Agnew: I accept there should be more visibility.

Lucy Powell: On that, I think what has changed markedly over the last few years, as you keep describing, is that we have a much, much more narrow and robust—difficult, one might say—accountability regime for schools. Those same schools under the academy freedoms are much more able to exclude or persuade people to remove their children from those schools.

There has also been, as you have just described from your own trust yourself, an increasingly draconian position taken about zero-tolerance behaviour policies and so on. That has led to this explosion in children being taken out of schools, either because they are being advised to be taken out or because schools are saying to parents—and we have heard this so much in this Committee, from pupils and from their parents—“Your kid doesn’t suit this school because it’s tougher here, it’s more academic, we don’t have their sort of behaviour”.

That is why there are now huge concerns about what is happening to these hidden children. We are not talking about me trying to teach my teenager GCSEs. I do not know how anybody wants to volunteer to do that, quite honestly. We are talking about children who are being left nowhere else to go. There is no safety net, there is no one looking at what they are doing. That is what is causing such concern.

Q1978 **Chair:** Why not agree to do the analysis? Why not at least agree to do a DfE project, or get a think tank to do it or one of your many research groups that you link with?

Lucy Powell: The IPPR has done a huge piece of work and you should be looking at this. This is not looking at this. You do not bother reading it, you do not bother publishing it.

Chair: I would like to know for sure how many children are being home educated in this country, the reasons they are being home educated, the



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quality of education they are getting and the outcomes they are getting. Surely that must be something that the DfE, directly or through your many institutes and think tanks that you are linked to, could do serious work on.

Lord Agnew: I think that is reasonable, but it is worth saying that we have come forward with the proposal for registration. That is the first step. That is a big step because that has been subject to controversy. That is now out on the table for proposed legislation. We have strengthened the guidance to local authorities. We have explained to them the use of school attendance orders, for example. I accept Thelma's point that they may not have adequate resourcing, but none the less we have clarified the path for local authorities to intervene where there may be concerns.

Lastly, Ofsted is tightening up on its inspection regime when it comes to off-rolling and what you might call backdoor moving out of difficult children. Therefore, it is not that nothing is going on. I accept that more needs to happen, but we are on that journey.

Q1979 **Chair:** But you have no idea. The last point again. You have no idea on the quality or education outcomes of home-educated children. You made an assumption that some are getting a good education but really the DfE has absolutely no idea. We know that that thousands of children are being home educated and you have no idea on their outcomes. That is wrong, surely.

Lord Agnew: Everyone has been happy with it up until three years ago. That is the point.

Q1980 **Chair:** Forget about what has gone on in the past. The point has been made.

Lord Agnew: I am not trying to be flippant about it. I think it is a very, very important area but it is a very sensitive area because some parents feel very strongly that the state should not be interfering in how they bring up their children and educate them.

James Frith: With all respect, Minister, this is not an exercise of rights. This is parents feeling obliged by the school to remove their child. This is not about a parent exercising their rights for home education.

Q1981 **Chair:** No one is saying that it should be stopped, that there should be no home education, but we say that people should wear seatbelts in and people ask, "Is that state intrusion?" No. There is nothing wrong with saying, "If your child is being home educated, as a Department overall we are going to do some kind of investigation into the outcome and quality of home education for children in general".

Dominic Herrington: On the group that you identify, where there is the perception that people are being asked to leave the school, that is why Ofsted is tightening up. That is why it is one of the things that the Timpson review has been looking at. That is one of the things we are



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watching very, very closely across academy trusts because it is a really serious issue.

I suppose one of the things that I see is there are reports coming out and we look at this very closely. There are also a lot of academy trusts that do not do this, that do a really good job and are in really difficult situations and go into that world because they want to provide inclusive education. Yes, an absolute laser-beam focus on those that do not but also trying to balance it against those that are doing a good job.

Q1982 Ian Mearns: The laser beam, though—we are talking about tens of thousands of youngsters who have ended up being nominally home educated but we know it is highly unlikely that they are getting an effective education. From a society perspective and also from a governmental perspective, that will have a down-the-line cost because we will end up with teenagers leaving at statutory school age, not having had a decent education and not having any marketable qualifications to use in the education, further educational or employment system. This needs to be concentrated on.

I have previously in this Committee asked Government Ministers if they will issue a DfE circular and guidance to all schools reminding schools that off-rolling is not legal. It is Ministers who have told me that it is not legal, in this Committee. Will the DfE issue a circular to all schools reminding them that off-rolling has to stop, it is not legal and that we will try to find a way of getting back in touch with all of those youngsters who have been off-rolled by schools over the last one, two and three years.

Lord Agnew: We are about to issue the Timpson report in the next few weeks, which sets out a number of recommendations. I am very happy to look at your suggestion, following the release of that report. I think it is a sound, practical idea and I do not want to dismiss it but I do not want, off the cuff, make a commitment to—

Q1983 Lucy Powell: Finally on that, because we have raised this with the Secretary of State as well, what is critical is an understanding of whose responsibility it is to ensure that every child in a given area is getting the education that they need and deserve. In a fragmented school system where people can choose and have their own admissions policies and all that, there are too many falling through the gap. That is what has critically changed. Will the Timpson review address that, seeing as you have read it and we have not?

Lord Agnew: I cannot remember if that is a specific recommendation but it is something that we need to look at.

Q1984 Lucy Powell: Can you go back and ensure that that is looked at before it gets published?

Dominic Herrington: When I was a regional commissioner, I did a really good piece of work with the local authority in Medway where exclusions were really high—why was this, what were their views on it and what



were the views of the schools, some academies, some non-academies as well. Lots of fascinating stuff came out of that and a lot of it was not about deliberately off-rolling: it was about head teachers and teachers not really having the confidence or the capability of dealing with some very challenging children. How do you manage a very challenging child but keep them in the school?

One of the things that came out of that was a programme of work that was about CPD for teachers in those schools. Where exclusions are really high, regional commissioners, if asked by the local authority who are worried about this, will get involved in conversations. My colleague John Edwards has been doing this as well. Where it is really acute and we are asked to get involved, so we are not over—

Lucy Powell: We know there is good practice and we know there are some areas not so, but it needs to be someone's job who has the powers and the resources to do that, not just, "If we are asked we might do it, we might share this". There are too many falling through the net because it is no one's real job who have the powers to deal with it. That is what needs to be addressed. If that is not in the Timpson review it is a massive, massive missed opportunity.

