

HOUSE OF COMMONS
ORAL EVIDENCE
TAKEN BEFORE THE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER 2013

RT HON MICHAEL GOVE MP

Evidence heard in Public

Questions 1 - 155

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Oral Evidence

Taken before the Education Committee

on Wednesday 18 December 2013

Members present:

Mr Graham Stuart (Chair)

Neil Carmichael

Alex Cunningham

Bill Esterson

Pat Glass

Siobhain McDonagh

Ian Mearns

Chris Skidmore

Mr David Ward

Examination of Witness

Witness: **Rt Hon Michael Gove**, Secretary of State for Education, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good morning and welcome, Secretary of State. Thank you for appearing before us this morning. We are all in festive mood ahead of Christmas, and we are looking forward to the gifts you will be able to share with the Committee.

What are the key lessons you take from Ofsted's report last week?

Michael Gove: There were several. The first thing to say is that, since Sir Michael Wilshaw has taken over as chief inspector, he has been a brilliant leader of Ofsted. He has put the emphasis absolutely where it should be—not just on raising the bar, but on closing the gap and helping disadvantaged children in particular. As ever, as a fair-minded teacher would, he mixed praise and encouragement to do better. The praise was there for those schools that have improved, and we do see that there has been, as he recorded, the biggest change in inspection history in schools ranked as good or outstanding, which is again a cause for celebration; but he also pointed out, quite rightly, that there are far too many parts of the country where standards are still not high enough.

Q2 Chair: What do you propose to do about that?

Michael Gove: One of the things that Sir Michael pointed out was that some of what we are already doing is addressing the problems that he has identified. If one looks specifically at the question of unequal performance, he is right in drawing attention to the fact that unlucky children tend to be poorer children, and not just in poorer communities; poorer children sometimes do worse in areas of relative affluence. Everything that we are doing, from the pupil premium to the changes in how our accountability system operates, is intended to address that. As ever in education, as the PISA statistics showed, it takes a bit of time before changes in policy feed through to changes in behaviour and then results.

Q3 Chair: But he identified leadership as essential. He identified the fact that, if you look at the areas of the country—often the east coast—where there is underperformance, there is a lack of national and local leaders in education, so we have a surfeit in areas that probably need it the least and a lack in areas that need it the most. One could read into Sir Michael Wilshaw’s report that there is a lack of a national strategy to ensure the deployment of effective leaders in the places they are most needed. Do you think that criticism is fair?

Michael Gove: With the exception of the words “national strategy”— but we can put that to one side—yes. As we constantly strive to do better, and as some problems are solved—as everyone acknowledges, for example, one of the biggest problems our predecessor Government had was underperformance in London, and now that has been tackled significantly, but not, of course, completely—so attention shifts elsewhere. There are some particular challenges, you are absolutely right. Sometimes they are in coastal communities; sometimes they are because you have had local authorities like Norfolk and Suffolk that have not done the right thing.

We are attempting to address that through a variety of tools. One of them was outlined by the Deputy Prime Minister in the speech that he gave a couple of months ago. Some attention was paid to the fact that he helpfully reminded us of Liberal Democrat commitments made at their spring conference; less attention was paid to what I thought was an excellent outline of how we could ensure we incentivised good leaders to work in some of those underperforming schools. That is one of the central tasks that Charlie Taylor is undertaking at the national college: growing the number of national leaders and making sure they are deployed more effectively.

Q4 Chair: How do you rate the performance of the national college in providing this leadership?

Michael Gove: I think that Charlie Taylor has been doing a brilliant job, but, as ever, we are seeking to address a problem that has been highlighted by success in other areas, which draws attention to those areas where we might have considered schools to be coasting beforehand, but now their performance really is giving us cause for concern. There are also particular demographic challenges in some parts of the country and in some coastal communities, not just in East Anglia but, as you know well, further north.

Q5 Chair: You made it specific to Charlie Taylor, the chief executive, but we have heard criticism that the National College for Teaching and Leadership itself is not providing much in the way of leadership. Do you reject that entirely?

Michael Gove: I absolutely reject that.

Q6 Chair: Overall, do you think they are doing a brilliant job?

Michael Gove: I think that Charlie is doing an excellent job, and I think that the team with whom he works are doing an excellent job. Having worked with Charlie, I know that he is his own sternest critic. There are some people who hanker after a particular approach towards the operation of the national college, but that is not the approach that we should have in what is increasingly a school-led, self-improving system.

Q7 Chair: But there must be a role for it. You would not have it if you did not think there was a role for it. If there are swathes of the country where there is a lack of leadership,

and you have a national college for leadership, that would suggest it was doing a less than brilliant job.

Michael Gove: It would suggest that there has been a problem that has been exposed, and that problem has originated in the past. I do not want to criticise previous leaders of the national college, because I think that they have all done a good job, but I do think it is the case that there are systemic problems, in that we have an insufficient number of national and local leaders of education, particularly in the areas that you mention.

The number of national and local leaders of education has increased. Obviously, it is the case that you cannot carry on being a national leader of education unless you operate energetically in the right way. There are examples of great leadership in some of the areas where we have been underperforming in the past. Some of that great leadership, of course, has been driven by the academies programme and by the challenge provided by free schools. If we are thinking about outstanding leaders in the east of England, it is impossible to ignore the impact of someone like Rachel de Souza, who took over an underperforming primary school in the south of Norwich and is now leading an academy chain across Norfolk.

Similarly, the Department was criticised in the past for the growth in the number of free schools in Suffolk. People said, “There are surplus places in Suffolk. Why do we need free schools?” but one of the reasons we need free schools is that we need innovation and challenge, and we need to create an environment that ensures that great leaders can be tempted to come to that county.

Q8 Chair: Thank you. As we did in January 2012, we went out to the world of Twitter and asked people to send us questions for you. We had an excellent response, with thousands of tweets and high-quality questions. We will attempt as best we can as a Committee—we ask you to join in, as you always do—to get through as many as we can. We will try to keep questions and answers short and punchy through the session.

Michael Gove: Will do.

Chair: With that, we turn to the subject of children’s social care.

Q9 Bill Esterson: Before I go on to children’s care, I have one question about Sir Michael Wilshaw’s comments about grammar schools and disadvantaged children not getting a fair crack of the whip in terms of access to grammar schools. Do you agree with him?

Michael Gove: Looking at both grammar schools and Sir Michael, I have the same response: as Billy Joel said in that great song of his— I think we all know it—“Don’t go changing just to please me; I love you just the way you are.” I love Sir Michael just the way he is, I love the grammar school contribution to state education just the way it is, and I think that is the best that can be said.

Q10 Bill Esterson: Does that mean no new grammar schools?

Michael Gove: The legislation says no new grammar schools. Of course the legislation also allows grammar schools, like all good schools, to expand. That expansion may mean that they acquire a new site—we may go on to discuss school places and which to expand. But, as you saw from the decision that I made last week, there is a line to be drawn between the legitimate expansion of successful schools—grammar schools are, for the most part, outstanding schools whose contribution to excellent state education we should all celebrate—and a wholly new school, which, as you know, is forbidden in law.

Bill Esterson: Thank you, I was wondering what Billy Joel song you were going to quote there for a moment. I am sure Twitter will be abuzz.

Michael Gove: I suppose in tribute to Pat I could have quoted “Uptown Girl”, but, you know, I was thinking—

Q11 Bill Esterson: It’s probably time to move on to children’s services. In your speech to the NSPCC you talked about the system of social care hitherto not being either systematic, radical or determined enough. You announced three critical areas for reform. If we turn to our first #AskGove, I don’t know who asked this, but what is your vision for the future for children in care and how do you plan to get there?

Michael Gove: That is difficult to answer punchily. The critical thing is that I would like to see more children taken out of homes where they are at risk more rapidly. I would encourage social workers to be more energetic and challenging; to shift the balance from concentrating on primarily developing a relationship with the adults in the household to thinking more about the children at risk, and therefore taking children into care more quickly; and, for children who are inevitably in some form of residential care, improving the quality of that—some steps have been taken there.

I would encourage increasing the number of people who come forward to foster and adopt, thereby increasing the speed with which children can then find a permanent place, whether it is with—in as many circumstances as possible—adoptive parents or another secure setting; and then to make sure that children in that setting can be supported as long as possible. Then we must make sure that we do everything we can, through the deployment of virtual school heads, the additional pupil premium plus, and now Edward Timpson’s decision to extend foster care for some who wish to be in foster care from 18 to 21, to provide them with a nurturing and caring environment to help them through life.

Q12 Bill Esterson: The next #AskGove question I will put to you is: do you believe that constant scrutiny and judgment of individuals is conducive to positive working environments and helpful for confidence?

Michael Gove: Not constant, but regular, yes.

Q13 Bill Esterson: What do you mean by regular?

Michael Gove: When we are dealing with the most vulnerable people in the greatest need, it is important that we expect and demand the highest level of professionalism. In any good children’s services department, such as the ones you have been responsible for in the past, Bill, you and the director of children’s services and other managers would want to be certain that everything from record keeping to the management of caseloads would be properly and effectively scrutinised and managed.

Q14 Bill Esterson: In your first answer you talked about what you would like to see from social workers: more and earlier intervention; quicker decisions on children being taken into care. How are you responding to the cry for help from social workers who are struggling to cope under the weight of growing case loads and reducing resources?

Michael Gove: I have enormous sympathy with the situation in which social workers find themselves. It is often the case that those who have excessive case loads are often people

who are themselves poorly managed, and there is a challenge sometimes, in that the quality of management and leadership of social workers is very variable. I would urge those local authorities that have a high vacancy rate, or social workers who feel that their case load is too heavy, to look to those local authorities—Hackney is one that I would particularly highlight—that have remodelled the way in which they operate to ensure that the work load of individual social workers is more effectively shared, and that the leadership that is shown by managers is more effectively directed.

Q15 Bill Esterson: Is there something from a national perspective that needs to happen to demonstrate support for social workers? Quite rightly, in my view, you make great play of the fact that we need great teachers, and great leaders of teachers, to produce the right outcomes for children in school. Is there a similar process for social workers, and how does that come from a national level?

Michael Gove: You are absolutely right; there is a similar process. In social work, child protection and children’s social care, I would say that the situation that we now face is rather similar to the situation that the Labour Government faced with education say 10 years ago. The Labour Government—the Blair Government—recognised that to take education to a higher level they needed to make some changes, one of which was to introduce a greater degree of diversity and innovation in the supply and another of which was to concentrate on improving leadership. A further one, critically, was to concentrate on improving the quality of people entering the profession through things like Teach First and indeed the national college. We have got to do the same thing now, so we need, as we have just been discussing, a greater degree of thought given to how social work departments are run, and the Hackney model provides a way forward, I think.

On the whole question of recruiting better people, first, there are some outstanding social workers, and some of them have been playing a part in helping to shape our policy. I should in particular mention Isabelle Trowler, who has been appointed as chief social worker for children and families—a brilliant person. I don’t know if you have had the chance to talk to her at length in the Department. She is a really impressive person, and the fact that she has that role, and can provide professional leadership, is highly effective.

The second thing that I would mention is that the Prime Minister, in his speech to the Conservative party conference, managed to do the impossible—to win praise from Polly Toynbee. He did that by explicitly saying how important the role of social workers was and calling them modern-day heroes and heroines.

Thirdly, I had the opportunity myself, both at the launch of Frontline—the new, in essence, Teach First for social work—and subsequently, in the speech that I gave to the NSPCC, to explain how highly I thought of social workers, and not in the abstract sense of giving them a hug and singing “Kumbaya”, but in the concrete sense of recognising that it is a uniquely difficult job that requires skills of emotional intelligence and intellectual rigour, which should rightly make us think that anyone who does the job of social worker well is performing a task that is both vital to society and enormously demanding, and that they should be celebrated.

