

THE GRANT MAINTAINED STORY: THE FINAL CHAPTER

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ABSTRACT

The Grant Maintained Story: the final chapter

Lesley Anderson

In the early 1990s, the Conservative Government made grant maintained schools the flagship of their education policy, while the Labour Party pledged to abolish them if elected to power. However, during the run-up to the 1997 general election, it was evident that New Labour's attitude towards GM schools was changing. This was confirmed in the 1997 Labour Government's first White Paper on education which proposed that, within a new framework for all maintained schools in England and Wales, opted out schools would have the option of becoming 'foundation' schools, a category that was closely aligned to GM status.

The research reported here is concerned with the views and perceptions of GM headteachers and chairs of governors about the future of their schools during the period following the election of a Labour Government. Thus, it documents the final chapter in the GM story. The data were generated through twelve interviews with the headteacher and chair of governor of six GM schools and a questionnaire survey using the same categories of informants in 126 schools.

The findings suggest that, while there were some concerns about the effects of the changes on respondents' individual schools, these managers and governors generally adopted a pragmatic attitude to New Labour's education policy.

In the final chapter, attempts are made to move beyond the data and develop a theory to describe the approach adopted at both government and school level. In doing this, it is suggested that the New Labour's strategy in respect of GM schools represents an example of its 'Third Way' politics, an approach that is not based on a particular ideology but rather adopts a pluralist, pragmatic outlook in its attempt to modernise the notion of government at the end of the 20th century.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Setting the scene

During the 1997 election campaign, New Labour put education high on its agenda. Indeed, at the time, the Labour Party described its priorities as ‘education, education and education’. Its concern then, and since being elected, relates to educational standards, the overall level of attainment of school children in the United Kingdom and the consequent impact on the economy and society generally. In the White Paper, *Excellence in Schools*, (DfEE, 1997a) the Secretary of State for Education and Employment stated that the Government’s policies are intended “to overcome economic and social disadvantage and to make equality of opportunity a reality”. Moreover, he went on to argue that:

... to compete in the global economy, to live in a civilised society and to develop the talents of each and every one of us, we will have to unlock the potential of every young person ... We must overcome the spiral of disadvantage, in which alienation from, or failure within, the education system is passed from one generation to the next (p.3).

In stating its concern about educational standards, the Government also made it clear that its focus is 'standards not structures'. However, despite this rhetoric, it seems that the Government could not ignore the school structure passed on to it by the previous Conservative regime. Although it embraced school-based management in the form of local management of schools (LMS), in its 1992 election manifesto Labour had pledged to return grant maintained (GM) schools to local authority control on its election to government (Labour, 1992, p.18). Within three months of coming to power in 1997, the Labour Government published the White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997a) which outlined its proposals to reorganise and restructure schools in England and Wales. Soon after, in December 1997, the *School Standards and*

Framework Bill was introduced which proposed the creation of the three new categories of schools, thereby abolishing GM schools. The Act resulting from this Bill received the Royal Assent in July 1998.

The GM schools policy was legislated for in the Conservative Government's 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA). From that government's perspective, this Act was, in fact, also designed to raise educational standards in England and Wales (Maclure, 1992, p.ix; Bush and West-Burnham, 1994, p.1) as well as to require state-funded schools to be more accountable (Thomas and Martin, 1996, p.12). Among a number of other reforms introduced through ERA, the GM policy was characterised by its devolution of decision-making to the school level and the removal of a tier of local bureaucracy, thereby creating autonomous, self-managing state schools (Bush *et al*, 1993).

This study is about GM schools. The research was undertaken, and the thesis emanating from it written up, at the time when it was known that GM status would be abolished as an option for school governance by the end of the 1998/99 academic year. During this period, the schools were, therefore, in transition and it was obviously no longer possible for schools to opt out.

The study is limited in the extent to which it was able to investigate the GM sector, both in broad, general terms as well as by time constraints connected with the re-classification of schools. Throughout the lifetime of the project, the issues of interest were evolving, both at policy level and in practice. Thus, a longitudinal study of the destinies of schools that were GM and, in particular, the development of the 'foundation school' sector that, to a large extent, replaces the GM one is desirable. (Details about foundation schools are given later in this

chapter.) However, such a development is not possible within the scope of this project. Indeed, the data collection phase of the work had, in fact, ended even before GM governors were required to make their final decision on the category their school would adopt within the new framework.

The background to the grant maintained schools policy

Concern about declining standards in education resulting from the introduction of comprehensive education and the use of progressive teaching methods in schools can be traced back to the Conservative 'Black Papers' of the late 1960s and 1970s (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p.19). On the face of it, Conservative Governments in the 1980s were, not surprisingly, anxious to remedy these alleged deficiencies for 'educational' reasons and the establishment of a new type of school was seen as one way to achieve improvement (Rogers, 1992, p.51). However, there were also broader concerns. As Fitz *et al* (1993, p.19) explain:

The context for the emergence of the GM schools policy was not just a straightforward educational one... in the wake of a growing fiscal crisis, (there was a need) to implement policies for non-subsidised economic renewal featuring the provision of more efficient public services.

Increasing unemployment, particularly among young people, led to discussion dominated by the political right about the role of education in society (Feintuck, 1994, p.10). Rogers (1992) makes a similar point that unease about the extent to which schools provided an education that satisfied the national economy was an influencing factor in the development of the GM policy.

Furthermore, these concerns were not solely in the domain of right wing Conservatives. James Callaghan, the Labour Prime Minister is said to have initiated the 'Great Debate' on education in

his speech made at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1976 (Rogers, 1992). Callaghan's assertion was that education was not sufficiently concerned with the preparation of students for work.

However, when the Conservative Government came into power in 1979, it became clear that Tory politicians intended to become more directly involved in the detail of educational provision. The party managers and manifesto writers perceived it to be an important area on which the Conservatives could capitalise in the next election (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p.20). Their approach became evident during the 1980s with what Lawton (1994) describes as "the attack on education [between] 1979-1986" (p.41) although, in contrast, Feintuck (1994) explains that "in the early 1980s, educational change was neither radical nor rapid" (p.14). However, he goes on to add that "extensive discussion of the education service took place from 1981-6" (p.14).

In line with the Black Papers, for many Conservative educationalists at this time, the way to improve standards in education was by the restoration of opportunities for the academically able to attend grammar schools as well as raising standards of attainment in literacy and numeracy among all students. (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993). An example of the former is evidenced by the introduction of the Assisted Places Scheme in 1981 which was designed to help academically able children from poor families attend some of the country's leading independent schools (Edwards *et al*, 1989).

However, alongside these developments, the 'New Right', argued that:

... standards in education, as well as in other public services, would be raised if institutions were compelled to organise and manage their affairs in similar ways to those prevailing in the commercial and business world.

(Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p.20)

This claim was premised on an assumption about the effectiveness and value of market forces, competition and parental choice. Thus, during the early 1980s, "education policy-making within the Conservative Party thus lay at the confluence of two strands of thinking" (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p.20).

At this time, there is no doubt that Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education 1981-6, had sought to inject market forces into education. However, it did not prove to be possible for the Conservative government to introduce radical reforms of education until the late 1980s when "the 'New Right' had won the ideological battle within the Conservative Party" (Feintuck, 1994, p.15). A struggle which Brown (1989) characterises as between 'Free Marketeers' and the 'Authoritarian Right'. Even then the market approach was limited in its scope within education. Alongside the neo-liberal reforms of open enrolment, parental choice, and formula funding, part of the 1988 ERA was concerned with the expression of the neo-conservative principles of state authority and the restoration of traditional values that, in turn, imply regulation and a restricted market. The most obvious example was the introduction of the National Curriculum and the linked system of national testing and assessment (Carr and Hartnett, 1996, p.166).

In their discussion about the ideological background to the GM policy, Bush *et al* (1993, p.3) highlight the "values of the enterprise culture" as well as concepts of consumer choice. Rogers (1992), similarly, makes the point that many of the more radical proposals for reform were based on ideological commitment rather than research. He also suggests that a small group of

"influential - but not widely recognised ... individuals" (p.52) were largely responsible for these proposals. Feintuck (1994, p.14) describes it as a "genuinely Thatcherite prescription" and goes on to state that "the form ERA ultimately took appears to have been the result of the congeries of potentially contradictory concepts addressed in the publications of the various right-winged think-tanks" (p.16).

Grant maintained schools

GM schools have already been defined as autonomous, self-managing schools (Bush *et al*, 1993). They were different from other publicly funded schools in that they were incorporated institutions directly funded by central government and had no legal relationship with a LEA. (LEAs were still required to provide a limited number of services to individual pupils in GM schools). The GM sector was created from existing schools as a result of some of them 'opting out' of their LEA after a parental ballot and approval from the Secretary of State.

Specific differences between GM schools and their LEA counterparts focused on the composition and powers of the governing bodies and the funding and admissions arrangements. Hence, this study is concerned with these organisational issues. Additionally, as the relationship between a GM school and its former LEA was often strained and, as such, was a matter of interest, this aspect is also explored within the project. With these foci in mind, the main factors under each heading, governance, admissions, funding and the relationship between the school and its former LEA, are now highlighted in relation to GM schools. However, each area is also considered in more detail in the next chapter.

The composition of the governing body of a GM school differed from other maintained schools in that there was no representation from the LEA. The majority of members were described as 'first' or, in the case of schools that were formerly voluntary aided or controlled, 'foundation' governors. The significance of this difference is that LEA representatives, nominated by a democratically elected body, have public accountability whilst the accountability to "the community served by the (GM) school" (DES 1991) was never defined (Bush *et al*, 1993; Feintuck, 1994).

Rogers (1992) also expresses concern about the accountability of GM school governing bodies in relation to the length of the terms of office of first governors compared with elected members. The former served for between five and seven years depending on the school's original proposal for GM status, while the latter were elected for just four years. As the first governors were in the majority, Rogers suggests they are in "a powerful position ... and it is hard to see how real accountability can be exercised; the potential for a self-perpetuating oligarchy is clear" (p.75).

Without the back-up of the local authority, the governing bodies of GM schools had more responsibilities than their LEA counterparts, for example, as employers, as corporate owners, as arbiters and having final responsibility for the curriculum, assessment and reporting (Bush *et al*, 1993, p.179). Although Halpin *et al* (1991) argue that the nature of these differences was minimal, the freedom around these areas provided by GM status was often quoted as one of its main advantages (Davies and Anderson, 1992).

With regard to one of these additional responsibilities, the GM governing body's power to decide the school's admission policy and handle parental appeals against non-admission or exclusion of pupils, the critics of the GM policy argued that this aspect of their autonomy was designed to reintroduce selection. It was perceived that selective admissions arrangements would be achieved either through the school seeking a change of status or, covertly, through the adoption of other forms of 'back-door' selection (Bush *et al*, 1993; Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993). Hence, under the Conservative regime, the GM policy was seen to be the "vehicle with which the government has been able to take forward other educational initiatives" (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p.30-1).

In terms of funding, the main factor of interest was the advantageous allocation and grants made available to GM schools and, hence, the opportunity provided to them to enhance their resources. Although, in 1988 Baker claimed that "the effect of opting out should be broadly neutral for both school and LEA", it soon became clear, and accepted, that GM schools were funded more favourably than LEA schools. Bates (1991) quotes from Prime Minister, John Major's letter to the National Union of Teachers in August 1991: "We have made no secret of the fact that grant-maintained schools get preferential treatment in allocating grants to capital expenditure."

Sherratt (1994) tackles the issue of financial bribes that were used to encourage schools to opt out. He points out that there have always been funding differentials between LEAs. Cleverly turning the argument around, he asks: "If it is unfair for some (GM) schools to receive more than other (LEA) schools, why has it not always been unfair for some (LEA) schools to receive more than other (LEA) schools?" (p.19). Sherratt concludes that, as the number of schools

seeking GM status had not increased significantly, then it must be that the "existing financial incentives have been exaggerated" (p.19).

Finally, the issue of relationships between GM schools and their former LEA was pertinent. It was hardly surprising that LEAs did not welcome 'their' schools opting out. It meant a reduction in LEA funding and threatened their viability. Hence, once a school began the GM process there was usually a significant decline in the relationship between the school and the LEA. This negative relationship often continued after the school had achieved GM status. Furthermore, in the early years of the policy, there were a number of disputes between LEAs and GM schools that were tested in the courts and some of these are documented in Feintuck (1994, chapter 4).

However, since 1988, the nature of LEAs has changed, partly as a result of the introduction of LMS. Indeed, most local authorities made their services available to GM schools, albeit at a higher rate than that offered to their 'own' schools. Additionally, the introduction of unitary authorities in certain areas of the country meant that some GM schools were situated in an area controlled by a new local authority. Hence, relationships between GM schools and the LEA in which they were located were as varied and as changeable as any other relationship between individuals and groups of people.

The grant maintained schools sector

The first eighteen GM schools were incorporated in September 1989. The group consisted of seventeen secondary schools and one middle school. (At that time only large primary schools could consider seeking GM status and there was no opportunity for special schools to opt out.)

The new GM sector included grammar and comprehensive schools, some of which were co-educational and some provided single sex education. The schools had opted out of seventeen different LEAs and were spread across England.

Thereafter, other schools joined the sector at the start of each new term. In the early days of the policy schools tended to seek GM status either to gain independence from what they described as the bureaucracy of their LEA or because there was a threat of closure or reorganisation hanging over them. However, once the financial advantages became evident, this factor became significant among the reasons given. From their survey of the first one hundred GM schools, Bush *et al* (1993) identified four models that define the process of opting out in terms of internal and external aspects of transition.

Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993) explored the patterns of opting out up to 1993 and concluded that "the scale, pace and distribution ... is characterised both by continuity and unevenness ... There are also recognisable trends in the motivations and types of schools which opt out" (p.46).

During the nine years from the introduction of the policy to the Conservative Party's 1997 General Election defeat, various changes were made to the policy in order to encourage more schools to opt out. For example, from 1991 the restriction on the size of primary schools that could apply for GM status was dropped. In 1992, the Education White Paper, *Choice and Diversity: A New Framework for Schools* (DfE, 1992a), made it clear that the government intended to enhance a process which, it claimed was "transforming the educational landscape of this country" (p.4). The subsequent Education Act in 1993 introduced measures that eased the transition to, and flexibility of, GM status as well as creating a new statutory body, The Funding

Agency for Schools (FAS). The FAS was responsible for funding and monitoring expenditure in GM schools, provision of information relating to GM schools and, where specific circumstances prevail, either alongside or independent of LEAs, provision of sufficient school places for a particular area (Sherratt, 1994, p.45). Hence, the establishment of the FAS marked an important shift from the oversight of education by locally elected representatives to a situation controlled by ministerially appointed non-elected quangos (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p.105).

The GM schools sector continued to grow from 1993, although GM status never attracted schools in the number hoped for, and possibly anticipated, by the Conservative government.

Data describing the GM sector during the period of its existence are given in table 1.1.

Table 1.1: GM school data 1989-99

Year	Phase	Total per phase	Total per year	Running total
1989	Primary	0		
	Secondary	18		
	All Ages	0	18	18
1990	Primary	0		
	Secondary	26		
	All Ages	0	26	44
1991	Primary	5		
	Secondary	54		
	All Ages	0	59	103
1992	Primary	48		
	Secondary	129		
	All Ages	0	177	280
1993	Primary	132		
	Secondary	294		
	All Ages	0	426	706

1994	Primary	212		
	Secondary	104		
	All Ages	1	317	1023
1995	Primary	48		
	Secondary	22		
	All Ages	5	75	1098
1996	Primary	38		
	Secondary	17		
	All Ages	9	64	1162
1997	Primary	30		
	Secondary	17		
	All Ages	1	48	1210
1998	Primary	3		
	Secondary	1		
	All Ages	0	4	1214
1999	Primary	1		
	Secondary	1		
	All Ages	0	2	1216

Schools that have opened and closed are not accounted for in this table. The relevant numbers and dates are:

- 1 opened in 1995 and closed in 1999;
- 1 opened in 1993 and closed in 1999; and
- 1 opened in 1996 and closed in 1998.

The data includes the 18 GM special schools that were incorporated in England. These are not included in this study.

Three new categories of schools

The 1998 *School Standards and Framework Act* introduced three new categories for maintained schools in England and Wales. The categories - foundation, voluntary and community - are broadly intended to reflect the types of school which existed previously while, at the same time, bringing about the Labour Party's pledge to abolish GM schools (Labour, 1992). In general

terms, the classifications are differentiated by the constitution and responsibilities of the governing bodies, ownership of land and funding arrangements. These factors are considered in the next chapter.

Originally, in the White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997a), the 'voluntary' category was not included as such; it was preceded by an 'aided' classification. The intention had been that voluntary aided schools, and those GM schools that had formerly been voluntary aided, would become 'aided' in the new framework. However, there was angry reaction from the House of Bishops to this arrangement, not least because there seemed to be no obvious category for existing voluntary controlled schools. Furthermore, under the new framework as first set out, the Church would have lost its majority on the governing bodies and governors would have had to consult with LEAs over admissions (Coombe and Jones, 1997).

Having pledged in their manifesto that church schools would "retain their distinctive religious ethos" (Labour, 1997), the government, it seemed, were not prepared to risk the Bishops using their political power in the House of Lords. Indeed, GM schools, not church schools, were intended to be the main target of the reform (Editorial, *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 October 1997). Thus, before the Bill was published, the 'aided' category was dropped in favour of a new all-encompassing 'voluntary' sector. This category provides for existing voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools and those GM schools which were formerly voluntary aided or controlled to keep their existing characteristics and allow the Church to retain a majority of seats on the governing bodies. Furthermore, voluntary aided schools and GM schools formerly voluntary aided continue to employ their own staff and run their own admissions (Dean, 1997b).

The 'foundation' category is intended to subsume most of the GM sector (with the exception of schools which were formerly voluntary aided or controlled). The name, 'foundation', suggests that schools in this category are likely to be identified by the existence of an underlying foundation which is usually enacted in terms of a body of trustees or corporate body that holds property for the purpose of the school. Indeed, some former GM schools do have such a foundation and thus fulfil this requirement of 'foundation' status. However, where such a foundation does not exist, the Act also enables a 'foundation body' to be established in relation to a group of three or more schools to hold property for the purpose of the schools and to appoint foundation governors for the schools. Finally, the Act allows for a third category of 'foundation' school - schools which have no foundation or foundation body. Additionally, all foundation schools and voluntary schools are exempt charities.

Other changes in the organisation of schools

As well as creating new categories of schools, the *School Standards and Framework Act* introduced a number of organisational changes that affect the roles and responsibilities of LEAs, schools and their governing bodies. In the case of the latter, schools that were formerly GM are affected in particular.

In terms of the composition of governing bodies, the Act defines the type and number of governors in each category. All governing bodies include parent, LEA, teacher and staff representatives and, in all categories the parental representation is increased, making it the majority group. Within the new framework, the headteacher is also always an ex officio governor on the governing body of every category of school; co-opted, foundation and

partnership governors then make up the full complement in numbers that vary according to the type of school.

The Act introduces school organisation committees. These are set up by the LEA and have responsibility for planning school places and admissions in the area, thereby removing one level of authority from governing bodies of schools which were formerly GM. Alongside these committees, the Act empowers the Secretary of State to appoint adjudicators - as many as he/she considers appropriate - to act in situations requiring adjudication.

The demise of grant maintained schools

Ever since the Labour Party made it clear that it intended to abolish GM schools on being elected to power there has been much speculation over the future of schools affected. Some time before the 1997 General Election meetings with Jack Straw, the Opposition Spokesman on Education, were being sought by the various GM representative bodies in an attempt to build a relationship with a future Labour Government. However, as the general election approached, the GM sector became openly nervous. On 11 October 1996, the *Times Educational Supplement* (TES) reported that "GM headteachers fear retribution and discrimination from Labour and Liberal Democratic-controlled local authorities if the Conservatives lose the general election" (Rafferty *et al*, 1996). One GM governor was quoted:

Tony Blair may talk about New Labour and Christian socialism but many councils, especially in the North, are entrenched Old Labour with less charitable views and we fear they will act vindictively.

(Rafferty *et al*, 1996)

After the 1997 general election Labour victory concern among the sector turned to job losses. On 30 May 1997, the *TES* reported that, according to the Grant Maintained Schools Advisory Committee, 3000 teachers and around 1100 support staff in GM schools are likely to lose their jobs when the new government abolishes the sector. These redundancies were predicted because GM schools were expected to lose 10 per cent of their funding. However, it seemed that teachers had foreseen this situation. On 17 January 1997, the *TES* reported that “GM staff turnover reaches record high” (Dean, 1997a).

By the end of 1997 the situation appeared to be improving for GM schools. Stephen Byers, then Education Minister, was reported as telling the Industrial Society at its conference that LEA schools would be levelled up, rather than GM schools being levelled down. “We can’t punish the children in these schools for going GM”, he said (Rafferty and Barnard, 1997).

In contrast, a pamphlet published in June 1998 from the Conservative Centre for Policy Studies talks of ‘levelling down’ standards (Williams, 1998). Williams claimed that the *School Standards and Framework Bill* represented “a massive centralisation of powers” to LEAs and the Education Secretary (p.20) and he highlighted the impact on GM schools in terms of their reduced funding and autonomy.

Thus, reaction to, and from within, the GM sector continued as the details of the implementation of the legislation, especially concerning governance, funding and admissions arrangements, were finalised. Furthermore, the nature of the relationships between schools that were GM and their LEAs is still to unfold. This study explores this range of issues with GM headteachers and chairs of governors during the period of uncertainty leading to their school’s change of status.

The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to research the demise of GM schools and to document the last phase of their existence. It is intended that the findings will contribute to the record of evidence about GM schools. This, in itself, is important as the GM experience represents a unique experiment in school autonomy.

The research focuses on the identification and consideration of the issues of concern to GM headteachers and chairs of governors at the time when they are preparing for the transition of their schools to one of the new categories of school defined by the legislation. As mentioned previously, the broad areas of interest within the project are governance, funding, admissions arrangements and relationships with LEAs. These aspects have been selected because, in the case of the first three, they represent the greatest differences former GM schools are likely to experience under the new framework. Indeed, these are the areas which reflected their autonomy under GM status and which will be most significantly affected after the change in their classification.

The study aims to address the following research questions:

- What is the impact of the changes in the composition and powers of governing bodies, including the reduction in first/foundation governors, the inclusion of two LEA governors and the increased representation of parents?
- What is the impact of changes in the funding arrangements for the new foundation and voluntary schools?

- What are the implications of the introduction of new admissions policies for foundation and voluntary schools?
- What is the nature of the relationship between foundation and voluntary schools and LEAs in the light of sometimes hostile and bitter conflict between governing bodies and LEAs during and after their transition to GM status?

Summary

This chapter provides the context for the study as well as exploring the background to the GM policy. Additionally, factual information about GM schools and the 1998 *School Standards and Framework Act* is included. Issues which are likely to be of concern to GM headteachers and chairs of governors under the four headings: governance, funding, admissions and relationships with LEAs, are highlighted and are used to establish the objectives of the study and specific research questions.

The next chapter starts by exploring the literature on the broader concepts of decentralisation, autonomy and accountability before moving on to consider the four major themes of the study in detail.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the nature of the reforms introduced by the Conservative Government in 1988 in its attempt to raise educational standards in England and Wales and make schools more accountable. Various aspects of the management and organisation of schools were decentralised and autonomous, self-managing schools were created. It is pertinent, therefore, in a study of GM schools to engage with the related concepts of decentralisation, autonomy and accountability. As well as exploring the impact of the GM policy on school governance, funding, admissions and links with LEAs, this literature review will set the context by first considering these broader concepts more generally. It begins with an overview of the international dimension of school restructuring.

An international policy development

The restructuring of public education systems across the globe in recent years is well documented in the literature (for example, Ball, 1994; Brown, 1996; Bullock and Thomas, 1997; Lingard *et al*, 1993; Smyth, 1993 and 1996). Although these writers, among others, vary in the ideological perspective they adopt, there is considerable agreement over the economic factors stimulating changes (Levacic, 1995, p.2). Levacic (1995) identifies the main economic factor driving educational reform as "concern about the inability of the country's workforce and management to be internationally competitive" (p.2). This, in turn, has raised issues about standards and accountability (Dimmock, 1993) and has led many governments, particularly those of English-speaking countries, to dismantle their centralised educational bureaucracies

and to create autonomous institutions with various forms of school-based management (Whitty *et al*, 1998).

It was this move towards autonomous institutions that prompted Caldwell and Spinks (1988, p.1) to write their highly-successful book on self-managing schools. Four years later, in the sequel, *Leading the Self-Managing School* (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992), they develop their argument for self-management and claim, with some over-statement, that

everywhere, ... large bureaucracies are collapsing in favour of a shift to self-management" (p.viii). There is evidence of ... change in virtually every nation in the Western world with signs of major change in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States" (p.3-4).

A decade later, Caldwell and Spinks completed the trilogy with *Beyond the Self-managing School*, (Caldwell and Spinks, 1998) the publication of which they describe as "coinciding with a range of initiatives of the Labour Government, one of which is the extension of local management" (p.vii). In their preface they go on to explain that

the self-managing school is a pillar of the education-oriented, standards driven thrust of New Labour (and) the same settlement is likely to occur in other nations (p.vii).

In these books, Caldwell and Spinks present practical advice to school managers and governors about how to achieve effective school-based management. In other words, Caldwell and Spinks identified, and took up, an entrepreneurial opportunity in the form of the internationalisation of school self-management (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988, 1992).

Whitty *et al* (1998) draw on comparative data about educational reform in five countries in order to "illuminate the various ways in which governments in different parts of the world have

attempted to remodel national and local systems of education and to increase the autonomy of individual schools" (p.8).

Other edited volumes are devoted to international comparisons of the restructuring of schools and education (Shapira and Cookson, 1997; Chapman *et al*, 1996). For example, Beare and Boyd (1993) subtitle their edited collection: *An International Perspective on the Movement to Transform the Control and Performance of Schools*. In the introduction, Beare and Boyd suggest that "the fact that school restructuring is an *international* trend should excite our curiosity" (p.2). They go on to set the context of their book by asking "what is driving the movement, why is there such a consistent concern across the globe to improve schooling outcomes and school performance, and who typically are the prime policy actors?" (p.2).

From the literature, it is clear that the restructuring of education through decentralization and self-management can be viewed as a common response to similar problems, or indeed needs, in many countries around the world. Although originally confined to English-speaking countries, Lockheed (1998) argues that the approach is now applied on a broader basis.

Terminology

A cursory glance at the literature relevant to the trio of issues: decentralization, autonomy and accountability, quickly reveals both the complexity and lack of clarity about the concepts. Not only do the meanings of the terms overlap and criss-cross, but there is a proliferation of words associated with the overall concept of educational devolution. For example, in the literature a range of terms are used to describe GM schools: self-governing (Atkinson, 1997; Feintuck, 1994; Halpin, Fitz and Power, 1993), self-managing (Davies and Anderson, 1992; Sherratt,

1994) and autonomous (Bush *et al*, 1993; Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993). Levacic (1995) uses the term 'school-based management' to describe decentralised management in both locally managed schools (LMS) and GM schools because, she claims, the differences between them "remain those of degree" (p.12). While, in their discussion about what can be decentralized at the start of their book, Bullock and Thomas (1997) focus on self-management of schools without reference to the ambiguous nature of the term. Indeed, it is clear that they regard decentralization and self-management as interchangeable: they write "self-management - or decentralization is the language we shall use" (p.7). Brown (1990), similarly, describes school-based management as a "manifestation of decentralization" (p.vii).

Looking internationally, the terminology becomes even more confusing. Symth (1993) talks about the "bewildering array of terms like 'school-based management', 'devolution', 'site-based decision-making' and 'school-centred forms of education'" (p.1) in the introduction to his edited collection on self-managing schools. Whitty *et al* (1998) also comment on the problems in respect to their comparative study. They highlight some of the different meanings that can be associated with just one of these terms, for example school-based management, and point out that some words, like decentralization and deconcentration, are limited in their meaning to "the dominant 'top-down' modes of initiation of many current reforms" (p.10). They conclude that none of the terms "lend themselves to precise definition (p.9) and are "open to semantic slippage" (p.10).

Decentralization

The concept

Decentralization is not a new idea. Interest in it has been evident for many centuries. The longevity of the Roman Empire is usually attributed to its decentralized structure in which significant discretion was given to governors and generals as a way of overcoming the infrequent and unreliable communications (Jay, 1970, p.69 cited in Brown, 1990, p.31-32 but not referenced). In modern times, the idea of decentralization has gained particular prominence in organisational theory from the division of large corporations as a way to make their organisations more manageable. However, the influence of decentralization is not restricted to this one discipline. Along with centralization, it arises in many areas of study such as anthropology, history, philosophy, theology, the social sciences, law and accounting (Brown, 1990, p.32).

In considering what is meant by decentralization, a useful place to start is to adopt a literal approach. Hence, to decentralize means to disperse 'objects' away from the centre. The difficulty is that although a centre can be defined precisely, decentralization, as a process and as a condition of objects being located away from the centre, makes it imprecise and almost ambiguous (Lauglo, 1996, p.19).

In current usage, decentralization is taken to mean a variety of organisational forms. However, the lack of precision in defining the term results from the varying rationales that exist for different structures and in their implications for the distribution of authority to different agencies, groups and stakeholders (Lauglo, 1996, p.20).

The argument used to support the principle of decentralisation generally is that a range of structural arrangements provide varied opportunities for expression and influence by individuals who themselves have different amounts and types of information. It follows that the people with the most relevant and useful information about a particular subject should have the discretion to make decisions about that subject. Hannaway (1993) describes this reasoning as information-based. She draws on empirical research (Jennergren, 1981) which supports this rationale. There is evidence that large organisational size and complex or dynamic technology are factors likely to lead to decentralisation (p.136). However, Hannaway contends that such standard thinking about decentralisation has only limited applicability in education because schools and teachers already have the freedom to use the information they possess constructively in their work. She goes on to argue that decentralisation can have marked effects, both beneficial and deleterious, on how work in education is carried out. However, the effects depend heavily on the particular characteristics of the decentralisation.

Decentralization and centralization

It goes without saying that, in order to decentralize, there must be a centre and, hence, the possibility for organisations to centralize. Brown (1990, p.33) quotes some of the reasons for centralization given by other writers. For example, Brooke (1984, p.170) includes the need for central control, particularly when strategies may not be seen to be in the interest of lower units, as well as lack of confidence. Brown (p.33) comments that this second explanation is similar to Simon's (1957) view that "(centralization) feels safer" (p.235).

Centralization and decentralization are also intrinsically linked through the swings that are observed from one to the other and back (Brown, 1990, p.37). Furthermore, changes between

them are seldom total (Lundgren and Mattsson, 1996, p.141). Caldwell (1993), in discussing the shifting pattern of governance in education internationally, highlights the current trend to centralize in terms of goal setting, establishing priorities and frameworks for accountability and to decentralize authority and responsibility for key functions to school level. He writes about a 'centralization-decentralization continuum' and suggests the shifts in either direction which are occurring simultaneously or in rapid succession are responsible for "much uncertainty" (p.159). This view is also supported by Angus (1993, p.15).

The trend is exemplified in the 1988 ERA through the introduction of the National Curriculum, standardised assessment, LMS and GM schools. As a result of this single piece of legislation, aspects of policy, the curriculum and assessment, were centralized while practice and management responsibility for human and physical resources were decentralized. Although the Conservative Government responsible for ERA promoted the legislation on the basis of autonomy, choice and diversity, in other words, decentralization, the Act did, in fact, centralize many significant powers to the Secretary of State for Education. With respect to ERA, Whitty (1990) takes a particular ideological view and argues that "the rhetoric of decentralization is a cover for centralization" (p.22) while other writers (for example, Thomas, 1993a; Levacic, 1995) also comment on the polarisation of aspects of education policy and practice within the reforms introduced through this Act.

Decentralization and markets

The restructuring of education around the world in recent years is characterised not only by the shift to decentralize systems but also by the introduction of 'markets' within publicly funded

education systems (Levacic, 1995, p.2; Whitty *et al*, 1998, p.3.). For Lauglo (1996), "the market mechanism in education is another form of decentralization" (p.34).

Market advocates, for example Chubb and Moe (1990) and Tooley (1998), argue that the key to improving schools is through the market mechanism in which "consumers influence schools by their choices" (Ranson, 1996, p.216). This creates competition between schools. Good schools prosper and failing schools are forced out of the 'market'. Hence, it is argued the 'market' creates the incentive for school improvement.

Markets, then, are about choice, competition and supply. The term is borrowed from the commercial world and applied there to the exchange of products and services on the assumption that the aim of the supplier is to maximise profits and that of the consumer is to minimise costs.

This means that markets are also about demand and price, terms which create an immediately difficulty when applied to education. The providers, or suppliers, of publicly funded education are not traditionally concerned with 'profit', nor are the schools in question privately owned. Furthermore, total demand at one time is fixed (assuming movement in and out of the private sector is ignored.)

Competition, on the other hand, is also about market share. The 'marketing' of schools in an attempt to attract more pupils and, thereby, maximise its market 'share' has become a standard school management process. Although school managers are not interested in 'profit', the formula-funding mechanisms of LMS are designed to encourage schools to compete for pupils and the funding they bring with them.

Such reforms are not exclusive to education. They are evident in other areas of social policy and "reflect a reconstruction of the public sector" (Lundgren and Mattsson, 1996, p.141). Le Grand and Bartlett (1993) have described these so-called 'markets' as quasi-markets. Their analysis suggests that:

... quasi-markets differ from conventional markets in one or more of three ways: non-profit organisations competing for public contracts, sometimes in competition with for-profit organisations; consumer purchasing power either centralized in a single purchasing agency or allocated to users in the form of vouchers rather than cash; and, in some cases, the consumers represented in the market by agents instead of operating by themselves (p10).