Q1985 **Thelma Walker:** What do you see as the fundamental role of local authorities in education both now and in the future and is full academisation still your policy?

Lord Agnew: On the first question, the crucial role that local authorities play is pupil place planning. This has been a very successful partnership between the academy sector and local authorities over the last eight or nine years because we have added nearly 1 million additional places across England. They have a very important role in doing that.

In terms of the longer term, the Government have not made a commitment to full academisation. That would be my personal preference but not done at pace. It needs to be done in a cautious way as we build capacity in the academy sector to absorb the remaining schools.

Q1986 **Thelma Walker:** I mentioned the capacity of local authorities with the massive cuts that they have faced. We have mentioned the off-rolling and the monitoring and supervision of home-schooled children and their capacity to do that. There is a school of thought that many parents feel that the local authority in the past had that local knowledge about communities and the needs of local communities.

There is some thought that many of the MATs have become like supermarket chains, with the same branding, with an executive head who is like a brain in a jar, working many miles away from these individual schools, which historically many parents feel had that uniqueness, that distinctiveness and they reflected the local community and the LA supported them in delivering that for their children. What are your thoughts on that?



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Lord Agnew: There are a couple of things. In terms of large MATs with remote chief executives, they are probably on the fingers of two or three hands because the vast majority, as Dominic was saying at the beginning, are small organisations with between two and 10 schools. There is a very strong geographic focus with those, so I think the remoteness is overplayed. There have been examples of it, of course.

Both the trusts and the local authorities have had to learn to build a relationship to work together. For example, I will periodically pick up the phone to a chief executive or a director of children's services of a local authority and exhort them to talk more to their academies on pupil place planning. We get bids in from local authorities saying they need an extra—

Q1987 **Thelma Walker:** Local authorities would say they find it very difficult to get into some of the MAT chains.

Lord Agnew: On the other side of that, I also do it the other way around. I also pick up the phone to MATs and say, "You are not communicating adequately with your local authority. Here is an opportunity to add another class with capital being provided by the local authority. Talk to them". This is, as I said at the beginning, a huge change to our system in the way the relationships interact, but I believe in the evidence of the million new places, virtually, that we have created shows that the system has worked extremely well on that level.

Q1988 **Thelma Walker:** My point on the uniqueness and distinctiveness of local schools that may be lost when we have the MAT chain, the same policies throughout. You would disagree with that, presumably? You do not think that has been lost?

Lord Agnew: For me, the overriding priority is a child gets a good education. That is why I do this job. That is why I have spent nearly 10 years unpaid working in state education. That is the absolute bottom line. In terms of local distinctiveness, I am open minded to that. We have one of the most plural education systems in the developed world, so the opportunities for distinctiveness are very, very wide. Local authorities have their role in the system.

Q1989 **Thelma Walker:** That seems mainly to be accountable for when things go wrong, very often.

Lord Agnew: Possibly, but if you take Outwood Grange, for example, with 22 judgments from Ofsted, 14 of them are good, 13 had been failing schools, mostly local authority schools. That is the absolutely crucial piece of what this is about. They need to improve the relationship with the local authorities in some cases, and some trusts have relationships with several local authorities because they are in different areas, but they are in a very, very small minority.

Dominic Herrington: Can I offer a few thoughts from the ground? Sometimes the local authority has been seen as distant, big local



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authorities. Most MATs are small. Most MATs are based in their communities. Some of them became academies so they could do more in their local community.

Q1990 Thelma Walker: I keep coming back to capacity, though, with the cuts that they have faced. The LAs have haemorrhaged skilled, knowledgeable advisers and officers who used to work with schools. That is not always possible for schools.

Dominic Herrington: When I go and visit academies, and I went to a couple of academies just before Christmas in Birmingham, Oasis academies, they are absolutely at the heart of that local community. Talking to the MP there and talking to all the community there and the councillors, schools are rooted in their communities, whether they are academies or not.

My experience is that most multi-academy trusts are relatively small. They have grown on the basis of a pre-existing partnership or in a local school. A school is part of a community and an academy is part of a community. That is the picture we see more of rather than it being supermarket chains, because when you look at the number of MATs and the percentage of MATs that have fewer than five schools, is it nearly three-quarters, and fewer than 15 schools. 95% of MATs have fewer than 15 schools in them. It is not a supermarket system and I do not think we would want one like that.

Q1991 Thelma Walker: No. What are your views on the role of the CEOs? I mentioned there, and obviously you disagree, their remoteness sometimes.

Dominic Herrington: All of our exhortations to CEOs are to be rooted in the communities that they work in. The role of the executive leader in the trust has changed. Two years ago they were probably not sure about what their role was. It is fairly clear they are there to run the organisation, to ensure that there is great teaching and learning, to ensure that they are financially healthy and also to be really visible and to be in their schools and knowing what is going on. That is our vision for it. There is a lot more support now for those leaders going in.

Q1992 Trudy Harrison: I would like to start by thanking you both personally and individually for the commitment that you have showed to Whitehaven Academy, because it has taken a lot of work, it has taken everybody on this Committee, a very emotional and desperate MP and the most senior Ministers, including the Secretary of State, to step in and intervene in the rot that Bright Tribe brought to that particular school. We are seeing a transformation. I very much look forward to the day when Whitehaven Academy is the school of choice and one of the statistics of a good or outstanding school in the future. We look forward to an entirely brand new school.

However, we now know that there are some outstanding examples and there are some terrible examples. What are the characteristics of multi-



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academy trusts that you have learnt over the time that make the difference between good and bad?

Dominic Herrington: One is a sense of geography. We have learnt that over time. We have also learnt that successful multi-academy trusts do not grow too quickly. We have also learnt the importance of great governance and leadership. If there is not a really strong set of trustees and strong executive leaders, there will be an issue.

When I talk to multi-academy trusts and I ask about the benefit of being in a MAT, the thing they talk about most of all is collaboration, teachers collaborating and learning from one another and writing curricula, middle leaders working across schools and that power of collaboration.

The final thing I would add is that there is a real sense of mission, vision and values in the organisation. The strongest ones have that. They live and breathe it. They are there for the children. It is distinctive.

Q1993 **Chair:** Could I just ask very gently? It is just that we have a lot to get through. You need to be more concise with your answers because we have a lot to get through still.

Dominic Herrington: Sorry, Chair. I will stop on that one.

