School autonomy in England:

The impact on democracy

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Abstract

There has been a fundamental shift in the management and administration of state-funded schools in England since 1976, furthered by the rapid expansion of academies since 2010, which means many students no longer have a governing body as the legal decision-making forum for their school which is representative of their locality. The period following the 1944 Education Act was characterised by control of the curriculum being exercised by teachers and the management of state-funded schools by democratically elected local authorities. The role of central government was mainly one of funding, with limited control or influence on what was delivered in schools, but one that changed over the succeeding period to move state-funded schools in England from minimal to maximal control that was external to the local community. This paper reports on two issues: the transference of power over state-funded schooling towards central government since the mid-1970s and the growth of multi-academy trusts (MATs) during the second decade of the current century which has hastened the reduction of democracy in state-funded compulsory schooling.

The move toward central government taking control effectively began in 1976 when an incumbent Labour government questioned the contribution state-funded schools were making to the national economy (which, at the time, was in serious trouble). The incoming Conservative government of 1979, led by Margaret Thatcher, seized on this debate and soon exhibited a desire to implement policies based on neoliberalism which were intended to shift decision-making in public bodies towards the influence of the market. In turn, amongst other things, the 1986 Education (No. 2) Act saw each state-funded school being required to have a governing body which provided a voice for all involved – a mixture of local authority, parents and teachers who had both a professional and personal investment in the running of the school. The influence of local democracy soon began to be constrained, however, and was seriously damaged by the 1988 Education Reform Act, one aspect of which was devolution of funding to individual schools which began the inexorable process of reducing local authority control and, subsequently, expose schools directly to greater central government influence.

By the early part of the 21st Century central government dominated local decision-making for schools whilst ostensibly granting them greater freedom. A major policy decision in this era was to offer almost total liberty to schools through a policy of academisation, the transference of school governance to charitable trust which were answerable only directly to the Secretary of State for Education. Following the Academies Act of 2010 there was a rapid acceleration of the academisation process with many schools being formed into academies as charitable companies, limited by guarantee, working in a direct relationship with central government. At the time of writing over half the school population is in academies with most now in MATs which are multi-school organisations with one board of trustees. School governors typically now only have delegated tasks and responsibilities, with accountability having now been transferred to the trust which runs the MAT.

The analysis of the influence of MATs is based on data from 41 interviews conducted with senior members of staff in MATs during 2017 & 2018, (previously partially reported in Male, 2019), supported by analysis of a 10 per cent sample of MAT annual reports in 2018 and 2019, a total of over 200, which show the changing membership of the trust boards. One key finding is that, on average, over 75 per cent of trusts showed members (i.e. 'shareholders') also acting as trustees, even though legal guidance suggests this is not good practice for organisations with charitable status as it blurs the lines of accountability. Furthermore, some 80 per cent of CEOs are also trustees, a finding which contrasts with individual school governing bodies where the majority of headteachers were acting in a non-executive capacity. The findings from this second wave of research confirm the shift away from democratic decision making which involves the local community.

Introduction

The journey to school autonomy in England started during the late 1980s and almost certainly because of neoliberal policies being exhibited by the Conservative government in the previous decade under the leadership of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Before embarking on how that story unfolded, however, it is it is important to recognise that a total of four national school systems exist within the United Kingdom as both Northern Ireland and Scotland have their own regulations, whilst Wales has devolved powers which allow for different policy enactments. It is also necessary to understand that legitimacy is given to independent fee-paying schools which account for some seven per cent of the relevant student population (i.e. those of compulsory education ages – currently 5 to 18 years). This paper only explores what has happened (and continues to happen) in state-funded schools in England.

Figure 1: The United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland

The story begins

The key legislation which sought to establish a state-funded national school system was the 1944 Education Act which was passed by the UK coalition government of the Second World War as part of its plans to address social welfare, health and education for peace time. Prior to that universal basic education was delivered through elementary schools, with the end of compulsory education being at age 14 years. The act abolished elementary schools, raised the school leaving age to 15 and introduced state-funded secondary education for the first time. This led to the classification of primary schools for 5–11-year-olds and the introduction of compulsory secondary education for 11-15 year-olds (later raised to 16).