Bullock and Thomas (1997) categorise the 'market' as an allocative mechanism for the way in which society makes decisions about education which is decentralized and self-focused. So both the individual school and the individual parent are free to make decisions about the education they 'supply' or the education they 'purchase' (p.21). In reality, of course, many other factors come into play and schools and parents do not enjoy these 'freedoms'. Gewirtz *et al* (1995) comment that "the education market is intended to be driven by self-interest" (p.2). Human nature being as it is, this in turn raises questions about equity in education markets.

Autonomy

The concept

The Oxford English Dictionary defines autonomy as the "right of self-governance, of making ones own laws and administering ones own affairs". Autonomy is about personal freedom, freedom of will and liberty. In his discussion on the moral limits of the market, McLaughlin (1994, p.156-7) draws on the work of Novak (1991, 1993) and Gray (1992, 1993). A key element in Novak's justification for democratic capitalism is an emphasis on personal autonomy and liberty. Gray also describes autonomy as "one of the vital ingredients of individual well-

being in the modern world" (Gray 1992 p.2) and lists it, along with human solidarity and community, as one of the "animating values" of his "enabling welfare state" (Gray, 1992, p.62).

Dearden (1975) discusses autonomy as an educational ideal. Among his propositions, he argues that autonomy has intrinsic value that is particularly evident within contemporary social life. He describes autonomy as a source of pride, satisfaction and sense of dignity.

The man [sic] is thus engaged in shaping his own life, and to do so in all matters importantly concerning himself can acquire the power and infinite perfectibility of an ideal (p.16).

Although, as Dearden points out, our belief in this as an ideal is just a fact of human nature, the very fact of choosing it as an ideal reinforces our commitment to autonomy.

From a sociological viewpoint, Giddens (1991) draws on the concept of autonomy in relation to the issues of emancipation and politics. He defines emancipatory politics as "a generic outlook concerned above all with liberating individuals and groups from constraints which adversely affect their life chances" (p.210) and goes on to describe autonomy as the "mobilising principle of behaviour behind most versions of emancipatory politics" (p.213). His point is that emancipation - or freedom from exploitation - in the modern era is not absolute. It brings with it responsibility in relation to others and it is this balance between freedom and responsibility which he describes as autonomy of action.

Autonomy in education

The pursuit of autonomy in education is encouraged (Wilson, 1977, p.96). Bush and West-Burnham (1994) highlight the trend:

The shift towards educational autonomy ... reflects the belief that organisations are more effective if they are controlled and managed at institutional level. The trend ... is evident in the incorporation of the former polytechnics and colleges in 1989 (and) the independence of further education colleges from April 1993 (p.1).

Devolution of decision-making or autonomy can be applied at a range of levels in education and, within each level, involve a range of responsibilities. Whitty *et al* (1998) quote from an international study of education decision-making (OECD, 1995, p.32). Four possible levels are distinguished - from central government to school - the intermediate levels are included in order to take into account countries with federal constitutions. However, this model is incomplete in that it fails to acknowledge the possibilities of professional autonomy, that is the autonomy of the individual teacher.

In defining autonomy it is not necessary to be precise about what is being devolved, although it is necessary to be clear about the range of decision-making which could be devolved in order for an education authority, a school, or an individual to be autonomous. Definitive lists are not easily identified in the literature, although the components are evident within the various forms of autonomy applied to school management. Indeed, education authorities, schools, or individuals, could be independent, or autonomous with respect to more or less any aspects of schooling. For example, they could have control over the curriculum, the budget, governance, admissions, assessment and reporting, modes of accountability and/or teachers' pay and conditions.

This study is concerned with school autonomy. Hence, models of devolution at other levels, for example to a local authority or to the individual, are not considered here. The focus is on new forms of self-governance which provide fresh opportunities for decision-making at the level of the school.

Models of autonomous schools

In 1988 the ERA created two types of autonomous schools in England and Wales. On the one hand, the introduction of LMS provided opportunities for all maintained schools to manage aspects of their own affairs, while on the other, self-governance was enabled through GM status.

LMS gives governing bodies of schools that remain with their LEAs increased control over their own budgets and day-to-day management. This is achieved through the delegation of, at least, 85 per cent of the LEA's budget to the schools through a formula which, in itself, determines 80 per cent of each school's budget according to the number and age of its pupils. School governing bodies are responsible for managing the budget as they see fit for the purposes of their particular school.

Additionally, governing bodies of LMS schools also decide how many teachers and ancillary staff to employ and are responsible for appointing, disciplining and dismissing staff. Under LMS, LEAs can no longer appoint headteachers although directors of education can advise governing bodies on the process and practice. Formally, LEAs remain the employers of staff in LMS LEA-maintained schools although, *de facto*, the governing body adopts this role (Whitty *et al*, 1998, p.19; Bullock and Thomas, 1997, p.72).

Formula funding is a key element of LMS. The legislation requires LEAs to devise their formula according to specific rules that are intended to ensure that funding is allocated to meet "the objective needs" of each school. As well as the number and age of pupils' weighting, there is provision for LMS formulae to reflect pupils' special educational needs and the physical characteristics of schools, for example, a split site. These rules prevent individual education officers funding some schools more generously than others (Levacic, 1995, p.8) and allow for economies of scale. At their discretion, LEAs can delegate additional funding to small schools (Bullock and Thomas, 1992).

However, alongside LMS, the ERA also introduced more open enrolment thereby creating a quasi-market in education as discussed earlier (p.29-31). Hence, a school's ability to maintain its finances and staffing is directly linked with parental preference for it. Levacic (1995) comments that "LMS seems to be unique among school-based management schemes in the extent to which it links the school's success in attracting pupils with teachers' job security" (p.10). Her use of the word 'unique' is surprising here. It is assumed that she includes GM as a form of LMS and is comparing the schemes used in England and Wales with those in other countries.

The second type of autonomous school created through the ERA (1988), the GM school, is the focus of this project. More detailed aspects of their governance, funding, admissions arrangements and relationships with LEAs are considered in the second part of this chapter. However, it is important to highlight the fact that the GM schools' policy was planned to relate to LMS. Revenue funding for a GM school was based on the LMS formula of its former LEA, together with an additional allocation to compensate for the LEA's central services that it no

longer received. Furthermore, other reforms introduced through ERA, for example, the introduction of a national curriculum and national assessment, applied equally to all maintained schools. Hence, the autonomy given to GM governors was limited in its scope.

In other parts of the world the principle of school autonomy has been translated into practice using different organisation models. For example, in the United States of America (USA), the charter schools movement represents a 'bottom-up' approach in that it allows a group of teachers, parents or others who share similar educational views and interests to organise and operate a school (Wohlstetter and Anderson 1994).

Wohlstetter *et al* (1995) found that the levels and aspects of autonomy granted to charter schools differs across states. Hence, the schools vary in their ability to innovate and in their potential for improving standards. Wells *et al* (1996) suggest that these differences "reflect the unique political struggles over the meaning of this reform in each state and local community" (p.8). Whitty *et al* (1998) also comment on the problematic nature of generalising about charter school reform but point out that the policy is being taken up in an increasing number of places and has popular support among politicians and many education administrators (p.27).

By contrast, in New Zealand, the Labour government introduced educational reforms in October 1989 which decentralised responsibility for budget allocation, staff employment and educational outcomes from central government and regional educational boards to individual schools. Boards of trustees consisted initially of parents but an opportunity for members of the business community to become involved later were established (Whitty *et al*, 1998, p.21). Whitty *et al* (1998, p.21) suggest that because:

... boards of trustees were given effective control over their enrolment scheme, the New Zealand reforms have ushered in a much more thorough-going experiment in devolution and free parental choice in the public sector than has been the case in England and Wales.

Accountability

What is accountability?

To be accountable is to be open to scrutiny and held responsible, possibly through the application of sanctions, for decisions and actions made on behalf of others. In his definition of accountability, Kogan (1986) describes it as "a condition" applied to "individual role holders" (p.25). It is, therefore, only those people who have the authority, or power, to make such decisions who can be held accountable. In other words, there is a connection between power and accountability. In a democracy, this link is particularly evident for those in public office.

As Ransom and Stewart (1989) argue:

Power is legitimated ... by the consent of the public who have granted authority to elected representatives and officials on the condition that they are to account to the public for their actions (p.18).

Hence, for Feintuck (1994) accountability can be considered as the:

processes whereby those that exercise power are subject to effective scrutiny, and if necessary challenge and sanction, in order to seek to ensure that the exercise of power is within prescribed limits, and within a conception of the public will (p.39).

Sockett (1980) defines the concept of accountability from a viewpoint of obligation. He argues that accountability means there is an obligation to deliver an account as well as being able to do so. The account usually relates to outcomes and results although, in certain professions, it has come to mean responsibility to adherence to codes of practice. For example, in law and medicine, accountability is for due process rather than the results of professional activity.

The main purpose of the process of accountability is to ensure legitimacy and one of the central aspects of accountability relates to establishing which individuals and groups have legitimacy (Bush 1994 p.310). However, accountability is also often taken to be concerned with efficiency in the context of standards achieved (Feintuck, 1994, p.39). Burgess (1992) highlights the different interpretations of accountability. He suggests the problem is not "merely of definition ... (but) rather that accountability can be of many kinds: personal, professional, political, financial, managerial, legal, contractual" and points out that all these kinds of accountability are present in education" (p.5).

Responsiveness and responsibility

A significant strand in the case for educational devolution is the concept of responsiveness. School-based management, it is argued, makes schools more accountable by virtue of making them 'closer' to their constituent users (Whitty *et al*, 1998, p.105). In this sense, accountability is being used to describe the response of the school to its customers: the parents and the local community.

Scott (1989), however, does not accept that responsiveness - and responsibility - are alternative forms of accountability. He contends that:

responsiveness hovers uneasily between the other two . In some senses it is close to accountability, especially if responsiveness is defined in relation to political authority rather than market demand. At other times it is closer to responsibility, because only a responsible institution can be a responsive one (p.13).

Taking the distinction further, Scott describes responsiveness as being "freely arrived at", while "accountability is imposed from outside". He concludes that responsiveness is a "much broader idea" (p.17).

Later, Scott (1989) elaborates his ideas about responsiveness and accountability and identifies what he initially calls 'four aspects of responsiveness'. In fact his model comprises four aspects of a complex concept which combines accountability and responsiveness. Scott justifies this because, he argues, "in the context of education the two must be discussed together" (p.17).

Elliott (1979, p.69) claims that responsiveness is only likely to be acceptable if it results in change. He argues that the audience to whom the institution is accountable is most likely to accept a responsive approach when there is evidence that practices are modified in the light of public discussion. Conversely, the audience must demonstrate "a willingness to use the information provided as a basis for constructive criticism and comments rather than as a basis for legitimating political control" (p.69). The first stages in the development of a responsive approach are inevitably tentative with each party testing out the other to see if it can be trusted.

Kogan (1986) distinguishes between accountability and responsibility in terms of legal and moral obligations. He uses a narrow definition of accountability and describes it as "institutional authority to call an individual or group to account for their actions" (p.26). He contrasts this with responsibility or "a moral sense of duty to perform appropriately" (p.26).

Models of accountability

The differences between responsiveness, responsibility and accountability are then accepted as valid. Turning now to consider models of accountability discussed and adopted in the literature, it is necessary to acknowledge at this point that most often the concepts of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability are, in fact, categorised as one: namely accountability. Hence,

it seems that within the literature the argument about responsiveness, responsibility and accountability moves full circle.

This is true of Kogan's (1986) model. Kogan sets out three ideal typical approaches to accountability which have been employed in public sector education in Britain. His first category describes the traditional political model of public control. It is characterised by its managerial hierarchy and is based around familiar political and legal checks and balances, including aspects of democratic control.

Kogan identifies professional self-control as his second category. This includes peer report on the basis of teachers' adherence to professional norms and values and is similar to the professional responsibility aspect in Scott's (1989) model. Finally, he points towards consumerist models of accountability, based either on partnership between education professionals and lay service-users in active participation, or on quasi market principles (see p. 31).

In considering Kogan's model, it is important to remember that his work was completed prior to ERA in 1988. The enhanced accountability introduced by ERA was largely concerned with increased availability of choice to individual 'consumers' in the form of parents of schoolchildren. Clearly, this form of accountability is a subsection of Kogan's third category (Feintuck, 1994, p.40). Interestingly, Feintuck goes on to argue that market forces have become the primary mechanism for accountability since ERA. In the name of improving educational standards, the market has now replaced community goals as the crucial element in decision-making (p.40).

Macpherson (1996) draws on the typology of perspectives on accountability described by Elmore and Associates (p.141). This typology, in contrast with Kogan's, categorises the concept according to technical, client and professional perspectives. The first approach categorises accountability in terms of purpose. Performance indicators are defined and objective data collected and used to guide planning in the next round. Macpherson suggests quality assurance as a crude example of this type of accountability (p.141).

Accountability through client perspectives, Macpherson's second category, is accomplished through political, market and managerial mechanisms such as clients' governing school policy, competition, external audits and responsive human resource management and development. School development planning, management practices and evaluation driven by a community charter is given as an example of this type of accountability (p.141).

Macpherson's third category, professional perspectives, accomplishes accountability by deconstructing and reconstructing schooling, collaborative planning and co-operative teaching and learning. An example is staff collaborative action research with a focus on 'educational productivity' and learners (p.142).

Decentralization, autonomy, accountability and GM schools

This trio of issues, decentralization, autonomy and accountability, provide, then, the broad context for the GM schools policy in England and Wales. It is against such a background that the Conservative Government created the new school sector in 1988 as part of its strategy to raise educational standards and increase the accountability of maintained schools. However,

these issues are not the main focus of this research project. Therefore, it is necessary to consider other aspects of school organisation and, particularly, how they impinge on the GM sector.

The chapter continues by exploring the literature on school governance, funding, admissions and relationships between GM schools and their former LEAs. These issues are pertinent in respect of the creation of the three new categories of schools and the associated abolition of GM status as legislated in the *Schools Standards and Framework Act*. Each issue is considered separately in the following sections.

The governance of schools

The Conservative Government reforms 1980-1993

In the early 1980s, the formal responsibilities of school governors were relatively ill-defined with the exception that the 1944 Education Act required them to have oversight of the curriculum and the general organisation of the school (Deem *et al*, 1995). Additionally, prior to 1980, many governing bodies were dominated by party political governors (Deem and Brehony, 1994). However, as outlined in chapter 1, the election of a Conservative government to power in 1979 saw the start of a wide ranging strategy of change in education including the reform of the governance of schools.

The 1980 Education Act made parental representation on school governing bodies a legal requirement and, in 1986, the Education (no 2) Act increased the number of parents and co-opted governors, including some from industry. This, in turn, decreased the number of LEA representatives on an individual school governing body. Furthermore, this later Act also gave new responsibilities to governing bodies. These included involvement in headteacher

appointments, the publication of an annual report for parents and the associated meeting to discuss it, taking a decision about whether sex education should be offered, establishing a secular curriculum policy and ensuring that the curriculum is free from political bias.

However, the reforms did not stop here. The 1988 Education Reform Act gave governing bodies in schools with delegated powers responsibility for a range of matters including budgets, staffing, admissions and overseeing the teaching of the National Curriculum. Additionally, it gave governors the right to pursue the route to opting out and the associated powers and responsibilities (see Chapter 1).

Further reform to the governance of state schools followed in 1989, 1991 and 1993. The Education Acts of these years legislated for governing bodies to delegate some of their powers to sub-committees and, in the 1991 Act, introduced a regulation which reduced the number of governing bodies on which an individual governor could serve from four to two. Furthermore, the 1993 Act was intended to enhance the GM sector and bring about its rapid expansion by requiring the governing bodies of all maintained schools to consider 'opting out' as an option for their school annually. Additionally, this Act simplified the process of going GM, offered incorporation to reduce legal liability and introduced new arrangements for funding and organising schools within this sector.

In sum, the changes to school governance in England and Wales during the Conservative Government's period of office can be described as mostly concerned:

... with changing or redrawing the boundaries of those eligible to become governors, with a bias towards parents, business people and community members, and with giving governing bodies increased surveillance powers over headteachers as well as giving them shared responsibilities for delegated budgets and staffing. (Deem *et al*, 1995, p.14)

The role of governors

The legislation and enhanced role of the school governors have, however, not been straightforward in their implementation. Confusion over the role of governors since the 1980s is evident from both the popular educational press and from the academic literature (see, for example, Golby, 1992; Gregory, 1994; Pierson, 1998). The *TES* includes a weekly column in which Joan Sallis answers questions from concerned governors. She highlights the issue in her comment that "most governors who write to me say, in different ways, that they are confused about their role, whether they are in effect supporters, inspectors, ambassadors or go-betweens" (Sallis, 1991, p.217).

Jane Martin, Chair of Action for Governors' Information and Training, also writing in the *TES*, suggests that there is a misinterpretation of roles that can lead to disputes. Martin's view is that "an education cannot just be professionally delivered, for to do so would run the risk of remaining detached from an understanding of the wider public purpose and, moreover, the conditions required to achieve that purpose". She goes on to say that "this is the work of governance" which, she argues "is the domain of agreement about public value, and judgement about public purpose and policy. It is a domain invested with public accountability" (Martin, 1997, p.21).

The *TES* is used yet again by the Chief Executive of the Teacher Training Agency, Anthea Millett, as a platform to promote "an even better governance" (Millett, 1997, p.23). Millett also starts from the basis that governing bodies remain unclear about how to discharge their responsibilities, particularly in terms of the lay/professional boundaries. She goes on to advocate a range of changes in the responsibilities and accountability of governing bodies

which, she argues, are designed to reflect the shift to school improvement through better teaching and enhanced standards and performance of pupils.

Participation

Another feature of the reform of the governance of schools since 1980 is the increased parental and community representation on governing bodies. This change is significant because it raises questions in connections with the availability and motivation of these lay governors.

Brehony (1992) asks: "Who are the governors?" and reports on his own and NFER studies (Keys and Fernandez, 1990) into how representative governing bodies are of the population as a whole, and of the parents of the school. Evidence varies with respect to representation by gender but in all three studies considered, black and Asian governors were under-represented. Additionally, the data from these studies indicate that the majority of governors are from professional and managerial or executive backgrounds. Brehony's research (1992), like the NFER surveys, finds some schools with unfilled governor posts, particularly co-opted categories, although he reports that "the scale of resignations has not reached anything like crisis point" (p.209).

Brehony suggests, however, that the pertinent issue is about the participation - at meetings - of different groups of governors rather than resignations or vacancies. Like Brigley (1990) before, Brehony found parent governors quieter than other governors. He also reports structural divisions excluding certain categories from the debate, for example, women and working class governors on secondary school governing bodies and black governors where they were in the minority. It seems that while the non-participant governors have the formal opportunity to

participate, they do not do so. As Brehony comments "in some cases, this might be explained by the fact that on numerous occasions contributions by women and black governors have been at best ignored and at worst interrupted" (p.210).

Turning to the reasons for governorship, Deem *et al* (1995) identified three types among their sample. For some, being a school governor was not their only experience of voluntary activity in the community. Often but not invariably, people in this group had been elected local politicians or were active members of a political party. For others, being a parent, especially a mother, was the springboard to governorship. Finally, a group of more recently recruited governors came from business and industry and perceived themselves "lending their expertise to schools previously innocent of the world beyond the public sector" (Deem *et al*, 1995, p.3).

From their research into participation in voluntary activities, Lynn and Davis Smith (1991) found that a large number of their sample became involved because the activity was connected with a personal need or interest or one connected with their family or friends (p.82). Although Brehony (1992) did observe some instances of private interests having to do with a governor's child being pursued through the governing body meetings, he adds that such instances are relatively rare (p.211). He also reports that some of the chairpersons in his sample mentioned private interest as their main reason for their initial involvement. However, Brehony found that the main reason for the involvement of the governors in his sample was that they had been asked to become one (p.212). Interestingly, Lynn and Davis Smith (1991) found the same main reason among their volunteers (p.81).

The matter of what is the motivation for lay participation in the governance of schools requires consideration of the nature of citizenship in a democratic society (Deem *et al*, 1995, p.21).

Deem *et al* (1995) identify the key issues in relation to active citizenship and the governance of schools and explore them in detail in their book. In developing their argument, they quote Barker (1994) who contends that:

the politics of citizenship have replaced the politics of social and economic policy. How things get done, and the way in which people take part in their own government, have become as important as the distribution of wealth and opportunity (p.19).

Deem *et al* suggest that this description aptly applies to education in the 1990s (Deem, 1994) and go on question whether "school governors are ... acting as empowered citizens in the community or whether they are merely state volunteers" (p.157). The conclusion they reach from their own research and that of others is that "the exercise of truly democratic citizenship is (not) high on the political agenda in contemporary societies" (p.170).

Lay governance

In addition to issues about the availability and involvement of lay governors, it is also appropriate to consider the nature of the lay governance of schools, particularly in respect of lay-professional relationships.

Prior to the 1980s reforms of English and Welsh governing bodies and the 1988 ERA, lack of control over resources meant that governing body influence and power was largely lodged in the political contacts of governors (Kogan, 1984; Golby and Brigley, 1989). The changes in composition, powers and responsibilities introduced during the 1980s were, in part, designed to depoliticize governing bodies, (Deem *et al*, 1995, p.64; Field, 1993, p.166). However, these

writers suggest that their own research shows that the reality has been that governing bodies may have been depoliticized from party politics but with so many different interests being presented, governing bodies are "intensely political" (Deem *et al*, 1995, p.64).

A partial explanation for this may lie in the fact that, in the main, school governors are not educational professionals. This, in turn, means that, often, the knowledge and understanding they draw on in governing is varied and sometimes lacking in detail. This view is borne out by early research on school governing bodies. Lay governors find many aspects of educational practice difficult to understand or do not have the confidence to involve themselves in professional matter (Bacon, 1978; Kogan, 1984; Golby and Brigley, 1989).

Furthermore, these findings are confirmed by more recent investigations and writings. Field (1993) reports that governors she interviewed referred to themselves as "a bunch of amateurs" and "lacking in expertise" (p.168). She highlights the governors' worries about the relationship between lay and professional issues as being "concerned with potential problems" and sums up their general attitude by quoting the Vice-Chair:

The professionals run the school and the governors bring their outside experience to bear on the partnership. The Head and SMT know what they are doing. It is not the task of the governors to challenge that (p.168).

Booth and Hill (1996) raise questions about the accountability of governors and ask specifically:

"Are governors ungovernable?" These writers also describe the governing body as "made up of amateurs" and "sandwiched between the professionals - the headteacher and the local authority".

This arrangement, they suggest, provides "plenty of room for conflict".

Deem *et al* (1995) consider governor knowledge, both generally and about education. With regard to the latter, they comment on the:

observed, predictable, asymmetry between professional and lay governors in terms of the amount of expert or technical knowledge of education that each possesses ... (which) extends beyond knowledge of a particular school to knowledge of the teaching and learning process.

Indeed, Deem *et al* go on to suggest that, in addition to lack of knowledge about education, governors' values about it may be at odds with those of the professionals. Although, these writers do not suggest this, in itself, is a 'bad' thing, they assert that it is "productive ... of conflict" (p.77).

GM school governors

Confusion about the role - and power - of governors in GM schools is similarly evident. The difficulties came to a head in the early 1990s as a result of the dispute between the headteacher and a group of governors of Stratford School, Newham. Feintuck (1994) documents what he describes as the "greatest tragi-comedy yet played on the GM stage" (p78-82) and suggests that the "Stratford debacle ... raised a central issue in relation to opted-out schools, in asking 'Who runs GM schools?'" (p.80).

Feintuck goes on to explore the various interpretations and explanations of the Stratford saga as reported in the national and specialist media. He concludes that though:

... events at Stratford School in no sense typify the pattern at GM schools as a whole, they do provide a startling example of the potential outcome of power-struggles ... the absence of a clear internal framework of accountability and in the alternative any effective external checks ... required (intervention) by way of the sparingly used general powers under the 1944 Act

(Feintuck, 1994, p.82).

Furthermore, as a result of the events at Stratford School, the Grant Maintained Schools Foundation (GMSF) thought it necessary to initiate the preparation of guidelines on the roles of governors and headteachers in GM schools. In consultation with the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and the Secondary Heads Association (SHA), GMSF set up a working party of heads and governors in 1992 with a brief to examine the relationship between schools governors and heads in GM schools and to prepare guidance (GMSF, 1992).

The various research projects concerned with GM schools in the 1990s generally included consideration of the governance of these schools. Fitz *et al* (1993) report hints in their data that suggest "some headteachers are struggling to come to grips with the new form of governor accountability which their schools' change in status had brought about" (p.67). These researchers go on to argue that "the GM schools policy does not carry with it any overriding commitment to either greater openness or new forms of democratic control of education ... (nor does it) provide a new parents' or governors' charter" (p.68). This contrasts, however, with Deem and Wilkins (1992) who report excellent working relations in one GM school.

Bush *et al* (1993) devote a chapter to the role of GM governors. They point out that GM school governors have additional responsibilities over and above the enhanced role of governors in all schools since the Education Acts of 1986 and 1988 without the 'fall-back' of an LEA. Their research explores the appointment and replacement of governors over time, the organizational models adopted for governance of GM schools, the involvement of governors in policy-making and implementation in schools, examples of interference and conflict as well as governors' accountability. Bush *et al* conclude that the role of governors is:

evolving through the intense activity associated with the establishment of a GM school towards a supportive, enabling and monitoring role as policy becomes implemented ... governors have shown awareness of their answerability to the community through the maintenance of numbers (p. 197-198).

Two years later, Cauldwell and Reid conducted a similar survey to that of Bush *et al* by sending a slightly modified questionnaire to the heads of the first 499 secondary schools to gain GM status. In reporting their findings, Cauldwell and Reid (1996) describe the governing bodies of GM schools as "not only acting in the role of governors but also LEAs" (p. 256). They found that while 79 per cent of the heads who responded felt governor involvement was "just right", 10 per cent felt their governors did not act positively. Furthermore, 9 per cent found it hard to keep existing governors and 21 per cent hard to attract new ones. It is worthy of note that, compared to the other cohorts, Cauldwell and Reid's 'initial schools' cohort - schools that were among the first 100 to opt out and which formed the study group for the project reported by Bush *et al* (1993) - did not find it hard to keep existing governors nor to attract new ones (p.256).

Governance within the new framework

The *Schools Standards and Framework Act* 1998 distinguishes the three categories of schools in terms of the composition of the governing bodies associated with each type of school and, in so doing, lists eight categories of governor. The constitutions of the governing bodies of all three types of school are linked through the inclusion of parent, LEA, teacher and staff representatives. Although the precise number of each type of governor varies according to the category of school and governor, the size of the school, parental representation is increased making them the majority group on the governing bodies of foundation and community schools. Within the new framework, the headteacher also has the right to be an ex officio governor on

the governing body of every category of school; co-opted, foundation and partnership governors then make up the full complement in numbers that vary according to the type of school. The 1998 Act allocates a likely category for all existing schools according to table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Allocation of categories under the new framework

Existing school	Allocated new category
County	Community
Maintained special	Community special
Controlled	Voluntary controlled
Aided	Voluntary aided
Special agreement	Voluntary aided
GM formerly aided	Voluntary aided
GM formerly special agreement	Voluntary aided
GM established by promoters	Voluntary aided
GM formerly county	Foundation
GM formerly controlled	Foundation
GM established by the FAS	Foundation
GM special	Foundation special

Special schools are included here for completion but are not part of this study. The schools in the first column are defined according to the Education Act 1996.

In the case of GM schools, the allocation is indicative. The governing body of each existing GM school was required to make a 'preliminary decision' on whether to accept the school's allocation as set out in the table or to opt for their school to be allocated to a different category. The governors were then obliged to notify their decision to the parents of the pupils on the

school's register, the chief education officer of the LEA for the area in which the school is situated and, in the case of a church school, the appropriate diocesan authority or any person holding land on trust for the purposes of the school. A group of parents, equal in number to at least 20 per cent of the number of pupils on the school's register, were then able to petition the school to ballot the parents on the question of which category the school should be allocated to. The governors were required to instruct a ballot administration company to arrange a secret ballot of parents and, as long as more than 50 per cent of those eligible to vote did so, and that, from the votes cast, there was a simply majority in favour of a particular category, then the school was classified accordingly. In situations where there was no parental ballot, the governing body of the school made their 'final decision' within a set time limit.

Hackett (1997) highlights the fact that this opportunity for the governors and parents of GM schools to determine the category of their school within the new framework afforded them 'special treatment'. All other schools were notified as to their new classification, either community or voluntary, and have to stay in that category for at least a year. However, at the time Hackett was writing, the DfEE had still to publish the Code of Practice on Admissions and details about funding, hence, as she points out, a the final verdict on whether the system is fair has to be delayed.

The funding of schools

The background

Since the late 1920s maintained schools in England and Wales have been funded from local taxation channelled through the LEA (Barber, 1994). However, for many years now the government has supplemented these locally raised taxes with centrally administered grants.

Indeed, Adkins (1996) comments that, at the time of writing, grants from central government funded over 80 per cent of local authority spending. Moreover, since 1984 the government has sought to limit the amounts raised by local authorities through local taxation by using a "capping" mechanism that progressively withdraws central grant as the amount raised locally increases beyond a government-imposed target. Both the government grant and the assessment of targets are calculated using a methodology known as the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA).

Prior to the introduction of LMS and GM status in 1988, funding mechanisms for schools in an area were based on LEA decisions about the level of finance required for a whole range of real resources that were then allocated separately. The Council and its education and finance committees would determine the pupil/teacher ratio, the level of support staff, equipment budgets and the level of capitation allocated for books and materials. In addition, these methods were supplemented by discretionary funding allocated by LEA officers and advisers in response to requests from headteachers and governing bodies (Coleman *et al*, 1994, p.19).

Stewart (1992) describes how this process operated in the county of Kent:

Broadly speaking a school had a budget based on what it had, over time, negotiated and established for itself by trading with, and persuading of, the LEA to recognise and provide extra resources for its individual needs. Of particular significance was the provision of 'discretionary staffing' in response to special pleading ... Discretionary staff were originally additional to entitlement and were provided for special reasons. With the passage of time they became accepted as the norm in that they were employed on the same basis as other staff.

(Stewart, 1992, p.12)

Hence, these historic patterns of incremental resource allocation, based on political choices at the discretion of LEA staff, perpetuated inequalities among schools (Coleman *et al*, 1994, p.19).

Funding under LMS

Alongside the introduction of LMS, the 1988 ERA introduced formula funding in place of the subjective processes described in the previous section. This funding mechanism requires LEAs to determine spending on schools by a formula which is then applied equally to each institution; thereby removing the subjectivity of the historical process. In its 1994 LMS Circular, the Department for Education (DfE) stated the purpose of formula funding as "to bring about an equitable allocation of resources between schools, based on objectively-measured needs rather than historical spending patterns" (DfE, 1994, p.7). Furthermore, the statement goes on to add "within each LEA, schools with the same characteristics and the same number of pupils should receive the same level of resources under the formula" (DfE, 1994, p.7).

Under LMS, LEAs are required to determine the funding formula within the limits of the total amount of funding available for schools. However, as stated in the previous section, the latter is controlled by central government through the SSA mechanism whereby each LEA is allocated a SSA for each primary and secondary school pupil. Although the SSAs do not determine the overall budget, as government grants for education are based on them, they are very influential in determining an LEA's overall budget for education (Bush, 1997). Bush comments:

SSAs enable central government to maintain significant control of public expenditure while leaving schools to determine the allocation of budgets and to deal with the consequences of cuts in funding (p.12).

In addition to these controls, LEAs are also required by the DfEE to allocate 80 per cent of the aggregate schools budget (ASB) - the total money delegated by a LEA to its mainstream schools - on the basis of pupil numbers weighted by age. Thus the scope for LEA judgement in designing the formula is further limited and competition between schools is introduced. Popular schools benefit by receiving more funding which can then be used to enhance resources and

improve teaching and learning while, in contrast, less favoured schools lose income and are forced to reduce resources including staff. Hence, although the application of formula funding is designed to be objective, its construction is not value-free (Thomas, 1993b, p.17).

Levacic (1989) highlights the impact of formula funding on LEAs which can "no longer use detailed control of school ... resources as the means of implementing their educational policies, they need to design the resource allocation formula so that it reflects, as far as possible within the DES guidelines, their educational policies" (p.137). Thomas and Bullock (1992) agree and elaborate on what is possible in practice:

Despite the Government's policy-driven guidelines, LEAs are still able to devise LM schemes which, to an extent, reflect their judgements of local need. A consequence of LM, however, is that this diversity becomes more visible (pp 217 and 223).

Funding GM schools

It was intended that GM schools would be funded on a par with LEA schools. Indeed, the ERA 1988 provided for the same funding formula as that used by each school's former LEA to be applied, together with an additional amount to compensate for the LEA services which GM schools did not receive. This allocation was recouped from the LEA's revenue grant. Over and above this, each GM school was able to bid for funds for major capital development and received a formula funded allocation for minor works. Other grants were available to meet the initial costs of GM status, to cover insurance costs and for staff development purposes.

However, as Levacic (1995, p.10) points out, the complexity of LEA funding formulae made it difficult to apply them on exactly the same basis, or to ascertain for each LEA the appropriate allocation for central services. Additionally, the government was faced with the dilemma about

the growing costs of opting out. On the one hand, they were anxious to maintain the financial attractions associated with GM status in order to encourage more schools to opt out while, on the other, there was growing concern from the Treasury about the need to control the overall cost of the policy (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p.105-6). For all these reasons, in 1993, a common funding formula (CFF) to be applied initially to some GM schools, was introduced as part of the Education Act of that year.

Despite what its name may imply, the CFF was not a national formula. It was tied to the government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) which itself is based on pupil numbers and other social factors. Travers (1993) points out that, by basing the CFF on the SSA, the government was, effectively, reproducing the differences in resourcing in GM schools across the country. Levacic (1995) goes further and states:

The government has boxed itself into an increasingly complex funding mess with respect to GM schools, by insisting that GM schools must not be funded worse as a consequence of going grant-maintained, and that spending increases must be constrained. It has thus been impossible to achieve the government's stated aim of a simple and transparent funding formula which lay people can understand (p.11).

