

National Foundation for Educational Research

Schools that work for everyone

Department for Education consultation

Key points from NFER's submission

12 December 2016

For 70 years NFER has improved the lives of children, young people and adult learners through robust, independent evidence about education and learning. On the 12 December 2016, NFER submitted its response to the Department for Education's [Schools that work for everyone consultation](#). The Government sought views on:

- the identification of those families who are 'just about managing'
- the contribution which independent schools can make to the state sector
- the involvement of universities in the provision of school places
- conditions that should be met if existing selective schools are to be allowed to expand and new selective schools established
- the removal of the 50% faith-based oversubscription criteria for faith-based free schools.

NFER responded to the first four of these items with nine key points

1. NFER welcomes the Government's interest in families 'just about managing'. As a minimum, NFER suggests that any definition should rely on equivalised income, to make household income comparable across families of different size and composition.
2. Once a definition is agreed, existing administrative data sources (e.g. HMRC tax credits data) could be used to identify families. To understand the impact of education policy on this group, the data will need to be matched to pupil data, such as the National Pupil Database (NPD).
3. New analysis by NFER finds that there is already potential within the current system for partnerships between high performing schools (5,683) and underperforming schools (2,352) with the aim of improving school performance. Taking account of reasonable travel distance, phase, and focusing on schools not in a Multi-Academy Trust, we find a potential pool of high performing partnershipsⁱ available for any underperforming school at an average ratio of 11:1.
4. NFER urges the Government to consider this new data about the existing potential capacity in the system and to think more holistically about sources of school support, beyond a focus on certain institutions or school types. This will be the best way to achieve the stated desire that 'all parts of the education system need to collaborate more to widen opportunity and raise standards'.
5. Our response highlights evidence that shows school-to-school support works best between partners with some similarities, including similar cohorts, geographical

proximity, and a mutual commitment to collaborationⁱⁱ. Any collaboration or sponsorship arrangements should involve institutions that demonstrate excellent practice that can be shared.

6. As independent schools are held to account differently to state schools, it is difficult to identify which independent schools are 'most successful'. Independent schools that participate in assisting the state-funded sector more directly may need to be encouraged to provide additional information to demonstrate their capacity to take on this role.
7. There is currently little evidence on which types of partnership between independent and state schools have the best impact or value for money.
8. Higher Education Institutions are well placed to contribute to improving standards through initial teacher training, raising pupil aspirations, professional development, conducting and engaging practitioners in research, and working with intermediaries to create a more evidence-informed education ecosystem. More direct roles in supporting or sponsoring schools would require careful design, piloting and evaluation. Geography, value for money and alternative, existing capacity within the system should also be considered.
9. Existing evidence suggests that the current system of selection at age 11 has an overall negative impact on social mobilityⁱⁱⁱ. Selection tests at age 11 favour students with higher prior attainment, who tend to be from wealthier households. Based on its extensive assessment experience, NFER believes a 'tutor-proof' selection test would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to develop. This area needs further research, including exploring the impacts on those not entered or selected, as well as on tutoring and parental choice. Making selection test data available for research purposes would enable more analysis to be conducted to help understand grammar school performance.

ⁱ NFER will publish this analysis in full in early 2017

ⁱⁱ See NFER, 2014, Mid-point evaluation of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Tranche 1 Pathfinder Project <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/WGIE01>, NFER, 2016, Evaluation of Tranche 2 of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/WGTW01>, Walker, M., Sims, D., Lynch, S. Durbin, B., Henderson, L. and Morris, M., 2012, Evaluation of the Gaining Ground Strategy [DfE Research Report 216] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184088/DFE-RR216.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, see Education Policy Institute, 2016, Grammar schools and social mobility http://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Grammar-schools-and-social-mobility_.pdf