A major feature of the development of schools within England, however, had been the influence of the churches without whom there would not have been universal basic education as they were the principal provider throughout the 19th Century. Prior to the 1902 Education Act the governance and management of the school system had been through school boards, of which there were over 2500 by the time they were abolished by the act. Responsibility for the provision and management of education was given instead to local councils as part of a unification of the control of schooling. This democratically elected tier of local government was to establish local education authorities (LEAs) which were given authority over the secular curriculum of voluntary (church) schools (Ball, 2018). The LEAs provided grants for school maintenance, but if a school wanted to provide denominational teaching the buildings had to be paid for by the church. The centrality of the churches to the early development of schools has never been seceded, meaning that the system today is a mix of secular and religious schools which has meant that for most of 20th century governance and management of schools had been a compromise between local and church authorities, with most religious denominated schools becoming part of the state sector. LEAs were thus responsible for the provision and quality of state-funded provision which included church schools, although some chose the status of Voluntary Aided (VA) which provided enhanced state subsidies, but retained autonomy over admissions, curriculum and teacher appointments. The period of control was colloquially described as a 'national system of education locally administered' (Ainley, 2001: 457).

Typically, LEAs geographically mirrored democratically elected local councils although in some instances (such as in conurbations) they administered to a larger population than within any individual council. For the next few decades, however, school education in England was considered a private matter where the state had only a limited role to play (Syriatou, 2009), with most teachers believing that the freedom to teach what they wanted in the way they wanted was a matter of safeguarding democracy itself (Gillard, 2018a). During this period central government determined the structure and financing of schools, but did not intervene in the curriculum, pedagogy or assessment, whilst LEAs governed and managed schools on behalf of the local population.

1970 was the year by which for the first time a national school system in England can be considered to have been established when the Education (Handicapped Children) Act was introduced, making LEAs responsible for the education of severely handicapped children who had previously been

considered to be 'unsuitable for education at school'. Universal access for all school age children was thus legally established in England.

> …. the first time in history all children without exception are within the scope of the educational system. The act is the last milestone, along the road starting with the Education Act of 1870, which set out to establish a national system of education. (Ball, 2018: 218)

Ironically, the Secretary of State for Education at the time was Margaret Thatcher, to whom the above quote is attributed. The irony was that this was also the year in which she exerted her authority to stop the development of comprehensive schooling, which had been a major governmental policy during the 1960s. Since then, schools in England can be considered to have moved from being the least to the most state-controlled system in the world by the second decade of the current century.

The transition back from local administration to national 'control'

Despite the continued investment following the 1944 Act there had been a growing sense of frustration in central government throughout the 1960s that, despite funding a huge increase of state-maintained schools, they had little impact on desired outcomes. The first attempt at intervention from central government had been made in 1959 by the Secretary of State for Education, Sir David Eccles, who suggested it was time to "sally into the secret garden of the curriculum" and further commented:

> I regret that so many of our educational debates have had to be devoted almost entirely to bricks and mortar and to the organisation of the system. We hardly ever discuss what is taught to seven million boys and girls in the maintained schools. (cited in Taylor, 1989: 62)

The 1960s, however, was a period of great excitement and creativity, especially in primary education with the publication of the report of the Central Advisory Council for Education for England (CACE) (1967), commonly known as the 'Plowden Report' after the chair of the enquiry. The report called for the abolition of the *Eleven Plus* (11+), a test which had been designed to identify children with the capability to go into grammar schools, which offered a highly academic curriculum throughout secondary education. The 11+ too often tended to dominate the primary school curriculum and learning process, however, and when it became clear that the selection system was failing most of the nation's children the government asked CACE 'to consider primary education in all its aspects, and the transition to secondary education' (Gillard, 2018b). The outcome was a transition to a child-centred

approach with primary schools to be freed from the constraints imposed by the need to 'get good results' and teacher-led curriculum innovation:

> the abolition of the 11+ in many areas [enabled] primary schools to develop a more informal, child-centred style of education with an emphasis on individualisation and learning by discovery: in short, a 'progressive' style of education, which Plowden largely endorsed. (Gillard, 2018b)

There was also a review of secondary education in the same era, led by a Labour government, which considered grammar schools as being divisive and the province of the middle classes. LEAs were required to prepare plans to deliver secondary education in their areas along comprehensive lines as "there were many who believed that educating all local children in a single school, where they would have equal physical facilities and equal access to high quality teachers, would raise the aspirations of all children and teachers, bringing about greater equity within the schools and lead to greater opportunities outside in the world of work" (Pring and Walford, 1997: 2).