Furthermore, after a pilot phase in which the CFF was tested in five LEAs, the 1993 legislation provided for it to be applied only in LEAs where the number of pupils attending GM schools had reached a certain level. Hence, when the Labour Party came to power in 1997 only 47 per cent of GM schools in 31 LEA areas were funded through the CFF.

Fair funding

Alongside the introduction of the new arrangements for the organisation of schools, the *School Standards and Framework Act* 1988 also required local education authorities to prepare

schemes for funding maintained schools, including GM schools, based on the new system. The latter is known officially as devolved funding but generally referred to by the title of the consultation document 'fair funding'. The scheme replaced funding under LMS and the CFF and came into effect from April 1999.

The fair funding consultation document set out seven principles for the changes;

- Raising standards in schools
- Self-management for schools
- Clear accountability of both LEA and school
- Transparency of school finances
- Opportunity for schools to take greater responsibility for management decisions if they want this
- Equity between the new categories of foundation, voluntary and community schools
- Value for money for schools and LEAs

(DfEE, 1998, p.8)

Furthermore, it stresses the increased level of financial delegation and, indeed, describes a "100% delegation" model "designed to allocate funds in a way which adequately reflects the respective roles of LEAs and schools" (DfEE, 1998, p.1). Those for LEAs are classified under four main headings: strategic management, access (planning of school places, admissions, transport etc.), school improvement and special educational provision although, if a large majority of schools vote for it, there is also the provision for an LEA to retain funding and provide particular services.

The paper goes on to identify the difficulties with the arrangements for delegated budgets under LMS and begins with transparency. The problems as seen by New Labour here are that:

... over the years, a system of almost Byzantine complexity has built up. The series of acronyms is bewildering and daunting. Different LEAs appear to classify similar expenditure under different headings, making comparison between authorities very difficult. It remains far harder than it should be for heads, teachers, governors and parents to understand the reasoning behind their budget allocation as opposed to what other schools get and what LEAs retain. This lack of transparency can only hinder the crusade to drive up standards.

(DfEE, 1998, p.6)

The second difficulty concerns value for money. In particular, the paper suggests that the present arrangements do not put sufficient pressure on LEAs to obtain value for money on its expenditure. There is suspicion that relevant expenditure can be “hidden” in obscure parts of the authority’s budget and LEA expenditure has not been submitted to any of the ‘four Cs’ outlined in the Prime Minister’s paper on local government - comparison, competition, consultation or challenge.

Accountability is another concern, particularly with respect to division of responsibility between school and LEA under LMS. The Government view is that, at present: “LEAs are left in the position where their critics can credit them for none of the successes in the education system and blame them for all the failures” (DfEE, 1998, p.7). The fair funding scheme is intended to sharpen lines of accountability.

Finally, there is concern that all these problems are compounded by the fact that:

previous policy on school structure led to a two-tier system in which GM schools enjoyed more generous funding than the schools that chose to remain within the LEA orbit (DfEE, 1998, p.7).

The local partnership arrangements between schools and LEAs, and the opportunity for greater delegation to all schools under the new framework, are designed to remove the two-tier system. However, despite the 100 per cent delegation argument and the fact that the Government have instigated traditional arrangements for GM schools up until 1999-2000, it is evident that there is concern among these schools that the level of their funding will diminish under the new framework. Dean (1998) reports on the implications of becoming a foundation school for Kendrick School in Reading, the top performing state school in the country. According to Dean, “financially the future of the school is far more uncertain than when it went GM”. Although the school can make up to £30,000 on lettings, it has no savings and more than 80 per cent of its £1.8 million annual budget is accounted for by staff costs. She quotes the Chair of Governors as saying “We need every £1,000 that can be negotiated out of the situation”.

Slater (1998) describes similar concern among managers and governors of a comprehensive GM school in Surrey. According to Fullbrook School’s Finance Manager, as a GM school, it has been used to annual spending of around £50,000 on building repairs yet the local authority had already indicated that, under the new arrangements, the annual budget figure for this category was likely be about £15,000. The Finance Manager explained that even after exercising severe cut-back, the school had allocated £25,000 for building repairs in the previous year.

School admissions

The introduction of open enrolment and parental choice

In addition to LMS, the 1988 ERA also introduced open enrolment as a decentralizing measure.

School catchment areas were abolished and LEAs lost their power to restrict admissions to schools in pursuit of policy aims, or in response to demographic changes. After 1988, schools

were required to admit up to their physical capacity. Thus, LEAs could no longer restrict admissions to 'popular' schools in order to ensure admission levels at less favoured schools, or to plan admissions in the interests of economic or educational efficiency (Feintuck, 1994). Lawton (1992) agrees and describes open enrolment as "a blatantly consumerist ploy subordinating LEA regard for overall efficiency and economy" (p.51).

Open enrolment formed a significant part of the Conservative Government's plans to create a 'market' in education as a strategy for school improvement and raising standards. Hence, alongside open enrolment, parental choice was also necessary. This second concept was not new. The idea of the state providing parents with vouchers which enabled them to purchase education up to a set value either at state or private schools, and hence make choices about their child's education, can be traced back to the mid-1950s (Chitty, 1989). Over the years, a voucher scheme to enable parental choice was picked up by various politicians and, in the late 1980s, the concept of the market underlying the voucher schemes was the focus of the right-wing pressure groups and 'think tanks' (Feintuck, 1994, p.46). Although not taken up as such, Chitty (1989) suggests that, in reality, the ERA brought about the incorporation of the voucher into public education, "under a different name" in the form of open enrolment and LMS.

GM schools and admissions arrangements

In seeking GM status, the governors were required to provide details of the admission policy as part of their proposals to the Secretary of State. In line with other aspects of the proposals, the admissions policy was either accepted or modifications required before approval was granted. As with all schools, GM schools were required to follow the DfE's advice on admissions that states:

Admission authorities must say clearly how schools will decide between applicants if they are oversubscribed. In particular, an admission policy should give parents a good idea of their chances of success if they choose to apply to a popular school.

(DfE, 1992b, p.7)

Additionally, in the early days of the GM policy at least, there appeared to be no intention by the government that schools seeking GM status should use it as an opportunity to change the nature of their entry. The 1988 ERA made it clear that admissions arrangements for GM schools "will have to be consistent with the previous character of the school" (DES, 1988, p.18). Moreover, a circular published in the same year stated that there should be no applications for change of character within five years of a school acquiring GM status (DES, 1988). However, as the five-year rule did not appear in the ERA and, therefore, could be changed without legislation, it had a short shelf life. In May 1991, the then Secretary of State, Kenneth Clarke, made it clear that he was willing to consider proposals for a change in character after any sensible period of time (*Education*, 3 May 1991).

Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993) cite this change in the arrangements governing GM schools as an example of what they call "a policy in motion" (p.31). Talking about the situation at the time they were writing, they argue that dropping the five year rule is just one way in which:

...the policy has changed from originally providing a framework to enable schools to opt out to one in which schools are now actively encouraged to seek GM status ... the principle of parity of ... esteem has been abandoned to the point where government is now committed to GM status as the predominant model of education governance and provision

(Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, pp 31-32)

So, on becoming a GM school, the governors were responsible for implementing the admissions policy "without fear or favour" (Page, 1992, p.88). Hence, in addition to the annual publication of the policy, the governors were required to establish a committee to hear appeals and deal with exclusions. Page (1992) comments that, at the time he was writing, this was likely to be a new

activity for most governors and advocates training for governors sitting on an appeals panel. He goes on to describe the approach adopted by the GM governing body of which he was chair which included the constitution of an admissions sub-committee and three appeals panels which were monitored for consistency and fairness.

In reacting to the various aspects of the GM policy, Rogers (1992, p.380) highlights the greater level of control over admissions which GM schools exert compared with LEA schools in that the appeals panel of the former only requires an independent element while the latter's are entirely independent.

Evidence from more recent research conducted by Mayet (1997, pp.166-177), on behalf of the Society of Education Officers, makes a number of claims about the impact of GM schools on LEA admissions and appeals arrangements in its conclusions. First, parents find the need to duplicate applications confusing and the lack of freely available information from GM schools further obfuscates the picture. Second, parents are impeded in their right to exercise choice due to lack of accountability of GM schools and in gaining fair access to appeals hearings. Third, "the lack of synchronisation and transparency in GM areas is a major problem for parents and local authorities which are left picking up the pieces and not always able to do so adequately"(p. 176). Finally, in areas where there are GM schools, the picture regarding how many parents receive their first preference is unclear. This last point is supported by Jowett (1995) to some extent. From his study of the allocation of secondary places, Jowett concluded that, although very hard evidence was difficult to produce, it did seem that the government's claim of increased parental choice was hard to support.

GM schools and the selection of pupils

Concern about the possibility of a two-tier system of state schooling emerging as a result of the GM policy was evident from the start. Bush *et al* (1993) flag up the common perception that GM schools that are not already grammar schools could become selective either by a change of character or by adopting covert selection practices (p.88). Indeed, their own research finding supports this view. 30 per cent of the comprehensive schools responding to their survey were discriminating amongst applicants on the basis of interviews, reports or examinations (p.95).

The Bristol Polytechnic Education Study Group (in Bash and Coulby, 1989) raise the matter of 'selection by the back door' emerging as a result of open enrolment, parental choice and other policies introduced through ERA. They go on to connect this with a possible furthering of racial segregation.

The issue of equality of opportunity has also been tested as a result of opting out and parental choice (*Equal Opportunities Commission v Birmingham City Council*, The Times, 1992). When the majority of grammar schools in Birmingham became grant maintained, the opportunity for girls as well as boys to have equal access to grammar school education was raised. After lengthy litigation between the City Council and the Equal Opportunities Commission, it was decided that the LEA remained responsible for such provision despite the fact that the local authority had no control over admissions to the GM grammar schools.

However, both West and Pennell (1997) and Bush *et al*, (1993) highlight the fact that selection by ability is not confined to the GM sector nor did it originate with the policy of opting out. Bush *et al* go on to point out that the practice of covert 'selection' has always been evident

among voluntary schools, particularly church schools. In their sample of 14 comprehensive GM schools engaged in covert selections, eight were formerly voluntary schools and three were church schools. West *et al* (1998) list a selection of admissions criteria from different GM schools and comment that “some ... are clearly not equitable in that they allow for social selection and others lack transparency” (p.190).

New arrangements for school admissions

The *School Standards and Framework Act* 1998 requires the Secretary of State to issue a Code of Practice in respect of the discharge of school admission functions by LEAs, the governing bodies of maintained schools, admissions appeal panels and the Adjudicator. Accordingly, such a Code was published in early 1999 (DfEE, 1999b) to take effect from 1 April 1999 and to apply to arrangements that lead to primary and secondary intakes from September 2000 onwards. It provides guidelines on aims, objectives and general guidance which each of the bodies listed above must have regard to in its provisions. A separate Code of Practice on admissions appeals is due to be published.

In his introduction to the published Code, David Blunkett describes the desire to achieve balance in the guidance in order that admissions arrangements provide, on the one hand, meaningful choice for parents and, on the other, maximum efficiency, as a particularly difficult task. He also states that he is “not in favour of any further selection based on academic ability at whatever age of entry”. In his final paragraph, the Secretary of State lists “co-operation rather than conflict, linking schools in partnership together and with the wider community” among the government’s goals.

The Code itself emphasises the importance of “making admissions easier for parents” (p.3) and improving local arrangements. Moreover, among the aims for those drawing up the arrangements, is one of ensuring that the latter contribute to improving standards for all pupils. The Code also gives details about the new Admissions Forums that LEAs, together with other school admissions authorities, are required to set up as well as outlining the role of the adjudicators who the Secretary of State is empowered to appoint through the 1998 Act.

LEA and GM school relations

Reasons for opting out

Among the reasons given for opting out, the nature of the school's relationship with its former LEA prior to seeking GM status was significant (Bush *et al*, 1993, p.70). GM schools were critical of the way LEAs operated which was perceived as "overly bureaucratic and politically motivated" (Davies and Anderson, 1992, p.5). They were anxious to free themselves from "local political interference, ... LEA inertia, ... LEA bureaucracy" (Sherratt, 1994, p.2).

This concern is exemplified by a comment made by Birmingham GM headteacher, Roger Perks.

In an article by Lightfoot (1992), Perks is quoted: "Frankly, I don't think Birmingham City Council has any education policies. It just doesn't seem to see education as a high priority."

Furthermore, another Birmingham headteacher, Cecil Knight, alleged that his school was neglected by the LEA:

What price educational opportunities when your pupils are being denied adequate teaching, books and equipment and being put at risk by falling plaster, penetrating rainwater and soggy wiring? ... Frankly we were tired of listening to ceaseless litanies of 'it can't be done' and 'don't blame us, blame the government' from politicians and occasionally from officers.

(Knight, 1992, p.27)

From their survey among GM school representatives, Bush *et al* (1993) found there was also "a general feeling of discontent with LEA services and a belief that the school could operate more effectively alone" (p.70). They describe a group of GM heads in their survey as "visionary ... who saw independence from the LEA as a means of achieving their objectives for the school" (p.71).

Avoiding closure or reorganisation are further reasons given by schools for opting out. It is clear that the provision of the GM option provided a lifeline for some schools and did little for their relationship with their former LEA. An example of a deteriorating relationship between a school and its LEA as a result of proposed reorganisation is provided by Deem and Davies (1991). These writers were the Chair of Governors and Co-director of Stantonbury Campus in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire and they link their decision to seek GM status to the county council's recommendation to introduce selective education in Milton Keynes. They write:

By September [1989] we found ourselves in a deteriorating, hostile environment with more and more of our time being devoted to defending Stantonbury against an increasingly antagonistic LEA. It was at this point that we embarked upon the GM process (p.15).

Opting out from the LEA's viewpoint

The GM option aroused fierce opposition from a number of directions, not least from local education authorities (Bush *et al*, 1993, p.4). This is exemplified by the following comment from the Council of Local Education Authorities (CLEA):

The fundamental issue is whether schools should belong to the whole community and be accountable to its elected representatives or be put in the hands of a small, transient clique of activist parents.

(CLEA, 1987, p.9)

Bush *et al* (1993) highlight the tensions created by GM status for Conservative controlled local authority bodies. Although they did not wish to be seen as opposing government policy, they also wanted to retain 'their' schools. Hence, as these writers point out, comments from LEA representatives were sometimes muted (p.5).

Moreover, Halpin *et al* (1993) found GM status had significant impact on LEA strategic plans:

Many local authorities' reorganisation plans have been either abandoned or temporarily shelved pending further discussion in the wake of schools electing to want to opt out ... This outcome was reported by almost two-thirds of our LEA respondents (p.23).

GM schools and the LEA getting along together

Once GM schools had become a reality, the LEA and the schools themselves each had to decide on the line they would take with the other. Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993 p.56) report that some of the Labour-controlled LEAs in their survey were determined to keep any GM schools within 'their' area at arms length. However, like Bush *et al* (1993), they also found the attitude among many LEA officers who they interviewed was one of pragmatism.

The majority were anxious to develop positive relations with 'their' GM schools. Moreover, such relations were being fostered regardless of the political colour of the LEAs concerned (p.57).

On another occasion, the same writers illustrate this point with the following quotation from an LEA officer:

There will come a point when there will take place some form of reassessment of the relationships between an LEA and its LMS and GM schools ... To both kinds of schools we would be saying we would like them to move to a more federal arrangement with the LEA in which we were at the centre but not at the top.

(Halpin *et al*, 1991, p.241)

From the schools' point of view, Bush *et al* (1993) report their survey evidence concerning the percentage of schools buying back a range of services from their former LEA. From their more recent research, Cauldwell and Reid report one GM headteacher in an area where nearly all the schools had opted out as stating:

Relationships between all schools are MUCH closer and more co-operative than ever before. The schools relate to each other directly, headteachers meet and plan regularly and are more open with each other on an equal professional basis without the involvement of the LEA. ... We live in a "post-LEA" world.

(Cauldwell and Reid, 1996, pp254-255)

New guidance on LEA-school relations

In addition to the Code of Practice on school admissions, the *School Standards and Framework Act* 1998 requires the Secretary of State to issue a Code of Practice offering practical guidance for securing effective relationships between LEAs and schools. Accordingly, this was issued by the Department for Education and Employment in 1999 (DfEE, 1999a).

In its *preface*, the status and purpose of the Code are outlined and, with regard to the former, the statutory nature of the document is emphasised. The purpose starts from the premise of the government's top priority of raising standards of education and goes on to set this intention within the dual context of school autonomy matched by accountability. It states:

Schools should be able to make their own decisions about the way they operate...But that autonomy has to be matched by accountability. Schools cannot demand autonomy as of right, irrespective of their performance...So the Government is seeking to build the necessary checks and balances into the system. The role assigned to LEAs is central to achieving this...Developing such relationships between LEAs

and schools requires skill, sensitivity, goodwill and a common understanding of roles and objectives (p.2).

Hence, it seems that the government's approach is to acknowledge that there have been difficulties in LEA-school relations in the past and to endeavour to prevent similar problems in the future.

Summary

This chapter has set out the background and context for the study. The backdrop has been created through the exploration of three broad issues: decentralization, autonomy and accountability, together with an overview of the international dimension of school restructuring.

The review then focused on GM schools and four specific areas of concern to their managers and governors as these schools prepared for incorporation within New Labour's framework for the organisation of schools.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS OF ENQUIRY

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the research methods used in the study. It starts by considering methodological issues of importance to the social science researcher and, in general terms, the research methods available to her. Mason's (1996) five questions about the essence of an enquiry are explored and applied to this project. The design is then explained and the use of semi-structured interviews and a self-completed questionnaire is justified. Finally, the details of the samples and the practical implementation of the two stages of the project are discussed.

Categorising research methods

At a simplistic level, the research methods used for social enquiry can be divided into two categories: quantitative and qualitative. The data generated may be labelled similarly. However, the most superficial investigation of the literature immediate reveals that the theory is far more complex than suggested by such categorisation and, indeed, different writers use different terms and approaches. Robson (1993) highlights the complications of carrying out a social science enquiry and comments that "there is no overall consensus about how to conceptualise the doing of research" (p.18). He suggests there are two traditions which, he says, "continue to engage in sporadic warfare" (p.18). Robson goes on to find problems in applying the traditional models of research to real world enquiry and explains that the confusion is aggravated by the various labels attached: 'positivist', 'natural-science based', 'hypothetico-deductive', 'quantitative' or even 'scientific' to one tradition while the other has been termed 'interpretative', 'ethnographic' or 'qualitative'. However, regardless of the complexity, the need to interpret, select and apply models and methods is unavoidable. Hence, in order to provide a

context, a sample of these classifications will now be considered, starting with the straightforward quantitative/qualitative approach to methodological categorisation.

As the name suggests, quantitative methods are concerned with quantity and use some sort of measure to estimate the number, size or portion of the attribute being studied. Johnson describes quantitative research as "interested in aggregating data, most of which are assigned numerical values" (Johnson, 1994, p.6). Moreover, in their preface, Bryman and Cramer (1990) state that they prefer the term 'quantitative data analysis' to 'statistics' (p.xiii), thereby suggesting that the two are analogous. Later, they explain this preference as being based on the former's emphasis on the "understanding and analysis of data rather than on the precise nature of the statistical techniques themselves" (p.1).

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is much more difficult to define and there is no consensus on whether it can, or should, be differentiated from quantitative research (Mason, 1996, p.3). Hence, the inadequacy of the quantitative/qualitative division is immediately evident. Johnson (1994, p.7), however, does adopt the classification and describes qualitative research as being "interested in the complexities of human decision-making and behaviour". She highlights the two distinct schools of thought which, traditionally, have been used by researchers. According to Johnson, quantitative - or, in her terms, 'positivist' - research follows the scientific mode while qualitative - or 'relativist' - research is based on the assumption that all human life is experience and constructed from a subjective viewpoint. "Social research should seek to elicit the 'meaning' of events and phenomena from the point of view of participants" (Johnson, 1994, p.7).

Cohen and Manion (1994) also identify two competing views that they attribute to opposing conceptions of social reality. The established, traditional view holds that the social sciences are essentially the same as the natural sciences and are, therefore, concerned with discovering natural and universal laws that regulate and determine individual and social behaviour. In other words, a social reality exists and can be researched empirically. The other, more recently emerging radical view emphasises how people differ from inanimate natural phenomena, and from each other. This implies that it is the subjective experience and perception of the individual that give meaning to the social world and explains human behaviour. Cohen and Manion describe the former as the objectivist, or positivist, approach and the latter as subjectivist, or anti-positivist.

They go on to apply these broad concepts to methods and methodology in educational research and identify two different approaches to the study of human behaviour: normative and interpretive methods. The first of these is characterised by its concern with society and the social system and a desire to explain behaviour or seek causes. Under this approach the research is conducted from 'the outside', the 'taken for granted' is assumed and generalisations are made from the specific. In contrast, interpretive methods focus on the individual and understanding actions and meanings rather than causes. Using this method the researcher is personally involved, investigates the 'taken for granted' and interprets the specifics. Cohen and Manion (1994, p.39) classify the normative and interpretive approaches as objectivist and subjectivist respectfully.

Along similar lines, Silverman (1993) discusses the two 'schools' of social science which are associated with very different versions of research. In common with most other writers he

equates the positivist approach with research into social structure and social facts and quantitative hypothesis-testing. He describes the other 'school' as interpretive social science interested in social construction and meanings and using qualitative hypothesis-generation. For Silverman, relativism is a factor affecting the public esteem of the sociological culture because "if you are looking at the ways in which things operate differently in different milieux, you tend to get into a position where it is difficult to take a stand on anything because everything is relative to its particular context" (p.181). He advocates that:

relativist sociology needs to think about how it can present its findings in a way that will seem relevant to people who turn to social science with a naive belief in progress and an absolute version of the role of science (p.181).

Describing the characteristics of research, Usher (1996) highlights the fact that data on their own are not of much use. His point is that they only become significant when analysed in some way (p.10). Usher also points to two epistemologies - or methods of distinguishing different kinds of knowledge - appropriate in social and educational research: positivism and interpretivism. Like others (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Robson, 1993), he associates the former with the "discourse of science". It describes, explains and generalises the data and is concerned with prediction and control. The latter, however, focuses on interpretation, meaning and illumination (p.18).

However, in practice the various approaches are rarely mutually exclusive and social science researchers are likely to adapt the theory according to the nature of the project being investigated. This point is made by Miles and Huberman (1994) who discuss the spectrum of classifications and comment: "We believe that all of us - realists, interpretivists, critical theorists - are closer to the center, with multiple overlaps." (p.5). Hence, researchers appropriately focus

on the design of the project rather than the precise types of research methods they intend to adopt. In the next section, the design is considered.

Designing a research project

Before undertaking any research it is obvious that a number of decisions need to be made. These include the general area of the topic as well as the research questions and specific issues such as the methodology and the particular methods to be used. Silverman (1993) discusses the difference between research topics and, what he calls, 'social problems'. The latter, he suggests, are at the heart of political debate and fill the more serious newspapers" (p.3). They include topics like unemployment, homelessness and racism. Silverman's point is that, although important in their own right, 'social problems', by themselves, cannot provide a researchable topic. By considering different research methods, Silverman goes on to demonstrate how a 'social problem' perspective can be avoided by exploring with participants how they attach meaning to their activities and 'problems'. In Silverman's view this is the distinctive form of qualitative research analysis.

Mason (1996) tackles the issue of a researchable approach to a topic from a list of five questions - all of which she describes as "difficult" (p.10). First, she asks about the "nature of the phenomena, or entities, or social 'reality'" that are being considered for investigation (p.11). Mason suggests the answer to this question defines the 'ontological' position of the researcher although she acknowledges that ontology itself is a difficult concept to grasp because "the nature and essence of social things seem so fundamental and obvious that it is hard to see what there is to conceptualise" (p.11). In an attempt to develop understanding, she lists alternative ontological positions, for example, "people, social actors; attitudes, beliefs and views; bodies,

subjects, objects; words, codes, communications, languages" (p.11). Mason points out that parts of one ontological position cannot be mixed with those of another as different versions may be logically competing rather than complementary.

The second question is epistemological and is about the theory of knowledge. It concerns the principles and rules which are used to decide whether, and how, social phenomena can be known and how knowledge can be demonstrated. Mason's third question looks more like the usual starting point for a research project: "What topic, or broad substantive area, is the research concerned with?" (p.13). From here, she moves on to her fourth question about what it is that the researcher is trying to explain. In other words, what are the research questions? Mason advises that the answer to this question needs to connect with those of the other three. Finally, she asks: "What is the purpose of the research?".

Mason's point in asking these questions is to "encourage ... a researcher to interrogate his/her own assumptions, to systematize them and, possibly, to transform them" (p.10) at the early stage of an enquiry. She explains that all of this is necessary because many researchers find it difficult to articulate the essence of their enquiry. She suggests that, by using such questions as the framework for developing their understanding of the nature of the enquiry, researchers are more likely to produce "a good, and useful, research design" (p.10). However, Mason also points out that it is unlikely that any researcher would produce "a research design that provides a clearly formulated set of answers to each of these five questions" (p.10).

Johnson (1994) makes a related point when she comments about "the extent to which any research project can mirror the 'best practice' models of research" (p.69). In line with Silvey

(1975), she confirms that, even as an experienced researcher, her research designs always represent a compromise. The same point is spelt out by de Vaus (1986):

The course that a piece of research takes will be peculiar to that piece of research: it is affected by the research topic, the technique of data collection, the experience and personality of the researcher, the 'politics of the research', the types of people being studied, funding and so on (p.9).

The authenticity of educational research

Before moving on to consider the nature of this project in detail, it is important to give consideration to ways in which the authenticity and quality of educational research are established. Easterby-Smith *et al* (1994) illustrate the main approach to this by highlighting the question which always needs to be asked by researchers: "Will the research stand up to outside scrutiny and will anyone believe what I am saying about it?" (p.89).

One important way to ensure a positive answer is given to this question is through the application of the process known as triangulation. This technique involves comparing different sources of evidence in order to determine the accuracy, or *validity*, of the information or phenomena. Sapsford and Evans (1984) define validity as "the extent to which an indicator is a measure of what the researcher wishes to measure" (p.259) while Nisbet and Watt (1984) illustrate the concept of triangulation in respect of case study research:

In order to guard against being misled, either in interview or by documents, you must check one informant against another, and test what they say against any documents which exist. Similarly, observations in one context must be checked against others in comparable situations (p.85).

The term 'triangulation' is derived from the concept of 'fixing' a physical spot by measuring it from at least two markers. Hence, it is applied analogously in social research by using multiple and different sources, methods, investigators or theories (Denzin, 1988) in order to get a better

estimate of 'the' answer and improve validity. Anderson (1998) argues that "with proper triangulation it will be difficult to refute conclusions which follow logically from multiple data sources" (p.150). Based on Denzin's typology (1970), Cohen and Manion (1994) identify two types of triangulation used in research: the application of the same method on different occasions and the use of different methods on the same object of study. Interestingly, however, these authors note that "only a minority (of researchers) use (triangulation) in practice" (p.233).

Scott (1996), however, identifies two problems with Denzin's typology. The first focuses on the use of triangulated methods which, necessarily, demand that like is compared with like. He points out that "researchers do not and cannot triangulate at the same moment, so that comparison is made between perceptions, conceptions and descriptions of evolving structures at different times" (p. 151). Scott's second problem is with the use of the triangulation of methods because, in his view, this is only possible if the method is independent from the data it generates. He argues that this lack of a relationship "can only be sustained within the framework of a realist's ontology" (p.151).

The authenticity of educational research is also established through the *reliability* of the data. This term is concerned with consistency and relates to the probability of achieving the same results if the research technique is re-applied. Bell (1987) defines reliability as:

the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions ... A factual question which may produce one type of answer on one occasion but a different one on another is ... unreliable (pp.50-51)

Hence, it is evident that unless a measure is reliable, it can not be valid although the opposite does not follow: a reliable test is not necessarily valid (Robson, 1993, p.67). This link

between reliability and validity is developed in terms of quantitative and qualitative measures by

Aspinwall *et al* (1994) who comment that:

quantitative indicators are often more reliable than more qualitative ones [but] their reliability may be bought at the expense of their validity (p.218).

The problem here is that the use of the quantitative/qualitative distinction opens, once again, the difficulties of classification. On the assumption that most educational researchers come to the field “with ‘quantitative heads’”, Ely *et al* (1991) argue that:

while issues about reliability and validity apply to both quantitative and qualitative work, they are conceived of and arrived at in different ways. When people inclined towards viewing the world with quantitative lenses recognise this fact and begin to understand the routes to doing acceptable research in that paradigm, it is often an intense and poignant event (p.94).

Drawing on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1989), Ely *et al* (1991) prefer to use terms such as trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability or authenticity criteria (p.95). However, they also acknowledge that not all qualitative researchers agree with this approach, for example, Fetterman (1989), Goetz and LeCompte (1984), Miles and Huberman (1984). However, whatever terms are used, the importance of ensuring authenticity of research remains paramount (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 277).

The nature of this enquiry

Although the purpose and aims of this study were stated in chapter 1, it is appropriate to revisit them within the context of the research methodology.

The purpose of this study is to research the demise of GM schools and to document the last phase of their existence. The research focuses on the identification and consideration of the

issues of concern to GM headteachers and chairs of governors at the time when they are preparing for the transition of their schools to one of the new categories of school as defined by the new framework.

The specific research questions are:

- What is the impact of the changes in the composition and powers of governing bodies, including the reduction in first/foundation governors, the inclusion of two LEA governors and the increased representation of parents?;
- What is the impact of changes in the funding arrangements for the new foundation and voluntary schools?;
- What are the implications of the introduction of new admissions policies for foundation and voluntary schools?;
- What is the nature of the relationship between foundation and voluntary schools and LEAs in the light of sometimes hostile and bitter conflict between governing bodies and LEAs during and after their transition to GM status?

The views, ideas and perceptions of the GM headteachers and chairs of governors are, therefore, the main point of this project. Hence, it is vital that the methods adopted enable these to emerge.

Applying Mason's questions to this study

Bearing in mind Johnson's point about research design always being a compromise, it is still useful to consider Mason's (1996) five questions as they apply to this study. Starting with the ontological perspective, for the purpose of this project the researcher is interested in

investigating the thoughts, interpretations, attitudes and beliefs about the social 'reality' of GM schools. From Mason's viewpoint, it is argued that the views, attitudes and interpretations drawn from people associated with GM schools represent an epistemological interpretation of what might represent evidence of the issues under investigation.

Before considering Mason's third question, the issue of data sources is addressed. Mason (1996, pp.36-8) asks the reader to consider what data sources might be used. She provides a list of possible answers which includes 'aspects' of people as specific sources, for example, people's interpretations, opinions, understandings, ideas and so on. Hence, the choice of 'aspects' of GM school headteachers and chairs of governors is justified on the basis that, ontologically, it is these aspects that are of interest to the researcher and, epistemologically, these same aspects represent the researcher's view of how the social reality of GM schools is known.

Mason (1996, pp.37-8) raises two other questions about the sources of data: the practicalities and ethics of using them. In this study, it is self evident that the sources exist and, as each person is free to decide whether or not to participate, ethically, the sources can not be challenged.

Turning now to Mason's third question, the topic of this study has been addressed in chapter one and in the previous section. In brief, this project is concerned with the issues of interest and concern to headteachers and chairs of governors of GM schools at the time when the demise of this category of school was inevitable. The research questions focus on matters of governance, funding, admissions and the relationships between the schools and 'their' LEAs.

Finally, addressing the question about the purpose of the study, as stated earlier, it is intended that the outcomes will contribute to the body of knowledge about school autonomy generally and GM schools in particular. At the time of the creation of GM schools in the late 1980s they represented a radical change in the governance and management of schools. Thus, although the policy was unpopular among educationalists and researchers generally, there are lessons to be learned that can be applied on a broader basis. Furthermore, the future of GM schools as foundation, voluntary or even community schools is significant and worthy of in-depth research. Therefore, the findings from this study could be important in informing further enquiry into any relationship between self-managing schools and school effectiveness.

The design of the study

Having considered the nature of the investigation and possible data sources, the researcher decides on the specific ways in which data will be generated. The key features of the enquiry as well as the data sources suggest the survey approach as an appropriate starting point for the study. Indeed, it is frequently used as the means of generating data in educational research. However, before exploring surveys as a research method, three alternative approaches: documentary analysis, observation and respondent diaries, will be considered.

The generation of data from studying relevant documents has many practical and ethical advantages. For example, it is unobtrusive, cheap and, in the main, the documents are unaffected by the process which means that the data can be subject to re-analysis if necessary (Robson, 1993, p.280). Also, documentary analysis may be used both quantitatively and qualitatively (Bell *et al*, 1984, p.23). However, in this project it was unlikely that there would be more than minimum reference to the issues of interest in school documentation because the

nature of the latter was developmental. The information, the legislation and the actual plans were changing throughout the research period. However, it is important to note that documents emanating from government departments, mainly the DfEE, were used to provide evidence.

Observation offers another alternative approach for generating data. Of the two types: participant and non-participant observation, it is self-evident that for practical and ethical reasons the first would not have been possible. With regard to the second type, the reasons for its lack of applicability are similar to those for documentary analysis. It is likely that the issues in question would have been discussed only occasionally and would be subject to the evolving nature of the information available.

The third and final alternative approach considered here is the respondent diary. Robson (1993) describes diaries as “tantalizingly attractive because they appear, on the surface, to provide the means of generating very substantial amounts of data with minimal amount of effort of the part of the enquirer” (p.254). However, he also warns against the degree of responsibility diaries place on the respondents in terms of commitment, interpretation, or indeed, the dangers of mis-reporting. For these reasons, respondent diaries were considered inappropriate for this project.

Surveys as a research method

Surveys feature in most discussions in the literature about research methods. Indeed, many writers highlight their popularity (Blaxter *et al*, 1996; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Hopkins, 1993; Johnson, 1994). Robson (1993) suggests that “you will have to have led a very hermit-like existence not to have been asked to take part in some form of survey” (p.121). Moreover, he

claims that landmarks of the survey can be found in the Domesday Book as well as in evidence of attempts to assess the effects of the plague of London in the seventeenth century.