Chair: Thank you.

Lord Agnew: I would agree entirely with what Dominic has said. We have increased the oversight and accountability of MATs. We have very much brought the chairs of the boards into discussions. Whenever an RSC meets a trust, it insists on meeting the chair with the chief executive so that there is proper ownership of the governance of the trust and much more scrutiny of the financial management.

Q1994 **Trudy Harrison:** On that point on the scrutiny, where in the code of practice would we not see an academy trust taking public money to carry out works in a school that were never completed or not completed to a standard that any sane person would say was acceptable, particularly relating to related-party transactions when there was financial gain to be had?

Lord Agnew: We have uprated the Academies Financial Handbook, as I mentioned at the beginning, which puts much more clarity on that.

In terms of RPTs, we have brought in an enhanced mechanism. From 1 April this year, any RPT in excess of £20,000 has to have preclearance from the ESFA before it is allowed to proceed.

Q1995 **Trudy Harrison:** Do you think related-party transactions should be allowed at all?

Lord Agnew: The vast majority of them are services provided by dioceses to MATs and so, in practical terms, they are useful. As long as



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there is proper disclosure and transparency, they are there. There is no requirement to disclose them in LA schools, for example.

Q1996 **Trudy Harrison:** Finally, what was the biggest lesson that we have learned from Bright Tribe and other multi-academy trusts that will be taken on board to ensure that that never happens again?

Lord Agnew: I would not make much of a hostage to fortune and say it will never happen again—I have observed politics long enough—but to reduce dramatically the incidence of it happening again. As Dominic said, with Bright Tribe geography was poor and they were not able to collaborate with their staffing resources. Secondly, they grew too quickly and took on too many difficult schools too soon before they built the capacity.

Trudy Harrison: I am pleased to hear that.

Q1997 **Mr William Wragg:** Thank you again, gents. Lord Agnew, one of your key endeavours in the Department is rooting out and cutting down on all forms of profligacy within the state system and waste and so forth.

Lord Agnew: You say that with a slight irony.

Q1998 **Mr William Wragg:** I do, because you know what is coming: you encouraging perhaps bulk purchasing of product. Have you been bulk purchasing Champagne recently?

Lord Agnew: I offered a bottle if not a case of Champagne at an academy show for any trust that could show that it was running at optimum efficiency. It was taken out of context. I stand by those comments because one of the most important things for me is that we put some £40 billion of taxpayers' money into education every year and I want to see the money go to the front line. I am absolutely unapologetic about that.

It might be worth also saying that I know there is great consternation about the level of funding in schools, and I share the concerns. But my view is that as a junior Minister in this portfolio I can either sit there and wring my hands with a kind of learned helplessness or I can do what I can do, which is to help the system be better and to marshal our resources most efficiently.

Q1999 **Mr William Wragg:** In terms of those DfE advisers going in, have any of them come back to you and said, "No, we cannot find any savings in this particular school that would warrant a bottle of Champagne"?

Lord Agnew: No.

Q2000 **Mr William Wragg:** None? Okay. Are you sure that some of the recommendations that the advisers going into schools make are not detrimental to the quality of children's education?

Lord Agnew: Of course, that is fundamental. It is a challenging process. It is taking the challenge to the heads of those schools and to the boards



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and saying, "These are the things that you could do". It is up to those schools to decide which of those things to implement or not. This is not, "Do or die". This is, "Have you thought about this?"

In many cases, the schools have not and that is what we are trying to do. We are trying to give them that challenge and for them to take the best bits out of it. Indeed, the whole point of it is that the money that then is reallocated is going to where it is needed, which is to improve education. It is not being wasted on too many photocopiers, wasted utilities or all the other money that leaks around the system.

Q2001 Mr William Wragg: When some of these examples were reported, you said that it "called into question the expertise" of some school resource management advisers. One example in particular was that of Corfe Hills, where advice was given to save money on supply teachers by using spare staff to cover three classes at the same time in the dining hall. Might that have a detrimental impact on children's education?

Lord Agnew: Yes, it possibly would, and so this is my point of the challenge. If the supervision was a reading session for 100 kids, that might be a way of dealing with it. If people want to pick holes and say that it is a bad idea, they will find them.

Q2002 Mr William Wragg: Yes. People will always nit-pick—I absolutely agree with you. But, for example, if it was the case that one said to gently ease out expensive teachers and replace them with NQTs, one might have been given that advice in one way, shape or form, but that is quite endemic, really, across schools as a whole at the moment in terms of their management of budgets. It is to have newly qualified teachers and not to replace teachers who move on with more experienced teachers.

Lord Agnew: I would respectfully disagree. I have had only one case since I have been Minister when a school had come to us with a specific funding issue, it was running optimally, had an experienced cadre of teachers and was a good school. They were doing everything right but the one thing they were not doing right was getting enough pupil-premium children into that school. They were sitting at about a third of the average of their local planning area. It is not agreed yet and so I do not want to publish it as a case study, but we are in discussion with the board about support linked to them increasing their intake of pupil-premium children. That has been the only one that I have seen.

Again, probably the advice was taken out of context and it might have said, "Look, you have a large cadre of senior, experienced teachers. If you have attrition, you should use it to balance up and have a younger cohort", possibly. I do not know which one you are talking about.

Q2003 Mr William Wragg: Do you have a means of assessing the balance of the workforce in schools across the country? Does, for example, Ofsted comment on the balance of experienced teachers to newly qualified teachers within schools?



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Dominic Herrington: We have data on the school workforce across the piece, those in leadership positions, those newly qualified, those above the upper pay spine. There is a whole national dataset on that.

Q2004 **Mr William Wragg:** Does that data match the anecdotal suggestion I am making to you?

Dominic Herrington: Not generally, no. We understand that schools are doing a really good job under very tight financial circumstances. As the Minister said, the aim is to try to support them and help them in this way. One of the ways is through the advisers. Another way is through all the procurement frameworks and the national deals that we have now for all the schools. There is a range of support going in.

Q2005 **Mr William Wragg:** I am glad you mentioned national deals. I assume they are what we mean by the commercial deals created by the DfE, for which I think uptake was about 10%. Has that gone up?

Lord Agnew: That is not the full story at all. A lot of them have only recently been rolled out and so it is still early days.