Q16 Bill Esterson: What can you do to ensure that social workers want to go and work in some of the more challenging places where currently they are clearly choosing not to?

Michael Gove: A case in point is Doncaster. We recognise that there have been problems there for some time now, and with the co-operation of the new Labour mayor, we are setting up a trust arrangement there specifically to provide more space and scope for

effective leaders and managers from social work to, as they did in Hackney with education through the establishment of the Hackney Learning Trust, have a body at one remove from the unhappy history of the past, capable of providing the quality of leadership required.

The model that we have adopted is one that was designed for us by Alan Wood, who is the director of children's services at Hackney—another outstanding social worker—and also by Professor Julian Le Grand, who is an ethical socialist and one of the leading thinkers in this area. It is the sort of innovation that I find incredibly exciting, but also that is clearly designed and shaped to meet and respond to social workers' concerns, rather than to fit anyone else's ideological blueprint.

Q17 Bill Esterson: Why are you so confident that that kind of model will attract social workers to work in Doncaster or Birmingham, for example?

Michael Gove: Birmingham is a particular example. Alan and Julian are going to help us by looking at some of the problems in Birmingham as well. I cannot know that it will work. What I do think is that if you have some of the best people who are currently operating in the area and some of the smartest people who have been thinking about policy in this area, and if you ask them to come up with a new approach and then they recommend something that commends itself to everyone from the Labour mayor of the area to Conservative Ministers, it has definitely got to be better than the status quo.

Q18 Mr Ward: I welcome your comments on social workers. I also read that you are accusing them of being idealistic and failing to ensure that people accept personal responsibility.

Michael Gove: This reflects a concern that I have about social work education. Martin Narey has been conducting an investigation into social work education and training for us, which will be published in the new year. I hope that you will have the chance to talk to Sir Martin and read his report. One of the concerns is—

Chair: The new year covers a very long period.

Michael Gove: I hope that it will be published early in the new year—in January or February—and that you will have the chance to talk to him shortly after, or whenever you want to. My particular concern is that there are some courses and some academics within social work who try to deprive people in the sense of agency or individual responsibility, because they over-stress the importance of external factors in determining the circumstances in which people live and the decisions that they take. It is very important that we do not have a situation in which social workers are tempted to explain away poor decisions made by adults purely because of difficult socio-economic circumstances because, of course, tough times make life tougher, particularly for people in tough circumstances, but there is no excuse for some of the behaviour that places children at risk of abuse or neglect.

Q19 Mr Ward: Have you seen evidence of that?

Michael Gove: I have seen evidence of some of that work. I don't want to pre-empt Sir Martin's report, but I think when people read it, they will see that there is evidence that there are some academics and some courses for which the emphasis is not where I imagine most of us would want it to be. If, at the end of it, you think that Sir Martin is wrong and that I am wrong, I am very happy to come back.

Q20 Bill Esterson: Back to #AskGove. Will all local authorities with an inadequate rating have child protection responsibility removed from them?

Michael Gove: Not always. The important thing is to recognise that it may be the case that a local authority recognises where the fault lies and wants to work with others to improve, and is putting the appropriate steps to improve things in place. You need to have a degree of sensitivity. As you have hinted at, there are some local authorities where, partly because of size and other reasons, like in Birmingham, there are some real difficult challenges. But there will be others that are registered as inadequate, but the political and officer leadership recognises that or wants to work with others.

Q21 Bill Esterson: Earlier you didn't quite answer the question about additional resources.

Michael Gove: Sorry.

Bill Esterson: One of the #AskGove questions was "What are you going to do about maintaining early intervention/prevention services" to manage social care "overload"? That is a resources question. Are you fighting for extra resources?

Michael Gove: Yes. Every time I talk to the Treasury, I am always asking for as much money as possible. Money is not the only answer—I think we would all acknowledge that—but it certainly makes things easier.

Q22 Pat Glass: Secretary of State, you will be aware that the Committee is carrying out an inquiry into residential children's homes at the moment.

Michael Gove: Yes.

Pat Glass: Edward Timpson came to see us a few weeks ago and we talked about the difficulties of establishing innovative practice in difficult financial circumstances. He told us that the new innovation programme would help to make it available to children's services that faced financial barriers to innovative practice. What are we talking about? How much money?

Michael Gove: The innovation programme has just started. As Edward may have mentioned, we have asked Clive Cowdery, who helped to set up the Resolution Foundation—he is a highly successful businessman but, more importantly, someone who, having spent the early part of his life in care, has developed a profound commitment to helping the most vulnerable—to work with us, local authorities and professionals to see what is required to stimulate innovation. In a way, the recommendations that he will make will determine how much resource we should allocate to supporting those areas of the country that need it. As, for example, with Doncaster, the three MPs quite rightly said, "Are Doncaster's already hard-pressed council tax payers having to pay extra?" I said, "No, it is the Department that will bear the additional costs required to improve things."

Q23 Pat Glass: What we are finding already is that there are local authorities—largely metropolitan and largely in the south—that are exporters of their children to other local authorities where there is cheap housing, sometimes big housing, often on the coast with ex-boarding houses, etc. Those local authorities and services are under massive pressure. That is not good for the children involved. To get London authorities, particularly, to start to look at running their own children's homes again—I know that is part of your consultation at the moment, and I think it is really good—will not be cheap. So are we talking about insufficient funding, and is it both capital and revenue, or will it depend on what comes out of the review?

Michael Gove: You are absolutely right. People who are directors of children's services are, by definition, people who care about doing the right thing. They are not going wilfully and arbitrarily to say, "Do you know what? Let's fling these children into the worst possible homes and forget about them." I wanted to understand what the market pressures were and what the incentives were that meant that people who were under pressure felt that they had to make these decisions. As you quite rightly point out, some of it has to do with straightforward things like the cost of property.

We have published more information than ever before about the location and costs associated with these placements—against some internal resistance from the sector. By so doing, we have already begun to identify some local authorities and providers that are doing things better, both more effectively in cash terms and also with better outcomes for children. We can learn from that. But, yes, while I won't put a price tag on it now, I do think that it is absolutely right that we should, if necessary, provide the additional funds to ensure that children are safe. Edward's work at the moment is designed specifically to ensure that we improve the quality of residential care for our most vulnerable children and young people.

Pat Glass: I welcome that because while I agree with you that directors of children's services would not wilfully, or would not wish wilfully to, throw these children into the worst possible homes—

Michael Gove: They are under pressure.

Q24 Pat Glass: That, unfortunately, is what we are finding.

Moving on to #Ask Gove, why is there is a different care leaving age for foster children than for children in children's homes, given that the children in children's homes are very often the most difficult and the most vulnerable?

Michael Gove: Precisely for the reason that you mentioned earlier and that we have just been discussing. Until we are absolutely certain that we've got the situation right with residential homes—residential care and residential care homes—and the policies are properly aligned, we won't extend the age there. We have to get the system right before extending the age. Fostering is different, but in due course I have a completely open mind about matching the two.

Q25 Bill Esterson: Those children need help now don't they?

Michael Gove: They certainly do, but the critical thing is whether we can be certain that we are improving the quality of residential care.

Q26 Bill Esterson: Is there something we could do right now for children who are ending up with all the poor outcomes as a result of that problem?

Michael Gove: By making public—not least by letting Ministers and others know—the quality of the homes and where they are, we are putting pressure on local authorities to think hard about it. We are asking some tough questions ourselves about why those decisions have been made to ensure that we can have more people being placed in higher quality accommodation. The short answer is that you are absolutely right, but we need to be certain about what interventions we make. We need to know what will definitely improve things before we instantly act, so we are in the process of working out exactly what is wrong and what is required. You are absolutely right, however, to say that we should seek to act as quickly as possible, consistent with not being knee-jerk.

Q27 Chair: Our *Children first* report on child protection had three key themes, as you may remember: neglect, thresholds and older children. We recently received a memo from your Department following up on that report that failed to mention older children at all. Will you now undertake to review how well the child protection system meets the needs of older children, in particular?

Michael Gove: Absolutely.

Q28 Ian Mearns: On the back of that, when we visited Margate, which is part of the Thanet authority, we were impressed, but we were worried as well by the kind of social overlay picture that was given to us. You had high concentrations of youngsters in the care system living in the town, and you had high numbers of youngsters who had left care—the 16-plusers—living in what looked from the mapping like an almost ghettoised situation.

Overlaid on top of that was the fact that because of the housing tenure, the nature of the housing and the value of housing, ex-offenders and sex offenders were all living in a community that looked, from the mapping system, as though it could at any time have been a crisis community. Thankfully, they had it managed to a certain extent, but it really left us worrying about the welfare of those young people, particularly the care leavers and 16-plusers, who were largely left to their own devices.

Michael Gove: I went to exactly the same part of the world with the local MP, Laura Sandys. I talked to the police and the children's services, and I saw the same situation. You are right: there are bail hostels, houses containing individuals who are undergoing drug rehabilitation, and homes being used, we know, by people with criminal connections from eastern Europe and beyond. It is absolutely the worst place to put vulnerable young people, which is one of the reasons why we need to change.

Q29 Ian Mearns: But, as was pointed out before, we have actually got London authorities exporting children there on a daily basis.

Michael Gove: We have had for some time. Both Charlie Elphicke, the MP for Dover, and Laura have been campaigning on this. They are not campaigning in the sense that they are saying, "Keep the children out." They are deliberately saying, "We want to do everything possible to help these children and young people, but the circumstances in which they are being placed are not sensible." There are also other parts of the country, including parts of east Lancashire and so on, where—although some of the homes are very good, it has to be said—because property costs are cheaper, people are being placed and it is not always right.

Q30 Chair: On the cost of the London authorities addressing this: Roger Gale, who has also been campaigning on this as an MP in the area, has said that you can get seven or eight-bedroom Victorian houses for well under £200,000. If you compare that with the cost of a similar property, if it exists, in London, that would run to millions. Is the appetite there to make this change? It is all very well to say that one wants to change it, but it will cost an enormous amount to put right what is clearly a pernicious situation.

Michael Gove: Yes, the appetite is there. That is the short answer. I can go on to say more but, yes, the appetite is there.

Q31 Alex Cunningham: You are the Secretary of State, and you have seen for yourself that these children are extremely vulnerable—possibly even more vulnerable than they were

before they were moved there. Can you not do anything about that personally by saying to an authority, “Don’t put these children here.”?

Michael Gove: If I were to say to any individual local authority, “Don’t do it,” the local authority would quite rightly say, “Where’s the extra money coming from? We did not do this deliberately or wilfully”—as Pat said—“because we do not care about these children. We are under some pressure.”

Q32 Alex Cunningham: So it is a financial matter?

Michael Gove: No, not only a financial matter. It is partly a financial matter, because I need to know why it is—

Q33 Alex Cunningham: But if you give them a few more pounds, or a few more thousand pounds for some of these individual children, couldn’t they be accommodated in a place that is safe, rather than a place that is unsafe?

Michael Gove: What is interesting is that there are some local authorities that are placing children in residential homes that are—

Q34 Alex Cunningham: Suitable?

Michael Gove: Which are suitable and which are significantly cheaper than some that are more expensive and more at risk. There is a relationship but it is not an absolutely direct relationship between cost and quality.

Q35 Alex Cunningham: But surely when we know of a particular situation, where there are children placed in a vulnerable situation, we should be doing something directly about it? Surely you have the powers to do that?