By 1970, 115 LEAs had had their plans for the reorganisation of secondary education to comprehensive schooling approved, whilst 13 had had theirs rejected and a further 10 had defied the government by refusing to submit any plans at all. This latter issue became of great significance in the next stage of the evolution of a national system of state-funded schools when the new Conservative government ended the compulsion on LEAs to convert to comprehensive schooling. To this day it is still possible to find grammar schools operating in parts of England, with even a recent Prime Minister, Theresa May, seeking to promote them even more widely during the final period of her office in 2019.

The idea that there was a need to break what was considered as a cosy consensus between the local authorities, teacher unions and departmental officials, which seemingly excluded the Secretary of State for Education, led a number of conservative activists seeking to exert influence through the publication between 1969 and 1977 of a series of 'Black Papers' (a descriptor deliberately chosen to contrast with government White Papers which are advanced proposals for an Act of Parliament). The Black Papers were strongly critical of what they saw as the excesses of an education system largely focused on individual learning needs, which they dismissively labelled as 'progressive', and demanded a return to education of 'the pursuit of choice', with LEAs to choose how to organise their schools, of

parents to choose the school they felt appropriate for their children and of pupils to choose subjects and areas of study within schools (Cox and Dyson, 1969, 1970a, 1970b; Cox and Boyson, 1975, 1977).

This period was also one of national financial crisis which led in many ways to schools being considered as one of the culprits for the weak economy and, at times, the scapegoat for decline. The discourse emanating from the Black Papers and combination of depressing economic performance seemingly began to dominate thinking in central government and started the demand for an increase in central authority over compulsory schooling in state-funded schools and a reduction in the autonomy of the LEAs. The populist view at the time was that state-funded schools were overly liberal in their interpretation of progressive education and were not producing a capable workforce during a period of economic depression. What happened next was that Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan commissioned an internal government report which gave the view of the department and HMI on the 'health' of the education system and led him arguing for the setting of national standards, the monitoring of increasingly scarce resources and a core curriculum of basic knowledge in his famous speech at Ruskin College in October 1976 when he attacked the "educational establishment" and signalled an intention to launch a 'Great Debate' on education.

In reality, little happened immediately in the wake of that speech, but it seemed the Labour government had "prepared the soil for a breakthrough by the radical right" (Simon, 1991: 454), led by Margaret Thatcher who had been elected as Prime Minister of a Conservative government in 1979. The next eleven years fundamentally shifted the locus of power towards central government with a seeming determination to adopt a neoliberal approach to policy. This populist approach to running the nation was based on the principle of a market driven capitalist economy under the guidance and rules of a strong state. Sir Keith Joseph, a keen supporter of a market-driven economy, was appointed Secretary of State for Education in 1981 and immediately made an intervention into mainstream secondary schooling with introduction of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) in 1982. Essentially this was a curriculum which was aimed at promoting the capability of the bottom 50 per cent of the school student population to contribute to the nation's economic growth by training them in work-related skills. More importantly, in the context of this paper, this was the first time that funding for education was managed by a separate government department, in this case the Manpower Services Commission (MSC). The significance of this move was that it brought specific

accountability to schools who were required to perform according to precise contractual criteria and demonstrated a determination by central government to direct the curriculum.

1988 Education Reform Act – The Empire strikes back!

Following his failure to resolve a long running pay dispute with teachers Keith Joseph was replaced by Kenneth Baker in 1986 who, on the strength of subsequently settling the dispute (and getting extra funding for this from the Treasury), set about redesigning the school education system, culminating in the Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988. This was:

> … the most massive intervention in the education system of the twentieth century and, in terms of curriculum and assessment, totally reversed earlier political notions that these should be left to the teachers, schools and local authorities. (Bassey, 2005: 24)

The act had several key features which radically changed the nature of schooling, as well as endorsing central government control over local authorities. The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) was abolished, for example, with each of the 13 local councils in central London being required to establish their own LEA. This was part of a wider agenda, driven by Thatcher, to limit the ability of local government to modify policies. The main elements of the act, however, were to establish a national curriculum and assessment system and to free schools from local authority financial control. Control of the learning process in the nation's schools was now firmly in the hands of central government who set up two bodies to oversee curriculum and assessment: The National Curriculum Council (NCC) and the Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC). In terms of finance, schools were either to remain with local councils, yet have almost total control over decision making as part of the Local Management of Schools (LMS) or be directly responsible to central government as a Grant Maintained School (GMS). This was the defining moment of the struggle for control of the nation's schools and was evidence of neo-liberalism, the so-called 'freedom' under the guidance of a strong government:

> The 1988 Education Act laid the foundations of an education market system of education or what we might call neoliberal education […] driven by a factory-based model of performance management […] that is predominantly defined publicly and politically by concerns about underperformance. (Ball, 2018: 220-221)

Subsequent policy initiatives sought to limit both the power of local government and to direct control of funding to the end users, in this case schools. Various large local authorities were either reduced in size through abolition or reorganisation to increase central government control over local decision

making, whilst seemingly providing a strong steer as to which decisions could be enacted. Reorganisation of local authorities included abolition of large local authority conurbations such as the Greater London Council and Humberside, plus the Metropolitan Counties of Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands and West Yorkshire was included in the 1985 Local Government Act. It was clear that this action was taken by a Conservative government which considered these local authorities as opposing and preventing their policies, based as they were on free market principles.

Reorganisation of funding for schools had thus begun in 1982 for specific, curriculum based, initiatives with the introduction of TVEI (see above) and was followed in 1984 with the introduction of Education Support Grants (ESG). By 1986 funding was identified for teacher development through TVEI related in-service training (TRIST) which fundamentally changed the nature of LEA in-service education, allowing for the appointment of co-ordinators of training and development to direct and fund school-based activities. By 1987 the government had removed the barriers to specific funding for in-service training and development with the introduction of the Local Education Authority Training Grant Scheme (LEATGS), although spending was very controlled through a system whereby National Priorities (i.e. defined by central government) were supported at a higher rate (70 per cent) than Local Priorities (50 per cent), with specified amounts being defined in the grant for certain activities. ESG and LEATGS were combined in 1990 to become Grant for Education Support & Training (GEST) which funded compulsory teacher appraisal from 1991. Thus, we saw a radical shift in the control of school funding over the course of the decade which culminated in almost total devolution to schools following ERA in 1988.

Redefining schools

The first step in the process of redefining schools was the shift of power towards greater parental engagement and choice of schools through amending the governance structures through the 1980 and 1986 Education Acts. Each school was required to have its own governing body, responsible for decision-making on key issues, which demonstrated a balance between LEAs, parents and the teacher workforce. Following ERA such decisions included most recurrent expenditure, including staffing. By 1994 this control of expenditure was embedded in all state-funded schools, following completion of the abolition of ILEA and the inclusion of special schools in LMS. It soon became evident, however,

that central government was still dissatisfied with the way in which LEAs maintained their schools and were held accountable.

One action that followed (still being manifested today) was the classification of some schools to deliberately take them out of LEA control. At the same time Kenneth Baker was planning ERA he also announced intentions to open a chain of 'City Technology Colleges' (CTC) which were to be science-focused inner-city schools owned and governed by autonomous governing bodies, rather than LEAs. The first school was announced in 1987 and fifteen were built in total. A new Labour government was elected in 1997 and by May 2000 Education Secretary David Blunkett had decided "a more radical approach" was needed and "substantial resources" would now be provided for the establishment of City Academies (politics.co.uk, n.d.). This strategy was to build upon the initiative of CTCs with the opening of City Academies in deprived areas, to be sponsored by business partners, with CTCs to be encouraged to convert into academies. Three such academies were opened by 2002 and legislation was subsequently applied that allowed 'City' to be removed from the title so that schools in non-city areas could join the programme. Growth of academies was not as fast as central government would have preferred, however, and despite changes in regulations about who could act as a sponsor and a public determination to increase the numbers just 207 were established by 2010 when a new Coalition government was elected. Under the determined direction of the new Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, there was a much more aggressive drive towards academisation with less emphasis on business involvement and a greater focus on releasing schools from local authority control. Conversion was now to be open to all schools and by January, 2011 there were already 407 academies, with a further 254 applications in place.