The one that we rolled out about four years ago that I am particularly enthusiastic about is the risk protection arrangement, which we brought in to combat a monopoly provider of insurance into academies. It was basically taking supernormal profits, charging £50 per pupil for insurance. Since we introduced the RPA, we have brought the price down to about £20. Of course, that has also applied to the monopolist, which has had to follow us, although we now have 65% of the academies programme. We are now talking to local authorities about this, although it is more complicated because of procurement rules. It has been an outstanding success.

I am sorry, but I am going to give you one more anecdote on this because I am so energised.

Q2006 **Chair:** Very quickly. Be mega quick.

Lord Agnew: The retained surpluses of the RPA are being used to reinvest into the school estate for flood protection. The money is in a closed circle. It is a huge success.

Q2007 **Mr William Wragg:** Have then these deals moved from the choice, in your words, being pants or that you are not promoting them enough?

Lord Agnew: Sorry, say that again?

Q2008 **Mr William Wragg:** I believe you said that it was a challenge given that so few had taken up these commercial deals. You said it was a question of whether what you are doing is pants and wasting your time or whether you are not talking about it loudly enough.

Lord Agnew: Indeed, yes. The context of that was that I wrote to every chair of every academy trust shortly after I arrived and at the end of the letter I said, "We have all these national deals. Take-up is poor. Please



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tell us what is wrong with them because, if they are not any good, we will sort them out". I got very little feedback. If they are pants, we will kill them.

Q2009 **Mr William Wragg:** Excellent, but has take-up improved?

Lord Agnew: Yes, it is improving all the time. For example, we have rolled out a teacher recruitment website this year for—

Q2010 **Chair:** Just before I pass on to my colleague Lucy, what is the total cost of these advisers going into schools for more efficiency?

Lord Agnew: We offer a tariff of about £5,000 for—

Q2011 **Chair:** Sorry, no. How much are you spending overall on these advisers going into schools for more efficiency savings?

Lord Agnew: We did about 100 last year and we are planning to do about 800 over the next 18 months.

Q2012 **Chair:** The cost?

Lord Agnew: Multiplied by £5,000, whatever that comes out at. I am sorry. I am not quicker. But as I have said—

Q2013 **Chair:** There is a pilot extending £2.3 million in extra funding to provide at least 160 advisers. What is the overall cost of these advisers? Are you making enough efficiency savings to cover the cost of these advisers? That is my question.

Lord Agnew: I wish I was on a percentage of the savings.

Q2014 **Chair:** Are you?

Lord Agnew: No, sadly. Basically—

Q2015 **Chair:** Hang on. If you are spending millions on advisers to go into—

Lord Agnew: They will be finding at least 10 times the cost.

Q2016 **Chair:** What I am trying to be clear about is the cost benefits of you spending millions of pounds on advisers going into schools to get schools to be more efficient. Are the savings that you had from that covering the cost of those advisers? You do not know the cost. I want the total cost of all those advisers.

Lucy Powell: The £4 million.

Chair: Yes, the £4 million.

Lord Agnew: Yes. There are two pots. There is the DfE pot, which is paying for these advisers in most cases. Then there is the academy pot, which is saving the money. In aggregate, the system is saving money, but there are two pots.

Q2017 **Chair:** How much have you saved? If these advisers are costing £4



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million, how much have you saved so far in the schools?

Lord Agnew: It is work in progress because the money is not saved overnight.

Q2018 **Chair:** The crucial point is that if you are going to spend a lot of money on advisers, you need to cover their costs and more.

Lord Agnew: Indeed.

Q2019 **Chair:** Would you be able to give those precise figures to the Committee in writing?

Lord Agnew: We did a pilot of about 72 and, when we have analysed those, we will publish a report summarising some of the savings, yes.

Q2020 **Chair:** Just very quickly, schools' spending on education consultants rose by 196% in real terms between 2002-03 and 2016-17. Are these advisers providing good value for money. Is the Department advising schools in relation to the use of these consultants?

Dominic Herrington: Do you mean just consultants on anything?

Q2021 **Chair:** It is termed "education consultancy". It could be a wide range of things but it has gone up by 196% since 2002-03.

Dominic Herrington: It depends really on what the school is using it for. What we want is as much money in the system to be spent on teachers and children and as little as possible on consultants. Some schools use a consultant to come in and hold a mirror up to them for a bit of a health check and to say, "How are you getting on?" Our model of trying to help improvement in the system is with teachers and leaders improving education, not consultants doing it.

Q2022 **Chair:** Minister, briefly? Do you think this is money well spent?

Lord Agnew: I do not know. That is the honest answer. I honestly do not know. That is for schools to decide. They cannot claim in one breath that they do not have enough money and then spend millions of pounds on consultants.

Q2023 **Chair:** You are spending millions of pounds on consultants, you are spending £2.3 million in recent times.

Lord Agnew: We are delivering savings.

Chair: You have not yet have been clear with us if you are delivering, you have not given us the figures.

Q2024 **James Frith:** That is a really dismissive tone to take to schools, Minister. I would really urge you to be more sympathetic with the language you use when you suggest that schools are somehow complacent to the cost of running a school at a time when the majority of them have done extremely well—despite your Government, not because of it. Language is really important in this debate and that is a very dismissive tone. It is not



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the first time that—

Lord Agnew: I entirely disagree with you. The Chair just asked me if the money being spent on these consultants, £196 million, was well spent. I said that I do not know. That is the fact. I am not going to lather this Committee with some unctuous statements about how it was wonderfully spent. I do not know. I have no idea.

Q2025 **Chair:** I want to be clear also about how your £4 million is being spent and if that is bringing value for money as well.

Lord Agnew: I can absolutely assure you it is and we will produce a summary of the first 70 or so in the next few months to prove that. I would not have put so much political capital and time behind it if I did not believe in it. The reason I know it works is I used it in my own trust. I have lived and breathed this stuff. I have lived in this system for six years. I took over seven failing schools. I had no additional money given by the DfE because of my board role. I was not allowed any—

Q2026 **Chair:** I just want to be clear about the money going to the front line. You are spending millions of pounds on consultants in schools. I want to be clear that not only are you recovering the cost of that to the taxpayer in the efficiency savings but that you are doing much more than that.

Lord Agnew: I can absolutely assure you that it is. In terms of James's comments, I do not agree with you. I accept there is stress in the system financially. I accept that.

Chair: Lucy has been waiting very patiently. Lucy?