Michael Gove: We are trying now to work out exactly what we should do. The most important thing to recognise is which local authorities are doing the right things, in the right way, for the right reasons, and how we can encourage others to do exactly the same thing. I absolutely appreciate the emotional and rhetorical force behind the question, but I do not think it would be appropriate for me to second-guess every individual decision about where every individual child in care is placed by every individual local authority.

Q36 Alex Cunningham: So while we all talk about it, the children remain in a vulnerable situation?

Michael Gove: The children are in a vulnerable situation, but it is not the case that we are just talking about it. I think that is unfair both to the local authorities that are working with us, and also to Edward Timpson. This issue would not be on the map in the way that it is if it was not for, as well as the Select Committee’s work, Edward’s work. I do not think—I may be being unfair to previous holders of his post—that there is any Minister who has been as energetic or as determined to deal with this situation, or any Minister who has put more information in the public domain, or been more determined to challenge local authorities to do better in the way that you quite rightly want.

Q37 Pat Glass: Can I bring you back to spend to save? I think that the consultation that is out at the moment is excellent and part of that consultation is that no child should be placed more than 20 miles from their home local authority. I think that is the shock that the system

needs, but you will need a huge amount of capital funding behind that. Is the priority within the department to make sure that the capital funding is there, and are you serious about the 20 miles?

Michael Gove: Yes.

Q38 Pat Glass: You will ensure that the funding is available? It is about priorities, isn't it? £1.3 billion has been made available for free schools. You are equally committed to finding this funding to bring these children back?

Michael Gove: We are absolutely committed to making sure of that—yes.

Q39 Bill Esterson: Does the plight of the most vulnerable children who need the most support in our society have sufficient attention from you as Secretary of State, given your other responsibilities?

Michael Gove: I do not think you can ever have enough attention, but what I would say is—the reason I pause is that I hate providing a running commentary on myself—I don't know if it gets enough attention from me; I hope it does. It is one of the questions that I ask myself every day and every week: am I using my time as effectively as possible to help the most vulnerable children and are we doing as much as we can? I don't know; others must judge whether it is enough.

Q40 Alex Cunningham: Last Friday night, I spent some time with young people from Eastern Ravens Trust. They are all young carers and they have developed their own policies—it is a great organisation. They asked if I could put a couple questions to you from them. This may not be their exact words, but do you agree that all schools should have a young carers policy, which clearly states how the school will support young carers?

Michael Gove: I am very wary about insisting that every school has a policy for x, y and z, however important the needs of those individuals are. I do think it is the case that every school that is well led should take account of the specific needs, not just of young carers but of other children who may face additional responsibilities, strains or pressures on their home life. So I would worry about saying that every school needs to have a policy for young carers, because then you could have a proliferation of policies for each individual group of children or young people who are genuinely in need. What I would prefer to say is that every school needs to think about the specific needs of children and young people and, of course, young carers have a variety of needs which teachers and the school leadership need to be sensitive to.

Q41 Alex Cunningham: Some of them will find that answer quite helpful, but I think they will also be disappointed, because they have just developed their own policy which they want to promote to local schools. Are they wasting their time, then? Wouldn't you encourage them to encourage the schools to adopt their policy and their thinking about how they should be cared for?

Michael Gove: What I would say is, first, I applaud their initiative in doing it; secondly I am sure that local schools would, at the very least, want to pay close attention, if not actively adopt. I would encourage schools to take close account of the voice of students who have thought carefully about how their particular needs can be addressed. If, Alex, you can pass on their model policy to me, then I would be very happy to read it and write back to them and you with my thoughts on it.

Q42 Alex Cunningham: I think you have just won another couple of brownie points there from the young people. They tell me that lots of young people who are carers are not actually identified. They want to know what Government are going to do to try to raise the profile of young carers and ensure that they are identified and appropriately supported.

Michael Gove: I say again that in Parliament—irrespective of what Government have done—there have been some very articulate advocates for the role of young carers. A former member of the Committee, Lisa Nandy, I think has done a fantastic job. I have not always agreed with everything she has said in raising those concerns. Those concerns have been reflected in debates in the Commons and the Lords and resulted in some amendments to the Children and Families Bill as well. But you are right: it is often the case that there are some young people who have caring responsibilities who often do not want to reveal too much about what is happening.

Q43 Alex Cunningham: But they still require support.

Michael Gove: Absolutely they require support, but if, for the sake of argument, your parent is alcoholic or in the grip of an addiction or substance abuse and all the rest of it, it can be very difficult for the adult to recognise the problem and very difficult for a young person to compel them to seek the help that they need, but that young person might well have responsibilities, not just to pick up the pieces in the adult's life, but to look after other youngsters in that home as well. It is a really difficult situation if you have someone who is in that position. Who are they going to share their troubles with? Of course, what we would expect is that other responsible adults in their lives—not least those in school—would be able to find time to talk to young people, so they can help them through that near impossible set of dilemmas.

Alex Cunningham: One—

Chair: Alex, I am going to move on.

Q44 Ian Mearns: From carers to careers. You were quoting Billy Joel before: “I took the good times, I’ll take the bad times”. Ofsted has found that the new arrangements for providing careers guidance to young people are not working well in three quarters of schools. Do you agree with the Skills Commission that provision of careers advice is now in “crisis”? I use that word advisably. I worked quite extensively in the careers service before Connexions was invented. Certainly we are a long way from where we were before Connexions was invented with regard to independent careers advice and guidance.

Michael Gove: I would say two things. I cannot think of any time in the history of this country when we got advice and guidance to young people right; and no one has yet shown me an alternative international model where they get all of these things right. Secondly, the nature of the labour market that young people are entering has changed dramatically from when we were both young people. For certainly a majority of young men and to a lesser extent young women, career choices were often dictated by geography and the pattern of industry at the time.

When I was growing up, or more to the point, when my father was growing up in Aberdeen, there would be a number of obvious routes for people who did not secure academic qualifications and were not going on to higher education. The situation has become much more fragmented and difficult now. That requires a more sophisticated response and that is something that we are grappling with at the moment. You are absolutely right that there are some schools—not enough—that get it right, but I think it is important that we do not beat up

on schools in that regard, because no one beforehand has got the system of advice for young people perfect.

Q45 Ian Mearns: The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission have used the term: “The chickens are...coming home to roost”, with regard to funding and handing the responsibility to schools. Do you think it is time that we had some sort of national taskforce to re-evaluate what needs to be done in terms of careers advice and guidance in schools? Quite often now, youngsters are having to make decisions about which academic or vocational route they are going to go down before the age of 14. They are looking at options post-14, which go on into GCSEs, GNVQs, or whichever model it is. Given that, do we not need to be doing much more to help youngsters with independent, impartial advice and guidance at a much younger age?

Michael Gove: I would say two things. The first is about the options that students take, whether they are thinking at the age of 14 or 16 about which set of qualifications they should pursue. The evidence there, very strongly, is that premature specialisation reduces the number of options that people have later in life.

My view is that the more options that people can have for longer, the better, and I think that some of the changes that we have made to accountability, from the English baccalaureate through to the progress 8 measure, are encouraging people to take the sorts of courses that keep their options open. It is also the case that some of the changes that we have made, following Alison Wolf’s report, to vocational qualifications as well mean that there are fewer vocational qualifications—or so-called vocational qualifications—around that people are tempted to take that then limit their chance to progress.

I think that one critical thing alongside that is that people—teachers, parents and young people—need to develop a clearer sense of what the world of work offers and demands. I think that is best communicated by improving links between business or other employers and schools, because nothing is more inspiring or helpful than hearing from individuals in a particular area about the opportunities that they have to offer. Nothing is more likely, for example, to encourage someone to pursue science than knowing that the range of career options available to you is infinitely greater if you are doing physical sciences and mathematics than if you have chosen prematurely to specialise in other areas.

Q46 Ian Mearns: There is a problem in delivering that on the ground, given the nature of the local business economy. In the north-east, for instance, the number of large companies that are headquartered there are few and far between, and the economy is much more exemplified by SMEs. It is a question of how you get those SMEs the capacity to deliver that advice, guidance, and two-way communication with school pupils, because they just do not have the physical capacity to do it themselves. That is difficult, because you do not have the large corporations with large headquarters or large numbers of staff in a particular location.

Michael Gove: There are different labour market realities in different parts of the country, but I think it is also the case, to be fair to the north-east, that there is a number of very impressive medium and large-sized manufacturing concerns. For example, Nissan in Sunderland is an exemplary company in many ways, and—

Q47 Ian Mearns: But Nissan can’t do it all.

Michael Gove: No, it can’t do it all, but it is also the case that Newcastle university is one of the best in the country, and a world leader in naval architecture and life sciences. I

think a lot can be done, particularly given that Newcastle university has been very good at developing business links—so has Durham, actually—

Ian Mearns: So has Northumbria, by the way.

Michael Gove: Indeed. A lot can be done in getting some of the businesses that have already taken a particular interest in education closer to schools. Just because it is not easy, doesn't mean that we should not make that our focus. I infer from what you have said that you agree, irrespective of what other mistakes we may have made, that it is right to concentrate on getting inspirational people from the world of employment in front of young people to explain to them how they can fulfil their ideals.

Q48 Ian Mearns: I couldn't agree more with that. The trouble is they are not thick on the ground. Schools have had responsibility for delivering careers guidance for 15 months or so, and I'm afraid the general view out there is that it is a bit of a mess. When can the Committee expect to see significant improvement in the quality of careers guidance being offered in schools?

Michael Gove: I think it is improving for three reasons. One, there has been a degree of political focus on this, not least from the Committee, the Chairman and others. Two, there has been a degree of leadership on this from Ofsted itself: Sir Michael's report and the fact that the quality of careers guidance will form part of the overall inspection are going to drive things in the right way. Thirdly, the Minister with responsibility in this area, Matt Hancock, has produced both an action plan, which I found compelling and persuasive, and some statutory guidance, which I had the opportunity to read last night, and which will be coming out very shortly. I think that that statutory guidance will bring a degree of clarity and help which will make things improve.

Q49 Chair: Make things improve? You think things are improving?

Michael Gove: I think things are improving—

Q50 Chair: I put it to you that there is no evidence—from the National Careers Council, from Ofsted, from our study—yet that things have improved. Have you got any evidence? You have told the Committee that things are improving. Have you any evidence base for that assertion?

Michael Gove: I believe that things will improve as a result of the changes.

Chair: That is different.

Michael Gove: Of course, but this is Christmas, a season when naturally all of us are enjoined to place our faith in small beginnings and then great things grow from that.

Q51 Alex Cunningham: I think we need more than good will.

Michael Gove: I talked about the three wise men who are playing a role in this. The Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar of careers are, of course, Graham Stuart, Michael Wilshaw and Matt Hancock.

Q52 Bill Esterson: You introduced a Christmas theme at the beginning. I think the themes of the tweets was that you tend to base your education policy on faith and what you believe rather than on evidence. Anyway, that was not the question that I was going to ask.

Continuing on the point about teachers and guidance for children, readying them for the world of work, it is not just the north-east where small business is crucial. Small businesses are increasingly the place where young people will have their first experience of work. This is an incredibly important point. You seem to be suggesting that there is a need for training for teachers when it comes to understanding what is needed in the world of work. Is that something that you are proposing or would suggest should be part of initial teacher training and continuing professional development?