Johnson (1994) defines survey activities in general as “eliciting equivalent information from an identified population” (p.13). She then explores the technique in more detail through reference to keywords from the definition. These are italicised for clarity in the following example. Johnson suggests *information* may be “straightforward ‘facts’, attitudes or opinions” although she goes on to caution against using a survey to seek views on the future; instead data need to be set in the context of “at the time of the survey” (p.13). Johnson asserts that *eliciting* “implies something more proactive than just ‘collecting’ information” and “because *equivalent information* is needed, the survey questions are standardised” (p.14).

The issue of the reliability of survey research is raised by Sapsford and Evans (1984). The nature of survey research, particularly in terms of the fact that the researcher is not always present when the data is generated, means that considerable emphasis is given to the standardisation of the measuring instrument and the reliability of the data collection techniques. Hence, the instrument design and testing, for example, through piloting, are vital components for establishing reliability.

May (1997) discusses the variation in the nature and purpose of surveys. They can range from small surveys of (say) two hundred of people with a purpose of investigating housing needs in a locality to large-scale national surveys involving several thousand people and documenting British social life in general (p.82). However, whatever their purpose, complexity or scope, surveys require a research tool such as an interview, a questionnaire, a test of attainment or an

attitude scale to generate the data (May, 1997; Johnson, 1994). In this project, data were generated using two different research tools: interviews and questionnaires. Their selection is justified in the following section.

The research instruments: interviews and questionnaires

Focusing, first, on interviews, most writers agree that it is a popular, if not always well used, research technique - or tool (Anderson, 1990; Wragg, 1994). Wellington (1996 p.21) suggests it is "one of the most rewarding and potentially informative ways of carrying out small scale research". Ackroyd and Hughes (1992) comment "there must be few people in modern industrial societies who have not taken part in an interview for a social survey" (p.101).

While Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p.135) go further and suggest "most of us have conducted interviews". These writers describe an interview as a "purposeful conversation" (p.135) which, as a definition, is generally accepted (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992; Burgess, 1984; Johnson, 1994; May, 1997). However, the term 'purposeful' in itself requires consideration.

Cohen and Manion (1994, p.272) identify three purposes; to gather information connected with the research objectives, to test hypotheses and to check reliability when used in conjunction with other methods in a research undertaking. Picking up the first of these, Ackroyd and Hughes (1992) point out that:

A great deal of valuable work has been carried out on the interview itself. In the past, the interview tended to be regarded as simply a means of collecting factual information from respondents ... Today, however, there is a much greater realisation that the quality of the data is important to their precision and quantification (p.101).

There are three main types of interview used by those people Delamont describes as 'qualitative' researchers (Delamont 1992):

The first is done while observation is going on, when quick questions are put to the informants about what is happening ... there is the more formal interview, perhaps tape recorded, where a check list of questions is covered ... there is the life history interview, which may take repeated visits and many hours (p.108).

Although the interviews used in this study fall into the second category, the 'formal' description is not accepted.

Wellington (1996, p.26) also categorises the styles of interviewing in three ways: unstructured, semi-structured and structured. Variations in style depend on a range of factors, for example, the extent to which the agenda is predetermined and the ease of analysis sought. Furthermore, the degree of control exerted by the interviewer and the level of flexibility s/he required also produce differences between the three types of interview.

In this study the use of interviews is justified as follows. The ontological position described earlier suggests that it is meaningful to seek people's views, knowledge, interpretations and understanding in relation to the research questions. Furthermore, a straightforward way to generate data on these properties is to interact with people by talking with, and listening to, them. With regard to the use of semi-structured interviews, this style provided the necessary balance between ensuring the pertinent issues were addressed, and enabling the interviewees to raise related matters of interest to their school rather than be restricted by a structured approach (Drever, 1995 p.13). As the interviews formed the pilot study within the enquiry, it was important that there was flexibility within them while, at the same time, it was necessary for them to cover the issues identified within the aims of the study.

Turning now to the second research tool, the self-completed questionnaire, as stated previously, data generated from the interviews were used to inform the preparation of the questionnaire and the latter was piloted among the interviewees. Furthermore, the use of two approaches addressed the issue of triangulation and provided a check on the reliability and validity of the data.

Questionnaires, like interviews, are used commonly in social research (Cohen and Manion, 1994 p.83; Robson, 1993 p.125). Furthermore, they also enable the researcher to elicit information from a selected sample. However, as Johnson (1994) highlights, there is a fundamental difference between the two in that the questionnaire “is in the hands of the respondent ... (while) an interview schedule, which may be similar in format ... remains in the hand of the interviewer” (p.37). The implication of this is that the questionnaire empowers the respondent in that, usually, he or she can decide whether or not to complete all or some of it and, if relevant, the way in which he or she will tackle it (Johnson, 1994).

While Robson (1993) describes self-completed questionnaires as “very efficient in terms of researcher time and effort” (p.243) he also warns that they may present difficulties. He suggests the data are “necessarily superficial (as) there is little or no check on the honesty or seriousness of responses” and “while analysis may be easy, interpretation can be problematic”. However, there is evidence that Robson finds some merit in questionnaires as he provides guidance on how to increase the likelihood of obtaining a high response rate.

Youngman (1994) links the reliability and validity of questionnaires. He suggests that findings should be compared with other sources and respondents questioned directly to investigate

whether personal responses match previous answers (p.263). He is also very sceptical about face validity, saying that it is “more often than not a euphemism for doing nothing” (p.263).

This section has focused on the broad design of the study. The planning and implementation of the two stages of the research are now considered.

The interviews

Designing the schedule

In this study, the nature of the data sought from, and, the primary purpose of, the interviews were such that, in the main, open-ended questions were the most appropriate. The interviews were concerned with exploring views and perceptions about government policy in the making with a view to using the outcomes to inform the next part of the project. Hence, the interviews were exploratory and linked to the questionnaire stage. Ackroyd and Hughes (1992, p.106) comment that: "open-ended questions are best used...in exploratory surveys."

Wellington (1996) discusses factors affecting quality in the data generated from interviews and suggests ambiguity in questions is a major source of error. Anderson (1990) identifies five types of questions to avoid which include leading questions while Delamont (1992) provides guidance on the length of an (unstructured) interview which, she suggests, usually lasts between forty minutes and one hour.

Particular attention was given to these factors in preparing the schedule for this project and drafts were amended after trailing it with a colleague. The final version of the schedule used is given in appendix 1.

Identifying the sample

The factors that influenced selection of the sample in this project were of two types. First, it was necessary to ensure the sample complemented the purpose of the project, that is, to generate data connected with the research questions. Second, there were a number of more practical issues to take into account.

With regard to the first group of factors, headteachers and chairs of governors were identified as the groups from which the interviewees would be selected. By nature of their positions, these are the people most able to comment on the management and governance of their schools. In describing the nature of their sample, Bush *et al* (1993) justify their choice of respondent:

The power and responsibility of the headteacher in the management of the school made it essential that his or her views were included, whilst the heavy responsibility laid on the governors of GM schools necessitated canvassing the views of the chair of governors (p.16).

Furthermore, in an attempt to reflect the sector as a whole, it was decided to involve secondary, middle and primary GM schools and that interviews would only be followed through if both the headteacher and chair of governors of each school agreed to participate. In selecting the actual schools, attempts were made to cover as many of the following school characteristics as possible:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| * formerly voluntary aided | * formerly voluntary controlled |
| * Anglican | * Roman Catholic |
| * grammar/selection | * single sex |
| * comprehensive | * new unitary authority |
| * small in terms of pupils on roll | |

These characteristics were identified as those most likely to impinge upon the new framework for the organisation of schools as proposed in the White Paper (DfEE, 1997).

Additionally, interview schools were chosen from the list of those that had been incorporated as GM in 1992. By selecting schools opting out in this particular year, it meant that the sample schools had all achieved autonomous status within a limited time period and thus it was more likely that their experiences in dealing with the DfEE, the FAS, their own LEA and other agencies were similar. Also, within the time-frame, the period between the introduction of GM status in 1989 and the calendar year 1992 was sufficient that it was reasonable to assume that the initial difficulties concerning the policy would have declined or been eliminated. Finally, it was an election year and the political advocates of GM status were returned to power.

With regard to the more practical reasons for the selection of the sample, time and financial resources were limited. Hence, attempts were made to find schools as near as possible to the starting point for journeys to them. Furthermore, as the researcher had some personal association with headteachers and chairs of governors of GM schools, attempts were made to exploit these contacts in cases that satisfied the other criteria.

Further decisions that were influenced by both factors relating to the purpose of the study and those of a more practical nature were concerned with the sample size and primary/middle/secondary split. In an attempt to obtain an appropriate balance, a sample of six schools and twelve interviews was decided. The sector as a whole was modelled by including two primary, one middle deemed secondary and three secondary schools.

All the identified characteristics, with one exception, were satisfied; a formerly voluntary controlled school was not among the sample. Moreover, the selected group included a two schools with technology college status, one of which is also a community school. Six different local authorities were represented; one of the schools is situated within the boundaries of a unitary council that came into being in April 1998. Finally, in order to satisfy the small school criterion, it was necessary to include one school that had opted out in 1993.

Obtaining access

Initial contact was made with each school by telephoning the headteacher. Ackroyd and Hughes (1992 p.108) describe this initial contact as "crucial" but point out that appointments made by telephone are "relatively easy to refuse or break". The same writers also emphasise the importance of academic researchers quickly establishing their credentials. During this initial conversation the researcher introduced herself, explained the purpose of the study and requested separate interviews with the headteacher and chair of governors. She also indicated that each interview was likely to take up to one hour.

Headteachers who agreed to participate were asked for advice about contacting the Chair of Governors of the school and arrangements for the interview. At this stage copies of the school prospectus, a recent Ofsted report and other general information about the school were requested. Where necessary the researcher made separate contact with the Chair of Governors by telephone and/or letter. Letters were sent to each interviewee confirming the arrangements.

As mentioned previously, the researcher was already acquainted with some of the people invited to participate in the interviews. In fact, one headteacher and one chair of governors (from a different school) were personally known to the researcher and she was known to each of them. Additionally, as it worked out, the researcher was also known by another headteacher and there were connections with yet another head and a second chair of governors.

Two headteachers declined the invitation to participate in the research. Both were in the primary sector and the reasons given were unconnected with the project. In fact, one head explained that she had taken over as acting headteacher just two weeks earlier. Additionally, her chair of governors had only taken up office very recently. She explained that she preferred not to participate "due to lack of experience". The other head was willing to participate but only if the interview could be delayed until December 1997, after the school's Ofsted inspection.

Conducting the interviews and analysing the data

All the interviews were conducted in September and October 1997 at times to suit the interviewees. Most interviews took place in the participant's school, either in the headteacher's office or another suitable room. Two interviews, with chairs of governors, were conducted in offices at the interviewee's place of work. Apart from the interviewer and the interviewee, no one else was present at any of the interviews.

Before starting each interview, the researcher established a rapport with the interviewee by explaining the nature of the research and its part in her studies for the degree of Doctor of Education. Each person was given reassurance that their anonymity and that of the school

would be preserved. Permission was also sought at this stage to record the interview and, in all cases, it was granted.

The recording of each interview was transcribed by the researcher and, eventually, the set of twelve transcripts were analysed by her. The latter was achieved by identifying themes running through the discussions and then physically cutting up the transcripts and re-grouping the cuttings according to the themes. By comparing and contrasting comments within a theme, the interpretation of the data was developed.

The questionnaire survey

Designing the questionnaire

The set of twelve interviews formed the pilot phase of the project and the outcomes from it were used to inform the next stage of the project. Hence, the questionnaire was designed on the basis of the interview schedule and the interviewees' comments. Additionally, it was necessary to ensure that details were amended as changes were made in the way the legislation was being drafted and, eventually, implemented. For example, the name of one of the categories of school in the new framework changed from aided to voluntary between the interview period and the time the questionnaire was piloted. (There were also a number of organisational details about aided/voluntary schools that changed at this time.)

There is much advice in the literature about both the type, and wording, of questions as well as the layout and administration of a questionnaire (Blaxter *et al*, 1996; Cohen and Manion, 1993; Johnson, 1994; Robson, 1993; Youngman, 1994). Most writers comment that, as questionnaires are widely used, there is a belief, at least among inexperienced researchers, that they are easy to

design and produce suitable data without too much trouble. This fallacy is corrected by the same writers. Davidson (1970) compares an ideal questionnaire to a good law emphasising the need for the design to “minimise potential errors from respondents ... and coders”.

Youngman (1994) draws the reader's attention to the difference between factual questions and those that seek opinions. Factual questions can usually be dealt with by asking the respondent to tick a box or answer yes/no. However, he warns that although a question may be factual in theory, in practice it may not be so. In designing the questionnaire for this study the writer decided not to offer a range of options for the age range of pupils in the school but, instead, to ask the respondent to state it. This was because there are many variations in the age ranges within schools.

The problem of using open questions is also raised by many writers (Blaxter *et al*, 1996; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Robson, 1993). Youngman (1994) suggests that, to some extent, the use of open questions should not be an issue at the stage of designing the questionnaire because, "in opting for a questionnaire rather than an interview approach, the assumption must be that the *bulk* of the information to be collected is accessible via structured questions" (p.250).

The design of the questionnaire used in this enquiry included mainly closed questions that required either a yes/no answer or selecting answers from a range of options. However, most of these closed questions were followed up by another question that asked respondents to explain their previous answer. The questions were also framed to ensure that they were not ambiguous or imprecise and were kept simple. Furthermore, much effort was made to draft the questions so that they did not presume a particular response. For example, the issue about relationships

between GM schools and their former LEAs is sensitive and questions on this topic were prepared from a neutral viewpoint rather than on the assumption that these relationships were, or are, negative.

The presentation and length of the questionnaire were also matters considered seriously. The questions were grouped into sections and numbered accordingly. Brief information about the nature of the questions in each section was provided for the respondents in the introductory paragraphs. Turning to the length of the questionnaire, in total it covers 12 sides of A4 paper with adequate, although not extensive, spaces left for the respondents' explanations and answers. It was reproduced in a format using only one side of the paper in order to ease of completion while at the same time providing additional space for fuller answers should respondents wish to provide them. Two different coloured sets of questionnaires were produced and used to distinguish those sent to headteachers from those used by chair of governor respondents.

Finally, at the end of the questionnaire, the respondents were given the choice of either returning it anonymously or providing their name and school although confidentiality was assured. They were also offered the chance to receive an abstract of the findings in due course.

Piloting the questionnaire

According to Johnson (1994) "questionnaires are a research tool which perhaps more than any other need a pilot run" (p.39). In the context of smaller scale pilot studies, she highlights the fact that Bush *et al* (1993) were able to fine-tune their questionnaire on the basis of an analysis of the questionnaires completed by the twelve pilot respondents, together with the notes about the questionnaire itself that were invited from the pilot group (p.40).

In this study, the questionnaire was piloted with the headteachers and chairs of governors from the same six GM schools involved in the interview stage. It was intended that the twelve respondents would, in fact, be the twelve interviewees. However, it turned out that one of the headteacher interviewees had taken early retirement at Easter 1998. His replacement completed the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was distributed among the twelve pilot respondents in early May 1998, together with a covering letter and stamped addressed envelope. Individual questionnaires were coded to identify their respondent. Immediately after the deadline date, a follow-up letter, another copy of the questionnaire and a second stamped addressed envelope were sent to members of the pilot sample who had not responded to the first mailing. All the headteachers and all but one chair of governors returned a completed questionnaire. This represents a 92 per cent response rate.

Minor changes were made to the questionnaire as a result of piloting it. For example, the list of school characteristics was rearranged to aid completion and the question about the new category of school was amended to agree with changes in the drafting of the legislation. It was also noted that pilot study respondents provided little clarification in their answers to closed questions; many left these spaces blank. Two possible, related explanations are offered although neither have any bearing on the likely response to requests for clarification from members of main survey sample. One explanation is that the questions asked covered the same range of topics and details as those used in the interview schedule, so that, the pilot study respondents had already explored these issues in conversation with the researcher. Furthermore, at the time the

questionnaire was piloted, hardly any new information about the organisation and governance of schools within the new framework was available compared with what was known at the time of the interviews. Hence, these respondents had little new to say. More recently, consultation documents on funding, admissions and the arrangements for change of status for GM schools have been published by the DfEE. Therefore, this aspect of the questionnaire was not altered on the basis that main study respondents would be in a position to offer more information. A copy of the final version of the questionnaire is provided in appendix 2.

The final sample

For reasons similar to those given for selecting interview schools that had been incorporated as GM in 1992 (see pp. 89-91), schools identified for the questionnaire survey sample had opted out in either 1991 or 1993. In this way they were linked to the interview schools by virtue of having opted out in a similar period. Additionally, 1991 was the first year that primary schools joined the sector. Furthermore, this sample comprises schools that had opted out prior to, and immediately after, the 1992 General Election. Hence, comparatively, the informants in the sample represent those schools which had sought GM status at a time of uncertainty and those who had the knowledge that a Conservative Government was likely to be in power for the next five years. In fact, 1993 was the year in which the largest number of schools achieved GM status.

The sample size was decided on the basis that it was unlikely that all questionnaires would be returned. Thus, in order to ensure a suitable number of questionnaires for analysis, the sample size was inflated. Originally, the intention was to identify samples of 100 headteachers and 100 chairs of governors with 50 in each group being selected from those schools that had opted out

in 1991 and the remaining 50 in each group from schools in the 1993 category. However, reference to the precise numbers for 1991 revealed that five primary and 53 secondary schools had gained GM status in that year. Hence, it was appropriate to include all 58 schools in the sample.

The 1993 sample consists of 68 schools made up of 20 primary and 48 secondary schools selected at random from the two sectors. (In selecting the sample from both years, middle schools were classified as primary or secondary according to how they are deemed.) The ratio between primary and secondary schools was calculated from the actual numbers opting out in this year: 125 primary and 293 secondary schools. These figures were reduced to 5:11.8 and the ratio was then approximated to 5:12. A multiplier of four was then applied in order to produce a sample of similar size to, but slightly larger than, that adopted for the 1991 schools. Hence, the survey sample consisted of 126 headteachers and 126 chairs of governors from 126 schools.

Administering and analysing the questionnaire survey

The questionnaires (see appendix 2 for a copy of the instrument) were posted separately to individual members of the sample, together with a covering letter (see appendix 3), in late September 1998. The questionnaires were numbered in order to enable the researcher to follow-up non-returns soon after 21 October 1998, the date by which returns were requested. This second mailing was achieved on 28 October 1998. With a few exceptions, sample members from whom a completed questionnaire had not been received by 28 October 1998 were each sent another copy of the questionnaire together with a different covering letter. The exceptions comprised the headteachers and chairs of governors of one secondary and one primary school. In case of the former, the headteacher had indicated that they did not have time for the task

while a letter from the (seconded and acting) headteacher of the latter explained that completing the questionnaire would not be “conducive at this present time as the school is under special measures”.

After the second mailing four further letters were received in connection with non-returns. Two headteachers explained that pressure of work prevented them participating in the survey, one chair of governors wrote that “the headmaster has already completed one and I would wish this to suffice” and one headteacher’s secretary noted that the headteacher was unable to help as she had only been in post for 6/7 weeks and this was her first experience of a GM school. 76 completed questionnaires were returned by headteachers and 45 by chairs of governors. A further two questionnaires, originally sent to chairs of governors, were returned having been completed by the clerk to the governors; these were not included in the analysis. Hence, the overall rate of return (of useful questionnaires) was 48 per cent.

Summary

This chapter has described the research design of this enquiry. In order to justify the latter, it began by considering methodological issues of significance to such a study, including the complexity of categorising research methods. Mason’s (1996) five questions about the essence of an enquiry are explored generally and then applied to this project. The details of the design, the sample and practical implementation of the two stages of the study are considered.

CHAPTER 4: THE PILOT STUDY INTERVIEWS

Contextual matters

There are a number of contextual matters that need to be borne in mind when considering the data generated by the pilot interviews. First, there was only limited information available - to anyone - at the time the interviews were conducted during September and October 1997. The main sources available to the informants were the White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997a) and the technical paper (DfEE, 1997b) that went with it. These had been published in July and August 1997, respectively. This meant that, for some interviewees, there had only been time for individual study of the documents and no opportunity for consultation within the community of the school, or beyond. Indeed, a few chairs of governors expressed some initial concern about how helpful they could be in contributing to this pilot study.

Second, the new school year brought with it the usual range of pressures, both internal and external, on each school. For example, both the primary schools involved were inspected by Ofsted in September 1997 and one of them had very recently heard from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) that their plan to build larger premises had been turned down (O'Leary 1997). This was despite an agreed sale for the existing school, fund raising which had secured half the £750,000 costs and detailed negotiations with the Funding Agency for Schools (FAS). One school was located in an area which was to become a unitary authority from April 1998 and the headteacher of another school had retired somewhat unexpectedly at the end of the previous term in July 1997. The Deputy had been acting headteacher although he was appointed to the post the day before the interview in October 1997.

Third, two of the headteachers interviewed were active within the GM movement. One was Secretary of the Association of Catholic GM Schools and another was involved in the Association of Headteachers of GM Schools. The former had met with DfEE officials and the latter with the Minister for Education, Stephen Byers since the start of the new academic year.

The consequences of GM status

It is not surprising that all informants talked about positive aspects of opting out in their responses to the question about the consequences of GM status. In framing their answers, there seemed to be no thoughts about less advantageous consequences. One chair of governors immediately started talking about the 'benefits' and, when corrected by the interviewer, still pursued the 'benefits' argument. He began his answer now as "the good consequences ...". Similarly, one headteacher started by saying "a whole range of improvements have been made..."

Just one informant took a slightly different approach in part of his response. He started by talking about his own "sense of responsibility". He commented that:

This may sound an odd place to start, but I think it hits you as the headteacher. You have no back up. You are responsible for everything that goes on. So the consequences are managing everything rather than in the traditional sense of (just) managing the learning and the teachers.

This headteacher went on to pick up the 'benefits' approach by continuing: "I believe there is a real benefit for the pupils because ... you've only got yourself to blame (if things go wrong)".

Among the other replies there were examples of specific ways in which individual schools had improved physical and human resources as well as broader gains in terms of management

practices. While all of the latter were presented as advantageous to the individual school, some were perceived as beneficial to GM schools on a more general basis. Furthermore, the comments from the headteachers and the chairs of governors were generally complementary and there were no contradictions within the responses from any one school.

In terms of benefits to individual schools, the opportunity to bid for capital grants was highlighted. However, it is interesting to note that all interviewees who mentioned the bidding process in relation to capital grants went on to talk about what they had been able to achieve as a consequence of a successful application. Not surprisingly, there was no mention of any unsuccessful bids. The chair of governors of one of the formerly voluntary aided schools emphasised the benefits for the school of direct bidding for grants. She commented:

because we are able to bid for ourselves, not through the Diocese and the local authority, our bids have been accepted for their worth...The last time we put in a bid when we were still with the authority, we were bottom of the local authority's priority and bottom of the Diocese's priority.

In one primary school both the headteacher and the chair of governors talked about the opportunity to open a nursery department as part of their school. This was a development they had wanted for some time but, in their perception at least, when they were an LEA school, the local authority had blocked the initiative. The head of this school also spoke about how, as a consequence of GM status, they had invested in learning support assistants. He went on to link this directly with pupil learning by explaining that this 'consequence' had enabled the school to target the teaching of reading.

One chair of governors talked about the enhanced quantity and quality of the information made available to governors as a result of the school being GM and, like other informants, added:

"We are able to be more in control now". Others spoke of financial independence. For one chair the consequences of GM status were "the things that are less easy to measure". For example, he highlighted the attitudes and responsibility of the governing body and explained that "from (the time we achieved) GM status, people have owned (the school)". He described the role of the governing body before the school opted out as an "overseeing, policing role ... whereas now it is much more of a partnership". It seems that this last informant made a connection between GM status and the level of accountability demonstrated by the school.

Reasons for seeking GM status

A number of informants interpreted the question about the consequences of GM status in terms of the reasons why their school had opted out. One headteacher explained that "the main reason (for seeking GM status) was to secure our future". As a small school, the LEA had been considering closing it for some years and opting out had provided the governors and management with the opportunity to remove that threat. However, she also went on to say: "I think we also did it because we always felt frustrated that we had lots of ideas, like everyone playing a musical instrument, like teaching French, Latin and Spanish. (Yet) we almost felt we were committing a crime even thinking about these things". She described a range of ways in which her school curriculum and teaching and learning have been developed since GM status was achieved. It seems that, like the other primary headteacher, this person had attempted to use autonomous status to improve directly the work with children.

The headteacher of the middle school mentioned the threat of reorganisation as part of his answer about the consequences of GM status. He explained that being in a particular part of the county, the LEA "don't take much notice of what is going on up here ... there were questions of

reorganisation in this area because ... the rest of the county is two tiered so they were thinking of making this (area) two tiered".

Hence, it seems that when asked about the 'consequences' of GM status, some of these informants, especially those where closure or reorganisation had been a threat, immediately focused on reasons why their school had originally opted for GM status. Other interviewees also chose to provide similar information as part of their answers to this question. The immediate reply of one headteacher was "we did not do it for the money". It was evident, however, that his personal involvement was particularly significant because he talked about how accusations were made against him as an individual at the time the school opted out. He also explained that the school had taken this route because it wanted to take responsibility for its own future. He imaginatively drew on an analogy with a young person leaving home. "We were adolescent and we became grown up ... we left home - the LEA - and set up our own place and we started to count the real cost of schooling".

Dissatisfaction with LEA services and the opportunity for governors and managers to make their own decisions was mentioned by one chair of governors. He commented: "We've got some bright people knocking around here so we felt we could cope ... just as well". Later, he went on to add: "There were tangible, up-front benefits ... the fact that we can decide our school priorities and allocate monies accordingly".

These 'consequences' or, indeed, explanations as to why schools have opted out closely match those reported previously (Bush *et al* 1993; Cauldwell and Reid 1996; Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993).

Governance

The interviewees were asked about the changes in the composition and powers of governing bodies as represented in the White and technical papers. Their views and reactions were sought, particularly with respect to the proposal that all governing bodies should include at least two LEA governors.

The interviewees tended to focus on the composition of governing bodies in their replies. Their reactions to the involvement of two LEA representatives varied, although on the whole they appeared to be accepting of the fact. For example, a chair of governors commented: "We don't want them, but we will have them". However, one headteacher made an extraordinary comment in terms of the stated purpose of LEA representatives, she indicated that she had "no objection as long as they (the LEA representative) are there to represent the interests of the school". Another headteacher was adamant that LEA governors were not going to make a difference. She stated: "Our governors are strong, articulate people, one or two from the LEA won't make a difference ... They won't have a lot of power". Perhaps these informants realised that the level of LEA representation on the governing body of foundation schools could have been set in line with, or at least closer to, that proposed for community schools. In either case, the consequences would have been even more local authority involvement.

Like the headteacher above, the motivation and commitment of future LEA governors to individual schools was questioned by some of the other interviewees. Previous experiences suggested that, sometimes, such governors came with a political agenda and/or were too busy in other parts of their work to give appropriate support to individual schools. For example, one headteacher described his school's previous experience with LEA governors as: "They came

infrequently. They weren't interested in the school. But when they came they were full of resolutions. National issues were rehearsed while this school was ignored." Similarly, a chair of governors remarked: "We don't want fuddy-duddy councillors whose interest is not to further the school but to further their own political interest".

One headteacher was clear that LEA representatives had "dominated his (school's) governing body before it went GM and stopped the school moving forward". He went on to describe in some detail what he called his "conspiracy theory" about how, in the past, LEA governors ensured that the majority of funding went to the grammar schools in the area, leaving the other schools, like his, under-resourced. His assertion was that GM status "has enabled us to begin to redress the balance".

However, the importance of not assuming LEA governors would automatically revert to former practice was also acknowledged by this same headteacher. He commented: "There is a danger I will assume that the former LEA governors of this school will be typical of LEA governors that are yet to be appointed. I may be doing them a disservice because LEAs have changed and, hopefully, so have their representatives". However, in another school rumours were already rife that the LEA intended to make sure its governor representatives are people who are "vocal, anti and pushy".

One striking feature of the interviews was the evidence of the high level of commitment expected of these GM governors. In addition, it appears that these schools are achieving their aims in this aspect of their work, albeit as reported by the chairs of governors and the headteachers. For example, one headteacher commented: "If governors are going to be

governors then they've got to commit themselves to this school. We've got that now. A couple of governors have just resigned because they knew our expectations of them are beyond their ability ... because they are too busy doing other things." Similarly, a chair of governors explained that he expected all members of his committee to "add value" and that, annually, he checked on this and asked for resignations if necessary.

It also seems that these governors brought with them considerable expertise in a range of areas helpful to the school and there was an implicit suggestion that the ability to recruit such governors may diminish with what the informants perceive to be the forthcoming loss of autonomous status. One chair of governors commented: "The principle I like about being GM is that governors can be invited ... we've got an accountant, a solicitor, a chartered surveyor ... we've got a good mix". However, it seemed that this chair was more concerned about recruiting people who, in his perception, would be most useful rather than the democratic process usually associated with the appointment of governors.

One headteacher talked about the proposed changes as "taking the heart out of the job" as far as governors were concerned. He described the responsibility as presently delegated to GM governors as "both awesome and exciting. We need a bit of awe and wonder about the place", he added. Another headteacher of a voluntary aided school mentioned the importance of continuity among denominational governors in order to maintain the school's religious ethos. She was also concerned that continuity of governors would be more of an issue under the proposed new framework.

More explicitly, having listed the type of people on the governing body at that time, one chair asked: "Are (these people) going to be part of a bureaucratic system?" His frustration about what the future may bring was exemplified by his comment: "Even China acknowledges that entrepreneurship and single mindedness on the part of individuals is a good thing". Similarly, one headteacher described the quality of his school's governors and, in the light of the proposed changes in status for his school, added: "(It is likely that) we will retain some of these governors but not all of them. There could be a problem (recruiting and retaining the right sort of governors)".

One chair of governors even went as far as to estimate the monetary value of the work his governors did on behalf of the school. "If you added the contribution made by governors (to the cost of other services), you could probably add another one to two hundred thousand pounds of management time". (It is assumed he was referring to the annual budget).

These examples suggest that, at this time, there seemed to be an innate belief that the new framework for schools was analogous to reverting to pre local management of schools (LMS). One headteacher was very straightforward in his understanding of what would happen in his area. His view was "I don't believe (the LEA governors) intend to maintain the autonomy". It was not clear, however, how, or why, he believed just two LEA governors would be able to have such an effect on the independence of his school.

In terms of the increased number of parent governors proposed in the new framework, three areas of concern were mentioned. These were parent governor recruitment, their objectivity and their continuity. In relation to the first, an obvious question raised by some interviewees was:

"Where are they all going to come from?" (In fact, this question was also asked about the LEA governors by another interviewee.) While describing parental involvement as "laudable", one chair of governors pointed out that "it is very difficult to actually enforce ... schools in the more disadvantaged areas will get less parental involvement".

Turning to the objectivity issue, some informants commented that parent governors tend to approach governing body matters from their child's viewpoint. One headteacher described this as "blinkered" and said the number of parent governors proposed within the new framework could be "detrimental to the school". However, she did acknowledge that there is a tension because she added: "It is good to have some governors who are seeing it from the children's point of view, but not the majority". One of the chairs of governors also felt that "you can have too much parental influence". Like others he was concerned that they could make "unreasonable demands" in relation to their own child and also explained that they "tend to relate everything to their child rather than considering the broader educational issues".

Closely aligned to this is concern about continuity. As some informants pointed out, parental governors' period of office relates to their child's time in the school and is, therefore, limited. Generally, they do not want to be involved beyond this. Linking this with the proposals, some interviewees felt the increase in the number of parent governors could make changes in committee membership more acute and detrimental to the effectiveness of governing bodies. Furthermore, the concern about continuity among parent governors resonates with the headteacher's worries about denominational, or foundation governors mentioned earlier (see p. 107).

However, with respect to all these issues raised about parental involvement on school governing bodies, it is important to highlight the fact that they apply equally to all governing bodies and not just those associated with foundation schools.

Generally, the interviewees did not comment in detail about the changes in the powers of governing bodies. This may suggest that, at the time of the interviews, the issues had not been fully acknowledged by the group. One headteacher demonstrated an understanding through his comment that: "We could accept whatever the LEA has to do but not as our parent again, not interfering with our appointments and the capabilities of our headteachers ...we don't want to go back to situations when governing bodies had big mouths and no teeth". Like the earlier respondents, this headteacher also seemed to be assuming 'going back' meant a reversion to pre-LMS days. One chair of governors was also aware of the changes in the powers of governing bodies as set out in the new framework. She had prepared a typed list of the issues.

New funding arrangements

The headteachers and chairs of governors were asked about the changes in funding proposed in the new framework and, perhaps surprisingly, had comparatively little to say. The comments by one chair of governors may provide an explanation for this reaction. He asked: "Are there transitional arrangements? Who is paying for them? There are huge questions that don't seem to be addressed or thought through". One headteacher expressed similar feelings. "When you look in either document for specifics, there is nothing ... the very things we want answered aren't there."

The remarks and thoughts that were offered tended to focus tightly on their own school situation and ignore the broader issue of the public funding of schools. For example, the formerly voluntary aided schools were concerned about the 15 per cent their foundations were required to contribute towards capital development under aided status. One headteacher commented: "My Treasurer says if we go back we can't go on as we do now". A chair of governors remarked about these proposals: "The privileges that the 15 per cent bought are not there - the admissions, the staff appointments ... We are going to be under funded again".

The comments of another chair of governors exemplify the narrowness of thought.

We had this argument with the prospective Labour MP ... She is ex Cheltenham Ladies College and was advocating a strong anti grammar school approach ... We are offering an elitist education to quite poor people... (It is) an opportunity which is then stamped on by people with that background ... So if it (the percentage held back by the LEA) is 10 per cent, we are out of business.