Q2027 **Lucy Powell:** Talking about public money and scrutiny of it, I am sure you will all flick straight to what you know I am about to ask you about. Given the £16.1 million that has been given to AET, Academies Enterprise Trust, in recoverable and non-recoverable funding to support its turnaround plan, AET being the largest MAT in the country with 62 schools, is it in your view too big to fail?

Lord Agnew: No, it is not too big to fail because we have progressively reduced the size of that trust over the last three or four years. Going back to the point that Trudy made a few moments ago about what lessons we have learned about the programme, AET is an example of one that grew too quickly and grew without any geographic logic. Those are two problems that are a legacy of the trust.

No, it is not too big to fail at all. We are very rigorous in our oversight of it. There is indeed a school in the system at the moment that is being from it. Again, I will not give you the name of that until the deal goes through, but we have a very robust series of challenges.

Dominic Herrington: I meet the chief executive quite regularly. AET teams meet with regional commissioners. There is monthly monitoring of everything they are doing.



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Do we have faith in the leadership of that organisation at the moment? Yes. They are turning around the organisation. It was not in an ideal place. It is in a turnaround. The governance has changed. There have been new appointments. We are absolutely clear that we are holding it to account and we think it is now going in the best direction.

Q2028 Lucy Powell: It is a hell of a lot of money when you are talking about spending £4 million on efficiency advisers to save a few thousand pounds on school-meal portion sizes. Yet AET is getting £16.1 million, quite a lot of which will be non-recoverable. That is a lot of money and it sticks in the craw of the standalone MAT or the MAT of two or three schools that is having an adviser coming in, don't you think?

Dominic Herrington: It is up to that amount. I do not know whether they will get the full amount. There will be repayment plans for all the amounts that are recoverable there and we are all over that.

Q2029 Lucy Powell: Can we be all over that? You will not publish that. I have asked if you could publish it and I know a number of the trade unions have also put in freedom of information requests. Why is the turnaround plan with £16 million worth of public funds not publicly available and FOI-able?

Lord Agnew: It is a work in progress. If you want to get reassurance—

Q2030 Lucy Powell: It is not a work in progress. It is a turnaround plan that you have agreed with up to £16.1 million of public money into what you have described as a trust that should not have been allowed to grow in the way that it was and has not been able to, therefore, be an effective MAT. Why can we not see that plan?

Dominic Herrington: There are lots of conditions against that around the change in governance, the change in leadership—

Q2031 Lucy Powell: I am asking a question. As a Member of Parliament, when I have tabled a parliamentary question, and as this Committee, why can we not see that plan?

Lord Agnew: As I have mentioned before, it is work in progress. They have not had the—

Q2032 Lucy Powell: No, it is not work in progress. It is a turnaround plan.

Lord Agnew: It is work in progress.

Q2033 Lucy Powell: You have either agreed it or you have not.

Lord Agnew: They have not had the full £16 million—

Q2034 Lucy Powell: I do not want to see it retrospectively. I want to see what you have agreed with them that they are allowed to draw down in either recoverable or unrecoverable money. If this was a local authority—and it is much bigger than most local authorities in terms of the number of schools—this would be completely publicly available. Why is it not publicly



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available or available to us as a Select Committee? Answer that question, please.

Lord Agnew: Because the policy has always been that we need to carry out the recovery exercise before publishing everything.

Q2035 **Lucy Powell:** What policy? Where is the transparency in that? The civil servant at the head of the DfE, the Permanent Secretary, has said, "We have nothing to hide on these issues. When the DfE steps in to support a school with a turnaround plan, we will make that public". Can you make that public?

Dominic Herrington: Shall we take that away and talk to the ESFA and look at what the Permanent Secretary has said? I do not want to obstruct the Committee—

Q2036 **Lucy Powell:** I do not want you to take it away. I want you to make it publicly available. I think £16 million of agreed funds—that may or may not be drawn down but quite a lot of it has already been drawn down—should be made available for us as MPs, for local communities, for staff, for trade unions and for others to scrutinise. It is a huge sum of money to a huge organisation.

Lord Agnew: To reassure you, at the date of this briefing note and so it may have been a bit more since then, we had provided £4.5 million.

Q2037 **Lucy Powell:** That is still a huge amount of money. I still want to see that.

Lord Agnew: Yes, but there are 33,000 pupils in that trust, Lucy. It is a large sum of money but you cannot move from portion sizes in one breath to 33,000 children in the next.

Q2038 **Lucy Powell:** I am not moving from portion sizes. If the local authority came to you and asked you for £4.5 million, let us say, before we even get to the £16.1 million, we would all want to scrutinise why they had asked for that money and whether it was necessary.

Lord Agnew: I respectfully disagree with you that there is similar transparency in the local authority. Local authorities in their returns late last year had 40 secondaries with £1 million-plus deficits. Yet getting to that information is extraordinarily difficult.

Q2039 **Lucy Powell:** But if they came to the Government and asked for a bailout—

Lord Agnew: But they do not.

Q2040 **Lucy Powell:** No, because they are not allowed. I am sure other members of the Committee agree with me. If any organisation came to the Government and asked for a bailout—because that is essentially what it is—of £16 million for failure, some of which was going to be spent on redundancies, the chief executive gets £300,000 a year—



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Dominic Herrington: No, he does not.

Q2041 **Lucy Powell:** Okay, between £290,000 and £295,000 a year. Quite a lot of it has helped to stabilise AET's finances and support its long-term viability. Does that mean it was unviable without this intervention? That is a serious issue if it was.

Dominic Herrington: It was a trust that grew too quickly. There is new leadership. It is turning around. This was part of the turnaround. In terms of your question about publishing it, all I can say from a civil service perspective is that I am happy to take that away and see what the thinking has been in the ESFA about publishing or not publishing. I do not know whether, if a local authority came to us for that amount of money, we would publish that.

Lucy Powell: You would say no.

Dominic Herrington: I would need to get a sense of the rules.

Lord Agnew: That is not fair, Lucy. I agreed a capital funding package for Kent County Council a few months ago for extraordinary basic need. We always look—

Q2042 **Lucy Powell:** That is very different. Basic need is to provide extra places and to build capital. It is not to deal with failure. You said at the beginning that—

Lord Agnew: Can we just put the failure into some sort of context? They are sorting themselves out. At primary level, the last two years have seen substantial improvements. Last August's results were above the national average. They are coming out of a bad place but they are coming out of it.