Michael Gove: Let me take it one step back and partly respond to the Chairman's question as well. Let's not imagine that prior to the transfer of careers advice responsibilities to schools, the situation was brilliant. It is not the case that there was a Ming vase of careers guidance that has been smashed by a thoughtless Government. Ian quoted from the social mobility report, the author of which is Alan Milburn—great man. Alan was the person who pointed out that Connexions was appalling in the first place. So we inherited a poor situation and we are improving it.

Q53 Chair: You mean we will improve it. You have not been able to give us any evidence that you have. I would say that you have taken over an appalling situation and made it worse, but you hope it is going to get better?

Michael Gove: No. I would contest that we have made it worse. I think that we have made it better.

Q54 Chair: Can you give us any evidence—from the Ofsted survey, the National Careers Council, or any evidence at all—suggesting that you have done anything other than made a bad situation worse so far?

Michael Gove: There is no evidence that we have made a bad situation worse, because there is no evidence that the situation is worse than it was beforehand.

Q55 Alex Cunningham: You need to read our report, Secretary of State.

Michael Gove: I did. There is a group of self-interested people—*[Interruption.]* Critical question—

Pat Glass: No, we ask the questions.

Michael Gove: What was better beforehand? No one has proven it and it is not there in the report. It is the case that the situation is improving, and it is the case, as I mentioned earlier, that people are making better decisions about the qualifications that they should pursue. If people think that we should reconstruct Connexions—

Chair: Nobody says that.

Michael Gove: In that case, the situation is clearly better, because we would not want to go back to the status quo ante. If you do not want to go back to the situation beforehand, then it clearly was a worse situation, and it is clearly better now. That is not faith, that is logic.

Chair: We will not examine the logic.

Michael Gove: On Bill's broader point, the answer is no, it should not be part of initial teacher training, but I do believe that it is an important part of how schools are run, and therefore professional development that links with local business should be forged.

Q56 Mr Ward: I just feel that there is staggering level of complacency. We have evidence from a variety of sources, including the Skills Commission, which refers to the situation being in crisis. It is getting worse.

Michael Gove: What is the evidence that it is worse? What is the evidence that the situation is worse now than before? You might regard the situation as bad, but what is the evidence?

Mr Ward: So the response from the Secretary of State is, “Well, it never was really very good, and at least it’s not got worse.”

Michael Gove: No, the response from the Secretary of State is that I take this incredibly seriously. I believe in deploying intellectual rigour to analyse the problem, that there is lot of garbage talked about careers—

Mr Ward: Including the Select Committee’s report?

Michael Gove: —from some self-interested sources, but there is now clarity and responsibility. Not the first time, we inherited a situation that was totally inadequate and we are making improvements.

Q57 Mr Ward: So is the Select Committee’s own report part of that garbage?

Michael Gove: No, but there are some people who have populated the debate who I think are not deploying the degree of rigour that is required and who are self-interested.

Q58 Chair: Who are you talking about? I have not the faintest idea of who you are talking about, honestly.

Alex Cunningham: Names, names.

Ian Mearns: Secretary of State—

Chair: Wait, Ian. Secretary of State, you have said that the debate is being clouded by self-interested people, unnamed, and I do not know who these people are.

Michael Gove: I think I have probably said enough.

Q59 Ian Mearns: To take you back a little while. What we have actually done is got rid of a whole range of organisations that were providing to schools, from an external source, independent advice and guidance to young people. I agree with you about Connexions, which came out of a report from the social exclusion unit called “Bridging the Gap”. It was invented using the careers service budget plus about 10%. It was meant to provide a comprehensive service for young people, but you could never hope to do that on that budget, so I am going to criticise the last Government for not doing that properly and making a mess out of it, but there was still independent advice and guidance available to young people.

The late Malcolm Wicks described much of what was happening in schools in terms of advice and guidance, before career services and Connexions were doing it much better, as akin to pensions mis-selling. That was because of bums on seats funding regimes, and schools and institutions wanting to retain youngsters under that regime. The responsibility now lies with schools. Is there not a real danger that the independence and impartiality of careers advice has gone out of the window, because schools are giving that advice and guidance to young people themselves, and are often hoping to retain those youngsters in their own institution?

Michael Gove: Malcolm Wicks made a fair point, and I know that there are one or two cases where that occurs. I know that there have been individual schools that have not

advertised to their students the full range of post-16 options with the vigour that all of us would want—true—but the way in which schools are being held to account more energetically for the decisions that they make by this Department means that that will change, and is changing.

As the Chairman of the Committee has pointed out, destination measures will become an increasingly important way in which the public and the Government judge schools. If a school takes the short-sighted view that someone should stay on in the sixth form to be one of those bums on those seats, and the courses are not in their interests, that will show up in the fact that that person will not go on to the sort of destination that they would want.

However, the other thing that I would say is that although there is a lively argument about the extent to which it is right for any school to have a sixth form and whether it should expand and so on—I know that that is another area that the Chairman is very interested in—I think that there is nothing wrong with the belief that we should encourage more children to pursue an academic course beyond the age of 16.

Q60 Ian Mearns: Your Department rejected this Committee’s recommendation that schools should publish an annual careers plan. How are we going to see the accountability and transparency in what schools are delivering if they are not held to account on this properly on an annual basis?

Michael Gove: Writing an annual plan or having a policy is, in my view, bureaucracy. The critical thing is: are you being held to account for the outcomes, rather than for the beauty and elegance of the policy that you write or construct? I think that the fact that schools are going to be inspected for the quality of the careers guidance that they provide will concentrate their minds. I can understand why asking someone to write a policy is a tool to concentrate their mind. I think that knowing that you are going to be inspected on it is more likely to concentrate your mind. I appreciate entirely that the intention behind what the Committee proposed was to force that greater concentration of minds, but I think that it is happening anyway.

Q61 Chair: This is a #AskGove question. Ofsted has noted—I am repeating a bit of what Ian said, but I would be interested to hear a further answer from you—that schools with sixth forms rarely promote vocational routes and apprenticeships in an effective way. Is there a conflict of interest in a school—it is the same question—being expected to provide independent careers advice if it also needs to fill its own sixth form? How can that be addressed? Your answer was, “Well, if they go on to sixth form, somehow it will show up”—

Michael Gove: In destination measures subsequently.

Q62 Chair: In destinations. The truth is that there are different options, information about which should be provided to young people to enable them to make the best choice for them. It is not true that everyone who goes to the sixth form will necessarily fail. It is not necessarily going to be a disaster for them. It is simply that because you have given the duty to schools, you do not insist that they have a careers plan and you have no one externally verifying properly that they are doing this in an open and impartial way, they will get narrow information.

It does not necessarily mean that it is all a disaster for them, but it means that children are channelled down certain routes to suit the institutional interest rather than the child’s interest. It is the fact that the accountability regime does not counter the institutional interest

when it comes to providing the impartial advice that we have set down in statute but that we know from Ofsted is not happening on the ground. That is the central issue.

Michael Gove: I think that of all the tragic things happening in our education system at the moment, the fact that there are too many people doing A-levels is not one of them.

Q63 Chair: You touched on this just now, and it is a concern of mine and the Committee's. If you are seeing people being kept on in small sixth forms, which you will know are the least effective 16-to-18 providers—

Michael Gove: *indicated assent.*

Q64 Chair: If you are seeing that and you are seeing institutions that are struggling to fill their places using their position as the sole arbiter of information, advice and guidance to direct people to stay on and keep their sixth form going and you say to me, "Is that potentially a disaster?", I will say, "Yes, it is," because if they are not told about the other options, including sixth-form colleges and other providers, it is absolutely cheating the child of the best possible outcomes. It goes against the central tenet of your time in office, which is to raise standards for all.

Michael Gove: Everything you describe, in a perfect world—that is not the biggest concern in education; let's get real. The biggest problem is attainment at the age of 16. The biggest inhibitor on people's subsequent choices is not a conspiracy of head teachers determined to keep children imprisoned in sixth forms when they could be doing something else. The biggest problem is the quality of education that children have up until that point. If they've got the right qualifications at the age of 16, those choices are available to them. The idea that children are not aware of apprenticeships when there is a huge excess of demand over supply for apprenticeship places is a misnomer.

Let me take another step back as well. Most of the people who are most aerated about this are careers advisers or people in the careers lobby and all the rest of it. Well, for the most part, in the past—let's look at the record of youth unemployment—have they been hugely successful? No. The most important thing to do is to get business involved, to make sure that people take the right decisions—our accountability mechanisms are ensuring that they do. I think that the failure of this country in the past to ensure that young people are provided with a sufficiently wide range of opportunities comes down to our failure to ensure that they are literate, numerate and confident in subjects like science, not that we have had an insufficient number of well-paid careers advisers.

Q65 Ian Mearns: I have to say, Secretary of State, I treat with incredulity the idea that the over-20% youth unemployment in the north-east of England is down to careers advisers.

Michael Gove: I treat with incredulity the idea that recruiting more of them and paying them more will deal with the youth unemployment problem in the north of England or anywhere else.

Q66 Chair: I think you are absolutely right to say that one of the central challenges is to increase the rigour of the system and ensure there is a sufficient nudge towards academic pursuits for all, raising standards—I entirely applaud that—and in changing the accountability system so that it better aligns with the needs of all children, not just those on the borderline. All of which, this Committee, cross-party, would support. But, as the Chief Inspector of

Schools said to me last week, you have said that the big challenge now is to engage employers in our education system.

Michael Gove: Yes, exactly.

Q67 Chair: Because we have this very expensive educational chute which is making so many children miss the employment bucket below. That is not because there are not jobs or possibility there, but because the education system is failing to provide. That is why we have this peculiar situation of a massive skills shortage at the same time as massive numbers of people who cannot have work.

Michael Gove: Correct.

Q68 Chair: So careers advice and guidance, making the right choices and understanding how your learning can fulfil your hopes and dreams is, I would suggest, quite central to improving outcomes for young people today. You said that you wanted to engage with employers, yet the point about our careers report is that we have not got an accountability regime or structure that incentivises schools to do that. Destinations data may help in that regard but, at the moment, many employers bounce off a schools system that is obsessed by fulfilling the things that you said are central: getting your A to Cs at GCSE. Therefore, it is not that bothered about engaging with employers. We have ample evidence that employers are not being engaged in schools when they should be.

Michael Gove: It is certainly the case that we should do more to engage employers with schools and vice versa. What I emphatically do not believe is that we need a cadre of careers advisers to operate in between those two.

Q69 Chair: Do you not think that it would be better to have careers advice and guidance provided by a professional in careers advice and guidance, rather than a teacher who may have limited experience or understanding of local and national labour markets?

Michael Gove: I think it is better to get business and, indeed, other employers in front of young people to inspire them.

Q70 Chair: So your talk from a local businessman replaces face-to-face professional advice and guidance?

Michael Gove: I am sceptical about the capacity of careers advisers, given the record we have seen in the past, to have all the knowledge required. What do we expect of them? Do we expect them to have perfect knowledge of the local labour market? Do we expect them to have an understanding of the psychology and motivation of the individual student? Do we expect them to be able to detect employment trends five, 10 or 15 years out in order to offer that advice? If we do, then we expect them to be supermen and superwomen.

I think that the specific question of how we ensure that young people are better equipped for the future has been, to my mind, clouded by the fact that you have a careers lobby that has failed in the past, has no effective answer for the future and wants to perpetuate its role when, in fact, we should be concentrating on improving academic attainment and getting business people who can inspire in front of schools. That is a clear vision. It is one that is being energetically pursued by Matthew Hancock and the Department and no one has put forward a working example from either the past or another country that we should adopt. If anyone can, I would love to see it.

Chair: Thank you.

Neil Carmichael: Good morning and happy Christmas.