A different view was expressed by one headteacher. He described funding as one of the "central" issues and one which "is least transparent in the White and technical papers". He talked about the relationship between the LEA and the GM schools in his area and how the introduction of the common funding formulae (CFF) had revealed ways in which, despite LMS and GM status, the LEA were still able to "move funds around". He claimed that the people in GM schools had discovered that "there was a top slice ... (and) there were areas where money could be moved across services".

He suggested the new framework should target funding so that both the LEA and schools each receive 100 per cent allocation for their functions. His approach included capping LEAs so that their growth is limited. He highlighted what could be a possible dilemma for LEAs under the new framework. His point was that it would be natural for LEAs to consult community schools

first and/or separately and formulate budget arrangements for the good of these schools.

"(LEAs) are not going to treat foundation schools in the same way (as community schools) because ... (foundation schools) have elected not to be part of (LEAs)", he explained.

The same headteacher was also realistic about funding LEAs with respect to their responsibilities as set out in the White Paper. For example, monitoring was not a 'service' about which schools would be able to exercise any choice. Hence, LEAs would demand "the money up front". He argued that there were likely to be anomalies in the systems say, for example, if foundation, like GM, schools had charitable status and he advocated foundation status for all schools. "All schools ought to be self governing", he claimed, "if they are not capable or feel they don't want that sort of responsibility then ... they are not functioning as they should".

A chair of governors, who had been a Conservative District Councillor at the time his school went GM, argued for centralised or regional funding saying: "LEAs are in for a bit of a surprise even though many are Labour controlled and we've got a Labour Government". In his view, the plans for Scottish and Welsh devolution are just the start of regionalisation. However, he also explained that he did not anticipate any problems over funding because his school's former local authority had not tried to hold back a lot in the past. Interestingly, he added: "There has always been a popular myth that GM schools got a lot more money than others. They don't", he stated firmly.

The issue of the present arrangements to fund GM schools was mentioned by another headteacher. He referred to inferences in the White Paper and technical document about unfair funding and claimed these were "clearly references to SPGs (special purpose grants)". However, he neatly shifted the emphasis from the funding of GM schools to that of local

authorities. He asserted: "My principle concern is that the biggest unfairness ...is between local education authority level funding". He quoted examples of differences between funding per child in two LEAs and asked:

Is a child entitled to the same amount of funding regardless of where he or she lives?
The answer is no ... We have a National Curriculum and a national payscale but different levels of funding ...don't talk to me about ...level playing fields ... if all you mean is fiddling around with a few special grants ... but not the actually funding regime because it is too much of a hot potato.

This same headteacher also expressed his dissatisfaction with what he considered to be an inequitable situation in that the proposals indicate that the three categories of schools will receive the same funding even though the level of their responsibilities will differ. He quoted an account that had been reported to him recently about a Chief Education Officer who was exhorting all the schools in his authority to opt for foundation status. The interviewee explained that, although he did not know if it was true, it provided a good illustration of his point. "What better scenario could an LEA have", he claimed, "than (all its) schools getting 93 per cent of their budget but (as foundation schools) having 100 per cent responsibility for their staff and estate ... (leaving) the LEA with 7 per cent with which to do whatever it jolly well liked".

Accountability

Evidence, albeit limited, relating to the accountability of GM schools was highlighted earlier as part of the discussion about the consequences of GM status. In addition, there are further data generated through these interviews that suggests that accountability is an issue for managers and governors of GM schools.

While talking about what GM status means to him, one headteacher made a direct link with accountability that suggests he views it as a significant issue. "We were accused in the early

days of not being accountable", he commented, "we are actually more accountable ... it is the most accountable system I know". He explained that his governors "are available to all our clients all of the time" and "financially we have the kind of thorough audit that LEAs have not begun to understand".

Another headteacher also made the point about the lack of accountability demonstrated by LEAs and their schools. He was angry that LEAs allow their schools to overdraw and do nothing about addressing issues relating to incompetent headteachers and deputies and weak governors. He explained that his school's response to the two papers exhorted proper auditing of all schools and, similarly, a requirement that all demonstrate accountability. Furthermore, at his first meeting with the new Director of Education for his school's former LEA, he had challenged the Director not to shrink back from his responsibilities, to intervene in cases of incompetency, sack the headteachers and call the governing bodies to account.

This headteacher justified this approach through reference to his own situation. "I'm positive my governing body would sack me if they thought I wasn't doing a good job", he stated. He then went on to explain how, when his governors had been considering GM status, he had asked them to find another headteacher to lead the GM school if they had any doubts about his own capabilities. He told them "you shouldn't shrink back from GM status if you think I can't lead it. You should say, it is the right thing, then find the bloke [sic] to do it". He remarked that he was not sure that the "LEA has got that kind of steel".

Chairs of governors interviewed also made reference to their schools' accountability. For example, one commented: "(Our budget) is transparent for all to see exactly what the total

funding of the school is and how we spend the money. It is subject to a rigorous audit as is any commercial organisation". Another chair of governors emphasised accountability through partnership as a result of GM status. In his view this was much more significant than in LEA schools.

Admissions arrangements

Reactions to the proposed arrangements for admissions varied according to particular school issues although there was also a general acknowledgement that admission arrangements tend to be problematic by their very nature. One headteacher commented: "(Admissions) will be a problem for some schools but then it has always been problematic. There is no solution that anyone can think of that will satisfy everyone". He went on to explain: "I don't really feel comfortable that schools are competing with one another. Yet,... I am comfortable with the idea that parents should have as much choice as possible".

The chair of governors of the same school was unconcerned about changes in admissions arrangements because, as he explained: "We are not selective". He explained that "we are here to serve local people within walking distance from the school. I don't think that should change" he added. He then added: "I think it could be of concern to church schools because they tend to take their pupils from wider area. I also see it as a big concern to secondary schools".

Both the chair of governors and the headteacher of the grammar school expressed concern about admissions although the former added that he did not "see a relationship between admissions and status". The headteacher was worried about the competition in the area and the details about precisely which parents would decide the future of the local grammar schools. Similarly,

both the chair of governors and headteacher of another school that admitted pupils in ability bands expressed concern about maintaining their 'comprehensive' intake.

The headteacher of one of the primary schools described how when parental choice had first been introduced she had expressed her concerns that no-one would ever choose her school. However, she had been proved wrong as the school is so popular that the governors have had to implement a very rigorous admissions policy which is mainly based on the distance of the family home from the school. The headteacher expressed her concern that:

Apparently people say we only take the best children ...(but) it is really utterly untrue, we just follow the admissions policy ... we have no form of selection and we have no wish ever to have one.

Another chair of governors, having acknowledged that he expects admissions to be problematic, stated that he thought it was clear that there was an intention for the LEA to control the process.

One of the headteachers agreed that admissions arrangements would be controlled by the LEA. He pointed out that, if there was disagreement, schools would not be able to afford to go beyond the adjudicator.

One chair of governors was fairly philosophical about his school's situation. He wondered if "in reality, they (the admissions forums) are going to make a great deal of difference over what we've got at the moment". He explained that although it is not a grammar school, his school is oversubscribed and is one of the "more attractive schools in the area". He went on to talk about recent discussion between the school, the LEA and the FAS about the intake number in 1998. This had now been agreed at the school's preferred level. He concluded "so I guess if the kids are in the feeder schools they are probably going to come to us anyway whichever method is used".

Another headteacher raised concerns about where the adjudicators will come from and their independence from LEAs. While yet another head questioned why governing bodies could not be trusted "to be fair and make good decisions". She went on to say "(introducing the role of adjudicator) is almost to make people think it is ... fair. It is just adding another layer of bureaucracy". A different headteacher stated that he thought using the courts as the final arbitrator in dispute situations was "silly". He explained that his governors and school had asked the Secretary of State to take on this role in their response to the consultative papers.

GM schools and their former LEAs

The majority of the informants described a minimal or non-existent relationship with their former LEA. Typical reactions to this question were: "We don't have a relationship with ..." and "There is no contact whatsoever". One chair of governors commented: "We were very unpopular because we were the first to go. We have been very unpopular ever since".

A number of the interviewees spoke of "old scores to be settled" and "battles ahead". One headteacher explained that he believed in his area: "There is an underlying feeling that GM schools robbed the LEA of its powers and its significance ... we won't be forgiven lightly. I don't think there will be overt retribution but (there will be) a guardedness from both sides". Another headteacher commented: "There will need to be some rapprochement".

Despite the informants' initial reactions to the question about relationships with their former LEAs, in fact, there had been a number of contacts, albeit not all of them amicable. On the positive side, the governors of the school who had appointed a new headteacher the day before

the interviews for this study had employed an adviser from their former LEA to act as a consultant to the appointing panel. The chair of governors reported favourably on this experience. He went on to explain that, until recently, he had been chair of governors of an LEA primary school, in addition to being chair in the GM school. Hence, he felt, that he was still in contact with the LEA. Similarly, one of the headteachers spoke of his continued personal relationships with individuals working for the LEA, including the Director of Education.

One headteacher described a visit from the authority's education consultant. He was adamant that "nothing will come of these discussions because no one is going to allow GM schools to have any influence". The situation relating to this headteacher's school is particularly complicated because there are many factors involved including grammar schools, a new unitary authority and technical college status. He went on to predict that events there were likely to become "even bloodier than when schools were going GM".

A few informants reported that their former LEAs had held meetings to discuss the new framework. In all these cases it was evident that the interviewees thought it worthwhile to attend such a meeting. One headteacher, however, described his former LEA as having "shot itself in the foot" by calling a meeting of local GM heads and then approaching the LEA headteachers' association to identify group facilitators. Furthermore, this informant was annoyed that, at this meeting, there had been no opportunity for discussion of what he described as the major issues such as finance.

In one area the LEA had set up a governors' forum. The relevant chair of governors explained that she had "persuaded" one of her governors to represent the school on the committee and the

school had paid the affiliation fee. The representative's brief, she went on to say, is "to find out what is going on".

'Going back'

Whatever stance individual headteachers and chairs of governors took, there seemed to be a common feeling among them of 'going back'.

One chair of governors was concerned about what could happen over time. Although he did not think even LEA schools wanted to go back to the old style LEA, he thought it could "drift towards it". Another governor thought that there is bound to be party political interference in the future. He said "we are going back to the old centralist, almost Marxist, way of control by party politicians. We will not be masters of our own destiny any more".

For another chair of governors it was clear what he would do if LEA involvement became unacceptable. "I will just say 'that's it'", he exclaimed. "This job takes a lot of time and costs me money as well... I shall just ... walk out and let them stew in their own juices."

However, at least one governor was more focused on the broader development of self management in recent years. He remarked: "The GM movement has dramatically changed the way LEAs can actually work. It has made (the LEA) more subservient to schools, rather than the other way round".

The GM theme was also taken up by one of the headteachers. He wanted to make it clear that, in his view, GM status is about self-government, not financial advantage or LEA bashing. His

view was that the Government has an opportunity, at present, to remove the differences between schools and make all of them self-governing. (He put aided schools to one side for the purpose of his argument). However, he described the White and technical papers proposals as "muddled thinking" and the Government as "not prepared to grasp the nettle".

Despite the rhetoric about standards not structures, another headteacher commented that the White Paper is "all about structures". "It is destroying the structures which have created the standards", she claimed. This headteacher was not only very worried about 'going back' to the LEA and all that could mean but also about the pressure on GM headteachers. She commented that many are talking about retiring - a path she would take if she were older. She described her morale as "at its lowest" and felt great resentment at the thought of having to prepare and implement new procedures instead of being able to focus on teaching and learning and raising standards.

The research issues

The primary purpose of these interviews was to identify and focus research issues emanating from the demise of GM schools and the introduction of the new framework for the organisation of schools as outlined in the White and technical papers. Not surprisingly, issues emerge under the broad headings used in the analysis in this chapter, for example, governance and admissions. However, when considering the data generated through these interviews, it is also evident that the concerns of the headteachers and chairs of governors criss-cross between those relevant across the sector as a whole and those that are pertinent to individual schools. The latter may, or may not, overlap with the former.

For example, the funding arrangements under the new framework and, particularly, those that apply to foundation schools, are of great interest to the GM sector as a whole. At the same time, however, individual headteachers and chairs of governors are keen to know about the implications for their school. The problem facing the managers and governors, and the cause of much of their anxiety, emanates from the lack of precise information available at the time of the interviews. It seemed that, on the one hand, the interviewees were reluctant to admit to advantageous funding under GM status while, on the other, they were tempted to talk about their own school situation and what they have been able to achieve as a GM funded school.

Hence, one focus of the next stage of this project is to explore the extent to which issues affecting GM schools are considered, presented and argued as whole sector matters and the way in which individual schools balance the information they have about the factors influencing their future. Linked to this focus are questions about the level of pragmatism shown by the headteachers and chairs of governors with respect to their GM experience. How do they view GM status within the broader organisation of schools, especially since the change of government? How do they rationalise and explain their involvement in the GM schools movement? What can be learned from the experience and how can this knowledge be applied usefully in future?

Another focus for the research is the way in which individual schools manage their own situations and reputations. Evidence from the interviews suggests that schools are worried about recruiting and retaining governors generally although some mentioned parent governors specifically in this context. The relationship between the school and its former LEA is also an issue of concern. What measures, if any, are GM schools taking to prepare parents, governors

and the local community for the change in status and circumstances for their school? Are they taking any specific action to address the changing composition of the governing body? How are relationships with the LEA being managed and developed?

The longer term future of the schools - as foundation, voluntary or community schools - is another significant interest arising from the interviews. In particular, will the consequences or benefits of the new status - whichever one an individual school opts for - be similar or changed in the future? What are the factors affecting how successfully the school can retain its present characteristics? Will a 'foundation schools movement' emerge in the same way that GM schools have created an individualised sector? Many of these questions are dependent on the passage of time and are, therefore, likely to be beyond the scope of this project. However, it is intended that the next phase of the research for the project will not only consider the medium term issues of concern to GM schools but will contribute to future work in the field.

In conclusion, these interviews have confirmed specific research questions concerning the details of governance, funding, admissions and relationships between former GM schools and LEAS. Additionally, the data generated have raised a range of other important questions the answers to which will inform the future of self-governing schools.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION OF SURVEY FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter reports the findings of the survey of GM headteachers and chairs of governors which was carried out in September and October 1998. The instrument was designed on the basis of the outcomes of the pilot interviews that had been conducted one year earlier and which were discussed in the previous chapter. It was constructed in six sections. The first section sought factual information about the school as it presently existed as well as its likely status under the new framework. The next four parts considered governance, funding, admissions and relationships with LEAs; a range of other issues were addressed in the final section. In the main, these five parts were concerned with the views and perceptions of the respondents.

Just as there are contextual matters which need to be taken into consideration with regard to the pilot study, the extent of the information available to the questionnaire respondents at the time they were asked to complete this instrument is also relevant. The 1998 *School Standards and Framework Act* had recently been added to the statute book although the details of its implementation were only just emerging. For example, codes of practice on school admissions and LEA-school relations were not published until 1999 (although interim guidance on the former was published in 1998).

The chapter is structured along similar lines to the survey instrument. Hence, factual information about the respondents' schools is provided in the next section, followed by an overview of their networking activities. The remaining parts consider the headteachers' and

chairs of governors' views and perceptions about aspects of the changes in governance, funding, admissions arrangements and school/LEA relationships.

The schools

Their characteristics

There were 88 schools represented within the sample (of 126 respondents). This equates to a response rate of 70 per cent in terms of schools compared with the overall response rate of 48 per cent in terms of people (see chapter 3). Details about the returns from schools are given in table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Questionnaire returns by schools

	Questionnaire returns received from:		
	Both headteacher and chair of governor	Headteacher only	Chair of governors only
Number of schools	33 (ie 66 returns)	43	12

The schools had opted out from 44 different LEAs spread across England and the vast majority have now returned to the same LEA under the new framework. Just five schools come under the auspices of one of the new unitary authorities created by the 1997/98 local government reorganisation. 78 per cent (N= 69) of the schools were described by the respondents as secondary or middle deemed secondary and 82 per cent (N= 71) were co-educational; single sex education being provided for girls and boys equally among the remaining schools. The majority of the sample schools were large; there was only one school with less than 100 pupils and only 6 with less than 300. 32 per cent (N=28) of the schools catered for 1000 or more pupils and there were more than 2000 pupils in two of them. 60 per cent (N= 53) of the schools had been funded under the common funding formula for GM

schools until April 1998. The details of these results are summarised in the following tables 5.2 –5.5.

Table 5.2: Percentage representation of schools in the sample by phase

Secondary	Middle deemed secondary	Middle deemed primary	Primary	Junior	Infant/First
75 (N=66)	3 (N=3)	0	14 (N=12)	5 (N=4)	3 (N=3)

Table 5.3: Percentage representation of schools in the sample by gender mix

Co-educational	Girls only	Boys only
82 (N=71)	9 (N=8)	9 (N=8)

(Total = 87 because one informant did not respond to this question)

Table 5.4: Size of sample schools as determined by number of pupils

No of pupils	No of schools	No of pupils	No of schools
Under 100	1	700 – 799	6
100 – 199	1	800 – 899	11
200 – 299	4	900 – 999	12
300 – 399	5	1000 – 1499	20
400 – 499	6	1500 – 1999	6
500 – 599	3	2000 and over	2
600 – 600	11		

Table 5.5: Age ranges within sample schools

Age range	No of schools
3/4 – 7	4
3/4 – 11	12
7 – 11	4
9 – 11	2
11 – 16	11
11/12-18/19	55

Among the schools that were categorised as secondary or middle deemed secondary (69), 22 per cent (N=15) were also described as grammar or selective schools. Furthermore, it was made clear by two respondents that their schools were ‘secondary modern’: they each added this classification to the options available within the instrument. A summary of the number of sample schools under each classification is shown in table 5.6.

Table 5.6: Percentage representation of sample schools by admissions arrangements

Comprehensive	Grammar/Selective	Secondary modern	Others
52 (N=46)	17 (N=15)	2 (N=2)	29 (N=25)

Respondents were also asked to rank admissions criteria as they applied to their school. The aggregated responses, for all schools, are shown in table 5.7.

Table 5.7: Percentage schools' 1st, 2nd and 3rd admission criteria

Criterion	Percentage of schools		
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
Sibling at school	31 (N=27)	37.5 (N=33)	11 (N =10)
Catchment area	16 (N=14)	8 (N=7)	8 (N=7)
Admissions test	16 (N=14)	3 (N=3)	0
Religion	11 (N=10)	1 (N=1)	2 (N=2)
Distance between home and school	7 (N=6)	16 (N=14)	22 (N=19)
Primary school attended	4.5 (N=4)	2 (N=2)	11 (N=10)
Other	3 (N=3)	3 (N=3)	4.5 (N=4)
Pupil interview	3 (N=3)	1 (N=1)	0
Sibling former pupil	2 (N=2)	8 (N=7)	6 (N=5)
Parent interview	2 (N=2)	1 (N=1)	0
Special needs	1 (N=1)	3 (N=3)	3 (N=3)
Special ability	1 (N=1)	2 (N=2)	4.5 (N=4)
Parent and pupil interview	1 (N=1)	2 (N=2)	2 (N=2)
Nursery attended	0	0	0

21 per cent (N=19) of the schools had voluntary status before they opted out; the majority (16 schools) having been voluntary aided. Eight of the sample schools provided Roman Catholic education and four offered an Anglican ethos. 12 schools had achieved technology college status, two described themselves as language colleges and one as a sports college. Three schools provided boarding facilities, two were special agreement schools and another noted that it provided significant special educational needs provision in terms of its five per cent population of pupils with physical disability. Further factual data about the sample schools are given below in tables 5.8-5.10.

Table 5.8: Percentage representation of sample schools by former category

Formerly voluntary controlled	Formerly voluntary aided	Non voluntary
3 (N=3)	18 (N=16)	78 (N=68)

(Total = 87 because one informant did not respond to this question)

Table 5.9: Percentage representation of sample schools by religious denomination

Anglican	Roman Catholic	Non denominational
4.5 (N=4)	9 (N=8)	86 (N=76)

Table 5.10: Percentage representation of sample schools by special characteristics

Technology college status	Boarding	Special agreement	Other special characteristics *	No special characteristics
14 (N=12)	3 (N=3)	2 (N=2)	4.5 (N=4)	76 (N=67)

* Headteachers and chairs of governors described other special characteristics as language college (two schools), sports college and significant SEN provision re 5 % physical disability.

Why the schools had sought GM status

For both the headteachers and chairs of governors the opportunity to become autonomous was the main reason why their school had opted out. Nearly half the respondents in each category made this their highest priority and about three quarters of each group considered it to be one of their top three reasons. Funding, both in the form of the level of recurrent funding and the opportunity to gain capital funding, was also high in the respondents' prioritised reasons for becoming GM. For a group of schools, threat of closure or reorganisation was the issue and

the main reason for opting out. Moreover, although not many respondents rated it as their main reason, a significant number of both headteachers and chairs of governors included freedom from the LEA among their explanations.

A detailed breakdown of the reasons for opting out as stated by the respondents is provided in Table 5.11.

Table 5.11: Percentage respondents' reasons for seeking GM status

Reason/Priority	Headteachers			Chairs of governors		
	1st	2 nd	3 rd	1st	2 nd	3 rd
Autonomy	48 (N=33)	19 (N=13)	4 (N=3)	44 (N=20)	16 (N=7)	16 (N=7)
Recurrent funding	17 (N=12)	19 (N=10)	16 (N=7)	16 (N=7)	16 (N=7)	18 (N=8)
Capital funding	10 (N=7)	15 (N=10)	30 (N=21)	11 (N=5)	24 (N=11)	27 (N=12)
Threat of closure	10 (N=7)	1.5 (N=1)	1.5 (N=1)	13 (N=6)	2 (N=1)	0
Freedom from LEA	4 (N=3)	20 (N=14)	12 (N=8)	9 (N=4)	16 (N=7)	20 (N=9)
Other reasons*	4 (N=3)	1.5 (N=1)	3 (N=2)	0	2 (N=1)	0
Local schools GM	3 (N=2)	7 (N=5)	6 (N=4)	2 (N=1)	2 (N=1)	2 (N=1)
Threat of reorganisation	3 (N=2)	4 (N=3)	0	4 (N=2)	4 (N=2)	0
Control over admissions	1.5 (N=1)	6 (N=4)	6 (N=4)	0	9 (N=4)	2 (N=1)

7 headteachers did not complete this part of the questionnaire; percentages are based on those responding.

* 'Other reasons' given for seeking GM status were:

Headteachers

1st priority

Repairs

Threat to provision of free transport to denominational school. School had been underfunded for capital work (typical religious school requiring Diocese, governors, and LEA to agree to a project when all three had monies available - did not happen very often).

Boarding - LEA not geared to run it. We felt we could do it better.

2nd priority

Control our own destiny and vision

3rd priority

Ability to have a change of character (within 3 days of going GM, we got our sixth form back).

Chairs of Governors

2nd priority

Control of finance

School category under the new framework

Under the new framework, all schools were allocated an initial category. GM schools that were formerly voluntary aided or controlled were classified as 'voluntary' while the rest came under the 'foundation' school heading. However, governors of GM schools were also uniquely given the opportunity to opt for a different category and required to make their decision by April 1999. Questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate whether it was likely that the governors of their school would seek to change from the allocated classification to one of the other two categories. Their responses are shown in table 5.12.

Table 5.12: Percentage responses to question “Is it likely that your governors will apply for a change of category?”

	No change	Change	No response
Headteachers	88 (N=67)	8 (N=6)	4 (N=3)
Chairs of Governors	84 (N=38)	11 (N=5)	4.5 (N=2)

However, from answers given to questions that followed, it appeared that some respondents misunderstood the survey question about the opportunity to change categories within the new framework. Only one of the chair of governors respondents who indicated that a change was likely then went on to indicate a different category from that which their school had been allocated. Presumably, they misinterpreted the question as being about change *per se* rather than change within the new framework. One headteacher also misunderstood this question in the same way. Hence, disregarding these responses, five headteachers and one of their chairs of governors indicated a change. All members of this group suggested that their school was likely to seek voluntary status as opposed to the foundation category to which they had been allocated. Interestingly, among the group of same school headteacher and chair of governor respondents, two chairs of governors made no response to this question whereas their headteachers had both indicated a change in category was likely.

In connection with liaison with parents, respondents were asked to indicate whether they had notified the parents of their pupils, and the parents of perspective pupils, about the school’s change in status. Half (N=43, there was no response from one school) indicated that they had informed their present pupils’ parents although the figure dropped to 21 per cent (N=18) in the case of prospective parents (who were often more difficult to contact). The majority had

informed, or were about to inform, parents about the changes in writing, mainly by letter. Others used the newsletter and/or school prospectus. A few respondents mentioned using the opportunity presented through the Annual Parents' Meeting and one headteacher indicated that there had been a special meeting at his/her school.

From the parents' perspective, respondents indicated little interest to date about the change in status; only four headteachers and three chairs of governors responded positively to this question. The additional information they provided was minimal; one head noted a telephone call from a parent requesting further details, another head wrote "yes, but very limited" and a chair of governors advised that the "parent governors (are) fully involved in discussion and decision-making".

The respondents and their associations

Just over two fifths (N=28) of the headteachers and about one third (N=15) of the chairs of governors who responded to the question about involvement in the GM movement replied in the affirmative. Their involvement was at all levels. For example, headteachers held positions of responsibility on local, regional and national GM groups, represented GM schools on LEA and professional association committees and attended GM conferences. A few had been active in setting up GM associations, for example, the GM Primary Support Group and some had spoken on behalf of the sector at promotional events. Similarly, a few chairs of governors were, or had been, elected members of the Grant Maintained Standing Advisory Committee (GMSAC), had attended conferences and had represented the sector to other schools.

The majority of both groups responding to the question about the formation of networks within the new framework (headteachers: 82 per cent (N=53), chairs of governors: 76 per cent (N= 31)) envisaged new associations being set up or existing ones reconstituting themselves. As one chair of governor commented: "If it's there, someone will organise an association for it!" There were, however, more informative comments as well although many of these suggest a certain lack of clarity about the new 'aided' category of school. They included:

GMSAC (Grant Maintained Schools Advisory Committee) is already planning to become FAVASA (Foundation and Voluntary Aided Schools' Association) to represent the interests of Foundation and Voluntary Schools as employers... AHGMS (Association of Headteachers of Grant Maintained Schools) is also planning to 'stay alive'.

(headteacher)

1. Continuation of National Association of GM Primary Schools as 'Association of Foundation and Aided Primary Schools' (which) may lead to an even larger organisation, 2. Continuation of Lincolnshire (former GM) Foundation and Aided Primary Schools.

(headteacher)

I hope some association will be set up to ensure that schools and governors hear directly from the Government and the DfEE re finance and other educational matters without the filter of the local LEA.

(chair of governors)

The respondents who did not envisage networks and associations being set up tended to take the view that such structures were unnecessary and not a good use of time. For example, one headteacher wrote:

These are largely time wasting and take away from the main focus of managing a school as it focuses on impossible standards. They dissipate energies; I am not convinced of their benefits.

Another head added:

I see no reason, other than (to discuss) financial procedures.

Chairs of governors commented similarly:

I see most sub-group meetings as unnecessarily divisive.

(They are) generally 'talking shops' which use valuable headteachers' time. (I) prefer ad hoc meetings on specific issues.

For governors, commitment to one school would generally leave little time for constructive involvement in broader committee work.

For just a few respondents, the role of the LEA was significant here. A chair of governors wrote: "I see little point as the main networks will, once again, be our LEA areas. The main reason for the GM networks was that we no longer had LEA ones" and another added "(I) assume LEA arrangements will be satisfactory". However, one headteacher was less optimistic commenting that "LEA networks will be difficult".

Reasons why respondents would, or would not, join an association set up under the new framework were very similar to those expressed about the formation of such organisations. For some, they provided an important "forum for like-minded schools to discuss common interests/needs/concerns" and opportunities "to share knowledge, experience and good practice"(headteachers). While others did not perceive any real benefit:

I hate meetings and prefer to be in school. I'm too busy obviously.
(headteacher)

I do not want to be an absentee headteacher – my job is to manage this school and to be here to do it.
(headteacher)

(I) cannot see that this would benefit the school. We believe in having a good headteacher and governing body and managing locally within the national framework.
(chair of governors)

A summary of the respondents' involvement – present and future – is provided in table 5.13. The increase in the number of respondents who indicate that they are likely to become involved in the new networks compared with those involved in the GM ones is significant. Interest from headteachers appeared to have nearly doubled while the figure associated with the chairs of governors had gone up by a factor of about 50 per cent. Of course it is only possible to speculate on a reason for this but an explanation may lie in the fact that, as headteachers and chairs of governors of GM schools, there was a perception that they 'belonged' to an elite sector. These respondents may subconsciously, or even consciously, be seeking a way to re-invent this privileged position.

Table 5.13: Percentage respondents' involvement in school networks

Response	Headteachers			Chairs of governors		
	Yes	No	Nil	Yes	No	Nil
Involvement in GM movement	37 (N=28)	53 (N=40)	10 (N=8)	33 (N=15)	64 (N=29)	2 (N=1)
Formation of new networks	70 (N=53)	16 (N=12)	14 (N=11)	69 (N=31)	22 (N=10)	9 (N=4)
Involvement in new networks	68 (N=52)	17 (N=13)	14 (N=11)	49 (N=22)	31 (N=14)	20 (N=9)

'Nil' indicates the number of informants not responding to this question.

Governance

Changes in the composition of governing bodies

Like the interviewees, questionnaire respondents had much to say about the changes in the composition of governing bodies and the way they will affect their school. In the main, the

latter can be classified under the broad headings of 'LEA representation', 'parent governors' and 'recruitment and selection' - areas which were also identified as the main areas of concern in the interviews. Additionally, other issues were identified such as changes in the size of the governing body and perceived 'quality' of governors. Some respondents indicated that they had no significant concerns about the changes in composition of governing bodies, while others took the opportunity to mention issues connected with the future of their schools, albeit that they were unrelated to the composition of the governing body. For example, 12 per cent (N=14) mentioned funding and other aspects of the financial arrangements within the new framework and one headteacher expressed concern about admissions here. Another head and a chair of governors, not from the same school, indicated that their worries about the change in composition of the governing body included issues relating to selective status. Finally, a different headteacher identified achievement and the state of the buildings - presumably she was concerned that both of these would decline under future arrangements. The broad headings mentioned above are now used to report the main relevant findings.

LEA representation

Only 20 per cent of respondents (headteachers N=14 and chairs of governors N=10) welcomed the requirement of LEA representation on their governing bodies and 31 per cent (N=38) mentioned it as an issue of concern in respect of the changes in governing body representation. Many of this second group commented in general terms, writing expressions like "LEA representation" as the area of concern to the school.

However, when asked directly if they welcome the LEA appointments, both the headteachers and the chairs of governors were much more explicit. Respondents demonstrated a range of views here. Only a few adopted a positive approach. For example, one headteacher wrote: "We

wish to work collaboratively with the LEA” and a chair of governors responded similarly: “(I) favour working closely with the LEA.” Another chair of governors considered LEA governors offered an opportunity “to promote the school within our LEA that does not want GM schools”. S/he went on to suggest that they “will assist in promoting the expansion of the school”.

One group took a neutral stance, accepting the inevitability of the change. A chair of governors commented: “We neither welcome nor object to this requirement” and a similar line was adapted by a few headteachers: “I am ambivalent about this” and “we are indifferent”. However, although accepting the situation, the concerns among a number of respondents were explained by one headteacher who wrote: “It depends on who they are and their attitude to the school”. While another headteacher summed up the situation: “if (the LEA governors are) local people genuinely interested in the school I could support the notion - otherwise (it is) a piece of political correctness”.

It seemed that previous experience of working with LEA representatives as part of their governing body had negatively influenced some respondents; 18 per cent (N=22) specifically mentioned it. For example, headteachers wrote:

Our experience of LEA governors was that their interest was superficial and their attendance was poor.

The LEA does not agree with selective status. In the past they were not helpful. They do not understand the school.

Previous experience of LEA governors has demonstrated that they play little or no part.

Chairs of governors commented in a similar vein:

Historical experience is that LEA governors collect governorships for personal, political enhancement rather than commitment to a particular school.

Our previous experience with LEA governors was that several were there as a means of furthering their political careers rather than because of any commitment to the school.

Past history shows that LEAs made no contact with their governors.

Like the interviewees, the political agenda of LEA governors was cited against their involvement by other respondents. They expressed fears: “It is difficult to determine their purpose other than to act as ‘informants’ between LEA and school, school and LEA” (headteacher), “We have little control over their political allegiance” (headteacher) and “The governing body under GM status has been strictly non political” (chair of governors).

Other respondents just stated their direct opposition to this change. One chair of governors wrote: “We do not consider this to be a positive step”. After stating that it is “quite unnecessary”, another added, “but unlikely to affect our operation”. A number of headteachers were equally forthright. For example, one commented:

The governing body has become very skilled and knowledgeable in educational matters and has very successfully run a large school - they probably know more than many LEA members and officers!

A similar point was made by another head:

We have managed extremely well without them - we are accountable already to our parents - the LEA representative does not add any new dimension to the governing body and (can) only interfere in the efficient organisation of the governing body.

A different headteacher explained that “the school sought GM status to be independent of the LEA”, and yet another, possibly with other aspects of the Government’s agenda on his/her mind, commented that there is “no evidence that LEAs can contribute to school improvement”.

Parent governors

Issues about parent governors also featured among the main concerns in the changes in composition of GM governing bodies. One of these relates to the proportion of parent governors on governing bodies. Government policy, as outlined in the White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997a) and in subsequent legislation, is premised on the principle of increased parental representation on the governing bodies of all maintained schools. Interviewees had classified their concern about the changes in one or more of three ways: parent governor recruitment, the level of objectivity they are able to demonstrate and their continuity. The first of these, parent governor recruitment, is considered in a later section under the broader heading of governor recruitment and selection in general; the other two are discussed here.