The Academies Act 2010 further allowed for the Secretary of State to require the academisation of any school that was deemed to be underperforming, for which subsequently there were schools which were forced to become academies often against the will of governors, parents and teachers (Elton and Male, 2015). The number of academies or other types of schools 'liberated' from local authority control grew rapidly for the rest of the decade and by March 2021 there a total of just under 10,000 which were either open or in the application process. As can be seen from Table 1, academies now total nearly half of all state-funded schools in England, but at least half of students in the system (National Audit Office, 2018)

Phase of Education	Converter	Sponsor	Free schools	UTCs	Studio Schools	Total Academy	LA Schools	Total
Mainstream Primary (incl. MD Primary)	25.9%	9.5%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	36.8%	63.2%	100.0%
Mainstream Secondary (incl. MD secondary, AT and 16+)	47.6%	22.2%	6.6%	1.4%	0.6%	78.5%	21.5%	100.0%
Special	27.5%	7.1%	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	40.4%	59.6%	100.0%
Alternative Provision	21.3%	8.0%	14.1%	0.0%	0.0%	43.4%	56.6%	100.0%
Total	**29.4%**	**11.4%**	**2.6%**	**0.2%**	**0.1%**	**43.7%**	**56.3%**	**100.0%**

Table 1: Open academies, free schools, university technical colleges (UTCs) and studio schools and academy projects awaiting approval. (Department for Education, 2021)

What does this mean for democracy?

Until the policy shift towards academies following the 2010 general election each English state-funded school had their own governing body which was the legal decision-making forum for the organisation. The composition of that body was normally between nine and 19 members, according to pupil numbers, and included representatives of the local authority nominees and officers, together with elected parents and teachers. The headteacher was part of the board (sometimes with full voting rights) which normally was serviced by a local authority officer acting as clerk. The articles and instruments of governance were defined by the 1986 Education Act (No. 2) and were part of the "*complex system of checks and balances inherent in the administration of public services that reflect the ability of English society to prevent fraud and misuse of resources*" (Male, 2006: 99). From 1986 each state-maintained school in England was thus required to have its own governing body which demonstrated a balance between local government, parents and the teacher workforce in a time when education was seen as a national system, delivered locally.

The shift away from local democracy

School governing bodies created by the 1986 Act were not immune to these neoliberal influences, as illustrated by Wilkins and Gobby (2020) who provide two formulations of governance: *instrumental-rational* and *agonistic-political*. The first is a technical approach, which sees governing bodies established to ensure certain strategic and operational priorities are set and overseen to enhance the quality and standards of schools; the second is more political approach, designed to provide

responsiveness to contextual situations and local autonomy. The conclusion to be drawn is that school governing bodies were encouraged to move away from apolitical to political activity during the Thatcher years, ostensibly to improve outcomes (i.e. responsive to the 'market'). In other words, school governing bodies were to be part of the neoliberal landscape that was emerging for public services.

All state-funded schools were still required to have a governing body, but the establishment of academies changed the governance regulations for those schools. Now the structure was for the academy to correspond to legislation relating to all charitable companies limited by guarantee in the UK which needs both an enabling power in its constitution and approval of 'shareholders' (legally identified as members). The key difference with a charitable company is that is limited by guarantees, rather than shares, and are non-profit organisations which can receive additional support from personal or corporate sponsors, either financially or in kind. Each academy was to governed by the Academy Agreement it made with the Secretary of State for Education. It should be noted, however, this was not the privatisation of state education, but rather was a move that separated academies from other state-funded schools to establish them as corporate entities with a direct relationship to central government.

Consequently, a governing structure had to be established which had members (the equivalent to shareholders) and trustees (equivalent to directors) who are legally, but not financially, accountable for the operation of the academy. Members act in a similar way to the shareholders of a company limited by shares and are invested with the power to change the name of the company or wind it up. It is the role of trust members to endorse and safeguard the trust's Memorandum of Association, to have an overview of the governance arrangements of the trust, to appoint other members and to add or remove trustees from the trust board. Trustee is the name given to a member of the trust board (of directors) with responsibility for directing the trust's affairs, for ensuring that it is solvent, well-run and delivering the trust's charitable outcomes. The trust thus serves as the legal entity of which the school is a part, with the trustees overseeing the running of the school and the option of delegating responsibility to any local governing body which they appoint. The day-to-day management of the academy continued to be conducted by the headteacher and their senior management team, as expected under relevant legislation, and subject to inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, the national inspection service for schools in England).