Michael Gove: Hi Neil. Happy Christmas.

Q71 Neil Carmichael: Thank you. Your statement today on funding allocations essentially intends to deal with increasing spaces for pupils at both primary and secondary, which is welcome. Do you think it will be sufficient, given the projections it is based on?

Michael Gove: Yes.

Q72 Neil Carmichael: Thank you. That is straight to the point. We were looking at this issue with your colleague, the Minister for Schools, who predicted certain needs, which this supersedes. Presumably you have recalibrated those projections and recognised that more resources are needed.

Michael Gove: At the time that David was talking to the Committee, we were in the middle of working out how to distribute the additional funding. We knew that we had additional funding to support additional school places and to deal with maintenance and other challenges. As David explained brilliantly, a significant number of changes have been made, even since the coalition Government were formed, in how we gather data and give money to the front line. We know that.

Crudely, as David explained, in Dorset you can say that overall net basic need is zero. However, in Poole and Swanage there might be an acute need, while in Sherborne and elsewhere there might be growing number of surplus places. It is all very well to say that Dorset overall has no additional basic need, but it feels very different if you are in Swanage and can't get your child a place because people are counting surplus places an hour and a half away. We have gone below the local authority level, with the support of local authorities and the Local Government Association, to look at the real picture of pressure, and we have tried to ensure that funding better reflects that.

Q73 Neil Carmichael: As a proportion of your predictions, to what extent will the new academies help with the provision of new places?

Michael Gove: One of the things that we did in the previous round was to have a targeted basic need programme. The idea was to invite local authorities to go out of their way to find partners—academies or free school providers—that could augment the provision of places locally. Partly, that was because when you are spending an enormous amount of money, quite rightly, to address the need for additional school places, you do not want to just produce more school places; you want more good-quality school places. One of the things more broadly—good people can disagree about this—about our school reform programme is that a greater diversity of providers and managers of schools is more likely to drive up quality, as well as providing new places.

Q74 Neil Carmichael: If a local authority has a large proportion of autonomous schools, how will it be placed to effectively manage the question of the supply of places?

Michael Gove: Autonomous schools are incentivised—like all schools are—to accept additional pupils. As David said when he talked to the Committee, there has been no evidence so far that any autonomous school has stood in the way of providing the additional places that an area might need. More than that, if a local authority wants to improve provision it can do so by holding a competition to create a new school or schools in the area—it has the power to promote additional provision. Although the number of academies is growing fast, the pupil

place challenge is primarily in primaries. Something like 90% of primaries are maintained, voluntary aided or voluntary controlled schools—i.e. not academies.

Q75 Neil Carmichael: To go back, did you say that there is no evidence that academies have been using autonomy to resist expansion?

Michael Gove: My reading of the evidence that David gave when you questioned him is that nobody has said that there is a specific problem of academies resisting the invitation to expand and creating a basic need problem. But if there is a situation such as that, I would love to know about it. It is entirely possible that such a situation may have occurred.

Q76 Chair: The DFE did a bit of research, which said: “In areas where the demand for places is rising sharply, particularly at primary, there is some evidence that academies are using their freedom to choose not to expand or community schools are looking to academy status as a means of avoiding expansion in the future.” That is your own Department’s research.

Michael Gove: Yes.

Q77 Neil Carmichael: A Twitter inquiry has probed that point by wondering if good schools—obviously, good academies—should be almost forced to expand to meet the needs of pupils. What would you say to that?

Michael Gove: I would be wary about additional compulsion, because my sense is that the money and incentives are there. I take the point that the Chairman makes about that research, but one of the things that I would want to hear specifically from local authorities is where those pinch points are, because one of the concerns that I would have is that the reporting of some of those issues may reflect a failure properly to secure the leadership required on either side. In other words, I would prefer to deal with each specific case, rather than a general report or a potential future hypothesis.

Q78 Neil Carmichael: Where do you think the equilibrium is between the issue of spaces and the issue of competition to improve standards, because this is really at the heart of the free schools debate? If you have an area with surplus spaces, for example, but you have inadequate schools and there is a demand for a free school, what would be the basis of any decision you make, given the situation?

Michael Gove: I think each case has to be judged on its merits. If you have got a potentially outstanding or very innovative and exciting proposal, then we would want to back that, but it is also the case that we need to make sure that a sufficient amount of money is there to meet the need for additional school places in that local authority and nationally. We have gone to great trouble to work out what is required, with the help of local authorities overall, and then there is additional money, and that additional capital can be devoted to anything from new schools, which can be innovative and help raise quality, to the necessary maintenance that is required across the school estate, and other things that the Department has to fund, from improving the quality of residential care to providing the investment that people might need in order to prepare for the wholly welcome extension of free school meals to infant children.

Q79 Neil Carmichael: Do you have a proportion in mind for a local authority area where a certain number of surplus places could be tolerated in order to promote competition?

Michael Gove: No, and I know that at different times figures like 3% and 5% have been used as the ideal for surplus places, but I think that it is important not only to look at each locality and to weigh the granular picture in that area of demand and surplus places, but also to look at the quality of educational provision overall in that area.

Q80 Alex Cunningham: On the question of free schools, the National Audit Office tells us that Ministers decide which applications to approve for pre-opening based on officials' recommendations. On how many occasions have Ministers overruled the recommendations of the officials?

Michael Gove: Several. I will write back to the Committee and let you know, if you would like, the precise number.

It is only right to say that officials put forward recommendations and Ministers interrogate them. Sometimes officials will say that a particular project is viable or attractive, but Ministers will say, "Actually, do you know what? I don't think we should proceed with it," and sometimes vice versa.

Q81 Alex Cunningham: The NAO also reported that 70% of lower scoring applications were approved. Did that include the likes of Al-Madinah, Discovery New School and Kings Science Academy?

Michael Gove: I have to stress that it is important that the confidentiality of advice that is given by officials to Ministers is respected, but within those constraints, I think it is only appropriate, given the legitimate public interest in those three schools, that I write back to you with more details about the application procedure in each of those cases.

Q82 Alex Cunningham: So you will actually confirm whether your officials recommended them for approval or not.

Michael Gove: I will write back to you with more detail, and if you feel that, following on from my having written back to you, there are further questions you would like to address to me, of course I will answer them. There is one thing I am anxious to do: I am a very strong believer in the fact that officials need to be able to offer advice frankly and candidly, and that safe space needs to be protected. So, in ordinary circumstances, I would say, "No, I am not going to reveal anything," but I do believe, for obvious reasons, that there is a very legitimate public interest in those cases, so I will write back.

Q83 Alex Cunningham: And you will confirm whether or not your officials recommended them for approval or not.

Michael Gove: I will write back. I am not going to tell you now exactly what I—

Chair: That is clear. Thank you.

Q84 Mr Ward: You mentioned Kings Science Academy. While I am on the subject, do you think—when there has been an interim audit report, an EFA report and an interim audit investigation team report, all showing widespread financial mismanagement, irregularities and fraud—that it is right that the principal of the college should still be in place?

Michael Gove: I think that there are specific concerns—well, you know it, David—that have been raised, and it would be wrong for me to talk about individuals while it is still the case that there are one or two matters that require to be resolved.

Mr Ward: These reports are—

Michael Gove: You are absolutely right; let us be clear: A, there are things that went wrong; B, there are people who at the very least made mistakes; and, C, we sought to inform appropriate authorities about the investigation.

Q85 Mr Ward: Should the head—the principal—not be suspended while these investigations, including police investigations, are carried out? It would happen in any other maintained school.

Michael Gove: I am not going to be drawn on individuals at this point.

Q86 Ian Mearns: None of us should ever forget that no matter what the status of these schools is, they are funded by the taxpayer—by the public purse—and therefore openness and transparency are required owing to that very fact alone. I just make that observation.

Michael Gove: I absolutely agree, and it is the case that there is a greater degree of openness and transparency about the management of free schools and academies than maintained schools. We had the opportunity to discuss this on the Floor of the House in an Opposition day debate, but let me state again that there are greater responsibilities on the members of academy trusts, including free schools, in terms of financial reporting, than there are for local authority schools.

The National Audit Office has conducted, I think, a very good report into the whole process of approving free schools, with some interesting recommendations, but also some proper praise for the Department and its officials. The National Audit Office itself also said that the process of local authority oversight of financial management within maintained schools was not good enough, and it is the case—David is quite right and you are quite right to say—that when public money is involved, we have to be careful about every penny. We have got to hold people in public service to the highest standards, but it is also the case that there have been in different types of schools at different times individuals who have fallen short. So I think it is not about the type of school; it is about the need to remain vigilant, whoever is scrutinising.

Q87 Bill Esterson: #AskGove: how much does each place in a free school cost the taxpayer?

Michael Gove: It varies. I can provide you with the average, but one thing I can tell you, as the National Audit Office reported, is that free school places are being provided at a significantly lower cost than school places were provided by the last Labour Government.

Q88 Bill Esterson: Are we going to get an answer to that?

Michael Gove: Absolutely. I can give you the capital costs. The thing about the revenue costs is that they are the average of the revenue costs for schools in that area, but capital is obviously the area of greater contention. The most important single fact is: cheaper than under the last Labour Government. Of course there is variation in cost, because there are some free schools that have been more expensive than others. Overall, the National Audit Office pointed out that the Department had been creative and imaginative in finding new sites for new schools.

Q89 Ian Mearns: How many applications to establish free schools have been rejected, Secretary of State?

Michael Gove: Hundreds.

Q90 Ian Mearns: You couldn't actually give us the figures, could you?

Michael Gove: I will give you the exact figures.

Q91 Ian Mearns: Thank you.

Bill alluded to this earlier, but I would like to make sure for the record. In 2012, you said your foot was "hovering over the pedal" on the expansion of grammar schools. Does last week's decision to reject Kent's proposal to open a new one mean that you now have cold feet rather than hovering feet?

Michael Gove: No. Motoring metaphors are always dangerous for politicians, and for me in particular, but should a future application come forward that is consistent with the law, of course I would approve it for a grammar school, as I would for any other school that is good and that wishes to expand.

Q92 Ian Mearns: In the discussion of the role of the new regional schools commissioners, one of the commissioners' responsibilities is to de-authorise sponsors where necessary. Would a reluctance to expand to serve an increasing population be grounds for de-authorisation of a sponsor? What other grounds might there be?

Michael Gove: I do not think so, in and of itself, although it might well be considered a relevant consideration. De-authorisation would follow if a sponsor had, for the sake of argument, not lived up to the expectations that we had, or due to the record that it had displayed of strong school leadership.

Q93 Ian Mearns: Given that the new schools commissioners will have some sort of regional remit, is there any conflict between Departments about the concept of regions? The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government hates it, but you are going to have a regional planning system through these commissioners.

Michael Gove: It is already the case that Ofsted has, rightly, recognised that it helps to have someone operating on a regional basis. I hesitate to speak for Eric, when he can brilliantly speak for himself, but I think his point would be that trying to say that everything should fit within nine regions and that you should have all sorts of responsibilities within that is wrong. But I think Eric would absolutely say that, sometimes, you need to operate above the level of individual local authorities. I know that he has encouraged a number of local authorities, including in the north-east, to share services. Of course, LEPs, which Eric has played a part in—in fact, he has been the principal champion of them—operate on an above-local-authority level.

Q94 Pat Glass: And what a success they've been.

Michael Gove: My experience of working with my local LEP has been great but, obviously, I look forward to finding out more about LEPs in the north-east.

Chair: Can we focus on school commissioners?