As a result of the pilot study, the matter of parent governor objectivity was addressed directly in the survey. However, interestingly, quite different results were obtained. Respondents were asked to select one of the following statements as their preferred descriptor of the nature of the contribution from parent governors:

- primarily focused on issues affecting their child
- primarily focused on general school issues

The responses are shown in Table 5.14.

Table 5.14: Percentage responses to survey question: What do you anticipate to be the nature of contributions from parent governors?

	Child-focused	School-focused
Headteachers	13(N=10)	82 (N=62)
Chairs of Governors	22(N=10)	73 (N=33)

The missing responses are accounted for because two chairs of governors and two headteachers each wrote “both” alongside the options offered. In addition, one headteacher indicated that the response of parent governors is “variable”. Finally, another headteacher just added a question mark to the script.

A significant change in perception of parent governors’ objectivity between the interviews and the survey is evident and interesting. This may be explained by the questionnaire respondents being more measured in their comments than the interviewees because, by the time the former completed the instrument, it was clear that the number of parent governors was going to increase. Alternatively, in terms of reliability, the survey findings may be more representative of GM parent governors than the outcomes from the interviews. Thus, it is possible that GM parent governors had a sense of whole school ownership resulting from the autonomy devolved to them through GM status.

Similarly, respondents were not explicit in their concerns about the continuity among parent governors. “More parental representation” was identified by a few informants although they did not go on to explain why this is a concern. One headteacher remarked that the “school has partnership approval with parents but (I am) concerned that elected parents will not have the skills required”. S/he went on to compare elected parents with first governors who were “co-

opted for their skills". In contrast, a few respondents mentioned "fewer parent governors". Some details were given. One explained that under the new framework their "elected (parental governors) increases from 5 to 6 but (they) no longer (have) 2 parent first governors" on their governing body. Thus, it seems that anomalies were already evident in the new system.

Before closing this section on parent governors, it is important to highlight that it could be argued that the issues raised here, and those that follow in the section on recruitment and selection, apply to all governing bodies and not just those associated with GM/foundation schools. However, the fact that the starting point for the changes in governing body composition, in other words the composition of existing governing bodies, differs among the various categories of schools provides a counter-argument and, therefore, these matters are relevant, and of interest, in the specific context of GM schools.

Other changes in the composition of the governing body

Among the other issues mentioned in connection with the changes in the composition of governing bodies was the loss of what was described, either by the use of an appropriate adjective, or by implication, as 'useful' governors. For example, headteachers wrote: "We will have to lose quality governors...", "having to lose committed, knowledgeable and hard working governors who bring their professional expertise at no charge..." , and "reduction of teacher governors". Similar views were evident among the chairs of governors who, along with another group of headteachers, were more explicit in who were the 'useful' governors. The former made it clear they were concerned about "loss of some co-opted governors", "the need to reduce (the number of) first governors" and "fewer governors appointed by the Foundation". Likewise, issues for the headteachers' included "the reduction in the number of foundation

governors” and “losing good governors from the first governor category”. In the view of one of them: “foundation status is disappointing in the number of foundation governors”.

Furthermore, there was some evidence that there were concerns about how the changes were going to be achieved. One chair wrote, “how to choose those to be asked to leave?” Confusingly, some respondents were concerned about the increased size of the governing body under the new framework and others about the reduced size. One chair commented: “Extra governors will make the Governing Body unwieldy” and a headteacher asked: “How to achieve continuity relationship with an existing charitable foundation? How to shed governors?”

Other concerns about changes in composition included the loss of autonomy and/or fear about changes in the character and ethos of the school. One headteacher wrote: “We want to keep our foundation (Church) governors to maintain the school ethos”.

No concerns about changes in composition of the governing body

Despite the range of concerns already identified, 12 per cent (N=14) of respondents considered the changes to be insignificant and consequently they had no concerns. For example, headteachers wrote: “We do not consider the changes to be of too great significance”; “(There are) no serious issues regarding governance”, and “(There are) no contentious issues.” Similar comments from chairs of governors included:

Any new composition will not affect the management and processes of the governing body.

I actually find it irrelevant to the good running of the school.

... existing governors see the exercise as grant-aided under a new name with little or no change.

(There are) no significant issues; (we are a) good (first class) school; super Ofsted report; hard working dedicated governors and staff.

Moreover, another 18 per cent of questionnaire respondents (N=22) chose not to respond in any way to the question that asked them to identify issues of concern to their school in respect of the change in governing body composition. Thus, it was assumed that they had none.

Changes in the powers of governing bodies

Respondents were also asked directly whether they welcomed the changes in the powers of their governing body. In view of the fact that these headteachers and chairs of governors rated autonomy high on their list of reasons for their school opting out, it was not surprising that the vast majority of them were unreceptive, even though most expressed their reservations in cautious terms. In contrast, however, there were some who did welcome the changes. A summary of the responses is given in table 5.15.

Table 5.15: Percentage responses to question “Do you welcome the changes in the powers of governing bodies which were formerly GM?”

	‘Yes’	‘No’
Headteachers	16 (N=12)	73 (N=33)
Chairs of Governors	13 (N=6)	63 (N=48)

In the elaboration of their answers, the respondents indicated a range of views although the majority took the stance expressed by one chair of governors “if it ain’t broke, why mend it?” Some respondents mentioned the reduction in autonomy here. For example, one headteacher

wrote that: “autonomy and independence have been welcomed. Any loss of these is a retrograde step”, and another added, “I believe that the existing GM powers give to governing bodies the right scope for discretion”. Moreover, yet another headteacher made the connection with self-governance explicit when she commented: “The reduction in powers relative to LEAs can only be a weakening of self-governance”.

A group of respondents, mainly consisting of headteachers, linked the changes in power to funding and associated issues. For example, contrary to what the Government intend, one head wrote “there are strong signals that the LEA will retain much funding at the centre and wish to ‘run’ the schools”. For others, capital funding was the issue. A head commented: “(My) main fears revolve around capital funding” and another noted “capital funding should be maintained. FAS ensured inset, premises, capital etc spent under those headings and audited it. (We are) unlikely to have the same rigour under the LEA!”

In contrast, however, it was also clear that some respondents did not perceive any real changes in the powers of governing bodies. In the view of one headteacher, “apart from LEA representation, not a great deal will change.” Although not necessarily agreeing with this head, one chair of governors appreciated that the changes could have been greater. “Given the change of political approach, I am reassured by the range of powers left to foundation schools”, he commented.

Among those taking a more positive approach to the changes, there was an acknowledgement of broader community issues as exemplified by one headteacher who commented: “We do realise that an agreed admission policy across ‘an area’ is necessary”. Another added: “GM

independence has been exhilarating but perhaps LEA governors will play a critical friend role vis a vis the needs of the whole community?"

Governor recruitment and selection

Respondents expressed concern about selection of the LEA representatives and the recruitment of parent governors. Focusing first on the former, a number of headteachers mentioned the issue in their comments. For example, statements such as "criteria to be used by LEA for LEA appointments (is a concern)" and "LEA have not yet provided criteria on which appointments of LEA governors will be made" were included. One head indicated that the "school is working closely with LEA in this regard". A few schools were attempting to retain present governors as LEA representatives. One headteacher stated that:

The LEA (is) happy for school to nominate two representatives. Therefore, (it is) possible - if we wish - for all governors to remain.

Similarly, a chair of governors expressed the hope that "one or two of our present governors with political connections can fill these positions".

Turning to recruitment of parents, these respondents indicated concern about "attracting additional parent governors" and the "increased difficulty in finding more parent governors".

In connection with an issue raised by one headteacher interviewee, questionnaire respondents were invited to indicate whether any of their governors had expressed an intention to resign and, if so, why. In fact, very few had done so. One chair of governors suggested that two members of his governing body were intending to resign. However, this was not corroborated by the

headteacher of the school. Similarly, another chair stated that one governor was intending to resign although, again, the headteacher did not seem to be aware of this. Three different headteachers also suggested that there were likely to be resignations, two of them quantifying it as one governor in each case. Reasons given for resignations include “loss of control, fear of LEA intervention and bureaucracy” and “changes are not conducive with interpretation of a governing body”.

Funding

Changes in funding arrangements

The previous section highlights the concern expressed by some of the respondents about the changes in funding arrangements; for some it was their major preoccupation when asked about the changes in the composition and powers of governing bodies. Thus, most respondents took the opportunity to comment when asked about the implications of the new revenue funding arrangements for their school, albeit that only limited information was available at the time.

57 per cent (N=69) of all respondents referred to a reduction in funding. Comments from headteachers included:

Funds will be significantly less and we will, therefore, be less able to serve the needs of the school, for example, in retaining skilled teachers.

It will mean a loss of £30K per year.

I don't know (whether) there will still be sufficient funding to keep us in the style to which we are accustomed.

Chairs of governors expressed similar views: “We can not find out how much money we will lose ” and “expect a reduction”. Some respondents mentioned particular grants and/or areas of activity which they believed they would no longer be able to fund. For example, the loss of special purpose grants (SPG) was mentioned by 12 per cent (N=14) of the sample and most of these highlighted the abolition of SPG(D) (special purpose grant for development) as of particular concern. One headteacher wrote:

(There is an) apparent slashing of standards - training and development. These will severely restrict staff development.

The LEA and funding

The role of, and holdback by, the LEA was also mentioned by a number of other respondents.

One head was “very concerned about the percentage delegated (by the LEA and the amount held back to) support the payment of central resources” and others had worries about “centralised decision making about staff development and a wide range of other issues” as well as “(the school) will lose out in the way the standards fund will be allocated via LEAs”.

Yet another headteacher remarked that s/he was alarmed by the fact that the “local authority has actually recruited new advisers (who started in) September 1998 (in order to support) ... its increased role. Similarly, chairs of governors commented:

Our LEA is not noted for its willing release of funds down to school level and there is fear that funds will be hidden from applications by individual schools.

We have to watch that the LEA do not hive off funds given (to) them by central government for education for other purposes.

(We hope for) minimum retention by the LEA, bearing in mind we have very little use for the central services they supply.

The uncertainty experienced at the time of the survey was also at the forefront in the respondents' minds. For one chair of governors the situation was "a complete non transparent mess as far as I can see. We will lack financial stability and planning (and be) subject to the vagaries of LEA funding". Similarly, other respondents were concerned about "transparency and cash flow issues" (chair of governors), "the lack of clarity as to how educational development plans will be funded" (chair of governors) and "no information about funding for buildings, grounds and personnel issues" (headteacher). However, in anticipation of the changes one headteacher wrote "staff have been made redundant and class sizes have increased" while another explained that because "we may suffer budget reduction, we are fundraising".

Another issue that arose from the survey was the relationship between the range of responsibilities associated with the different categories of school, LEA support and funding. Headteachers wrote about the "loss of central add-on for extra responsibilities" and a desire for "parity with a school which has fewer responsibilities".

Finally, there was yet another area of concern to the respondents which involved the LEA's role, that of the allocation of capital funding. This topic is now considered in the next section.

Capital funding

There was much concern about future capital funding arrangements and a belief that schools - and, in particular, the respondents' own schools - would suffer. Many respondents noted that one of the implications of the changes was likely to be a reduction in capital funding and one

headteacher summed it up as “reductions and interference”. Others added: “There will probably be little or no capital funding allocated to our school” and “I have no doubt we will go to the end of the queue”.

The role of the LEA in the allocation of capital funding was a major issue for these headteachers and chairs of governors. There was fear of recrimination. According to one headteacher: “The LEA are not keen on a selective school that was GM” and another remarked that “because of LEA antipathy, we are likely to lose out”. A chair of governors explained that “as before GM status, the LEA will spend no capital monies on this school” and another added: “It will mean that, as prior to GM, there will be little hope of winning LEA support for our projects”. The concern was particularly acute for GM schools that were formerly voluntary aided or controlled and were likely to adopt voluntary status under the new framework. Under the new arrangements these schools are required to contribute 15 per cent of the cost of any capital development. One chair of governors summed up the situation thus: “The 15 per cent is a nightmare. Where will the money come from? Certainly not from the Church”.

Some respondents made reference to the previous arrangements through the Funding Agency for Schools (FAS). The view of one head was that: “Bids to the LEA may not be as impartially handled as they were by the FAS” and another explained: “We have enjoyed our working relationship with the FAS and are somewhat wary of the interests of LEA officers in respect of major capital works”.

The loss of the formula-funded capital allocation was also an issue for some respondents who perceived it as a further reduction in the opportunities for schools to manage their own affairs.

One head commented:

We are once again in the situation of being unable to plan realistically. If schools lose formula allocation, it will mean poor facilities for pupils (and) parents are already very concerned about this possibility.

Fair funding

In contrast to the wide ranging concerns about the changes in the funding arrangements, some respondents anticipated little change under the new arrangements and two headteachers endorsed the principle of fair funding in their comments. One chair of governors urged that “100 per cent delegation must mean 100 per cent delegation” and another headteacher was optimistic that, in fact, his/her school would benefit from the new arrangements because his/her LEA would be required by government to increase its spending on education in line with minimum requirements set nationally. S/he explained that because the:

authority is one of only three that would fall below the 30 per cent standard spending assessment threshold and (as) fair funding implies a minimum entitlement ... hope the amount to spend will rise.

A different viewpoint was expressed by yet another headteacher. S/he suspected that there would be relatively few implications in terms of the new funding arrangements for his/her school. S/he went on to comment that the LEA “has funded all schools well in recent years, fair funding has clipped their wings”.

Admissions

New arrangements

Although the majority of respondents did not anticipate that the new arrangements for organising school admissions within their area would limit their ability to determine the intake of their school (see table 5.6), it was evident from written comments that there was still considerable uncertainty about how it would affect individual schools. One head thought that:

the adjudicator may influence matters in a town with too many school places.

While another, having answered ‘no’ to the question as to whether the new arrangements will limit the ability of the school to determine its admission intake, added:

... unless the LEA insist on an admissions policy for all schools, which might eliminate our open enrolment policy.

A chair of governors also displayed some doubt when s/he commented: “It is possible that the LEA will limit our intake to the standard number” while two others (both associated with primary schools) believed that any issues had been overtaken by government policy on class size. However, a different headteacher appeared to have come to terms with the situation when s/he expressed this realistic view:

Even a foundation school cannot be as independent as at present with local politics and recourse to an adjudicator.

Furthermore, a number of respondents indicated that it was “too early to say” at this stage. Table 5.16 provides a summary of respondents’ views.

Table 5.16 Percentage respondents' views regarding whether or not new admissions arrangements will limit ability of their school to determine its intake

	Yes	No
Headteachers	7.5 (N=5)	92.5 (N=62)
Chairs of governors	13 (N=5)	87 (N=33)

9 headteachers and 7 chairs of governors failed to respond to this question.

A local admissions forum

The respondents were asked to comment on the formation of a local admissions forum, both in relation to their own school and in general. Once again, the majority of respondents were unconcerned in relation to their own school. Either they did not anticipate any problems or real change or did not have sufficient information to comment at this stage. For example, headteacher responses included: “No real changes are envisaged”, “generally happy to participate in these arrangements”, “uncertain of the logistics”. Chairs of governors commented similarly: “Do not anticipate any new problems” and “have not received information at governor level, so we have not discussed it”.

Some respondents believed that their school – sometimes because it was either over or under subscribed - would be unaffected by the forum. Their arguments included :

(that) as a popular, oversubscribed school which is not selective we are not concerned about these new arrangements

(headteacher),

we are under-subscribed, so not an issue

(headteacher)

(we are) non selective, (therefore it) will not apply

(chair of governors)

...we are the only school in the village

(headteacher)

(that) as a boarding school it has little relevance

(headteacher)

However, other respondents expressed reservations. For example, chairs of governors remarked: "We fear the adjudicator will not appreciate the importance of the religious character of the school and our priority to preserve the Catholic ethos", "It sounds like interference" and "(The forum is) likely to be hostile to the school's current admissions criteria". Some headteachers commented about their perception of the increased bureaucracy and cost: "(It) involves more paperwork for the school. (It is) not as streamlined as our own procedures", "(It adds) an extra layer of unnecessary bureaucracy" and "We suspect it will be a 'talking shop' and are concerned about the cost of administration".

Turning to their responses in connection with local admission forums and schools generally, there was again a range of views. Some respondents acknowledged the benefits:

Co-ordinated admissions arrangements are a good idea

(headteacher)

(It) makes for amicable working relations

(headteacher)

It probably makes sense to co-ordinate admissions policies

(chair of governors)

Other informants expressed different views. For example, one chair of governors was concerned about "the balance between parental choice and LEA/Government desire to fill

empty places in less popular schools". S/he suspected that "the LEA will be biased to filling spaces than giving parents choice". Similarly, a headteacher remarked that: "The LEA may try to fill under-subscribed schools but parental choice should deter this". Other headteachers commented in respect of multiple applications:

(It) might improve the situation of parents 'holding' places at two schools until the last minute.

(It could make it) easier for schools and parents to know where they stand.

The adjudicator

The appointment and work of the adjudicator was of concern to other heads and chairs of governors. One chair wrote: "The adjudicator's appointment seems insufficiently democratic" and a headteacher asked: "Who selects the adjudicator?" Another headteacher commented that the effectiveness of the arrangements overall will depend upon "the composition of the forum and the standpoint of the adjudicator" while, after stating that "(it) could be a good idea", a different chair of governors added "as long as the adjudicator can remain neutral". A similar view was taken by yet another chair of governors who summed up the situation:

We understand the need to achieve greater local consensus. It will be an extremely difficult job. Adjudicators will need the wisdom of Solomon and a bullet-proof vest.

The School Organisation Committee

The views of headteachers and chairs of governors in respect of the formation of a School Organisation Committee in each LEA were similar and are shown in table 5.17. It is

significant that 21 per cent (N=25) of the complete sample did not make a response.

Possibly, there was a lack of understanding about the details of the structure and role of the committee. A few respondents who added comments indicated that they “don’t know yet” or were “uncertain”.

Table 5.17: Percentage responses: Do you welcome the introduction of the LEA School Organisation Committee to plan school places in your area?

Response	Yes	No	No response
Headteachers	37 (N=28)	45 (N=34)	18 (N=14)
Chairs of Governors	33 (N=15)	42 (N=19)	25 (N=11)

In the elaboration of their answer, many respondents expressed a mixture of acceptance tinged with caution about the establishment of the committee. For example, one headteacher argued that “someone has to do it”. Additionally, the necessity to plan in order not to waste resources was also highlighted. For example, one headteacher “planning is needed; unfilled places are wasteful of limited resources”. Another head made a similar point but added: “I would ideally have preferred a larger area than an LEA”. A chair of governors commented that: “it may mean sending children to less popular schools in order to meet class size limit of 30”.

On the positive side, one head suggested that: “It could reduce governor work load on admissions – a positive angle” and a chair of governors thought that it “will help with arrangements for (entrance) examinations”. However, many respondents were not so positive. Their comments included:

I do not welcome anything which gives added power to the LEA.

(headteacher)

(I have) concern over local politics over-riding sound educational reasoning.
(headteacher)

I am sceptical as to the LEA view of schools such as ours and their willingness to tackle denominational or church issues.
(headteacher)

(there is) likely to be an increase in interfering bureaucracy.
(chair of governors)

A group of respondents focused specifically on the committee as it affected their own school. For example, one chair of governors explained that: "Last time there was a forum to plan school places in the area they planned to shut down our school (in order) to lose the surplus places so naturally we would be on the alert about this". A headteacher also expressed concern about his/her own situation by writing: "But not to force this large school to become even larger".

Other headteachers were concerned about the committee's structure and way of working. One stated that s/he "would want to see a lot more transparency than was the case in the past with the LEA. Another explained that: "The composition of a recent shadow Schools Organisation Committee and the way in which it was both manipulated and composed has caused considerable concern". A third headteacher's view was that: "It appears that such committees will be democratically composed and will bring decision-making more into the open". Other respondents mentioned parental choice, value for money and quality of provision in relation to the committee's work and were anxious that these factors should not be overlooked.

Finally, for some respondents, the need to change was not evident to them:

We are happy as we are.

(headteacher)

In this respect, the Funding Agency for Schools (FAS) was praised. Headteachers commented:

The function has been well refined by the FAS.

The FAS has been better (than the LEA) – efficient and accurate.

Other admissions issues for these schools

Only 21 per cent (17 headteachers and 8 chairs of governors) responded to the question about other issues of admission for their schools. Issues of over-subscription, selection, class size and boarding arrangements were mentioned once again. Interestingly, one headteacher of a school that used a verbal reasoning test to select its pupils stated the issue for his/her school as “the attitude of the LEA to parents who opt for selective schools and fail to gain a place”. Possibly, the view was that some parents may not apply to his/her school for fear of LEA recrimination if their child did not secure a place. A chair of governors was concerned about the introduction of selection at another school in the town and the effect it would have on his/her school. S/he commented that “We have a well-balanced comprehensive intake ... we shall monitor the situation”.

Two headteachers raised issues about the education of children with special educational needs, although they took rather different standpoints. One head explained that:

We attract a larger than average special needs contingent ... (our) 'good reputation' in dealing with special needs students needs handling carefully!

The other headteacher was concerned about "statemented pupils" in connection with "pupils who are not of our religious denomination (who) have priority for admission".

LEA-GM school relations

On going GM

The majority of respondents (89 per cent, N=108) gave some indication about the nature of the school's relationship with their former LEA on going GM. With very few exceptions (for example, "very difficult" v. "fairly good") the views of headteachers and chairs of governors from the same school were similar. However, it should be noted that there were a few respondents who were not in post at the time their school went GM and were, therefore, not able to give an opinion. (These people are not included in the percentage given above.)

Among those respondents who were able to, and did, comment, nearly a third (N=34) described the relationship in positive, fairly positive or neutral terms. For example, "amicable", "formal but civilised", "acceptable" (chairs of governors); "warm but ineffective", "cordial - (the LEA) made their case and accepted the inevitable gracefully", "okay - other grammar schools opting out before us took most of the 'flak'", "good (obviously, the LEA did not want us to become GM!)". In contrast, there were negative comments about the relationship. These included statements such as:

outright hostility - (there was a) media campaign against the school both in the national press and local media;

(headteacher)

acrimonious in the extreme, rock bottom;

(headteacher)

the local authority were entirely unco-operative, forcing the school to become absolutely independent;

(chair of governors)

poor - the LEA has always been critical of this school but welcomed its good examination results.

(chair of governors)

Establishing and maintaining links

The majority of respondents (84 per cent overall, N=118, see table 5.18) described the school's present links with their former, or new, LEA as 'established'. In contrast to the majority of respondents' descriptions about their school/LEA relationships at the time of going GM, many explained that a level of co-operation between the school and its former LEA had been maintained throughout the GM period. One chair of governors asserted that: "We have always maintained links with the LEA" and a headteacher commented that: "Their (the LEA's) residual responsibilities kept the links alive throughout GM". Another headteacher supported this view: "Large scale SEN provision requires high level liaison which has always been maintained".

Table 5.18: Percentage respondents having links with LEA

Established links	Yes	No
Headteachers	82 (N=63)	16 (N=12)
Chairs of governors	80 (N=36)	16 (N=7)

One headteachers and two chairs of governors did not respond to this question and account for the remaining percentage.

Although, for some schools, the first period of GM status was difficult, changes in personnel, both at LEA and school levels, as well as changes in local political power, brought about improvements. For example, one headteacher outlined his/her situation as:

following the departure of a 'hostile' chief education officer (CEO) about four years ago and replaced by the Deputy CEO with whom we had already enjoyed cordial relations, mutual agreement to meet seemed to happen spontaneously.

A chair of governors responded in a similar vein by explaining that links had been established "now that we have a conservative administration in the county". S/he went on to write that:

the former Labour/Liberal Democratic (regime) would have nothing to do with GM schools (but) links (had been) formed immediately upon the change by both the school and county.

S/he elaborated her/his personal viewpoint by adding 'thank God' in parentheses. Another chair of governors explained that "except for the first year of GM there have been numerous links at head, teaching and support staff levels".

In terms of the initiation, or maintenance, of these links, both sides appeared to play a part. A number of respondents, both headteachers and chairs of governors, indicated that they, either as individuals, or jointly, had ensured the links although a few respondents acknowledged the LEA's role in this. For example, the CEO in one authority had called two meetings with GM colleagues and put them back on their mailing list and representatives from a new, unitary LEA had made contact about literacy, target setting and school places. Local headteachers' groups, both for GM heads and mixed GM/LEA (for example, secondary or primary heads'

associations) played a significant part in maintaining links between GM schools, other local schools and the LEA.

However, a few respondents gave indication of an on-going, less satisfactory relationship. Headteachers' comments included: "I have tried on several occasions. The CEO has written to me to say that the current (non) partnership is appropriate, given the current legislation", "(Links are) non existent although we have tried" and "I wrote to the CEO shortly after taking up my post in January 1997. He replied just after the May 1997 election"

Use of LEA services

About one fifth of schools (19 per cent, N=17) did not purchase any services from their former, or new, LEA. Of the 80 per cent that did use, at least, some LEA services, inservice training was the most popular (60 per cent use, N=53), followed by consultancy/advisory services (53 per cent use, N=47). Details of the number of schools using different LEA services are given in table 5.19.

Table 5.19: Percentage of schools using different types of LEA service

Inservice training	Consultancy/ Advisory services	Other educational services	Other services
60 (N=53)	53 (N=47)	42 (N=37)	41 (N=33)

Percentages are based on the 88 schools represented in the sample. In the situation where both the headteacher and the chair of governors from the sample school have responded, the headteacher's response has been used.

Summary

This chapter reports the survey data and, in doing so, tells the 'story' of the study group of GM headteachers' and chairs of governors' views, perceptions and ideas about the future of their schools during the period leading up to the abolition of GM schools.

The questionnaire used to generate the data was designed to incorporate, wherever possible, the research issues resulting from the pilot study and highlighted at the end of the previous chapter. For example, respondents were asked to comment on issues both in relation to their own school and the education system generally as well as about the ways in which they were preparing for the change of status. Moreover, although only the passage of time will reveal the extent to, and precise way in, which the schools in each of the new categories reinvent themselves, this survey makes an initial contribution to a bank of evidence about these schools, their backgrounds and possible future developments.

Thus, having focused on the survey data exclusively, it is now important, and necessary, to locate the outcomes in a broader context. The next chapter provides an analysis of both the interview and survey findings in the light of other empirical research into aspects of GM schools as well as the more general literature on autonomous, self-managing schools.

Note on factual information about sample schools

In some cases where the representative from both groups of respondents co-operated, there were differences in the factual information each presented about the school. Wherever possible, the accurate facts about the school were established and used. In cases where it was not possible to do this, those presented by the headteacher were used.

CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS

Introduction

In the previous chapters the data obtained from interviews and a questionnaire survey have been analysed using a thematic approach. This analysis is now developed within the broader context of the other research literature, particularly that which reports earlier empirical studies of GM schools, with the purpose of exploring the synergy between the findings from this study and those of other GM projects. The chapter is structured to reflect the issues of importance identified in the literature review (chapter 2), namely, the concepts of decentralisation, autonomy and accountability as well as the more specific topics of governance, funding, admissions arrangements and relationships with LEAs. The concepts in the first list are important because they underpin the GM policy while the individual items in the second group also have a significant impact on schools. Moreover, in contrast to chapter 2, the specific topics are considered here before the conceptual areas in order to demonstrate the development of the analysis from the specific to the conceptual. However, before embarking on such analysis, it is important to highlight relevant contextual details, both in terms of this study and those of others that inform it. The rest of this section and the two that follow address these matters.

Earlier research into GM schools can be categorised in two ways: work that adopts a more-or-less educational management/school effectiveness perspective and that which takes a mainly sociological view of the policy. The work of Bush, Coleman and Glover (Bush, 1990; Bush *et al*, 1993a, 1993b; Coleman *et al*, 1993; Glover *et al*, 1993a, 1993b), as well as that of Bell *et al* (1996), Brown (1990b), Cauldwell and Reid (1996), Deem and Wilkins (1991), Levacic and Hardman (1999), Thompson (1992) and Tritter and Chadwick (1997) fall into the first of

these categories. The main researchers in the second category are Fitz, Halpin and Power (Fitz and Halpin, 1991; Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997; Fitz, Power and Halpin, 1993; Halpin and Fitz, 1990; Halpin, Fitz and Power, 1991, 1993; Halpin, Power and Fitz, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1997; Power, Halpin and Fitz, 1994) although Campbell *et al* (1996), Deem and Davies (1991) and Walford (1994) also contribute to it.

Most of the first group of writers report survey and case study data and are concerned with aspects of school leadership, governance and management as evidenced in GM schools. Additionally, the Levacic and Hardman study on GM school effectiveness (Levacic and Hardman 1999) uses statistical techniques to analyse recruitment and examination performance data and thus explore how 'good' GM schools were. In contrast, sociologically inflected research on the policy investigates the initiative's more general impact on the educational system in terms of diversity of provision, parental choice and parents' and pupils' perceptions of what it meant to be a GM school. These studies also seek to theorise and explain the policy's significance. Thus, although these projects complement one another, their aims are somewhat different.

In addition to these academic commentators, of related interest are the surveys and reports of official bodies, for example, government agencies such as Ofsted and the National Audit Office (Ofsted, 1993, 1998; National Audit Office 1994) and those of the educational press (TES, 1994; Dean and Slater, 1998). While the research on which these publications are based does not adopt the rigours of academic study, they complement the studies listed above and contribute to our understanding of the policy.

All these projects (with the exception of the TES 1998 survey [Dean and Slater, 1998]) were undertaken at a time when the GM initiative was buoyant and in tune with current government thinking. The key informants, the headteachers and chairs of governors of GM schools, regarded themselves as partners with government in making and implementing the GM policy (Halpin, Fitz and Power, 1993, p.6). Many of them had made considerable professional and, in some cases, personal investment in it. For example, headteachers and chairs of governors became advocates for GM status, speaking on behalf of the policy at public meetings across the country. From their perspective at this time, GM schools were here to stay and their commitment to this type of school was real.

The research reported here is concerned with perceptions of the changes that are taking place as a result of the election of a Labour Government in 1997 and its decision to re-designate schools. This context creates a new scenario for the informants. Rather than being part of the policy-making, they are now 'having it done to them', and thus are having to respond to it in the government's terms rather than in their own.

Furthermore, many of these headteachers and chairs of governors are having to come to terms with the fact that, despite their best efforts, their work in a particular school has not been sufficient to ensure its continuity without change being imposed upon them. Indeed, it can be argued that this aspect applies equally to all GM headteachers and chairs of governors because, even those appointed after the school had been incorporated as GM had, by the acceptance of their post, demonstrated commitment to GM schools. While, at one level, they may be able to acknowledge that part of the reason for the demise of their schools is political,

at another, their personal involvement has been challenged. Moreover, for some of them, the changes may also contradict their own values and beliefs.

All of this means that it would have been impossible for the other GM studies to comment on the issues of interest in this project because the research on which they are based was undertaken before New Labour came to power and the present situation was created. Thus, there are significant differences between the projects listed above and the data reported in the two previous chapters. This, in turn, raises questions about the purpose of the research and, although it was explored in some detail in earlier chapters, it is worth a brief re-visit here.

Although many, particularly those on the political left, are celebrating the end of the GM movement, it does represent a significant experiment in school autonomy (Dean and Rafferty, 1999). Looking back on the introduction and development of the policy ten years on, it can be argued that the links with school effectiveness and school improvement are much more tenuous than those required of such an initiative today. Indeed, the Conservative Government did not commission any research into the impact of GM schools, neither generally, nor in terms of the difference these schools made to the academic progress and attainment of the pupils educated within them (Dean and Rafferty, 1999). On the contrary, as indicated above, research on GM schools was undertaken, but without government support. At this endpoint of the decade of GM schools, the study reported here is intended to provide a bridgehead between the findings from the earlier projects and future research which may consider aspects of these same schools in their new guise within New Labour's framework for the organisation of schools.

The schools, their characteristics and reputations

From the outset, GM schools were perceived as privileged. Although advantageous funding (which is discussed in a later section of this chapter) was a significant factor in this perception, there were other contributing features, many of which were 'created' by the Conservative government in an attempt to promote the policy and encourage opting out. These included various forms of 'spin-doctoring' of GM schools as well as the specific nurturing of key figures among the early GM practitioners. Indeed, Halpin, Power and Fitz (1993, p.6) suggest that:

... it is the widely and flatteringly reported experiences of many (GM headteachers) which have given the policy its public face and, in turn, legitimised a particular view of its merits.

Notwithstanding this, before considering the strategies used by the government of the time in its endeavour to encourage the take-up of the policy, the nature of the schools opting out in the first cohort is also worthy of note. Such consideration sheds light on why, and how, the GM sector developed its prestigious reputation.

The first eighteen schools to achieve GM status on 1 September 1989 included a disproportionate number (61 per cent, N=11) of long established schools which were voluntary aided or controlled or ex-direct grant grammar schools in comparison with English and Welsh state schools generally. For example, Wilson's School was founded by Royal Charter of James I in 1615, Old Swinford Hospital was established in 1667, Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School was set up in 1701, The London Oratory School opened in 1852 and Heckmondwike Grammar School came into existence in 1897. The remaining schools among the first 18 to opt out consisted of six comprehensive schools and one middle school.

Hence, there was a bias within this first cohort towards schools that, even before achieving GM status, presented themselves as more like independent schools than run-of-the-mill state schools. Confirmation of this analysis is provided by Fitz *et al* (1991, p.37) who considered the characteristics of the first 48 schools to opt out and found a disproportionate number of schools that were selective, single sex, had sixth forms, offered boarding facilities or had voluntary status prior to opting out. Indeed, in a later paper, Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993, p.76) point to the fact that GM schools were intended to "break down the barrier between public and private provision". Furthermore, advocating parent choice and "ending the existing unfairness ... in which only the wealthy have choice", Tebbit (1987) described them as a "half-way house" between state and independent schools.