Thus academies had become publicly funded independent schools which were only marginally linked to local authorities, normally through admission policies and special needs provision. The atomisation of the state's school system exhibited several high-profile cases of financial impropriety, however, and public concerns about a disjointed, inequitable school system which showed weaknesses in safeguarding, governance or financial management (Department for Education, 2018). In the main, however, there is little evidence to suggest this was widespread practice with most trusts exhibiting moral leadership (Male, 2019). What was important at the time of the massive expansion of academies (triggered by the 2010 Act) was that single academy trusts often seemingly replaced their governing bodies with trustees, often with the same or very similar membership. The transition point in terms of governance for democracy was the evolution of MATs.

In MATs the board of trustees can decide whether to appoint local governing bodies (LGBs) for individual schools within the trust, and which, if any, governance functions for which the LGBs would take responsibility (Wilkinson, 2017). Each LGB with delegated powers must include two elected parents (Department for Education, 2020a: para 18), whereas a member academy within a MAT with no delegated powers can be purely advisory in nature. Indeed, it is possible for an individual academy within a MAT to be included in governance arrangements for several schools without parent representation. The DfE guidance does, however, indicate:

> Having parents on LGBs (or trust boards) is not a replacement for engagement with parents more broadly. All trust boards should assure themselves that mechanisms are in place for their organisation to engage meaningfully with all parents and carers. (Department for Education, 2020b: 21)

A scheme of delegation is a systematic way of ensuring that the members, trustees, board committees, local governing bodies, executive leadership and academy head teachers and heads of school are all clear about their roles and responsibilities. Under these circumstances the LGB is a committee which the trust board has the power to appoint and remove at any time. As head teachers and heads of school are line managed by the CEO, the LGB no longer carries out the governance function of holding the head teacher to account, although all LGBs and local advisory committees are expected to scrutinise school performance and discuss with individual school leaders.

The changing nature of trusts

The growth in the number of MATs has also seen major changes in board membership, which has often conflicted with guidance provided by the DfE. The data emerging from research conducted for this paper was gathered by analysis of a 10 per cent sample of MAT annual reports in 2018 and 2019, a total of over 200, which show the changing membership of the trust boards. One key finding is that, on average, over 75 per cent of trusts showed members (i.e. 'shareholders') also acting as trustees. Government guidance indicates preferably this should be confined to just one member and not to allow a majority of members to also become trustees. The guidance also indicates this would "reduce the objectivity with which the Members can exercise their powers and increases the risk of unchecked 'group think' by the board" (Department for Education, 2020a: para 34). Another key finding is that some 80 per cent of CEOs are also trustees, a finding which contrasts with individual school governing bodies where the majority of headteachers were acting in a non-executive capacity.

Discussion

What we have explored in this paper is a shift in accountability and governance of state-funded schools away from local democracy since 1976 when the Prime Minister, through his intervention into the 'cosy consensus', laid the grounds for the radical right subsequently to implement neoliberal policies which impacted on the control of schools. Whilst ostensibly this was a movement towards market driven representation in decision-making, arguably demonstrated in the two acts of the 1980s requiring each state-funded school to have its own to school governing body, the general direction of travel was away from local democracy with a significant shift of control being embodied in the move to school autonomy, especially with the 1988 Education Reform Act. Greater control was subsequently exhibited over curriculum, assessment and management for state-funded schools by central government and its agencies which "allowed the state to continue to steer the system from a distance […] through a model we term '*coercive autonomy*' (Greany & Higham, 2018: 6, 11).

The acceleration of the academisation process from 2010 has seen even more disenfranchisement of local authorities and parents, especially in MATs. It is now a requirement that no more than 19.9 per cent of trustees can have worked for local authorities within a four-year period prior to their appointment. Parental representation in governance structures for MATs has also been reduced significantly. With over half the students in the state-funded school system now in academies, the vast majority of which are MATs, we are witnessing a further significant shift away from local

democracy. Furthermore, the schools' inspectorate, Ofsted, cannot inspect MATs, meaning "parents and policymakers are only given a partial view of what is happening in our schools" (Chief inspector of Ofsted, Spielman, in Weale 2019). Thus, academy governance risks undermining the UK government's own pledge to 'Nolan principles', the basis of the ethical standards expected of public office holders, which includes a commitment to 'honesty', 'openness' and 'integrity' (GOV.UK 1995).

Whither democracy?

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