Q95 Ian Mearns: I was just coming to that. I do beg your pardon. As far as the north of England is concerned, there is speculation that you would have only one school commissioner

across the three northern regions—Yorkshire and Humberside, the north-west and the north-east.

Michael Gove: The plan was to have a regional schools commissioner covering the north-east and the northern half of the north-west—in essence, Cumbria.

Q96 Ian Mearns: So you are reintroducing the old standard planning region.

Michael Gove: I did not know it was the old standard planning region. A wag pointed out that we were having one more school commissioner operating on a regional level than we had rulers in the heptarchy. Someone else pointed out that I was recreating the old kingdom of Northumbria. It is nothing to do with any of that. The real reason—this goes back to an earlier point—is that we want to make sure the regions have a sufficient number of strong NLEs. It is no reflection on the quality of the north-east—just a reflection of the fact that, in population terms, it is the smallest of the existing nine regions—that it helps to bring Cumbria in. Indeed, there are, as you know well, certain common areas of interest across Cumbria and Northumberland.

Q97 Ian Mearns: So King Oswald has a champion in you. What duties will the commissioners have with regard to the co-ordination and creation of new school places, bearing in mind the necessity for sensible targeting?

Michael Gove: That is not their role. One thing I should say about the people I hope will apply for these roles—

Q98 Chair: Who will be paid the same as the Prime Minister, I believe. Is that right?

Michael Gove: Obviously, we will wait to see who the candidates are. We want to attract really good people. They will be civil servants, and they will be operating under the schools commissioner himself—Frank Green, who was a brilliant head teacher. They will also be working with local head teachers and boards of outstanding heads. It will be their role to help the schools commissioner to try to find new sponsors and to broker the right relationship between underperforming schools and the sponsors who can help them to improve, but pupil place planning remains a local authority responsibility.

Q99 Chair: How significant are the schools commissioners in developing and improving education?

Michael Gove: Um; quite?

Q100 Chair: So if they are “quite” important to the future of education, why was this policy announced through an advertisement in *The Times Educational Supplement* rather than in a statement to the House? One would expect something that is quite significant to be notified to this Committee; one would expect the normal democratic scrutiny.

Michael Gove: I suppose one of the things about “quite” is that it is one of the words in the English language that can be a qualifier or an intensifier—

Chair: Quite.

Michael Gove: Quite. All I can say is that it is an internal reorganisation of the Office of the Schools Commissioner. I do not think it was the case that there was a parliamentary statement when that office was created. I do not think it was the case when Bruce Liddington was replaced in that role—in fact, it was vacant for quite some time under Ed Balls—that that

was the subject of a parliamentary statement. When Frank Green was appointed, it was not the subject of a parliamentary statement.

One of the most significant things that has happened in my time as Education Secretary has been the fact that, within the Department, we moved to having a DG for educational standards, one for infrastructure and finance, and one for children's services. It matters quite a lot in the day-to-day running of the Department, but it was not subject to a parliamentary statement. It is not a significant change of policy. It is an administrative reorganisation, much in the same way as the decision of Ofsted to change its management was to get a different approach towards local intelligence. So, in the greater scheme of things, I would not want to overstate its importance.

Q101 Chair: Given the focus on the absence of the middle tier of somebody to sit between the Minister's desk and the running of a small, 400-pupil school such as Al-Madinah, or indeed the closure of the Discovery school, surely this is a significant development, because somebody locally based, working with head teachers, with an understanding of what is going on closer to the ground, will be taking future decisions. Will they be taking decisions on things such as the closure of a school?

Michael Gove: The decisions will still be taken by the Secretary of State. The schools commissioner, like other civil servants, provides advice. We discussed the extent to which Ministers can reject or accept the advice of officials. Someone working for the Office of the Schools Commissioner in the region will have local intelligence and the support of local head teachers, and they will make a recommendation. If the Secretary of State—me or a successor—disagrees, they will be perfectly at liberty to say, "Thank you for your advice. You make a strong case but, for the following reasons, I say no." As Enoch Powell once said, power devolved is power retained.

Q102 Pat Glass: Secretary of State, may I talk to you about good old-fashioned school places planning? If you will indulge me, I want to talk through some statistics.

We know that we need a 27% increase in primary provision by 2016 on top of an existing primary shortage. That means that we need half a million places between 2015 and 2021. We are expecting a 3% fall in secondary places between 2012 and 2015, but numbers will increase slightly so that in 2018 we will have an expected need in secondary at the same level as we had in 2012. So, a slight increase, but we are only going to get up to 2012 levels.

Yet the vast majority of free schools that have been approved have been secondary schools, and many of them have been approved in places where there is already an up to 30% surplus in secondary places. We know that, on 2012 figures, nearly a quarter of all free schools have opened at 60% capacity, and two comprehensives have only 40 pupils on their books. One 14-to-19 school has only 40 pupils and another secondary school has recruited only 35 pupils.

When your Schools Minister came here to talk to us about this, I think I recall saying to him that, in terms of school planning and financial accountability, anyone looking at this from the outside would see it as the product of a deranged mind. How do you account for this gross waste of public money?

Michael Gove: Can I ask which is the 14-to-19 school?

Pat Glass: I don't have that, but I will write to you and let you know.

Michael Gove: Touché. You did make that point very effectively to David, and I think that David gave, if anything, an even more effective reply, which was that if you look at the overall amount of money that we give to local authorities in order to create pupil places—£5

billion, which has already created 260,000 places—up to three times more is spent on basic need than under the previous Government. In that sense, the free school budget is dwarfed by the amount that has been spent and is going to be spent in future on basic need.

Q103 Ian Mearns: In capital as well?

Michael Gove: Yes, absolutely. It is dwarfed. It is also the case that if we look at the primary schools that have opened, they are almost all in areas of severe or significant need. If we look at the secondary schools, which you mention, since all new schools generally fill up one year at a time—some fill up with year 7 and then year 12, because they recruit both at age 11 and sixth form—they are by definition not going to be full from the beginning. Indeed, it would be derangement to imagine that you would want to fill them all at that time. Again, as David Laws pointed out, the majority of free schools that have been open for more than one year are now oversubscribed. Free schools that do not attract students, as with any school, risk closure.

If one looks at the degree of innovation that we have seen on the ground in the overwhelming majority of free schools, I do not think that anyone can say that they have been anything other than hugely successful additions to comprehensive state education. You may already have had the chance to do so, but if you were to visit the Greenwich free school or the Reach academy or ARK Atwood primary academy or ARK Conway primary academy or the CfBT free school in Reading—I could carry on with the list—you would see that many more, out of the current 174, than the three that have, for understandable reasons, attracted media attention because of their problems are making a fantastic contribution. It would be an act of derangement to deny the improvement that they are bringing.

Q104 Pat Glass: Can I ask you about the Durham free school?

Michael Gove: Yes please. In Consett?

Q105 Pat Glass: No, in Durham city. I am interested in your views. In September this year, a school closed in the city for lack of numbers. There are, I think, five other secondary schools in the city. All have surplus places. All are good or outstanding. There are some incredibly outstanding schools in Durham city. A new free school opened in September in a city with good and outstanding schools, all of which have surplus places, in the same building as a school that closed for lack of numbers. Do you see that as a good use of taxpayers' money?

Michael Gove: Yes, and I think we will be able to judge that school against the other schools in Durham city in future. I have had the opportunity to talk to head teachers from Durham. Indeed, I visited your constituency on one occasion. I know that Durham Johnston school in Durham itself is widely recognised as one of the strongest in the country.

The free school proposal had a great deal to recommend it and had support from local employers. We will see. On the basis of the case that was put, Ministers thought that it had the potential to be a very good school. We will have to wait and see just how good it is, but it is only fair to say that neither of us can pronounce with authority whether it is a good use of money until we have seen how the school has performed over a couple of years.

Q106 Pat Glass: Can I ask you about the wider issue of free schools? The Swedish Education Minister recently told Reuters: “I think we have had too much blind faith in that more private schools would guarantee greater educational quality”. He basically admitted to

being wrong. We would all recognise that the free market experiment in Sweden has largely failed and Swedish children, who were once top of the international league tables, have plummeted down the PISA scales. Secretary of State, do you ever wake up in the middle of the night sweating and think, “My God, what if I’ve got this wrong?”

Michael Gove: No, I don’t often wake up in the middle of the night sweating. I always ask myself whether the policy that we are pursuing is right. Sometimes it needs to change. I will come back to free schools in a second, but one thing I would say is that I like to put forward a case as clearly as possible and invite opposition or comments. Sometimes I have acknowledged that I have got it wrong, not least over GCSE reform, where this Committee played a very important part, as did others, in persuading me to take a different course from the one that I had set out. I am completely open to thinking, “We got that wrong.”

It is also the case, as I and others have acknowledged, that when you are setting up 174 new state schools not all of them are going to be brilliant. There are at least three where there have been significant challenges. With one of them, we had to take tough action and close it. That was a matter of regret for me, but we had to do it in the interests of the students.

With respect to Sweden, the evidence is that in those municipalities where you have a higher proportion of free schools, standards are better, and that standards overall in free schools are better than in other schools. That is the academic evidence. The real problem, I think, in Sweden has been that they have lacked an effective inspectorate, such as we have with Ofsted, and have only recently created one. The other problem that Sweden has had is a lack of the high-stakes external testing that we have in this country. It is often some of the things that are held up for excoriation by some as being punitive and old fashioned that are in fact some of the greatest drivers of school improvement and of social mobility.

Looking at the overall PISA story, it is wrong to look at any one country and say, “I wish we could transplant that here.” You can’t make Britain into Sweden, or Finland, or Shanghai, and you should not want to. But if you look at all of the high-performing jurisdictions, there are certain common features, and the strongest three common features brought out by Andreas Schleicher are: maximum amount of autonomy for principals, strong external accountability and good staff.

Q107 Pat Glass: Like in Singapore? We visited Singapore, and it was almost a kind of Soviet state. A head teacher has no choice of what school they work in and they move every three years. That is not autonomy.

Michael Gove: Again, I would stress that it is wrong to say that we would transplant every aspect of one country here. It is the case that there is quite a lot of strong central direction of heads. This goes back to the Chair’s first question: we are thinking not about central direction in which we conscript heads but about how we can incentivise and encourage heads, as they do in Singapore and in Shanghai, to go to the schools where they are most needed. I do not believe that one should be entirely laissez-faire about that, but I do not believe in the state direction of labour, either.

To go to the broader substantial point behind this, individual principals in Singapore, once deployed, have a significant degree of autonomy. They also have very strong external accountability. Those two features together are the common features.

Q108 Pat Glass: Can I ask very quickly about the Information Commissioner? Why are you refusing to publish free school applications and acceptance and rejection letters in line with the ruling of the Information Commissioner? What do you have to hide?

Michael Gove: I have nothing to hide, but I believe that it is important that we protect those people who put forward applications that may have been rejected because we know that free school promoters and others have endured vilification and attacks. I do not think that people who made applications on the basis that those applications would be treated in confidence, and who may, if they have been unsuccessful, expose themselves to the risk of intimidation, should be exposed to that risk by my actions.

Q109 Pat Glass: You talked earlier about the need to conform to the law. Why does that not apply to you? The Information Commissioner has said you should publish these things.

Michael Gove: We are appealing.

Q110 Pat Glass: If the tribunal says you must publish them, will you then publish them?

Michael Gove: I will do everything possible to protect the confidentiality of those people, and I hope that we will prevail. If at the end of the process I have no option but to publish, then I will have no option but to publish.

Q111 Chair: You spoke about the necessary move to close the school, and I assume that you were talking about Discovery New school. Do you think it was given enough time to improve?