Turning now to the 'politiking' evident around GM schools under the former government, there was, at the time, much public acclaim for the sector generally. For example, in their speeches, senior Tory politicians used phrases like "the Jewel in the Crown" (MacGregor, 1990) and "beacons of excellence" (see Halpin *et al*, 1996) to describe GM schools. Furthermore, public recognition was bestowed upon individual headteachers and one chair of governors in the form of CBEs and OBEs (TES, 23 April 1999, p. 24). Other key actors from the GM sector received invitations to Royal Garden Parties and GM dinners and receptions were supported by secretaries of state and even prime ministers (Halpin Power and Fitz, 1993, p.21). Additionally, changes were made in the actual legislation as well as in its interpretation and implementation in an attempt to increase the number of opted-out schools (Fitz , Power and Halpin, 1993, p.7).

The reasons for opting out

The reasons why schools opted out have always been of particular interest to researchers. Halpin, Power and Halpin (1993, p.7) comment on the extent to which schools tended to seek GM status for negative reasons, for example, avoidance of LEA influence, threat of closure or re-organisation. They describe this fact as "one of the most ironic aspects of opting out" (p.7). Moreover, while the range of explanations provided by various surveys differ little, there are variations in the priority of the reasons given.

Bush *et al's* (1993) data indicate that independence from LEAs was the main motivator for seeking GM status among their sample of schools. Furthermore, confirmation of this reason was obtained when their respondents were asked to rank the responses. Other reasons mentioned included increased revenue and avoiding closure or reorganisation. Notwithstanding the fact it is difficult to generalise about the reasons why schools opt out (Bush *et al*, p.83), these writers identify four models of the process which neatly summarise their findings in terms of their study schools' internal and external coherence, conflict, neutrality and hostility.

Thompson (1992) undertook an early investigation among representatives of The Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association (AMMA) – now the Association of Teachers and Lecturers – working in GM schools and found fear of closure or reorganisation were the reasons most frequently given. Only 19 per cent (N=7) of her respondents mentioned freedom from the LEA. Similarly, the chief reason cited by the 19 headteachers in Fitz, Halpin and Power's (1993) sample was to challenge a closure or reorganisation proposal (N=7). Only two of their informants mentioned independence from the LEA.

Cauldwell and Reid (1996) investigated samples of GM headteachers in four cohorts according to when their schools had opted out between 1989 and 1993. Ninety one per cent of their complete sample (N=222) considered 'increased independence' to be important, or very important; increased revenue was the second most commonly viewed factor (71 per cent of total). When analysed by cohort, their 'initial school' sample (the group selected to replicate the Bush *et al* survey) also identified 'school closure' as another significant factor.

The outcomes from the survey reported here generally reflect those of Cauldwell and Reid. For example, in the case of both the headteachers and the chairs of governors, nearly half the respondents (headteachers: 48 per cent (N=33), chairs of governors: 44 per cent (N=20)) indicated that 'autonomy' was their school's main reason for seeking GM status. As one headteacher explained: "We asserted our independence ..." and another highlighted "control over our own destiny and vision" as the main reason for seeking GM status.

Thus, the findings from the two most recent studies which considered why schools opted out suggest that some expression of 'independence'/'autonomy'/'freedom from LEA' was adopted as the main explanation since the initial period of the policy. Threat of closure or reorganisation may have been less significant within a short time after the introduction of GM status because all, or most of, those schools in such a position were among the early schools to opt out.

The other reason given by informants for their schools seeking GM status, which features in some of these studies and is of interest here, concerns the funding of GM schools. Although the original intention, as presented by the Conservative Government, was that all schools

should be funded equally (DES, 1988), the advantageous position of GM schools was soon evident even though it was not formally acknowledged until 1991 by the then Prime Minister, John Major. Despite this, it was not surprising that GM schools valued their favourable revenue situation. For example, one headteacher stated: "It was financially attractive" and "our authority was awful – bad record of funding". Notwithstanding these comments, it is likely that a significant number of respondents to any GM survey would have claimed that funding, in itself, was not their main reason for opting out. However, it can be argued that, in itself, the level of funding provided GM schools with more independence, thus it would follow that a proportion of the 'more independence'/'autonomy' responses were, in fact, indirectly linked to the level of funding (Cauldwell and Reid, 1996, p.251).

Turning now to the data generated from the pilot interviews undertaken for this study, it is interesting to note that the two primary headteachers made direct reference to the link between going GM and improving teaching and learning when asked about the consequences of GM status. One of them listed the range of different subjects her school had introduced since it had opted out. The other described the impact on pupil learning that had resulted from the enhanced role of learning support assistants which, in turn, had been possible because of GM status. Although, it is not claimed that the findings from this project illustrate improvements in student learning outcomes, this interview evidence, albeit limited, does illustrate an awareness of different, less managerial, reasons for schools opting out.

In contrast, there is little evidence of such developments elsewhere in the GM research findings. For example, Ofsted reports on GM schools and more general matters (Ofsted 1993, 1995, 1996, 1998) make no reference to innovative developments in curriculum,

pedagogy or pupils' grouping (Fitz *et al*, 1997) aimed at school improvement. Moreover, Levacic and Hardman (1999) make a similar point in their recent publication. Discussing the motivation for schools opting out, they comment that "there was no particular emphasis on school improvement in terms of student learning outcomes" (p. 204).

Changes in school governance

Existing literature highlights the changing boundaries of those eligible to become governors as well as their increased responsibilities and powers over the past two decades (Deem *et al*, 1995, p.14). Furthermore, it explains that many of the changes introduced during the 1980s were, in part, designed to depoliticize governing bodies (Deem *et al*, 1995, p.64; Field, 1993, p.166). According to Kogan (1984) and Golby and Brigley (1989), prior to the 1988 ERA, a governing body's power and influence was largely lodged in the political contacts of the governors.

Changes in composition of governing bodies

GM status introduced the concept of 'first' governors in addition to the 'foundation' governor category that already existed in voluntary aided schools and was continued in those schools that became GM. First and foundation governors were appointed by serving members of the governing body, a privilege that credited the board with significant power and discretion about its own character. A point which is made by Bush *et al* (1993, p.181) who suggest that "the antecedence of each GM school, and the subsequent appointment of first or foundation governors, appears to have given each governing body its own character"(p.182).

The matter is also supported by Deem and Wilkins (1991) who, in their case study of Stantonbury Campus, emphasise the "substantial removal of the local political dimension from the life of the Campus" as "one immediate advantage of GM status" (p.8). In contrast, in a different study, Deem *et al* (1995) assert that interest in politics may contribute to the reasons why individuals become governors. These researchers identified three types of reasons why individuals become governors, one of which included people active in the community who had often been elected local politicians or were active members of a political party. However, Sherratt's (1994, p.12) suggestion that some governors act in an over-politicised way, especially around GM issues, is not borne out in Tritter and Chadwick's (1997, p.9) case studies. In contrast, these researchers did find evidence that LEA appointed governors were often absent from meetings and were less committed to the school. (Presumably, this last finding applied to LEA governors in pre-GM days).

Along similar but not identical lines, the data reported here indicate that, for some of the respondents, their concern about the re-introduction of LEA governors focused on the possible political stance these people may adopt. The perception was that LEA governors will politicise the way in which the governing body operates despite the fact that they will be only two among, for example, a minimum governing body size of 10 in a small foundation primary school. Moreover, for some of the informants, the commitment of LEA governors was an issue. They feared a lack of commitment to their individual school and contrast this with the support they were receiving at the time from 'first' and 'foundation' governors.

In this respect, it is suggested that the inclusion of local authority representatives was viewed as 'going back' to the pre ERA period when governors exerted their power through political

connections and before delegated budgets and self-management. However, it ought not to be overlooked that, in the pilot interviews, one headteacher acknowledged the danger of regarding LEAs as still operating in their pre LMS mode. Likewise, some survey respondents referred to the changes that had taken place within LEAs – both in terms of responsibilities and approach - over the last decade.

Importantly, among a group of survey respondents, another view was expressed. For these informants there were no concerns about the changes in composition. The implication was that the revised structure would have little effect and, indeed, was insignificant. This view was evident in some responses to other survey questions. There appeared to be an element of pragmatism in these informants' replies.

Turning to the increase in parent governorship, Brehony (1992) found this group quieter than other governors and, hence, made less contribution at meetings. Furthermore, on the assumption that most parent governors are non educational professionals, Deem *et al* 's (1995) findings that lay governors not only lack knowledge about education but their educational values may be at odds with those of the professionals is pertinent. Indeed, such differences could impede the effectiveness of a governing body.

The pilot study for this project identified parent governors' objectivity as an issue although this was not confirmed by the survey. The vast majority of the respondents in this study believed the nature of the contributions from parent governors would be school-focused. This situation closely reflects the outcomes from Brehony's (1992) research. Although he did find limited evidence of parents using governing body meetings to pursue the interests of their

own child, the instances were relatively rare. However, at least one survey respondent implied concern about elected parent governors ability to contribute when s/he compared them with first governors who were "co-opted for their skills". Interestingly, this statement also suggests a contradiction with Deem *et al*'s (1995) finding above because most 'first' governors were also 'lay' governors albeit they were often recruited for their professional skills outside education. This point is reinforced within the survey and pilot study outcomes. In the former, respondents repeatedly highlighted their concern about the loss of quality governors in the shape of 'first' or 'foundation' governors while some interviewees were explicit in that governors were recruited precisely for their professional skills.

Changes in powers and responsibilities of governing bodies

The changes in the power and responsibilities of the governing bodies of schools that opted out are well-documented (Davies and Anderson, 1992; Deem and Wilkins, 1991; Page, 1995; Sherratt, 1994). Furthermore, the adverse effects of these changes in certain circumstances is also addressed in the literature (Feintuck, 1994). Halpin, Fitz and Power (1991) assert that the difference in the nature of the responsibilities between GM and LEA schools was minimal (p. 235) although other writers disagree (Cauldwell and Reid 1996; Deem and Wilkins, 1991). Bush (1990, p.15) argues that GM governors tended to get involved in complex government and management structures as a result of the wide range of responsibilities that fell to them. Glover *et al* (1993) also found a greater sense of governor responsibility in the GM school in their study than "might be met in some maintained schools" (p.146), although they found no evidence of interference. Bush *et al* (1993, p. 186) report "a working philosophy, structures to carry this into management and opportunities for open discussion" in all their case study schools. Similarly, Cauldwell and Reid (1996) indicate that nearly four fifths of the

headteachers in their study felt that governor involvement was 'just right' even though, among the sample schools that had opted out most recently (in 1993), 21 per cent felt it was 'too great'.

While the informants in this study were asked to give their views about changes in a different context to those considered above, it was evident that the overriding perception was of a new framework which offered less autonomy and hence, power and responsibilities for governors. However, again, some respondents took what may have been the pragmatic attitude and claimed that they expected there to be no change in the nature of governance in their school.

Notwithstanding this, for most informants, GM governing bodies functioned well and changes were not necessary or welcomed.

Governor recruitment and selection

From their study, Bush *et al* (1993, p.181) report a diversity of practice in the identification and selection of 'first' governors, both in terms of their initial appointment when the school achieved GM and as replacements were sought. They found various criteria being applied and "the possibility of irregularities in the process" (p.183). Despite this, these researchers assert "teams with complementary strengths appear to have developed either by accident or design" (p.182).

The informants for this study expressed similar concerns about appointment processes. For most of them, the selection of the LEA representatives remained uncertain at the time of the survey. Thus, many respondents found it difficult to comment on the way in which the governing body would function in the future. Furthermore, there were other similarities with

the findings from the Bush *et al* project in that some GM headteachers and/or chairs of governors were endeavouring to retain presently serving governors by re-designating them, sometimes with the agreement of the LEA.

Cauldwell and Reid (1996) found difficulty among 9 per cent of their schools in retaining governors and 21 per cent of their respondents reported finding it hard to attract new ones. Interestingly, when these figures were analysed by cohort, both sets of figures for their 'initial' schools group – which matched the sample studied by Bush *et al* (1993a) – were much lower than for their other cohorts – which were similar in character to the sample schools used in this study. The findings from this research show that recruitment of additional parent governors was a concern to both the interviewees and the survey respondents although the issue of governor resignations was only marginally significant.

Funding arrangements

According to Levacic and Hardman (1999, p. 187) “the financing of GM schools remained a complex and controversial technical battleground between LEAs and the DFE/DfEE”. They describe the various aspects of advantageous funding made to GM schools throughout the last decade. A similar point is made by Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993) in their discussion of the origins and development of the policy. They highlight the financial parity that was initially promised between GM and LEA schools (DES 1988). Later in their book, these researchers detail the complications affecting all schools that were to be linked to the CCF. (CCF was about to be introduced at the time they were writing their book.)

Bush *et al* (1993a) adopt a more cautious approach in their chapter on financial management in GM schools, although they agree that "the Conservative Government ... deployed significant resources to support its political objective of creating an autonomous schools sector". They go on to add "favourable financial arrangements may be necessary to secure a large and successful autonomous sector ... the government has given GM schools preferential treatment in respect of both capital and revenue funding" (p.130).

For Cauldwell and Reid (1996, p.251), "the contentious revenues are the transitional grants and the level of capital funding". They argue that press claims (Dean and Sutcliffe, 1991, p.1) that GM schools were receiving more than four times as much income per pupil as LEA schools were exaggerated by the higher proportion of secondary schools in the GM sector. In contrast, their own findings support the increased capital funding schools enjoyed in the first year after opting out compared to that received in the years immediately prior to it.

Despite the lack of detail available at the time, the findings from this research indicate that the majority of GM school headteachers and chairs of governors were particularly concerned about what they perceived to be reductions in the funding of their schools under the new framework. Hence, these respondents acknowledged implicitly the advantageous position they had enjoyed, despite one interviewee stating categorically that such a claim was not true. As a result of this 'reduced' funding, the popular view was that individual schools would not be able to continue to provide the same overall level of education. Reductions in the number of teachers employed or the opportunities for staff development, and increases in class sizes, were quoted as examples of the declining conditions.

There were many other anxieties about funding, highlighted by the frequent references to such matters that were made at various stages throughout the interviews and in the questionnaire responses. These particularly focused on the role of the LEA in determining and managing all aspects of funding as well the uncertainty at the time about the actual arrangements. Hence, there is evidence to suggest that the majority of the headteachers and chairs of governors adopted a strong 'own school' culture rather than considering the needs of the education system overall.

This tension between individualism and collectivism is a key issue from Tritter and Chadwick's (1997) research into church schools' responses to GM status. Their findings demonstrate that GM church schools acted as though they had not only shed the power and control of their former LEA but also with regard to diocesan and episcopal direction and advice (pp.23-24). Tritter and Chadwick conclude that, together with LMS, GM status has:

... fundamentally changed the connections between church schools and LEAs and refined the nature of the historical relationship between Church and State (p.1).

Admissions and the planning of school places

Admissions criteria

The introduction of open enrolment was another feature of the 1988 ERA. Within this context, GM school governors were given responsible for the preparation and implementation of an appropriate admissions policy for their school. Bush *et al* (1993a), reporting evidence from their survey, suggest that the majority of GM schools were using objective criteria for selection when their school was oversubscribed. Elsewhere, they indicate that a significant proportion - "some 30 per cent" - of comprehensive schools were using subjective methods

although “there was little evidence of these practices in the primary sector” (Bush *et al*, 1993b, pp. 70-71). These researchers found the three most frequently mentioned criteria for the allocation of pupil places were, in order of priority, ‘siblings of present pupils’, ‘distance from school’ and ‘former LEA catchment area’. Furthermore, when they asked their respondents to rate the criteria they had identified in order of importance, Bush *et al* report that similar, objective criteria were being applied in the case of comprehensive schools. Not surprisingly, in selective schools, examination results were most important.

Cauldwell and Reid (1996, pp.250-251) report interesting differences between the research findings for their ‘initial’ group and those of Bush *et al*. Between the two studies, the use of examinations as a method of selection had increased by 27 per cent, whereas the practice of interviewing parents had dropped by 79 per cent. Interestingly, 58 per cent of schools in Cauldwell and Reid’s sample also indicated an increase in the level of pupil admissions.

Admissions criteria for the schools in this study were similar to those reported above. ‘Sibling a pupil at the school’ was the criterion most frequently used as either first or second priority, followed by ‘catchment area’, ‘admissions test’ and ‘religion’. As in the Bush *et al* project, ‘distance from home to school’ was also a significant criterion for some schools. Interestingly, 14 respondents indicated that they use an admissions test as their main admissions criterion whereas 15 schools had described themselves as selective.

Selection and specialisation

From its inception, the GM initiative was of particular interest to policy analysts and GM researchers in terms of the possibility that the initiative implied the re-introduction of

selective education (Bush *et al*, 1993a, p.88, Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p.111). At first, this allegation was tempered because schools were not permitted to change their character in terms of the criteria they used to select pupils within the first five years of being incorporated.

However, as the requirement was soon dropped, the 'hidden' agenda of 'backdoor' selective education (Bush *et al*, 1993a, p.88) remained an issue. For example, Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993, p.111) considered the evidence from their data and found that:

... these fears have largely been unfounded. Those GM schools which have successfully applied for change of character have done so mainly on the grounds other than to change their admissions policies in favour of selection by ability.

Bush *et al* (1993a) report similar findings. They assert that "few GM schools have sought a change of status, and amendments to admissions procedures have tended to be of a minor nature" (p.90).

Deem and Davies (1991) provide a fascinating contrast to the GM/selection scenario in their account of one school's reasons for opting out. These writers were the Chair of Governors and Co-Director, respectively, of Stantonbury Campus, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, a school that opted out in 1990 to avoid Buckinghamshire LEA's plans to introduce selective education and grammar schools in Milton Keynes.

As well as describing how they "managed to escape ... (the) LEA's distaste for comprehensives" (p.167), their analysis details an example of educational change. Deem and Davies' point is that "theoretical conceptions about educational change may differ from what happens on the ground" and may be brought about, not least, by the power that "human agency can (demonstrate) in subverting the intentions of others in the educational change process" (p.170).

Moreover, as the GM policy became more established, concern about the re-introduction of selective education was not the only issue emerging from it. Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993) argue that the "policy has become a vehicle with which the government has been able to take forward other educational initiatives" (pp.30-31). For example, they refer to the favourable treatment GM schools received under the Technology Schools Initiative and the establishment of GM Technology Schools. Bush *et al* (1993a) also explore the implications of the government's policy to encourage specialisation in GM schools. They highlight the mixed reaction to it from the professional associations as well as the practitioners, although they conclude that "for some (GM schools) the pressure to control intakes has proved irresistible" (p.106).

In this study, changes in admission criteria introduced since achieving GM status were not explored. However, it is interesting to note that the number of sample schools that were described as selective, 15 out of the 78 secondary or middle deemed secondary schools (19 per cent), is higher than across all maintained secondary schools although does not represent an exceptional figure for the GM sector. In terms of specialisation, twelve of the survey schools had technology college status, two were described as language colleges and one as a sports college. Among the interviewees' schools, two schools had technology college status and although this characteristic was recorded as significant to the sample, it was not the predominant reason for the inclusion of these particular schools. Thus, bearing in mind the greater opportunities made available to GM schools under the Technology Schools Initiative and their overall high profile in the implementation of government policy, the number of study schools with specialist status is not surprising.

Planning school places, admissions, adjudication and the FAS

Among the issues of concern which emerged as a result of the introduction of GM schools were the difficulty in planning school places in an area and the complexity, and consequent effects, of individual schools organising their own admissions arrangements. Hence, these were among the matters identified for clarification and rationalisation through the 1998 *School Standards and Framework Act*. The legislation attempts to do this through the introduction of school organisation committees, admissions forums and adjudicators. Hence, this study would not have been completed without evidence of the headteachers' and chairs of governors' views on these developments. Moreover, in terms of this analysis, it is important to acknowledge, once again, that discussion about such matters does not feature in any of the earlier literature on GM schools for the obvious reason that these structures are only now being set up.

However, the two main studies, Bush *et al* and Fitz, Halpin and Power, comment on the previous government's intention to create a related statutory body, the Funding Agency for Schools (FAS). This agency was established to take over the Department for Education and Employment's role in connection with various matters relating to opting out and GM status. Of particular interest to this research was the FAS's role in planning, and the provision of, school places. It is, therefore, not surprisingly that these earlier GM researchers comment on the FAS and its capabilities in these areas.

Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993) outline the responsibilities and powers of the FAS and highlight the criticism surrounding the setting up of it. In respect of the latter, they discuss the predicted confusion which could result from two public bodies – the LEA and the FAS – having responsibilities for educational planning. Additionally, they highlight the uncertainty

(at the time) about the nature of the resources that would be available to the FAS in order to make such decisions about schools and school places (p.104). Furthermore, with regard to the establishment of the FAS, they assert that it represents "an important shift of power and control away from the periphery to the centre" (p.105), thereby altering the nature of educational provision in England and Wales.

Bush *et al* (1993a) also raise concern about the possible outcomes of the (then) new arrangements for planning school places and point out that they are likely to be unpredictable as more groups and individuals become involved (p.211). Furthermore, in terms of the Secretary of State's additional powers, Bush *et al*'s opinion is that "the DFE view of viability will be decisive in determining the future pattern of schooling throughout the country" (p.211).

The findings from this project illustrate the mixed reactions to the new arrangements for admissions, appeals and the planning of school places. There is evidence of anxiety similar to that expressed about the FAS before its establishment in 1993 albeit that latter did not emanate from the GM actors. Informants here have reservations about the new structures for the organisation of admissions and related matters. Not surprisingly, there was concern about the LEA's role and the approach LEA officers may adopt towards schools that were previously GM. Furthermore, in line with many other aspects of the changes associated with the new framework, there were some informants who presented a more pragmatic view. They were explicit in welcoming the new arrangements although, at the same time, they identified areas on which they required more clarification. Some respondents again expressed their

annoyance about the changes *per se* that, in their view, were unnecessary. In this respect, informants spoke highly of the work of the FAS.

LEA-school relations

On going GM

'Freedom from the LEA' as a reason why schools opted out was considered earlier. From that discussion, and other literature, it is evident that, from the GM actors' perspective, 'freedom' can have a number of interpretations. It can mean freedom from the effects of the LEA's strategic planning which may threaten individual schools with closure (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993) or reorganisation (Deem and Davies, 1991) or it can mean freedom to purchase services from other sources (Bush *et al*, 1993a). It can also mean a straightforward version of freedom for the school managers and governors to work to achieve the objectives they regard as important for their school without any LEA requirements or restrictions (Bush *et al*, 1993a). However, whichever version of freedom applies, it seems that there is, by implication at least, a criticism of the LEA.

Cauldwell and Reid (1996, p.254) found that the majority (55 per cent, N=121) of GM headteachers in their survey described LEAs as 'unsupportive' or 'very unsupportive' during the move to GM status. However, they also found that, when the data were analysed by cohorts according to when the school had opted out, those that had achieved GM status more recently were less negative about the support from the LEA.

Unsurprisingly, LEAs did not welcome schools opting out (Bush *et al*, 1993a, p.4). This point is developed by Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993, p. 53) who highlight the impact on the LEA's

strategic plans in relation to school places. However, as far as LEAs are concerned, the situation did not remain static. As early as 1990, Andrew Collier, then Chief Education Officer for Lancashire, recommended that "the education service as a whole may be better served by reducing the differences between grant-maintained and LEA schools rather than exaggerating them" (Collier, 1990). Moreover, it seems that some LEAs followed this advice (Dean, 1990a, 1990b; Spencer, 1991). Halpin, Power and Fitz (1993) also suggest that, over time, individual LEAs developed ways of working with GM schools in their area which provided the authority with opportunities to develop "a degree of influence over their affairs" (p.20). Moreover, Cauldwell and Reid (1996) conclude that "LEAs maintain closer links (with schools that had opted out more recently) because over time the LEA attitudes have changed from boss to service provider" (p.254).

Although the interviewees in this project reported poor relationships between their schools and their former LEAs, the survey respondents were less negative about their experiences of opting out. In the light of the findings of other, earlier research projects and the pilot study interviews, this scenario is somewhat surprising although a number of explanations are possible. First, the categorisation of terms like 'supportive', 'unsupportive' or 'neutral' are subjective and the distinction between them may be marginal to the extent that only absolute hostility or unrealistic encouragement to opt out are registered. Second, respondents in this survey were asked to comment on a situation that had occurred some time ago. Their memories may have faded or, indeed, mellowed. Third, some respondents were not in a position to give their view as they had not been in post at the time the school achieved GM status. Fourth, at the time of making their response, the headteachers and chairs of governors were all aware that their schools were about to be returned to a form of LEA control. They

may have decided that a neutral, or indeed, more favourable interpretation of the school/LEA relationship at the time of going GM was in their future interest. Fifth, as suggested by Cauldwell and Reid, LEAs have changed the way they view their own role and are generally now more concerned about establishing and maintaining a partnership with schools rather than having overall control of them.

In the future

Again, for obvious reasons, no data are available on the ways in which schools that were formerly GM and their LEAs may work together in future. However, there is some evidence, albeit contrasting, from this project and the media that sheds some light on future relationships. The re-designation of schools has been described in the press (Slater, 1998) in terms of GM schools being 'returned to their LEA'. Furthermore, tensions are already predicted in some LEAs, especially where there were a large number of GM schools or in a new unitary authority which came into being after the introduction of GM status. Indeed, before it was finally wound up, the FAS prepared a file of potential troublespots in the move to the new categories and a DfEE local authorities support unit has been designated to act as arbitrator of disputes in the new framework for schools (Dean and Rafferty, 1999). These predictions are supported to some extent by comments from the pilot study interviewees whose perceptions of the future were fairly depressing and tended to adopt the view that their schools were 'going back' to tight LEA control.

In contrast, the survey respondents reported considerable links between the schools and LEAs, many of which they describe as well established. These included the provision of LEA services to GM schools and liaison over professional and planning matters. It seemed that, for

most respondents, old differences had been put aside or forgotten, often assisted by the fact that personnel had changed on one, or other, or both, sides. This, more optimistic, approach was confirmed by Slater (1998) who quotes a headteacher's comment:

We feared that we might end up back in the Stone Age. ... But the authority has made a real effort to smooth the transition.

Parental involvement

The creation of GM schools as a means of improving the quality of statutory education in England and Wales through competition is well rehearsed earlier in this thesis and elsewhere (Bush *et al*, 1993a; Fitz *et al*, 1997). The autonomous status of GM schools was intended to enable them to position themselves in the 'market' so as to attract the 'choice' of the local parents. Thus, over time, it was intended that parents would have a significant role in influencing the future of these schools (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p.82).

Drawing on the DES documentation, Bush *et al* (1993, p.173) comment that "parental involvement in education is integral to the policy of GMS". Consequently, they included a question about the level of parental involvement in the instrument they developed for their survey. However, the outcomes from their survey are rather mixed with responses varying from parents making more offers of practical help, for example, working with students or carrying out electric wiring, to a belief that GM schools needed less financial support from parents than before they became GM. Their findings also indicated a flurry of activity in some schools around the process of opting out although it appeared to die down once the status had been achieved. However, overall, the clearest outcome from the Bush *et al* research was that there had been little change. In conclusion, these researchers suggest that the 'partnership' envisaged among staff, governors and parents had not been achieved.

In their replication of the Bush *et al* survey, Cauldwell and Reid (1996) also found that approximately two thirds of the headteachers did not perceive a change in parental involvement since the school had opted out although the rest indicated the opposite of this. Cauldwell and Reid's 'initial schools' headteachers reported more involvement than other cohorts, a fact which the researchers attribute to the reorganisation threat that was prominent among this group. Along similar lines, Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993, pp. 75-85) interviewed a sample of GM school pupils and their parents about their choice of school and involvement in it. They also found evidence that little had changed in terms of their perceptions of the school and knowledge of it

Although informants in this study were not asked directly about parental involvement in their schools, again there is some evidence, albeit limited, in connection with the schools' change of status. Respondents indicated that they had, or were about to, notify parents about the change; half of them having done so already. However, there was no indication that governors had consulted with parents about the options available to the school. Furthermore, references to specific interest from parents were nearly non existent. So, although these findings are not conclusive, there is an implication that, in line with other research, parental involvement about the development of these GM schools was extremely limited. Thus, the choice and diversity rhetoric associated with opted out schools appears unfulfilled.

Decentralization and autonomy

As discussed in chapter two, researching GM schools necessarily implies consideration of the concepts of decentralization and autonomy and the way in which the latter has been

interpreted and implemented in the case of these schools. However, such exploration is complicated because the creation and introduction of GM status did not happen in isolation. As a result of the 1988 ERA all maintained schools became autonomous to some degree and, while the government decentralised the governance and management of schools, they centralised the curriculum and its assessment. Moreover, through the Education Acts of 1991 and 1993, the government continued to temper the autonomy bestowed upon GM schools by further centralisation of powers, for example, the establishment of the FAS (Fitz, Halpin and Power, 1993, p.105).

Furthermore, the matter of terminology – also raised in chapter two - confuses any analysis of earlier investigations. Researchers and writers use a variety of terms to describe the phenomenon. For example, Davies and Anderson (1992) refer to GM schools as "self-managing", while, for the purposes of their research, Bush *et al* (1993a) describe them as "autonomous" and refer to "the autonomous sector" (p.107) as if it consisted solely of opted out schools. Tritter and Chadwick (1997) particularly draw attention to the change from 'GM' status to 'self-governance' adopted by the government (DfEE, 1996) and "those organisations supporting and promoting GM schools", such as the Grant Maintained School Centre (Tritter and Chadwick, 1997, p.2, note 2).

In the early days of the policy, at least, the government was clear that "autonomy ... is at the heart of the Government's education policies" (DFE, 1992. P.19). This point is developed further by Fitz, Halpin and Power (1993). They reported civil servants' intentions that:

... differences between GM and LEA schools were to be minimal so as to demonstrate that managerial effectiveness arising out of institutional *autonomy* were all that were required to increase standards in schools (p.27) (my italic).

Bush *et al* (1993, p.12) link 'autonomy' and 'audacity' and assert that the evidence from their research "testifies to the success of this (the GM policy) audacious development for many of the GM schools". However, they add that it also raises fundamental questions about its impact on other schools and on the LEA. These researchers go on to highlight what they describe as the 'curriculum autonomy' which was bestowed upon GM schools in terms of the governors' responsibilities to ensure that their school's curriculum policy includes the National Curriculum as well as a scheme for religious education. There is also a requirement to ensure that the school employs appropriate equal opportunity practices (p. 131). While there is no doubt that the governors had some freedom of choice in respect of the religious education syllabus offered, it was within a narrow range of approved schemes. Furthermore, any flexibility in the interpretation of equal opportunities responsibilities by governors can hardly be described as providing them with autonomy in their actions.

With regard to curriculum autonomy, it can be argued that the requirement to teach the National Curriculum was, in itself, a limitation on the opportunity for GM schools to demonstrate creativity. However, in relation to secondary education, this view is not supported by Fitz *et al* (1995, p.6) who assert that "the National Curriculum has always given state-funded self-governing secondary schools in England and Wales an appreciable room for manoeuvre". On this basis, these researchers included an investigation of curriculum reform in their study of GM schools but found no significant examples outside the legal requirements. Indeed, they summarise the references to curriculum reform as "either glosses on the National Curriculum [notably in technology] or revivals of academic selectivity and traditional modes of education generally" (p.6).

Bush *et al* (1993, p.197) also provide guidance to the autonomy enjoyed by GM schools in terms of the role and responsibilities of their governors. Their research illustrates that:

... the role of the governors is seen to be evolving ... towards a supportive, enabling and monitoring role.

Moreover, the same writers predicted that the autonomy enjoyed by the schools in their sample, the first 100 GM schools, may be reduced in planning terms over time by increased centralisation and control by the Secretary of State (p.178).

Autonomy featured significantly amongst the reasons given for job satisfaction in Bell *et al's* (1996) survey although their findings apply equally to LEA and GM headteachers. It seems that, irrespective of the sector, headteachers' feelings of well being are derived from "being able to shape directly the future of their institutions and to be proactive in matters of day-to-day management" (p.257).

Although informants in this study were not specifically asked about their understanding and/or interpretation of 'autonomy', evidence emerged within their responses. When the survey respondents were asked to indicate the reasons why their school opted out, optional answers were provided which included 'autonomy' and 'freedom from LEA'. 'Autonomy' featured in the top three priorities of the vast majority of respondents – both those of headteachers and chairs of governors. Although 'freedom from LEA' was identified by some respondents, it was not considered as important. One headteacher chose to add his/her own reasons under the 'other' heading and wrote "control over own destiny" which, it could be argued, is another way of expressing the concept of autonomy.

Moreover, although the list of reasons for opting out included 'threat of closure' and 'threat of reorganisation', for some respondents, 'freedom from LEA' could have been interpreted in the context of the removal of such threats. Such an approach was evident from the pilot study interviews when one interviewee described the removal of LEA influence, and hence the removal of the threat of closure, as a consequence of GM status.

Like the headteachers – LEA and GM – in Bell *et al*'s (1996) study, these informants value the 'GM' autonomy to the extent that they link it directly to the satisfaction they derive from their post. For example, both headteacher and chair of governor interviewees talked about retiring/resigning in connection with the school's forthcoming change of status and, in their view, the resulting reduction in autonomy.

It was also evident from the interviews that there was confusion about the extent to which all schools enjoyed forms of autonomy since the 1988 ERA. On the one hand, chairs of governors talked about "old style LEAs" re-emerging and "centralist ... control by party politicians" while, on the other, another chair of governors acknowledged the impact GM schools had had on the way in which LEAs now operated. Among the headteachers, there were similar comments to those of the last chair of governors respondent. These indicated a deeper understanding of the context in which former GM schools were about to find themselves. Interestingly, one headteacher interviewee regarded the new framework as an opportunity for the government to make all schools "self governing". His interpretation of this was that all schools should be GM in practice but not categorised as such. However, based on the information available at the time, he did not perceive this to be the government's intention.

All of this suggests that perceptions and understanding about 'autonomy', both as a concept and as a condition within which schools now operated, were, and possibly remain, mixed. For many informants, opting out had been a means to an end in terms of avoiding closure or reorganisation or just getting away from their former LEA. The autonomy they 'enjoyed' as a GM school was a consequence rather than a purpose of it. This situation parallels that described by Halpin, Power and Fitz (1993) who apply the term 'regulated autonomy'. Moreover, there was evidence that GM headteachers and chairs of governors were aware of the tensions within the system as a whole that resulted from the 'autonomy' of GM schools.