Q2043 **Lucy Powell:** As you know, though, were that to be a school or a group of schools that were being run by a local authority, they would not have that time. They would be taken off it straight away and that would be the end of it and probably a multi-academy trust would be given extra money to do so. It is not true to say that, is it?

Lord Agnew: I disagree. I am afraid I disagree with you on that because I have seen how these deficits are working in local authorities. They are simply aggregating in their accounts deficits and offsetting them against surpluses in other schools and so they are not tackling the deficits. They are just kicking the can down the road.

Q2044 **Lucy Powell:** No, but a group of schools that was not AET, that had 62 schools, that was too big to fail and that was failing would not be given the time and space and this huge amount of resource to sort itself out so that you can see it turning around. It just would not.

Lord Agnew: That is where I disagree with you because I am seeing this happen in local authorities at the moment. They are essentially using surplus—



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Q2045 Lucy Powell: I am not talking about the deficits. I am talking about if there was a group of schools that were failing overall, it would be forced into academies like that. There would be no turnaround time. There would be no cash injection. They would be taken off the local authority. Yet here we have this huge multi-academy trust, which as you say should not have been allowed to grow in the way that it did. These are lessons learned. These are nice, expensive lessons to learn, are they not? Now it is eventually turning itself around.

You said at the beginning that you feel that in the last 18 months you have been able to operate with more scrutiny, the ESFA, more partnership. Is it not quite late in the day? We are talking nearly 10 years on from—

Lord Agnew: I am only speaking for my tenure in this post. The work has been going on for several years. I mentioned at the beginning the tightening up of the funding agreements. That has gone through six, seven or eight iterations over the last eight or nine years. I am trying to give you the experience of my involvement since I became Minister.

Q2046 Lucy Powell: No, it is fair assessment that more recently, in light of the collapse of WCAT and in light of Bright Tribe and other scandals—guess what—we have to make sure that the ESFA works hand-in-hand with the RSCs, we have to put more support around these schools and we have to make sure that they work in a geography where they can all support each other. It looks and sounds very like all the lessons we would have learned from good local authorities to me. No shit, Sherlock.

Dominic Herrington: We are speculating on the past. I do not know. All I can say is that we are holding academies to account with warning notices and with financial notices to improve. We have learned a lot of lessons. Our teams are really on this. We are absolutely determined to minimise any kind of failure in the system, maintained or academy. We do not want failing schools generally.

Q2047 Lucy Powell: That journey has gone from a thousand flowers blooming, autonomy; everything about the support systems that were around schools previously with the local authorities was bad. We will let a thousand flowers bloom. Then what a surprise. We lose money, we lose £16 million to AET, we have to take loads of schools off Bright Tribe, WCAT collapses, and many other examples. Then what we have to put around schools is the support, making sure that the multi-academy trusts grow in a considered way, that the geography is appropriate, that there is a family of schools, that we have to make sure that the financial and the standards talk to each other. Does that not sound like you are recreating the role of a local authority but just run by the DfE?

Dominic Herrington: No, we think we have a good school system generally with 85% of children in good or outstanding schools. We have a system where only 4% are inadequate and only 2% of academies have had financial notices to improve. The percentages and the numbers of



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problems we have had are actually statistically really rare. They are serious and we take them really seriously.

As Trudy pointed out, we will do absolutely everything we can. But when you look at the whole system and you look at the number of problems we have had statistically, there are 8,500 academies and 3,000-odd academy trusts. We are talking about a small group. For those communities, for those parents and for those children, we will do absolutely everything. Statistically, across the whole system, we have a good school system—

Q2048 Lucy Powell: Yes, but we have said this before. We have had this conversation with the Minister before. Your job is to deal with the bad apples, so to speak. It is not about just trumpeting the good. There was a financial notice to improve on AET back in 2014 that was put on this school and only lifted in 2017. Yet, even though it was lifted, you still put in this huge extra resource. Do you expect to get this money back? How is that going to work?

Dominic Herrington: There is a sum for how much they could take up to. They are not asking for as much as the sum. As much of the sum as we want we will make recoverable and so they have to pay it back and there will be a repayment plan starting. We will try to do everything we can to limit the amount of money that we will give in this situation because we want AET to be a strong organisation. We want it to deliver great education. We all do. We want great schools for every child.

Q2049 Lucy Powell: Yes, it is motherhood and apple pie, really. Can I take it from this Committee that you will publish that turnaround plan and that you will involve in this process in a publicly accountable way that is transparent parliamentarians, local MPs, trade unions, staff and parents?

Lord Agnew: No. What we have said is we will take it back to the Department, we will talk to the ESFA and the Permanent Secretary, and we will try to come up with a compromise that works.

Q2050 Lucy Powell: A compromise?

Lord Agnew: I am not going to give you a blank cheque, Lucy, to publish a report that I need to take advice on.

Q2051 Lucy Powell: I do not want a blank cheque. I just want the turnaround plan published.

Dominic Herrington: That could involve really sensitive things about professionals in that organisation, so we would not want to publish everything to do with it. Why we want to take it away and have a look at it is because it will involve the head teachers and teachers in that organisation. That is why we would want to take it away and come back to the Committee.

Chair: Just a quick one, please.



Q2052 **Thelma Walker:** Yes. Just continuing the theme of spending of public money and lack of transparency, Bright Tribe and Adventure Learning Academies Trust spent almost £350,000 of public money on 35 non-disclosure agreements. Allegedly, they were used to protect commercial interests instead of the public interest. Has the Minister investigated the use of NDAs? If so, what was the outcome? If not, will he commit to doing so?

Lord Agnew: We know that they are endemic across the whole public sector. That is the problem with them. Gradually, public opinion, led from the Commons, is starting to bear down on them. They are not a good thing when public money is involved. I respect that and I agree with you.

Q2053 **Thelma Walker:** Thinking about transparency?

Lord Agnew: Yes. In terms of transparency, Bright Tribe is still under inquiry. We have not closed the door on Bright Tribe. We still have a number of inquiries ongoing with them. We will get to the bottom of as much as we possibly can. So I am not condoning anything, but we know that in the country as a system in the public sector they are used too much.

Q2054 **Ian Mearns:** Minister, I know that Opportunity Areas are not in your remit but for some reason, even though Opportunity Areas are not in your remit, you have been given overall oversight of Opportunity North East. You might have heard that I have mentioned Opportunity Areas once or twice in this Committee because of the fact that there was not a single Opportunity Area in the north-east of England and I represent a constituency in the north-east of England. But now Opportunity North East has arrived on our doorstep. The launch was done in my constituency at Cardinal Hume School. It is a £24 million programme over three years.