Michael Gove: Yes, but, going back to Pat's point, these are never easy decisions.

Q112 Chair: Should they really be made? In Lord Nash's letter to Al-Madinah, there were 57 requirements specifying what should go on in that small school—from a desk in London to the decision to close that school far away from Whitehall. Does that not show a certain absurdity and the need to have somebody closer to the ground making those decisions?

Michael Gove: At the moment, even though it has been a success, it is a small-scale programme. You are right. I think that, in the future, one of the things that we should think about is how we develop an approach towards school entry and exit with multiple authorisers, as they have in other jurisdictions. At the moment, although we can always question some of the decisions that have been made—

Q113 Chair: Is it not an irony? Part of the point of the policy was to allow parents and the local community to challenge existing provision and have a new vision, but it is those same parents who are very upset about their head teacher being given just 12 days to turn around the school. Then they saw the school shut by someone as far away as Whitehall.

Michael Gove: I sympathise with the parents. Politicians obviously need to strike a balance. People sometimes shrug their shoulders and think that that is an evasion of responsibility, but a balance does need to be struck. There is space for innovation and risk taking in the programme. Some people would argue that such innovation, or space for innovation, has been too broad; others, and this is the implication of your question, would argue that perhaps it has not been broad enough.

Q114 Chair: I just want to understand why. If you check the timing, the head teacher had just been appointed and the school had been in special measures for, I think, six months, whereas the average can be a year or 18 months. It is a difficult decision and a balance has to

be made, but why, in this particular case, was the school shut down? Post Al-Madinah, was there a sort of defensiveness and a desire to be seen to be striking out?

Michael Gove: No. Right from the very beginning, we recognised that there would be some free schools that would not succeed. Obviously we hoped that the number would be as small as possible, and ideally zero, but we recognised that there was that risk. We also recognised that we needed to act quickly in those circumstances.

The difference between Al-Madinah and the Discovery New school is that, even though Al-Madinah itself did not respond sufficiently effectively with proposals to improve, we did identify, in Barry Day and the Greenwood Dale school trust, a trusted partner who could take over the school and command the confidence of parents and, more particularly, demonstrate that they had the potential to take over the school. That option was explored in the case of the Discovery New school, but there was no appropriate alternative.

Chair: Thank you. Let's move on. We have less than half an hour left if we go to 11.45 am.

Q115 Siobhain McDonagh: Do you think that you will ever see tax-funded schools run for profit?

Michael Gove: No.

Siobhain McDonagh: Thank you.

Q116 Mr Ward: I will stick to a couple of questions so that we can get through some of the #AskGove questions. There is one here about free school meals and the calculation of the Pupil Premium. Can you tell me how that will work out?

Michael Gove: As you know, some local authorities already provide free school meals for all infant or primary children, and they have been able to identify those families that would have been eligible if they were in a different area to ensure that their pupil premium allocations have been appropriately secured.

You raise a policy question that we are debating within the Department at the moment. The identification of children eligible for free school meals, or who have ever been eligible for free school meals over a particular period, is only ever a proxy for poverty overall. There was a debate, before we chose free school meal eligibility, on exactly how we would identify how the pupil premium is allocated.

There has to be a debate, and there is a debate now in the Department, about two things. One, should we revisit the mechanism for allocating the pupil premium; and, two, should we think again, in that context, about the accountability measures in order to ensure that the most disadvantaged children are supported? So there is an open debate, but it is certainly the case, as existing local authorities have shown, that you can provide universal free school meals and correctly identify families that would otherwise have been eligible for free school meals.

Q117 Mr Ward: So the funding currently available through the pupil premium, whatever the outcome of that, will be retained and not diminished in any way?

Michael Gove: Absolutely, and I hope that, over time, we can enhance the amount of money that is given to tackle deprivation. As long as I have any influence over education spending, we will not want to diminish the pupil premium one iota, nor will we take away from its central function, which is to support disadvantaged children.

Q118 Mr Ward: I have also been approached by Bradford College on funding for 18 year-olds, which is a new development. The question, via a tweet, is: are the costs of educating an 18-year-old in 2014-15 lower than for a 17-year-old?

Michael Gove: For those who do not know—I am sure that the people in Bradford College will know—we had to make a decision to reduce the amount that we spend for 18-year-olds from £4,000 to £3,300. Most 18-year-olds are not educated in isolation from 16 and 17-year-olds. It is a way of reducing the budget overall for institutions that educate 16, 17 and 18-year-olds, and it is a painful cut forced on us by difficult economic circumstances and the fact that some parts of the education budget are protected and some are not.

Q119 Chair: Would you describe this decision as regrettable? I got a letter yesterday from Wilberforce College in Hull, which serves some of my constituents. I think the average cut for a sixth-form college is a bit over 1%. In their case it will be 4%.

Michael Gove: Because they have more 18-year-olds?

Q120 Chair: Because they have more 18-year-olds. As we know, Hull has had difficulties; the colleges are doing their absolute best to turn the lives of young people around and to keep them in education and they feel as if this is a kick in the teeth. They are dealing with the very children most at risk of being NEET and you are pulling the money away. That seems like incoherence when you are also doing the pupil premium.

Michael Gove: I absolutely take your point. We conducted an impact assessment which we can share with the Committee. In short, of all the ways we looked at to reduce expenditure in the 16-to-18 area, we felt that this was the least worst. I will not say that it is a good thing to reduce spending in this area; it is a difficult decision.

Q121 Chair: Will you say something about sixth-form colleges? They seem consistently to be the highest-performing sector and yet there has been no growth in their number and the sector feels very unheralded. It seems rather odd, when we are so driven by raising standards, not to seek to expand that area of the sector, which is most efficient, cost-effective and excellent at raising standards and closing the gap between rich and poor.

Michael Gove: It is. I enjoy engaging with the sixth-form college sector; many of my own constituents benefit from superb sixth-form colleges, not least in Farnborough. As to why there are not more, there is the opportunity and there are new 16-to-18 institutions being created, whether or not one calls them sixth-form colleges—for example, the London Academy of Excellence and the new Harris Westminster Sixth Form Academy. They certainly walk, talk and act like sixth-form colleges; whether or not they choose to call themselves that is a separate matter. So there is expansion in that area, but as you have pointed out, there are some historical inequalities, not least the fact that sixth-form colleges are treated unfairly with respect to VAT. I would love to be able to do that, but money is tight.

Q122 Chair: Will you look at this?

Michael Gove: We do. We looked at it before the autumn statement. The case is clear and strong and people can quite properly say, “You should have spent money on that rather than this.” I will defend the choices we make, but I also say, going back to the point that Ian and Pat referred to, if I can get more money from the Chancellor and we can be certain that it will be spent effectively—there is no doubt that sixth-form colleges do—then I would love to be able to address that anomaly.

Q123 Chair: Going forward, it just seems that you should personally take an interest in that and look at it, because there has been no fundamental growth in sixth form colleges for some time, yet it seems that it is the most effective sector. It really does need attention.

Michael Gove: There are new post-16 institutions, and there will be new post-16 institutions with a particular specialism in maths, so we are taking that forward.

In the past, I have had to disappoint this Committee and the House by saying that we would not extend free school meals to people who were not in school but were in post-16. That was because we did not have the cash. Thanks to the tenacity and skill with which the Minister of State argued his case with the Treasury, we now have that. That is a tribute to your campaigning, Robert Halfon's campaigning and David Laws' technical mastery of his case. Hopefully, we will be able to address this in the future.

Q124 Bill Esterson: Dealing with the VAT issue for sixth form colleges is about creating a level playing field.

Michael Gove: I quite agree.

Q125 Bill Esterson: Returning to free school meals, we have taken evidence in more than one inquiry that free school meals are not necessarily the best indicator, and I think you acknowledge that there is a debate to be had.

Michael Gove: Yes.

Q126 Bill Esterson: Will you look at whether parental attainment is a good way or possibly a better way?

Michael Gove: Prior attainment?

Bill Esterson: Prior attainment. That, again, comes from international comparisons? Is that something you have looked at?

Michael Gove: We are looking at that. Yes is the short answer.

Q127 Bill Esterson: A linked question is: how will you calculate the pupil premium when all infant children receive free school meals?

Michael Gove: David touched on that. There are local authorities—Labour local authorities—that have found that there is no problem with having universal access to free school meals and correctly identifying those families who would otherwise have been eligible for free school meals in another local authority area and to whom the pupil premium can be attached.

Q128 Chris Skidmore: We are on the general knowledge section now—the exams curriculum, accountability and all the questions that have been asked on Twitter under #AskGove. When it comes to the GCSE reforms, how are you planning to tackle the demoralising effect that linear exams and no course work will have on children who struggle?

Michael Gove: I don't think it will have a demoralising effect. It is an ideological view that I do not share.

Q129 Chris Skidmore: When it comes to the new GCSE specifications with the abolition of tiering, one question that has been asked is whether it will deny access to many students in special schools who used to achieve grades C to G. Have we written them off?

Michael Gove: Absolutely not. The whole point about tackling tiering is to try to ensure that, wherever possible, there is no cap on aspiration for students, whatever type of school they are in. But of course, like this Committee, I am guided by the evidence, and the evidence is that retaining tiering, not least in mathematics, is sensible.

Q130 Chris Skidmore: With the new 2016 accountability measures, can you confirm today which non-EBacc GCSEs will count as high value?

Michael Gove: I cannot, unfortunately. Work is going on with Ofqual in that area. The rumours of the demise of certain GCSEs are likely to prove to have been exaggerated.

Q131 Chris Skidmore: Someone has asked why we cannot allow children to do fewer GCSEs but spend more time on them.

Michael Gove: The choices that are in the best interests of the students are the choices that should guide the school.

Q132 Chris Skidmore: When it comes to school freedom around the curriculum, why do we not give the freedom from the national curriculum that is given to free schools and academies to good and outstanding local authority schools?

Michael Gove: If they apply to become academies, they can exercise that freedom.

Q133 Chris Skidmore: Someone has asked why there is a national curriculum at all if only some schools need to follow it.

Michael Gove: One of the things about the national curriculum is that it was written to take account of the fact that there is greater autonomy so, as Russell Hobby pointed out, the deal with the profession would be a slightly greater degree of prescription over content in primary in English, mathematics and science in return for far greater flexibility in every other area, not least teaching methods and style. So the national curriculum becomes more of a benchmark and a tool for parents and teachers to structure what they deliver, and it is less prescriptive overall than its predecessor document.

Q134 Chris Skidmore: When it comes to the new national curriculum what type of training will teachers receive to be able to implement the changes? Will there be any training at all for teachers?

Michael Gove: Yes. It is already the case that schools are gearing up but we will be making an announcement early in the new year about some additional support that we will give to all schools in order to make them ready for the implementation of the new national curriculum in September.

Q135 Chris Skidmore: And when it comes to the significant change with the computing curriculum, who do you envisage will train the staff to deliver that?

Michael Gove: The British Computer Society and a number of other organisations have offered support and the impression I have had is that there has been general excitement on the part of most teachers of ICT at this change. It is also the case that there are teaching schools

and members of teaching schools alliances that have particular expertise in this area. Should any school worry or have concerns, then there will be schools both geographically near or with which they have relationships which will be able to help them.

Q136 Chris Skidmore: Let me come on quickly to some individual subjects within the GCSE framework. This was under #saveGCSEdrama. Do you still only value drama as an extra-curricular subject because there have been concerns about where the new artistic and cultural leads in this country will come from?