Furthermore, despite the respondents' desire for autonomy and/or freedom from their LEA, the majority indicated that they would become involved in networks associated with their school's new status and, somewhat surprisingly, there was considerably more interest in the new networks than in those which had existed around GM schools. It seemed that those who intended to join new networks valued the support and opportunity to share ideas and knowledge with other schools. Thus, alongside the autonomy they valued, there was a desire – or need – to work with other schools and colleagues.

Accountability

The issue of accountability completes the trio of issues which, it was argued in chapter 2, form the basic building blocks from which the GM policy emerged. Along with other aspects of the 1988 ERA, GM status was intended to improve educational standards and accountability (Dimmock, 1993); the latter being achieved through market forces as opposed to local democracy.

Bush *et al* (1993a) employ Kogan's (1988, p.139) models of accountability as a framework to explain the concept as it applies to GM schools. They highlight the extent of GM schools' public accountability that was lodged with the Secretary of State. In terms of professional accountability, from their survey they found examples of dialogue and involvement with interest groups that, they suggest, demonstrate professional accountability. However, from a consumerist perspective, Bush *et al* found only "limited evidence of increased 'mutual accountability' as a result of opting out" (p.177). They conclude that the effectiveness of GM schools is:

... increasingly assessed by their ability to recruit pupils and to perform well in public examinations. The autonomy valued by the first 100 schools may well be reduced by public accountability through the emergence of a planning authority itself accountable only to an increasingly powerful Secretary of State (p.178).

The tension between governing and managing is illustrated in Fitz, Halpin and Power's (1993) data. Some headteachers were struggling to come to grips with the new forms of governor accountability and, in some cases, were seeking ways to manage the school without too much governor involvement. These writers go on to argue that the outcome is that GM status encourages "a novel kind of 'producer interest' in the form of headteacher control" (p. 68) which, itself, distances these managers from the classroom teachers.

Levacic and Hardman (1999) approach accountability from a 'value for money' aspect. They argue that:

... given the additional finance made available to GM schools ... these schools should have demonstrated superior educational performance relative to LEA schools (p.186).

However, from their research, these writers found that:

There is little evidence that GM schools discovered how to manage pupil performance better than LEA schools because they were free of the LEA and could buy more staff and invest in improved physical resources (p.204).

These findings reflect those of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) which report “inspection evidence shows that the quality of teaching in GM and LEA maintained schools is very similar” (Ofsted, 1998, p.19).

There was evidence from the pilot interviews in this study that informants were aware of the importance of GM schools demonstrating their accountability albeit some took the opportunity to use the interview to assert a lack of accountability on the part of LEAs. Survey respondents also made a similar point in respect of their future relationship with an LEA. The implication was that the LEA needs to be more explicit in demonstrating its accountability. Such an approach could be explained in terms of the GM informants ‘turning the table’ on the LEAs. One of the criticisms about GM schools has always been their lack of locally elected democratic accountability. Perhaps, for at least some of these GM actors, the requirement for their school to be, once again, linked to an LEA provides them with an opportunity to raise the same sort of issues about the LEA as others had about GM schools in the past.

Summary

The different context of this research as opposed to those GM studies conducted before New Labour was elected to power in 1997 is particularly significant and should be borne in mind in connection with any comparison of findings. Nevertheless, it is possible to compare and contrast aspects of the findings of this project with those of others as demonstrated by the analysis in this chapter.

In summary, the findings from this research which complement those of earlier studies are:

- the reasons why the schools opted out are similar. In particular, school managers and governors were seeking some form of independence/autonomy/freedom from the LEA through GM status and/or the advantageous funding associated with it;
- the belief in the appropriateness of the powers and level of responsibilities of governors under GM status;
- the experience, and/or anticipation, of a lack of commitment from LEA representatives when they serve as governors;
- the experience, and/or anticipation, of a political agenda brought to governing bodies by LEA-nominated governors;
- the focus by school managers and governors on their individual school and the associated lack of awareness, or acknowledgement, of their school as part of a local system;
- the retention of some governors at the point of change in status either on going GM or as an intention on becoming a foundation (or voluntary or community) school;
- concern about the ability to recruit sufficient governors. It is likely that this applies more widely than just within the GM sector;
- similarity in the range of, and priority given, to criteria used for admission purposes;
- the lack of significant, and different, levels of involvement from parents as a GM school as opposed to prior to it. There was evidence that the partnership envisaged among staff, governors and parents of GM schools had not been achieved;
- the emphasis given to the autonomy enjoyed by the school as a consequence of having opted out rather than a reason for seeking GM status;

The new insights into the policy emerging from this research are:

- the connections between GM status and improved teaching and learning. These were, in fact, few in number and, in the main, they were made by informants working in the primary sector;
- the extent of the commitment and quality of the contribution from ‘first’ and ‘foundation’ governors. These governors were praised for their work in school;
- parent governors’ objectivity. Although the interviewees were less certain about this, there was a strong sense of belief in the objectivity of parent governors among the survey respondents;
- the contribution of lay governors. This point is linked to the previous two in that most ‘first’, ‘foundation’ and parent governors are lay governors. Hence, the acknowledgement of these people’s contributions as lay governors is significant;
- concern about a reduction in funding after the introduction of the new framework. As there is no relevant evidence from other studies on this topic, it follows that the concern expressed about the perceived reduction in funding after the abolition of GM schools is necessarily a new insight into the policy;
- optimism about good relationships between former GM schools and their LEA. Although there were some examples of effective relationships already in existence, the optimism expressed by informants could be interpreted as pragmatism;
- desire on the part of headteachers and chairs of governors to network with others in similar positions. A surprisingly high number of survey respondents expressed an intention to join organisations associated with their school’s status under the new framework;

- different interpretations of autonomy. Although the majority of informants identified ‘autonomy’ as their main reason for opting out, as the main consequence of GM status and, consequently, the possible lack of it as their main concern about the changes introduced by New Labour, the word was used with a variety of meanings. For example, some used it to describe avoidance of the imposition of closure or other changes in character while, for others, it described the flexibility provided to their school through advantageous funding under GM status;
- the pragmatism demonstrated by GM school headteachers and governors. Many informants, particularly the survey respondents, who made their comments within less than a year from the change, were pragmatic in their approach to the demise of GM status and the introduction of the new framework. For example, in connection with the revised structure of their school’s governing body and in the future nature of governance.

CHAPTER 7: THE END OF AN ERA OR A NEW BEGINNING?: GM SCHOOLS AND THE 'THIRD WAY'

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to research aspects of the phasing out of the GM schools policy and to document certain features of the last period of their existence. In particular, the work was constructed around the four broad areas of governance, funding, admissions arrangements and relationships between GM schools and 'their' LEA in order that the areas of concern connected with these issues at the time immediately prior to the end of GM status could be explored. This structure enabled the research to operate at a local level and to draw, and build, on other researchers' empirical data involving GM schools.

The findings, which were reported in previous chapters, have been categorised under two headings. First, this study has revealed a list of ways in which the interests and concerns of these informants complement those reported in earlier studies and, second, it has identified a set of new insights into the GM policy. At one level, these two classifications have contrasting outcomes. On the one hand, there is a focus on the needs of individual schools in terms of why they opted out, the anticipated lack of commitment from LEA governors, criteria used for admissions and the autonomy GM status bestowed on the school. On the other hand, ways in which GM status had brought benefits beyond additional funding are indicated, for example the extensive commitment to the schools by governors and links with efforts to improve teaching and learning. Furthermore, from the second list, there is evidence that some of the respondents have adopted a pragmatic and more positive approach to the future than may have been expected from the pilot phase.

Notwithstanding the interest and relevance of these specific findings and those of other researchers, at this end point of the decade of GM schools, it is also important to contextualise the GM schools experiment within broader analytic frames of reference in an attempt to conceptualise the policy and its implications. The demise of the GM policy has been brought about by a change in government in the United Kingdom. Thus, the domestic political situation is an important frame of reference for appreciating its significance. However, alongside this, the international context of autonomous schooling is also relevant. Indeed, as Bottery (1999, p.299) observes, any discussion about the changing nature of educational management at the end of the 20th century is incomplete without locating it within a global context.

GM schools in the international context of autonomous schooling

In terms of the autonomy they enjoyed, GM schools could be described as among the most privileged internationally. In their comparison of five national contexts of educational reform, Whitty *et al* (1998) suggest that reforms in England and Wales and, particularly GM schools, were “probably closest” (p.32) to the situation in New Zealand where all intermediate levels of decision-making were eliminated in 1989. In contrast, Caldwell and Hayward (1998, p.16) draw similarities between GM schools and the charter school movement in the USA on the basis that the latter are freed from the school district but receive public funds. The focus for these writers is Australia’s Victoria’s Schools of the Future and, commenting on their level of autonomy, they note that GM and charter schools “may be considered to have gone further than Schools of the Future” (p.16).

Turning to the local context in terms of autonomous schooling, a key factor in the establishment of GM schools was the intention to increase parental choice of school through greater diversity of provision. This, in turn, created competition between schools and a 'market' in education with the intended outcome of improving standards. Thus, as part of the Government's strategy to diversify school provision, the GM sector represented the most radical experiment with autonomy in England and Wales. However, in saying this, it is important to repeat that, as a result of the 1988 ERA, a level of autonomy was bestowed upon most maintained schools in England and Wales in the form of LMS. This means that any evaluation of the different kinds of autonomy given to the various types of school should be set in the appropriate context and the use of a linear continuum, with GM schools positioned towards one extreme, as a means of classification is far too simplistic. The autonomy devolved to any group of schools needs to be set within the overall system in which they operate and take into account its decentralising/centralising tendencies. In this context, Whitty *et al* (1998, p.32) explain that:

... any cross-national comparison needs to acknowledge the differences in the degree and manner in which education is being restructured. The extent to which responsibility has devolved downwards differs greatly both between countries and within countries.

Hence, the extent to which the existence of the GM sector contributed to the success of LMS is, in itself, pertinent. It is only possible to speculate here, but it could be argued that the extreme form of autonomy as perceived in GM schools 'softened' the move to LMS that most other maintained schools experienced at this time. Thereby, it may be the case that the GM schools' policy contributed to the success of LMS. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the recent introduction of 'fair funding' shifts the level of autonomy possible for all

maintained schools closer to that previously enjoyed by those that had opted out rather than straightforwardly reducing the autonomy of the latter.

Caldwell and Hayward (1998) highlight the “different connotations” (p.16) of the concept of decentralisation. Although their international overview is restricted to developments in Australia, Canada, England and Wales, New Zealand and the USA, they add that:

We are hard-pressed to name any nation where there has not been a trend to decentralise some authority and responsibility to school level (p.19).

Lauglo (1996, p.40) points out that decentralisation should not be thought of as a unitary concept. He identifies eight different alternatives to “bureaucratic centralism” in a national education system of which four reflect different political legitimations for redistributing authority and four reflect different arguments concerning the quality of education provision and the efficient use of resources. Whitty *et al* (1998, p.34) suggest that one of Lauglo’s political rationales, liberalism – or neo-liberalism as these authors prefer to classify it – is particularly evident in the English and Welsh form of decentralisation. They equate Lauglo’s terms ‘market mechanisms’ and ‘management by objectives’ with the so-called ‘new public management’, a concept which has been adopted by New Labour. For it seems that Blair’s administration, like the previous one, takes seriously the idea of parents as ‘consumers’ in education and the importance of diversification of provision, albeit within a frame of reference that prioritises improvements in education to “benefit the many and not just the few” (DfEE, 1997, p.11). Thus, New Labour sees nothing fundamentally ‘wrong’ in some state schools operating outside the control of their former LEAs. Indeed, it is sceptical of the capacity of some LEAs to deliver quality education (see the 1999 Ofsted reports on Leicester LEA and Islington LEA). Given this scepticism, it has no reason to abolish entirely a sector

of schools, some of whose members are perceived to provide a quality education as judged by the Prime Minister's decision to send his sons to a former GM school. Hence, the present government's re-invention of GM schools, albeit with a different name classification, is a natural development of its general outlook.

However, putting this issue to one side for the moment, the context for GM schools over the last decade is relevant. Alongside the stated intention to shift power from the LEAs to the consumer, there was significant centralisation of education policy. Indeed, Feintuck (1994, p.41) argues that the power shift occurred in the opposite direction – from LEA to the central government, particularly to the Secretary of State for Education. In elaborating upon this point, he highlights the rapid change in the chairs of the National Curriculum Council and the Schools Examination and Assessment Council in 1991 only to be replaced by a former member and a former head of the Downing Street Policy Unit. Feintuck suggests that this scenario exemplifies the lack of any pretence that the National Curriculum was 'politically neutral' (Chitty, 1992). Thus, far from the alleged decentralisation promoted by GM school autonomy, opted out schools were part of a Thatcherite agenda to both encourage a market in education and increase the regulatory powers of the state with no significant intermediate or alternative power blocs (Gamble, 1989, p.1). Indeed, such was the extent of state control over GM schools that Halpin, Power and Fitz (1993) used the expression "opting into state control" to characterise some of their research findings.

GM schools in the UK domestic political context

Turning now to the national context, in the early 1990s, the Conservative Government pinned their hopes on GM schools as the vehicle that would transform maintained education in

England and Wales, thereby raising standards and making schools more accountable (Levacic and Hardman, 1999). In their 1992 White Paper, *Choice and Diversity: A New Framework for Schools* (DfE, 1992a), they claimed that the GM schools policy was “transforming the landscape of this country” and that opted out schools were “the natural organizational model for schools provision”. The subsequent Education Act in 1993 augmented the law on GM schools with the intention of encouraging more schools to opt out and thus fulfil its principal promoter’s promise (Morris, Reid and Fowler, 1993, pp.126-7). However, despite all of this, when New Labour came into power in 1997, the policy had still not lived up to the earlier claims made on its behalf by its keenest advocates.

From the Labour Party’s perspective, GM schools were also a focus of interest, both before they came to power, and thereafter. From the outset, some Labour commentators, particularly those on the left of the Party, were highly vocal and critical of the GM schools policy and successive party conferences passed resolutions which would require a Labour government to return GM schools to LEA control. However, it became quickly clear that New Labour was not going to take on ‘returning GM schools to their LEAs’ as a straightforward idea. In 1995 the Labour Party published a paper entitled *Diversity and Excellence* (Labour, 1995) which was concerned with the organisation of schools in England and Wales. It was in this paper that Labour introduced the three categories of schools that form the basis for the new framework legislated for in the 1998 *School Standards and Framework Act*. However, whilst the latter abolished GM as a category of school, key elements of the structures associated with them were retained (Whitty *et al*, 1998, p.33). Thus, it is evident that the concept of autonomous schools as a part of government policy designed to raise educational standards is of interest to both major political parties in the United Kingdom.

There is no doubt that the earlier threat of abolishing GM schools *per se* has not happened and, in many significant ways, it is anticipated that schools which were formerly GM will continue to operate as before, albeit within the new framework (Hill, 1999, p.8). Indeed, evidence of this view reported in the previous chapter exemplifies such confidence among former GM headteachers and chairs of governors. For example, a significant minority of survey respondents stated that they had no concerns about the changes in the composition of their governing bodies nor in the powers and responsibilities of governors as well as the informants who had either maintained, or begun to re-build, links with 'their' LEA.

What has changed, however, is that, in framing its education policy, this government has distanced itself from the language of the private sector, of markets and competition and adopted, instead, the discourse of partnership, co-operation and collaboration - in its own words, a form of 'joined-up' government. Moreover, what is significant here is the fact that the re-invention of GM schools as foundation schools (in the main) typifies this political strategy. The approach is not just limited to education policy; it is the essence of government under New Labour and has been described alternatively as 'modernising' (Levacic, 1999), 'mutualism' (Kellner, 1998, p.15), the 'Third Way' (Blair, 1998; Giddens, 1998) – the latter term being the one most used recently. Thus, in order to contextualise the shift from the previous structure of GM and other types of schools to the new framework, it is necessary to explore this new approach to politics and government.

In many ways, the concept of the third way is hard to define. Power and Whitty (1999, p.1) refer to its "nebulousness", while McNeany (1998, p.45) asserts that it is a "totally amorphous

concept that can mean anything you wish it to mean". Marquand (1998, p.44) also comments that "it is rather fluid". Similarly, Halpin *et al* (1998, p.21) describe the third way as "a slippery concept" but go on to assert that it "constitutes a convenient shorthand for signifying New Labour's eclectic approach to the management of the economy and to the provision of public services". In an educational context, Hart (1998, p.44) believes "it's the Government's way of delivering on the promise of maximum delegation of responsibility to schools and accountability by them for the results".

Despite this lack of clear definition or, most likely because of it, the third way has been the subject of much debate over the past year (Power and Whitty, 1999, p.1). Even the Prime Minister has produced a booklet on it (Blair, 1998) in which he explains that:

The Third Way stands for a modernised social democracy, passionate in its commitment to social justice and the goals of the centre-left but flexible, innovative and forward-looking in the means to achieve them. It is founded on the values which have guided progressive politics for more than a century – democracy, liberty, justice, mutual obligation and internationalism (p.1)

He goes on to argue that after more than 50 years during which British politics has been dominated alternately by neo-liberalism and "a highly statist brand of social democracy" (p.5), the time is right for a different approach to politics that is relevant to the needs of the 21st century.

Giddens (1998, 1994) also makes the point about the need for an alternative political approach to existing ideologies. He comments that it is not just a matter that, in this country and elsewhere, neither the free-market policies of the right nor the socialist principles of those on the left have fared particularly well. In both case, these political frameworks fail to have "an adequate enough understanding or diagnosis of the nature of modern society ... (and) are

now seriously 'caught out of position'" (Halpin, 1999, p. 54). Giddens (1998, pp 27-28) identifies what he calls "five dilemmas" which are of major significance in the debates about the future of social democracy and that underline the need for new thinking and innovative policies. In his tribute paper to Giddens' contribution to the significance of the third way for education, Halpin (1999) assimilates these dilemmas into five changes facing modern capitalist societies. First, he, like Bottery (1999), is concerned about globalization which, according to Giddens (1998, p.33), is "changing everyday life ... creating new transnational systems and forces ... (and) is transforming the institutions of the societies in which we live" (p.33). Thus, it is difficult to contain national economies within the resulting global markets.

The second change concerns the different work skills and information required at this time of advance in technology and the consequential need for higher education on a wider basis.

Third, he highlights the new individualism prominent today. With the declining emphasis on custom and tradition in our lives, there is a need for individuals to make their lives in their own terms. Fourth, he points up the breakdown of traditional life patterns and structures which means that the established welfare and education systems are no longer compatible.

The final change in this list focuses on the growth in the importance of ecological politics and their integration in the debate.

So, in the context of these changes, the overall aim of third way politics is to "help citizens pilot their way through the major revolutions of our time" (Giddens, 1998, p.64).

Notwithstanding the virtue of this aim, the ways in which attempts are made to achieve it by a third way approach are also important and need to be considered. A list of the 'means' is

provided by Levacic (1999, p.4) who describes them as “selected on pragmatic ground according to ‘what works best’”. She emphasises pragmatism as a “distinctive third way characteristic” (p.5). Furthermore, third way ‘means’ do not imply the abandonment of the values such as freedom, equality, emancipation and co-operation that are generally associated with the political left. On the contrary, Giddens’ list of third way values (see below) is easily compatible with the beliefs of many who share this political outlook (Halpin, 1999, p.54).

Third way values

Equality
Protection of the vulnerable
Freedom as autonomy
No rights without responsibilities
No authority without democracy
Cosmopolitan pluralism
Philosophic conservatism
(Giddens, 1998, p.66)

Turning back now to New Labour’s approach to GM schools and, indeed, the pragmatic attitude adopted by a significant minority of the survey respondents, it is argued that what we may be witnessing is a shift away from the old politics of education. Instead of a political framework that was fundamentally inscribed in terms of ‘Left’ or ‘Right’, there is emerging a new politics of education that is ‘above’ this bi-polar approach. Thus, rather than adopting an ‘either-or’ approach to the existence – or not - of GM schools, the government’s stand is one of inclusion - or the politics of ‘And-Also’ - an approach which is explained by Halpin (1999, p.57) as one that:

... favours solutions that come less from either the outer limits of political analysis or the fashions of the moment, and more from a strategic mix of genuinely experimental proposals whose ideology derivation is neither here nor there but which connect meaningfully with what is actually happening in society.

Hence, it can be argued that, instead of opting for a new right or old left ideological strategy with respect to GM schools and removing all aspects of the policy from the statute books, New Labour has moved beyond these conventional political perspectives. Rather than conceding that there is just one way forward, it has taken the view that there may be multiple solutions to complex social problems and that no single political outlook, least of all ideology, can claim to have the monopoly of truth about the way to begin to solve them. Hence, the government's approach to GM schools can be viewed as one of the early examples of third way education policy. Others may be its approach to improving performance in schools in challenging circumstances through the Education Action Zone programme or its open view to grammar schools that enables local parents to make the decisions about the availability of selective education in their area.

Moreover, as indicated earlier, there is also some evidence of elements of a third way attitude among GM headteachers and chairs of governors and, hence, synergy with that of the current government. A significant minority of respondents was surprisingly pragmatic in their attitude to the ending of GM status and to the reincarnation of their schools within the new framework. In contrast to the alarm that might have been expected among GM headteachers and governors had Labour been elected to power in 1992, it seems that this new approach to politics and, in particular, the politics of education, has already permeated the attitudes of some school managers and governors. What remains unclear, however, is whether this approach is permanent or just a passing phase associated with the snapshot of time represented by this study.

Nevertheless, despite the uncertainty about the headteachers' and chairs of governors' attitudes and actions in the future, it is evident that, far from the end of the GM-form of autonomous schools, this type of school has been re-invented within a new framework. On the basis that third way politics is about inclusivity, and that policy formulation is not bound by rigid ideology (Price, 1999), the implication of all of this is that some of the third way values identified by Giddens articulate with the GM schools policy. For example, opted out schools offered freedom through autonomy and the rights they bestow on governors and managers were set in a context of accountability, and hence responsibility, through standards of performance. Furthermore, in terms of modernisation, in many ways, the schools were in sympathetic tune with the current political 'mood' of the moment. They demonstrated 'conservatism' that was more to do with a pragmatic attitude towards coping with change, particularly with regard to globalization and scientific and technological innovation rather than the way it has been understood on the political right. To be sure, in respect of equality and protection of the vulnerable, the record is mixed. However, given that most secondary GM schools were comprehensive, accusing the policy of fostering inequality is too simplistic. Indeed, GM comprehensive schools serving areas of serious social and economic deprivation particularly benefited from the extra resources made available to them. Thus, at one level at least, GM schools must be deemed to have been successful. As foundation schools, they have the opportunity to re-interpret and, even, re-invent the autonomy that they so value with a view to educating our children to be effective, global citizens of the 21st century. How they react to this challenge only time will tell.

APPENDIX 1

RESEARCH ON GM/FOUNDATION SCHOOLS

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR USE WITH GM HEADTEACHERS AND CHAIRS OF GOVERNORS – AUTUMN 1997

Thank you for giving me your time today. In a moment I'd like to ask you some questions about your reaction to the recent White Paper. I'm most interested in your views not only because I've always been interested in GM schools but also because the research I am conducting for my doctoral studies is about current issues of policy in education.

I would like to record the interview because I want to be able to listen carefully and not be distracted by business of taking notes. I give you my assurance that your identity and that of your school will remain anonymous in all writing emerging from this work. After the interview I will send you notes of the main points of the interview for your agreement.

1. School has been GM for 5 years. In that period, what would you identify as the chief consequences for the school in terms of having achieved autonomous status?
2. As you know, the government is proposing to establish 3 new categories of schools. If these proposals are implemented, what impact do you think they will have on this school?
3. Are you aware of any reaction from other people connected with this school, for example, teachers, governors or parents?
4. We've spoken about the proposals in a general way. Can we look now at some of the detail? What about the changes in governance proposed in the White Paper?

How do you feel about the requirement that there will be LEA representation on the governing body of this school?

How do you think proposals about funding will impact on this school? Can you tell me about any specific examples of the impact?

Are there ways in which the school has generated income which you anticipate being affected by the proposals?

How will your admissions arrangements be affected? What are the present arrangements for admissions in this school?

What is your reaction to the proposal to establish local admissions forums?

5. How do you feel about the suggestion in the White Paper that there has been too much emphasis on structure at the expense of standards in recent times?

Thank you for your time and for sharing you views with me. I've asked all the questions I'd planned but in the light of the discussion there may be other things you'd like to add. If so, please go ahead.

Once again, thank you.

APPENDIX 2

GRANT MAINTAINED STATUS AND THE NEW FRAMEWORK FOR THE ORGANISATION OF SCHOOLS

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR GM HEADTEACHERS AND CHAIRS OF GOVERNORS - AUTUMN 1998

Section 1

Section 1 of this questionnaire is designed to provide factual information about you and your school. Please complete the section by ticking the relevant boxes and providing the information requested.

1.1 Are you the head teacher? ☐ the chair of governors? ☐

1.2 Which of the following characteristics apply to your school? (Please tick as many boxes as necessary).

Secondary	<input type="checkbox"/>	Formerly voluntary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Middle deemed secondary	<input type="checkbox"/>	Controlled	<input type="checkbox"/>
Middle deemed primary	<input type="checkbox"/>	Formerly voluntary aided	<input type="checkbox"/>
Primary	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anglican	<input type="checkbox"/>
Junior	<input type="checkbox"/>	Roman Catholic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Infant / first	<input type="checkbox"/>	Comprehensive	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Grammar / selective	<input type="checkbox"/>
Co-educational	<input type="checkbox"/>	Technology college status	<input type="checkbox"/>
Single sex – girls	<input type="checkbox"/>	Boarding	<input type="checkbox"/>
Single sex – boys	<input type="checkbox"/>	Special arrangements *	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Other*	<input type="checkbox"/>

* please give details

1.3 How many pupils are there on roll in your school?

1.4 What is the age range of pupils in the school?

1.5 In which year was the school incorporated as a grant maintained (GM) school?

1.6 What is the name of the school's previous LEA?

1.7 If the school now falls within the boundaries of a new unitary authority, please name the authority.

When did the authority take over responsibility?

1.8 Under the allocations within the new framework, which category applies to your school?

foundation ☐ voluntary ☐ community ☐

1.9 Is it likely that your governors will apply for a change of category?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If yes, please indicate which category is the preferred option.

foundation ☐ voluntary ☐ community ☐

1.10 Has there been any interest from the parents about the choice of category?

YES

☐

NO

☐

If yes, please give details.

The following sections seek your views and comments on the new framework for the organisation of schools and its implications for your school. Each of the next four sections focuses on one aspect of school organisation; the final section is used for general questions. Please complete each section by ticking the appropriate boxes and providing the information requested.

Section 2 - Governance

2.1 Have your governors considered how the changes in composition of the governing body will be achieved when the school changes its status? (for example, LEA representatives and more parent governors on the governing body.)

YES

☐

NO

☐

What are the main issues affecting this school?

2.2 Have any governors indicated their intention to resign as a result of these changes?

YES

☐

NO

☐

If yes, how many?

What are their main reasons?

2.3 Has there been any communication with the LEA about their representation on the governing body of your school?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Please give details.

2.4 Do you welcome the requirement to appoint two LEA governors to your governing body?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Please elaborate.

2.5 Do you anticipate being able to recruit sufficient parent governors?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Please elaborate.

2.6 What do you anticipate to be the nature of the contribution from parent governors?
Please indicate your response by selecting one of the following options.

primarily focused on issues affecting their child ☐

primarily focused on general school issues ☐

2.7 Do you welcome the changes in the powers of governing bodies of schools which were formerly GM?

YES ☐ NO ☐

Please elaborate.

Section 3 - Funding

3.1 What are the main implications for your school in terms of the new revenue funding arrangements?

3.2 What are the main implications for your school in terms of the new arrangements for capital funding comparing it with previous capital funding which was:

formula funded based on pupil numbers

allocated through a bidding process

3.3 Until April 1998, was your school funded under the common funding formula for GM schools?

YES

☐

NO

☐

Section 4 - Admissions

4.1 Please indicate all applicable criteria in order of priority using 1 for the first, 2 for the second and 3 for third etc:

admission test*	<input type="checkbox"/>
pupil interview	<input type="checkbox"/>
parent interview	<input type="checkbox"/>
pupil and parent interview	<input type="checkbox"/>
sibling currently a pupil of the school	<input type="checkbox"/>
sibling formerly a pupils of the school	<input type="checkbox"/>
distance between home and school	<input type="checkbox"/>
catchment area	<input type="checkbox"/>
religion	<input type="checkbox"/>
primary school attended	<input type="checkbox"/>
nursery attended	<input type="checkbox"/>
special needs*	<input type="checkbox"/>
special ability eg music*	<input type="checkbox"/>
other*	<input type="checkbox"/>

* Please provide details of test/special needs/special ability/other selection criteria

4.2 Will the new arrangements limit the ability of your school to determine its intake?

YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	----	--------------------------

If yes, please give details.

4.3 The new arrangements for admissions involve the formation of a local admission forum together with the appointment of an adjudicator. Please comment on these arrangements in relation to:

your school

in general

4.4 Are there any other specific issues in terms of admissions for your school?

YES

☐

NO

☐

If yes, what are they?

4.5 Do you welcome the introduction of the LEA School Organisation Committee to plan school places in your area?

YES

☐

NO

☐

Please elaborate.

Section 5 - Relationship with LEA

5.1 Do you have established links with your former (or new) LEA?

YES

☐

NO

☐

If yes, who initiated these links?

Please indicate the nature of the links using the categories listed:

provision of inservice training

☐

provision of other educational services

☐

provision of other services

☐

consultancy/advisory services

☐

other (please specify)

☐

Please list the services your school presently purchases from its former, or new, LEA.

When were the links set up?

Please indicate the levels at which the links are maintained. Please tick as many boxes as necessary in each column.

within the LEA	<input type="checkbox"/>	within the school	<input type="checkbox"/>
councillor		headteacher	
officer	<input type="checkbox"/>	governor	<input type="checkbox"/>
adviser/inspector	<input type="checkbox"/>	senior management team	<input type="checkbox"/>
politician	<input type="checkbox"/>	middle management	<input type="checkbox"/>
administrator	<input type="checkbox"/>	classroom teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>
other*	<input type="checkbox"/>	other*	<input type="checkbox"/>

* please specify

Do the links include discussion about the arrangements for the implementation of the new framework?

YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------	----	--------------------------

Please elaborate.

Please add any other details about the relationship between your school and its former (or new) LEA.

5.2 Please describe the relationship between the school and the LEA at the time the school became GM.

Section 6 - Other issues

- 6.1 Please indicate up to three reasons in order of priority why your school sought GM status. Please use 1 for the reason with highest priority etc.

autonomy	<input type="checkbox"/>
threat of closure	<input type="checkbox"/>
threat of reorganisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
level of recurrent funding available	<input type="checkbox"/>
opportunity for capital funding	<input type="checkbox"/>
control over admissions	<input type="checkbox"/>
other schools in the area already, or going, GM	<input type="checkbox"/>
freedom from LEA	<input type="checkbox"/>
other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please elaborate your reasons as appropriate.

- 6.2 Have you informed your pupils' parents about the forthcoming changes in the status of the school?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If yes, please give details about the communication.

If no, when do you plan to do this?

How do you plan to inform the parents?

6.3 Have you informed the parents of prospective pupils about the changes?

YES

☐

NO

☐

If yes, please give details about the communication.

6.4 Are you, or have you been, active in the GM movement?

YES

☐

NO

☐

If yes, please give details.

6.5 Under the new framework, do you envisage the formation of networks and other structures (for example, headteachers and/or governors associations) along similar lines to those of the GM movement?

YES

☐

NO

☐

If yes, please give details.

If no, please give reasons.

6.6 Would you join a headteachers'/governors' association created under the new framework?

YES

☐

NO

☐

Please explain your answer.

Thank you for your time in completing the questionnaire. Please will you check that you have not accidentally omitted to answer any questions. Please use the stamped addressed envelope provided to return the completed questionnaire to Lesley Anderson, EMDU, The University Centre, Barrack Road, Northampton NN2 6AF as soon as possible and by 21 October 1998 at the latest.

Your responses will remain confidential. However, if you wish, please complete the details below.

Name

School

Would you like to receive an abstract of the findings from this survey in due course?

YES

☐

NO

☐

If yes, please ensure that you have given your name and school. Please now add your school address.

Once again, thank you very much for your time and input.

APPENDIX 3

INTRODUCTORY LETTER SENT TO SAMPLE OF GM HEADTEACHERS AND CHAIRS OF GOVERNORS WITH QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear

I am writing to ask for your assistance in connection with a questionnaire survey which I am about to undertake as part of my work towards the award of a Doctorate in Education.

My research is concerned with issues affecting grant-maintained schools as they prepare to change their classification as legislated in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. The survey sample includes headteachers and chairs of governors of all schools which opted out in 1991 and a random sample of those incorporated in 1993. The data obtained from the survey will provide the basis for a greater understanding of the contribution made by grant-maintained schools to school effectiveness and improvement.

Some of you will already know that I have a long history of working closely with schools in the grant-maintained sector, and between 1989 and 1993 was Deputy Director of the Grant Maintained Schools' Centre. My doctoral studies are being supervised by Professor Tony Bush here at the University of Leicester. Professor Bush will also be known to some of you through his study of the first 100 grant-maintained schools in the early 1990s (with Marianne Coleman and Derek Glover).

I hope that my connection and interest in grant-maintained schools will encourage you to complete the questionnaire. Indeed, the success of my study is dependent on your response. Please note from the last page of the questionnaire that I am offering to provide you with a summary of my findings. Should you require confirmation about the status of this project, please contact Professor Bush on the telephone number above.

Please can I ask you to return the completed questionnaire to me at the above address by 21 October 1998. A stamped addressed envelope is provided for this purpose.

Thank you very much in anticipation of your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Anderson

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