Can I ask why the Government decided at the outset that the focus of funds would be in Redcar and Cleveland, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Northumberland and not in Durham or any of the five Tyne and Wear authorities? That includes Gateshead, by the way, where the launch was done.

Lord Agnew: The assessment was done on weak secondary schools in the north-east area, as you have defined. Those were the criteria that we were to look at. Other than those in special measures, RI schools, the weakest 30 schools in the region, were identified. There was no particular preference given to one constituency or another. We invited all of those who have come onto the scheme. They were not forced to do it.

We wrote to them and said, "You hit the criteria of being a struggling school academically. This programme is here to help you". Not every single one signed up, but the vast majority signed up. Then we had a reserve list to bring it to 30. It was very much done on the needs of the school rather trying to deal with individual planning areas inside the region.



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Q2055 Ian Mearns: At the launch, which was in October last year, specific geographical and local authority areas were mentioned: Redcar and Cleveland, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Northumberland. I am not normally prone to cynicism, but one of the things that brings those areas together is that either they have a local Conservative MP—and there are three of them in the north-east out of 29—or they have a Conservative metro mayor or they have a Conservative county council. Is that a coincidence or am I just being overly cynical?

Lord Agnew: No, I genuinely think it is a coincidence. I am happy to write to you with a bit more information on how we selected those schools because I can say this to you completely: I had no idea about those particular dynamics politically. The reason we chose this area was that there was a recognition that it should probably have been included in the original Opportunity Areas. It is an area with a lot of deprivation and we wanted to do something to help it. But I will write to you with a bit more clarity around how we selected those schools, I hope to try to give you a bit more reassurance.

Q2056 Ian Mearns: As a counterpose and putting some context to the question that I have just posed, the other local authority areas—Durham and the five Tyne and Wear authorities—all have exclusively Labour-controlled councils and all have Labour MPs. It just seemed to me too much of a coincidence that the areas that were included and the areas that were excluded seemed to be at opposite ends of the political scale from that perspective.

Lord Agnew: It was a Conservative Education Minister who designated the first ones.

Q2057 Ian Mearns: Yes, it was, and there was detailed methodology as to why the Opportunity Areas that Nadhim Zahawi has oversight of were brought about but I and others on numbers of occasions, including people from the Northern Powerhouse, questioned the methodology as to why the north-east as an entire entity of 29 constituencies was totally missed out of the original Opportunity Area programme.

Lord Agnew: It has absolutely never been part of my brief to do that. I will hope to offer you some clarification. As an aside, I see pretty much as many Labour MPs as I do Conservative MPs in surgeries who come to me with problems with schools. Without sounding too moralistic, I am here to improve education.

Q2058 Ian Mearns: All right. In terms of the actual methodology, do you think that the methodology you have chosen in order to determine the areas that are going to be focused on within the North East Opportunity Fund was a similar methodology?

Lord Agnew: You sound very well briefed on this, so if I am repeating what you know, cut me off. The area in question had the lowest P8 score of -0.23 against an average in the country of -0.02. It had the lowest performance EBacc achievement at 9-to-5 of 13.8% versus 16.7%.



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University applications were very low, some of the lowest in the country. Those were the criteria we used.

Q2059 **Ian Mearns:** Does Opportunity North East as a programme interact with the Opportunity Areas in other parts of the country?

Lord Agnew: Definitely. The civil servant who is leading this programme is someone who is leading other OA programmes. I am not sure if she is doing all of them, but she is certainly doing some in the north. We are bringing a lot of the learning across from that to this programme. The board that we have created has been very much a broad church. We have two LEP chairs on the board. We have some local authority representation, we have university representation and we have some school representation.

Q2060 **Ian Mearns:** The Opportunity Areas though have delivery plans that are published online. ONE does not. Why is that? Are you planning to change that?

Lord Agnew: I would certainly have to take that away and look at that. We are still at the implementation phase, but I see no reason why we should not publish a plan. If we can take that away, I will look into that.

Q2061 **Ian Mearns:** Do you think it is wise to be six months into the programme since Damian Hinds came to my constituency to make the announcement about the launch of this programme and yet not have any agreed performance measures?

Lord Agnew: We have got performance measures. We just have not published them. No, absolutely, we definitely have detailed performance measures. I spent quite a lot of time with officials sorting them out.

Q2062 **Ian Mearns:** So is it your intention to publish them in line with the other Opportunity Areas?

Lord Agnew: I see no reason why not but let me just check the background.

Dominic Herrington: I think there is a Committee hearing, is there not, coming up on Opportunity Areas?

Q2063 **Chair:** It is tomorrow. We have one tomorrow and one on 15 May.

Lucy Powell: Yes, all your officials have briefed all the people coming in.

Lord Agnew: Maybe we will make them bring you an answer on that tomorrow. I have nothing to hide on this.

Q2064 **Ian Mearns:** Tomorrow we are focusing on Opportunity Areas and Opportunity North East is not an Opportunity Area.

Lord Agnew: I will write to you on it. Let me write to the Chair and let the Committee know.

Chair: James, can it be a very quick one? You said you wanted one.



Q2065 James Frith: Yes, I have two questions, if I may, Chair, just on capital funding. I do not know whether the perception is the same as the truth on this. I am trying to get a school in Bury rebuilt. It was a school that was on the final list of the Building Schools for the Future Programme. It was then in the two iterations of the Priority Schools Programme and missed out. Technically the new school should be 10 years old now, really.

What advice do you have for a school like Tottington High School that has just become an academy in a context that is very difficult? I would agree that the whole picture is complex. The local authority is no longer supporting it in the way it would have done as a maintained school. In those instances, what advice as the power, if you like, in this situation do you have to local MPs? I am encouraged that you have met with Labour and Conservative MPs. What could a town like mine do to get an audience with you and get a school rebuilt?

Lord Agnew: We are just completing the second phase of the School Condition Survey. I think it may be called something different, but this is a complete survey of the whole school estate, some 70,000 buildings. The first thing would be to look at whether your school has been done yet—and to look at that report and for you to be able to get a copy of that report—to try to understand some of the context of why it had been bumped out of earlier programmes. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that we are very vigorously bidding into Treasury for a better capital settlement for the next spending round. We have had £23 billion in this round, which is a huge sum, but it has not been enough and so I am very focused on that.