Michael Gove: I have never said that drama should be only extra-curricular. From the more prominent role that Shakespeare plays in the English literature curriculum through to the Best 8 measure which has explicit space for creative subjects, I have been very anxious to make sure that dance, drama, art and design and music are all there as options which are valued and supported.

Q137 Chris Skidmore: Another subject-specific concern: considering the economic shortage of engineers and employees for STEM-related careers, why is DT not an EBacc subject?

Michael Gove: Because we have drawn the EBacc subjects from those subjects that have been identified by the Russell Group and others as facilitating subjects that give students the maximum range of subsequent options. Slightly off the point, one of the areas of greatest contention has been the exclusion of economics from the EBacc—even more perhaps than religious studies. The new Best 8 measure means that for people who want to do design and technology alongside these other subjects then the room is there. I should stress, of course, that for people who aspire to a career in engineering then the single most important subject is mathematics.

Q138 Chair: One thing you did add was computing to the EBacc. In so far as the EBacc is a closed vessel, if you stick something else in it displaces another thing. I vaguely remember that from my physics—

Michael Gove: No two objects can occupy the same space at the same time.

Q139 Chair: There is a fear in the science community that with the addition of computing, the welcome increase we have seen in triple science will go into reverse and it might take quite some time and a lag before that appears. We could end up years down the road having returned more to double science rather than triple science. Can you give any reassurance on that?

Michael Gove: I think that is unlikely.

Q140 Chair: Is there a way that you could make it very clear to schools that triple science continues to be the best possible option and should be offered? There is a danger that double science will replace the triple science with a bit of computing.

Michael Gove: Computing is hugely important. I am delighted that we have overhauled ICT in the curriculum and introduced a computer science GCSE but you have provided me with an opportunity to say, absolutely, physics, chemistry and biology should be studied as individual and discrete subjects. They are all important. More students should be studying science for longer and there is a particular concern with the number of women who go on to study physics, particularly at A-level. I am grateful to BIS and No. 10 for organising a round

table yesterday to help address this subject. As a matter of social justice as well as economics it is wrong that we do so badly in supporting young women to study the physical sciences.

Q141 Chair: The report suggests that 49% of state mixed schools are reinforcing gender stereotypes in terms of A-Level subjects. How will you stop this?

Michael Gove: It is an Issue of Physics report, “Closing Doors”, isn’t it? The conversations that we had yesterday were designed to explore that issue. Specifically, we asked two schools that had been very successful in encouraging young women to study physics what their experience was, and we also talked to a variety of organisations. We are now reviewing what we can do to tackle that problem.

Q142 Ian Mearns: Given the clear evidence that gender stereotyping is happening within schools, it kind of takes us back to our discussion about careers advice and guidance. We have got clear evidence of gender stereotyping in terms of subject choices, but we are happy to give schools the responsibility to give young people advice about which way they should go.

Michael Gove: One of the striking things to emerge from our conversation was the spontaneous point that powerful role models and voices from business and industry who could speak to schools and to students about the wisdom of following particular choices would be highly effective. I think it is less a matter of careers advisers and more a matter of inspirational figures from the world of science and employment.

Q143 Ian Mearns: On computing, how is the recruitment of suitably qualified computing teachers going?

Michael Gove: It could be better. There is still more to do. I do not have the figures immediately to hand but the three areas of greatest concern to me in teacher recruitment are mathematics, physics and computing. It is a sort of chicken and egg situation in that there are an insufficient number who have been studying physics which means there is an insufficient number of teachers and so on. With computing, there are particular challenges because it is a new subject. Also, if you are gifted in that arena, there are a huge array of tempting opportunities outside teaching. All help gratefully accepted on how we can tackle that.

Ian Mearns: I do not have evidence but I have a feeling you have got a problem.

Michael Gove: Ye, it is a challenge, as we say in the civil service.

Q144 Siobhain McDonagh: There is no structure that represent the silver bullet in terms of improving education, schools and children’s performance. What concerns me about academies is the drought of new academy sponsors that are adequate or up to the task. Is your Department experiencing difficulties in finding those sponsors and would you say that the Department is becoming more liberal in its acceptance of track record when giving schools to sponsors?

Michael Gove: That is a very good point. I think we were at risk of becoming too liberal and over the course of the last 18 months, give or take a month, we have concentrated on being tougher on existing sponsors. You will have noted that one or two sponsors, such as ATT and E-ACT, which I suspect expanded too fast, are being told to rein in their horns—our fault not theirs.

An energetic pursuit of more sponsors is bearing fruit. I would say that some of the best sponsors are head teachers of existing high-performing schools who have taken the

opportunity to set up academy chains: people such as Barry Day, whom we talked about earlier, or Mike Wilkins at Outwood Grange. I think the exact problem that you correctly identify was identified within the Department a little while ago and we have taken action to deal with it.

Q145 Chris Skidmore: I have one final question about pupil's education in the round. There has just been a campaign by the British Heart Foundation around life-saving skills. One of the Twitter questions is saying that life-saving skills such as CPR are too vital to leave schools to decide whether they are taught. Why aren't they taught to all pupils?

Michael Gove: Funnily enough, I learned first aid not at school but through the Boys' Brigade. I think it is a hugely valuable skill.

Q146 Ian Mearns: It's all becoming clear now.

Michael Gove: Were you in the Boys' Brigade, Ian? Steadfast and sure?

Ian Mearns: I was in the Scouts.

Michael Gove: I was a member of a Presbyterian organisation. First aid is a hugely useful skill, but the reason that I mention the Boys' Brigade, or indeed the Scouts, is that one must not overload schools by demanding and insisting that they deliver everything that is desirable.

Schools are primarily academic institutions. They are primarily there to ensure that students acquire the skills, knowledge and qualifications to make choices as adults. The best schools will have a wide range of additional other ways of ensuring that young people grow up as wonderful citizens, but it is also important, given the welter of things that we expect of schools, that they do not feel that the Government is constantly prescribing, in every regard, everything that a good school should do.

Q147 Chair: The Personal Finance Education Group ran a successful campaign on personal finance and was successful in getting the curriculum to include personal finance in maths and citizenship teaching. But there seems now to be a problem in getting the funding to do the training of teachers that would be required to ensure that this personal financial education is embedded properly into maths and citizenship, and effectively across the curriculum. Are you looking at this, or would you do so, to ensure that the resources are in place for the new requirements that need to come in, in September next year, and that that is done well?

Michael Gove: To be honest, I had not heard that particular concern. Now that you have brought it to my attention, I absolutely will look at it.

Q148 Alex Cunningham: I should like to go back to the funding, although I was tempted to ask you if you remembered the object of the Boys' Brigade, which remains ingrained in my head, but I will not. The colleges are telling me that the funding for 16 to 18-year-olds is already 22% lower than for five to 15-year-olds. You say that you would justify that. Is not there somewhere else where we could have protected this budget for the colleges?

Michael Gove: Possibly.

Q149 Alex Cunningham: But you are not going to tell us where, or where you would rather have cut.

Michael Gove: I am happy to—the impact assessment, which I promised to share earlier, will run through some of these arguments. It is an uncomfortable question. If you are going to have to cut—where? We can have a broader argument about the scale of the budgets, but I think all of us would accept that there have to be some reductions. I think that this is the least worst.

Q150 Alex Cunningham: Yes, but some of these 18-year-olds come from the most difficult backgrounds—the most difficult place—and they are the ones who are suffering as a result of this.

Michael Gove: It is absolutely the case that, when you reduce funding, it is going to be difficult. I do not want to pre-empt your scrutiny of the impact assessment, but once that is shared with you, then I think that you will be able to see that, although it is undoubtedly not an easy decision, there are justifications for that which take account precisely of your concerns.

Q151 Alex Cunningham: So you will not accept the Chair's invitation to review the whole decision.

Michael Gove: Well—

Alex Cunningham: Just a yes or a no will do.

Michael Gove: No, not at this stage, but I would say, having had a chance to look at the impact assessment, if you then wanted to invite me back and say that you think the reasoning behind this or some of the supporting documentation is erroneous, I would be happy—and David, as well: actually, it is my responsibility—to answer that.

Q152 Alex Cunningham: Bill has mentioned the VAT issue regarding sixth-form colleges. In Stockton borough, Riverside college took over, or amalgamated, a sixth-form college, so it is now an FE college, and this building specialises particularly in sixth form. They have the VAT advantage over another sixth-form college in the area. Are you going to set a time scale for changing the rules on VAT for sixth forms?

Michael Gove: I would like to, but the Chancellor would not let me.

Q153 Alex Cunningham: So what are you going to do about it, then? Are you going to fight the Chancellor? Fisticuffs at dawn, perhaps?

Michael Gove: No. I carry on imploring and begging him to give me more money and he carries on doing a brilliant job as steward of the public finances.

Chair: There is one small step that might be within your power, and that of the Budget, to do. Colleges admitting students this year have lagged funding, so certain free schools and academies setting up are being paid for phantom students that do not exist, which is pretty galling for colleges that have actual students who they do not get paid for, because there is lagged funding till the year after. That is a historical situation.

It has been compounded by this change, because those colleges admitted students in September this year on the basis that they would get the money next year, and now they are going to get a 17.5% cut next year, on people they have already admitted, and there is nothing they can do to control that. Even a one-year intervention, to ensure they get the money that they are entirely entitled to believe they would get for this year's students next year, would be a small token, but at least it would suggest to them that their interests were being listened to.

Michael Gove: Let me have a look at that. It is a very fair-minded and generous suggestion.

Q154 Chair: Thank you. One last question for you today. Are you concerned about university technical colleges' ability to attract pupils?

Michael Gove: The short answer is, yes, but more broadly it is important that we analyse UTC by UTC. The principle of university technical colleges is fantastic. The reality has been expensive. The prospect of success in the future is exciting, but there have been one or two cases where recruitment has not been what we would wish it to be. But as I mentioned in the context of the Durham free school and other free schools, it is important not to judge prematurely.

It is important to say that I have a concern, but that concern is not because I do not believe that they can and will be successful. If you look at the JCB UTC, it is oversubscribed and hugely successful, so there is nothing either inherent in the model or its delivery which means that the schools cannot be a roaring success, but we need, as ever, to keep things under review.

Q155 Chair: What does “keeping under review” mean? You have talked about a certain academy chain which expanded too far, too fast. Their early schools were probably fantastic, otherwise they would not have got that momentum. You then intervened to restrict that. Ken Baker describes himself as an old man in a hurry, might you put the brakes on the expansion of UTCs?

Michael Gove: As with all new schools, we look at UTCs on a case-by-case basis. If every UTC proposal that comes forward is strong, then we enthusiastically back it. If a UTC proposal has potential, but is not yet strong, then we let the proposer know what it is that needs to be done to encourage it. I am a huge fan of Lord Baker and one of the biggest champions of UTCs, David Mellor, who is himself an academy sponsor, is the second most recent addition to the board of the DFE as a non-executive director. The Baker Dearing Educational Trust is an organisation, but is not an academy sponsor. Individual UTCs need to be looked at in their own right. Some organisations are stand-alone backers of UTCs, other UTCs are part of a broader family.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Secretary of State, for being able to answer questions across such a swathe of policy. We hope you have a very happy Christmas. Thank you for being so cogent and coherent on so many areas—even if that area does not yet include careers advice and guidance in schools. On the basis that you have, as so often, been prepared to listen and change your mind when challenged by evidence—we recognise and applaud that—we hope that over Christmas you will have time to reflect on the issues about careers, and others as well, and we hope to see you again in the new year. Have a very happy Christmas.

Michael Gove: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman, and thank you members of the Committee.