Q2066 James Frith: Would you agree to meet with me and representatives of the school and the academy trust responsible for it on that particular issue?

Lord Agnew: Yes, I am very happy to do that.

James Frith: Thank you.

Q2067 Chair: Thank you. Could I just ask when you last visited a UTC?

Lord Agnew: The trouble is it is hard for me to get out because of the whipping in the Lords and I do not get out nearly enough. I went up to one in Liverpool a few months ago.

Q2068 Chair: How many UTCs have you visited since in post?

Lord Agnew: I think I have been to two or three.

Q2069 Chair: What are you doing in terms of UTCs to support them? I have not heard you say much about UTCs as a Minister publicly.

Lord Agnew: No. I am a huge fan of them but we have had issues with them. The most important thing is to get them into MATs, which is starting to happen. One of the biggest problems has been this clash of



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the entry age of 14, which pits them against their local schools in the community, which is not a good idea. There has been a lot of very energetic debate with Lord Baker and he has now accepted that where practical they should have an earlier entry age so that they are working in harmony with their neighbouring schools.

Q2070 Chair: What I am trying to get at is that you say they are a good thing and clearly there need to be some changes and everybody accepts the argument about the age 14 start. What I am trying to understand is why as a Government very little has been said by either you or the Secretary of State or other Ministers publicly evangelising about the importance of UTCs. They support the technical education reforms in FE, but very little is said about UTCs. Why is that?

Lord Agnew: I have not consciously not done that. I have referred—

Q2071 Chair: You had to think very hard about whether you had been to one quite a few months ago, but you have probably been to a fair few academies.

Lord Agnew: To be honest, I have not seen enough. Literally, I am not seeing enough schools. That is a fair criticism if you wanted to level that at me. I am not able to get out enough because of the Lords whipping process. That applies to all schools, not just UTCs. Baker Dearing had a good event in the Lords for UTCs a few months ago.

Q2072 Chair: Will you evangelise for them with the changes and strong leadership and with the changes in—

Lord Agnew: In MATs, with an age group that it is fixed on—

Q2073 Chair: Do you believe they should all be MATs as part of that?

Lord Agnew: I do, for the simple reason that then they are in a community where there is not a conflict of interest. If a child has an aptitude for a vocational education and he or she is 12 years old and decides to leave a given school in a MAT and move to the UTC, that organisation does not lose any of its income simply by moving from one building to another. When you align the interests of the schools like that, you get a transformational change. That is why I am such a strong believer in the MAT process.

Q2074 Chair: Lord Baker said that his worry was about it all being incorporated into MATs was he did not want UTCs to be watered down and that was the danger.

Lord Agnew: I have addressed that with him and, essentially, there can be a memorandum of understanding that is agreed between the UTC and the MAT before it joins the MAT that sets out the key characteristics, in the same way when a faith school joins a non-faith MAT. That can all be dealt with.



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Dominic Herrington: There is some encouraging data on young people going into apprenticeships from UTCs, which does not come out often in the headlines but it is a really good thing. It is three times the national average.

Q2075 **Chair:** What is the outcome data of UTCs—Lord Baker has put it very high—in terms of them going on to either additional education, apprenticeships or employment?

Lord Agnew: Dominic mentioned that they are getting very good take-up into apprenticeships. The NEET percentages are pretty good, particularly given the challenges.

Q2076 **Chair:** What are the figures?

Lord Agnew: I am afraid I do not have those here, but I am happy to write and give those two you. In the last month we have had three good Ofsted outcome inspections of UTCs. The programme is improving, but I am anxious to get them into these MATs.

Q2077 **Chair:** You care about UTCs and you will evangelise about UTCs?

Lord Agnew: Absolutely. I did not go to university, Chair.

Q2078 **Chair:** So you will evangelise about them?

Lord Agnew: I will evangelise as long as they do those things.

Q2079 **Chair:** Dominic, are you included in that? They are not being swallowed up in the academy system?

Dominic Herrington: No. I have been to a fantastic UTC in Portsmouth with great links with the Navy and girls doing engineering. There is a UTC in Dartford with great apprenticeship progression rates there. Yes.

Q2080 **Chair:** As a Committee, we are quite strongly supportive of a 10-year plan for education because, if the health service has a 10-year plan and a five-year funding settlement, surely the most important public service of all—education and skills—perhaps should have the same to give teachers and pupils a clear idea of the strategy of the Government in terms of education.

Do you agree with that? Do you think there should be a 10-year plan for education in the same way that we have now done for the health service?

Lord Agnew: I do agree and I will take your recommendation back to my Secretary of State, particularly in capital because there are huge opportunities. I have been a very strong advocate for modern methods of construction, for example, which is a nascent industry in this country.

The DfE is one of the biggest builders in this country and I have pushed a lot of school buildings into MMCs and our take-up is growing enormously. For that industry to flourish, they need to have an order book that has a three or four-year forward look so that they can invest in the capital



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equipment needed to build the factories to create these buildings. On capital alone, which is more my area, I have fought very strongly for that to happen.

Q2081 **Chair:** Would a 10-year plan help academies in terms of your role?

Dominic Herrington: Yes, a 10-year plan has merit, but that is on the political side. As an official, anything that will help.

Q2082 **Ian Mearns:** One last one, Lord Agnew. You have talked about the growth in school places. In my own local authority—and I have asked the Secretary of State for a meeting about this—we are short of school places for this September by about 20 or so. That is in the throes of being managed. But for next September 2020, we will be anything between 120 and 150 school places short. It is something that needs to be dealt with and therefore I would really love the opportunity to have a meeting to discuss that.

Lord Agnew: I would be very happy to meet you and go through those issues.

Q2083 **Chair:** Thank you. I think you have agreed to meet almost every member of the Committee.

Lucy Powell: Not me!

Lord Agnew: Lucy, you are welcome any time. It is an incredibly important Committee. There is no one more committed to this programme, frankly. We might disagree on some elements of it but no one as a greater passion for improving it. The biggest thing to lift the GDP in this country over the next 20 years is to improve educational outcomes. That is what this is all about. We can argue about how we do it, but that is what I believe in and I am trying to deliver that.

Chair: Thank you. That is what we are here for as well. Thank you very much. I hugely thank both of you for your public service and for taking pretty tough questioning for the past two hours or so. It is really appreciated.